



## **Joe Nathanson: Md. transportation show and tell**

By: [Joe Nathanson](#) Special to The Daily Record March 3, 2016

It was “Transportation Day” at the BWI Business Partnership’s February breakfast meeting featuring Maryland Department of Transportation Secretary Pete K. Rahn as the keynote speaker.

Even before the Rahn’s speech, the conference room at the BWI Marriott hotel offered a buffet of transportation morsels from the many vendors at their respective exhibit tables. There are clearly many organizations that assist the transportation needs of the Baltimore-Washington corridor. Some examples:

- The Central Maryland Regional Transit group, since its reorganization in the summer of 2014, describes itself as having become “a more trim and focused organization,” concentrating its efforts on its TRIP Mobility Management program and its Travel Training activity. The TRIP (Transportation Resource Information Point) program is CMRT’s one-stop shop for transportation resources across the region, with up-to-the minute information for trip-planning purposes. CMRT’s Travel Training program is helping people live more independent lives by empowering people with disabilities and older adults to access public transit.
- Commuter Connections comes under the umbrella of the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments. It promotes the Guaranteed Ride Home program, as in the case of a rideshare participant needing to respond to an unexpected emergency.
- The Central Maryland Transportation Alliance, an advocacy group that has had a key role in establishing weekend MARC service to Washington and Zipcars around town, was also present. CMTA has a particular interest in boosting public transit
- The BWI Business Partnership itself is a key transportation provider within the airport district, providing shuttle services from the airport transit stops to local employers. It is now lending its expertise to develop “last mile” connectivity from the Owings Mills Metro station to employers in that business district.

While there are many partners to move people to and from their various destinations in central Maryland, MDOT is the principal public agency to provide transportation solutions for Marylanders.

Rahn presented his charge as that of a CEO of an organization with five major business units (the administrations for highways, airport, seaport, transit and motor vehicles) plus

the Maryland Transportation Authority, with jurisdiction over the state's toll bridges and tunnels. As the commander of 11,000 employees, his hope is that his campaigns on land, sea and in the air can be pursued, not through individual silos, but as one seamless entity. Some in the organization, he implied, are still absorbing that message.

### ***Bus system improvements***

Among the big issues he is currently taking on is BaltimoreLink, the proposed redesign of the Baltimore region bus system. He likened the process – one hopes, only jokingly – as beginning with the current bus network as an image on an Etch A Sketch screen. Flip the screen over, shake it around and have a fresh start in designing a new bus network. More seriously, MDOT and its consultants have been studying desired travel origins and destinations, actual travel patterns and the comments from the Bus Network Improvement Program to develop a first draft of the revised system.

BaltimoreLink, with its 12 major, color-coded routes serving portions of the city and selected suburban-to suburban connections, has been on the road in recent months for review by the public. The feedback has included some positive comments, some negative and a lot of skepticism, according to Rahn. How it all shakes out will be known in July 2017 when the new bus configuration is scheduled to take effect.

The secretary also reported on a major highway initiative will involve the state's most congested roadway, Interstate 270 through Montgomery County. MDOT is expected to select a consortium of consulting firms to design and build an upgraded highway resulting in "innovative congestion reduction." The work won't involve widening. Instead it will incorporate features such as ramp meters, bus-on-shoulder, and enhanced signals.

Rahn also provided updates on plans for port expansion and added international service from BWI Marshall airport. In recent months, several international carriers have either begun service or have announced plans to inaugurate service. These include Wow with service to Reykjavik, Iceland; Air Condor with flights to Europe; Norwegian Air with service to the French Caribbean; and British Airways' direct flights to London.

BWI Marshall was also part of a major recent success story – the management of clearing the airport surfaces from the 3-foot-plus of snow from Winter Storm Jonas. There was very effective collaboration between airport and state highway personnel, as well as the decision to have the state police shut down traffic along I-70 and I-270 at the height of the storm to facilitate rapid snow removal.

As a result, travel was able to resume without a single Maryland highway traffic fatality due to the storm. Rahn's desired cohesion of business units was clearly on display.

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