

OPINION - Local transit has unresolved issues

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To the Editor:

To comment on the St Mary's County news that George Erichsen is to take the position as director of MetCom, then it needs to be told what Mr. Erichsen is leaving behind with the local St. Mary's Transit System (STS) Bus while he has been the director of the St. Mary's County Department of Public Works and Transportation (DPW&T).

As it happens on this past Oct. 26, a complaint to the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) against the STS Bus was issued with the accusations of misusing the federal, state and local funding away from its intended use to serve the elderly and disabled citizens and instead the funding has been misused by the STS Bus to serve the general public. That might sound like a simplistic complaint but both the federal law and the Maryland law specifically requires that the heavily subsidized bus funding is to be used primarily for the elderly and for the disabled while the general public are to use the STS Bus only as space is available.

The problem is more than just the millions of dollars in funding being misused over the past 20 years while George Erichsen was the director, because what it really means by the bus being used as a "public service" is that the elderly and disabled persons are treated as inferior and second class citizens who get dropped off by the STS Bus on the side of the roadway at such places as like the senior centers, the Housing Authority, the Health Department, and in those situations it means near a quarter --mile walk at each place, and then the Elderly and Disabled have to return walking the quarter mile again and catch the STS Bus on the side of busy highways for their trip home. The STS Bus being misdirected as a "public service" then drops off "public" passengers at the front door to such places as Walmart and J.C. Penny, and at the front door to the ABC Liquor store, and this is done because the STS Bus funding has been misused away from serving the elderly and the disabled as directed under the "Americans with Disabilities Act" (the ADA). So the general public gets door-to-door service to public places while the elderly and disabled are dropped off on the street for places they need to go. See a real life example of this on video of a man, woman and child being recklessly dropped off by the STS Bus across a busy highway from the Bean Medical Building in Hollywood.

It is a shameful reality that Director Erichsen is now leaving behind the legal and the ethical problems as unsettled and unresolved and still ongoing, so that any new Director of the DPW&T will have to clean up the mess left behind with the STS Bus. Having him transfer over to MetCom is like the old fox in the chicken coop moving over to a new chicken coop while he is pretending to be doing a favor for the County by leaving his old job behind. And still there is more as I have a case for Judicial Review in the Circuit Court for St Mary's County where the court will decide if the ADA (the Americans with Disabilities Act) will be enforced onto the STS Bus and put an end to the 20 years of ugly discrimination against the elderly and disabled citizens who need the STS Bus to get around. Also the STS Bus has another different charge of discrimination done against the disabled under review by the Maryland Commission on Civil Rights while Director Erichsen moves on to his new job at MetCom starting in February 2017. He will be cursed wherever he goes.

None of this message here is declaring Mr. Erichsen as guilty just because he was the director of that agency under scrutiny, and we all know that government investigations are slow and often go on forever without any solution. So, yes, Director Erichsen is an innocent man, and yet the reality needs to become known that when the going got tough then he got going, and now what he is leaving behind with the STS Bus is a big mess of unethical business which other people will have to deal with, and so he is doing no one a favor but himself by transferring over to MetCom.

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