

Description of services

VanGO is the public transit provider in Charles County, administered by the county's Department of Planning and Growth Management. Operations are contracted to a private transportation provider, MV Transportation, who have taken over as provider of services effective July 1, 2017. VanGO operates 16 public transit routes, as well as specialized transportation services for senior citizens and individuals with disabilities who are unable to access general public services. These services are detailed in this plan. The 2020 Census depicts Charles County's growing population which at 166,617, reflects a 14% increase from the 2010 Census, depicting a growing county in need of additional scope and service of transit. The most recent estimates from the 2024 American Community Survey show a population of 174,478, an additional increase of 4.7%, outpacing Maryland's overall population growth.

An overview of system ridership for the last six fiscal years is provided in Table 2-1. As noted in this table ridership on the fixed routes decreased significantly when the COVID pandemic hit but is beginning to rebound. Of particular note, between FY-2017 and the most recent fiscal year, demand for ADA services has increased 24% and continues to increase.

Project Executive Summary

Charles County is requesting funds to construct a new transit maintenance and operations facility for its robust and growing transit service. This project began in 2010 and has diligently moved through the NEPA and D&E phase and the County is ready for construction. Constructing this facility will result in improvements to transit system reliability and allow for the expansion of services. This project will advance the County's commitment to providing transportation choices.

This facility will be 18,000 square feet of which 12,000 square feet will be specifically for fleet maintenance. There will be fleet parking sufficient to grow the fleet to 60 buses from the current 43, a dedicated drive through bus wash, state of the art shop equipment, driver lounge and locker rooms and will co-locate Charles County Transit employees with the transit operations contractor.

Demonstration of Need

Since the introduction of transit services in Charles County, the service known as VanGO, has been operated by a contractor utilizing County owned buses. Contractors are required to provide their own operating and maintenance facility either by leasing or purchasing the land and facility. The costs of this facility is reflected in the contracted cost of providing the transit service. Typically, facilities procured by contractors are not set up for transit operations and maintenance, and have to be "adapted" as best as possible to that purpose. The current facility has been adapted from an 84 Lumber roof truss manufacturing building with a modular office on the parking lot.

In Charles County's January 2010 Transit Development Plan, the consultant discussed the need to begin investigating construction of a County owned transit maintenance and operation facility that could be centrally located in the service area. With additional service needs, VanGo and local officials have identified that it is increasingly important to have a permanent operating facility to meet current and future demand.

A feasibility study completed in November 2012 identified several possible site locations—including both existing structures and open land—that were all centrally located in the transit service area. It was at this point ultimate construction of a transit facility became a priority and staff moved forward, obtaining approval of the elected County Commissioners to take this initiative through to construction. Since then, County owned property has been subdivided and the final phase of design and engineering is complete. With a fully funded construction budget, the project could be bid as early October 2025, currently on hold while additional construction funds are obtained.

Project Benefits

In the first phase a number of options were considered from unimproved land to existing buildings and land that could be properly converted to a transit facility. Through several subsequent phases, it was determined the structure will be built on County owned land and will be a newly constructed, state of the art, purpose-built facility (attachment F). There will be four maintenance bays serving a shop of just over 12,000 square feet and an administrative/operations area of 6,000 square feet. The administrative area will include dispatch and operations to include a lounge area and locker room for bus operators and mechanics. The facility will also include a fuel island and an automatic bus wash.

Currently, costs for an operating and maintenance facility are borne by the contractor and passed on to the County in their charges for services. Once the facility is completed and

operational, these costs will be eliminated and removed from contract costs charged to the County. This will represent considerable savings and may allow the County to expand services benefiting citizens depending on public transportation.

A County owned facility occupied by a contractor will enhance the competitive environment when the contract is put out to bid. This will place all firms competing to be the VanGO service provider on equal footing and will attract more bidders, which is expected to lower costs to the County. The provision of an operating facility by contractors has always proved troublesome and in the past has sometimes resulted in facilities that did not meet operational needs. Construction of a County owned facility will permanently resolve this issue.

The Project will construct a new facility utilizing the latest technologies, equipment and processes. The resulting working conditions will be significantly improved as compared to past, contractor-provided buildings that had been adapted from other uses. The provision of locker rooms, employee lounge areas, state of the art shop facilities, and staff meeting/training areas will all improve employee well-being, contributing to employee retention. Additionally, Charles County staff will be co-located in the new facility, improving their ability to oversee contractors.

This facility will aid in attaining consistency in the standards for maintenance, operations, and state of good repair for transit vehicles. Additionally, it will provide a safe working environment for operators and maintenance employees, resulting in improved service quality for transit riders. The County will be well positioned to grow transit services as the population continues to increase and can attract more service providers to bid on these services resulting in lower contract pricing.

The construction of this new facility will ultimately improve safety, reliability, and transportation choices for residents and visitors to Charles County.

Planning and Local/Regional Prioritization

As previously discussed, the need for a County owned facility was identified in the 2010 Transportation Development Plan followed by the initial feasibility study completed in 2012. Over the course of subsequent years more studies were completed that prioritized three locations for more detailed analysis. Public outreach sessions were also conducted during this time. Ultimately, a six-acre parcel on County owned land was selected and a public hearing was held that resulted in no objections. In fact, several residents testified in favor of the selected site. Following approval by our elected County Commissioners, this parcel was subdivided and formally filed.

After delays from the pandemic, the project scope changed due to post-pandemic inflation affecting all aspects of construction of a facility causing a significant funding gap as compared to the pre-pandemic cost estimates. This grant application is an effort to secure additional capital funds to adequately complete this project.

After identifying and securing a site, Charles County completed 50% design on the new facility and subsequently issued a task order for 100%, which is not complete and will permit bidding the project once funding for construction is secured. If the project is successful bid in the fall of 2025, construction could commence in early 2026.

Currently, all of the NEPA process is complete (attachment C) and stormwater management plans have been approved by the County. Throughout this process the local Board of County Commissioners have fully supported the project, recognizing the benefit to the County and improvements to the public transit system that will follow. That level of support continues.

Project Implementation Plan

The 2010 Transportation Development Plan (TDP) determined Charles County VanGo was in need of a centralized County owned facility to accommodate new growth. To identify the site, a feasibility study was completed in 2012 and a site selection study was completed in 2018. These studies were the foundation to determine the square footages and amenities the new facility would need for the VanGO system. The studies identified the need for 56 buses and 51 parking spaces for employees and visitors, a maintenance shop, administrative offices, vehicle wash and fueling site, and fare collection. Once the planning documents were completed and approved, the project moved into 30% design. (see Site Plan, attachments D and E)

Design and engineering are 100% completed. NEPA determination for a Categorical Exclusion (CE) was given on July 1, 2022 (see attachment C). Once the project is fully funded the county intends to procure the project through an Invitation To Bid (ITB). The ITB will be advertised for a minimum of 30 days, Notice To Proceed (NTP) is scheduled to start on 12-15-2025 with construction activities starting on 3-15-2025. The overall construction schedule is 12-18 months.

Technical, Legal, and Financial Capacity

Charles County has the technical, legal, and financial capacity to successfully manage this project: The construction of this project will be led by Charles County, Department of Public Works and Department of Planning and Growth Management. In addition, the Maryland Transit Administration (MTA) will provide direct project support throughout the process, ensuring compliance to all FTA regulatory requirements. The MTA's, Office of Local Transit Support (OLTS) has been successful in leading Locally Operated Transit Systems (LOTS) through major facility projects including the Ocean City Transit Facility, completed in 2021 and Frederick County Transit Facility, completed in 2022.

The Government Finance Officers Association of the United States and Canada (GFOA) awarded a Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting to Charles County, Maryland for its annual comprehensive financial report for the year ended June 30, 2020. This is the 19th consecutive year that the County has achieved this prestigious award. In order to be awarded a Certificate of Achievement, a government must publish an easily readable and efficiently organized annual comprehensive financial report. This report must satisfy both generally accepted accounting principles in the United States of America and applicable legal requirements.

The County implements five-year financial forecast models for all major funds to aid with both operating and capital budget plans. Our financial models have the ability to adjust current and future revenues to fulfill the desired service level requirements. The outcome of compiling financial plans is to determine the amount of additional debt that the County can issue over a five-year period in order to make fiscally sound management decisions as it relates to future infrastructure. This expertise combined with a budget allowing Charles County to hire an outside construction oversight consultant assures the capital budget will be effectively managed.

The Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) for this grant contains the following language: "The applicant assures and certifies, with respect to any application and awarded Project under this NOFO, that it . . . will cooperate with Federal officials in the enforcement of Federal law, including cooperating with and not impeding U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and other Federal offices and components of the Department of Homeland Security in the enforcement of Federal immigration law" (the "Immigration Condition"). Please be advised that the State of Maryland is a plaintiff in a lawsuit challenging U.S. DOT's imposition of the Immigration Condition on federal funding as unlawful. See *California v. U.S. Dep't of Transp.*, No. 1:25cv208 (D.R.I. filed May 13, 2025). On June 19, 2025, the court presiding over that action issued an order enjoining the imposition of the Immigration Condition on federal funding as to any Plaintiff State,

including any subdivision or instrumentality thereof. In submitting this application, the [state agency applicant] is subject to that court order, and this application should not be construed as a certification as to the Immigration Condition or as a waiver of any rights by MTA or the State of Maryland.