

Comparison of Capital Costs for Fixed-Route Bus Stop Improvements to Paratransit Operating Cost

(Source: Maryland MTA, Baltimore)

Transit agencies rarely have control over the public right-of-way, where the vast majority of bus stops are located, and frequently have little or no say in how sidewalks are constructed. Transit agencies are usually dependent on what they find and must be content to make the most of those facilities. This doesn't have to be the case.

Bus Stop Improvements

Maryland MTA has undertaken a program to improve some of its fixed-route bus stops, even though it is not generally responsible for facilities in the public right-of-way. Two levels of improvement have been carried out: "simple" and "enhanced."

Design and construction of simple bus stops includes obtaining permits from the localities, traffic control plans and minor fixing of sidewalks and the installation of a post and sign. **The total cost to MTA for 26 new stops was \$183,000 which amounts to about \$7,000 per bus stop.** Out of that, the design fee was \$110,000 including the consultant fee and ADA coordinator time. The fee for construction including management during construction was \$73,129. The relatively high cost for design was due to the major coordination efforts in the permit process

Design and construction of enhanced bus stops included lighted shelters, a bench, trash can and branded pylons, the corresponding trenching to provide electricity, permits, replacing and fixing portions of sidewalks and installing signs and posts. **The total cost to MTA for 14 new enhanced bus stops was \$813,000 which amounts to \$58,000 per enhanced bus stop.** Out of that total, the design fee was \$350,000 and the construction cost was 463,000.

The costs of the stops that MTA constructed did not include any right of way acquisition. However, MTA believes that as it gains more experience and develops standards and better relations with the localities (Counties and State), costs would decrease significantly for the design fee.

These improvements enhance customer service, benefit all riders, but also make stops available to persons with disabilities who might otherwise be accommodated only by paratransit. MTA says the project "illustrates the partnership of the MTA among its employees, contractors and with its customers. The completion of this project will serve as a model for how transit can be improved for everyone."

Paratransit

According to MTA's Finance Department, the costs of providing paratransit for FY '06 was \$40,935,000 plus overhead (multiply times 1.8067) which amounts to a total of \$73,957,264 for 965,000 trips. **So the total cost per ride for FY '06 to MTA including the management overhead was \$76.64.** Overhead was included in this cost because it was also added in the stop improvement cost.

One person using paratransit for work makes ten trips per week (\$766) and 500 trips (assuming two weeks of vacation) per year (\$38,300). If that person can now use the fixed-route service, the cost of the simple improvement is recovered in ten weeks and the cost of the enhanced stop is recovered in eighteen months and the paratransit cost saving continues.

If an agency's paratransit trip cost or construction costs are different, the payback time may differ from the above, but the principle remains the same.