

## **Charm City Circulator: Officials mark launch of free north-south bus route downtown**

By Liz F. Kay, *The Baltimore Sun*, June 7, 2010

The Purple Route of the Charm City Circulator shuttle service began Monday, ferrying passengers — for free — between Ostend Street in South Baltimore and Penn Station.

Funded by increases in city parking taxes, the hybrid electric buses will operate at 10-minute intervals.

Elected officials joined transportation, tourism, business and neighborhood leaders Monday morning at Cross Street Market to launch the new route.

"It's a great way to explore Baltimore," said Baltimore Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake.

The Purple Route is the second of three free shuttle lines planned to take passengers through downtown. The east-west Orange line connecting Hollins Market and Harbor East started in January, and a Green line connecting City Hall, Fells Point and Johns Hopkins Hospital is also scheduled to begin this year.

All three are intended to reduce traffic congestion and greenhouse-gas emissions by encouraging more people to park on the outskirts of downtown rather than drive into the area.

Tourists and residents of neighborhoods along the Purple Route, such as Mount Vernon and Federal Hill, will be able to use the bus and transfer between lines to reach other communities. The shuttles also connect to other public transit systems, including the light rail and MARC trains.

"It really does bring neighborhoods together," said Councilman William H. Cole IV, who represents part of the area served by the Purple Route.

The service starts at 6:30 a.m. on weekdays and 9 a.m. on weekends from April through October. It will continue until 9 p.m., except on Fridays and Saturdays, when it operates until midnight. The buses will stop running at 8 p.m. Sundays through Thursdays the rest of the year.

Some of the Purple Route's stops are at existing Maryland Transit Administration bus stops, but others are new, which should help the service stay on schedule, according to city transportation director Alfred H. Foxx.

"I want [riders] to be able to feel confident that all they have to do is wait 10 minutes," he said.

Originally, the route only extended as far south as Montgomery Street, according to Jane Seebold, executive director of Federal Hill Main Street Inc., a nonprofit that represents business and residential interests. But now, it goes down to Ostend Street, bringing riders closer to the heart of the business district, as well as the West Street Garage, she said. The hope is that the service will attract some people who may have avoided Federal Hill in the past due to concerns about parking.

"Those people won't have to think twice about it," Seebold said.

Sonny Morstein of Morstein's Jewelers, president of the Federal Hill Business Association, said business owners "couldn't be happier." He thinks the service will bring more people from the Inner Harbor who may have had a hard time crossing Key Highway in the past.

"Every great city has great transportation," he said.

Barry Werner, an owner of Scarborough Fair Bed & Breakfast, said he hopes the new route would encourage more visitors during slow business months in the hottest part of the summer and coldest part of winter.

Visitors like Baltimore because it's a walkable city, he said, but "people don't want to walk around in that weather."