

Section 3

Rock Spring Park



Rock Spring Park

The Rock Spring Park Activity Center study area consists of the area designated in planning documents as Rock Spring Industrial Park, generally bounded by Old Georgetown Road, Democracy Boulevard, and the I-270 spurs. See Figure 3-1 for an aerial view of the study area.

Located in Montgomery County, Maryland, Rock Spring Park is a suburban employment activity center characterized by a large office complex housing several company headquarters or regional divisions, with a mix of commercial/retail activity along Old Georgetown Road to the east, medium-density residential along Democracy Boulevard to the south, commercial activity to the west, and a large, well-established shopping mall. Figure 3.1 shows the general land use for the study area. The majority of the streetscapes are well-maintained. While approximately 70 percent built-out, primarily with office uses, the latest development includes residential units in the northeast quadrant. Bounded by both I-270 spurs, Rock Spring Park is easily accessible by automobile and contains ample parking.

According to the 2000 census as analyzed by the Metropolitan Washington Council of Government's (COG) 2002 report Regional Activity Centers, there were 6 households in the study area and 22,700 jobs. COG predicts a 30 percent increase in jobs to 29,700 in 2025. There will be a considerable increase in households to 1,300. The anticipated dramatic increase in housing at Rock Spring Park is due to the planned residential development in the northeast quadrant.

Summary characteristics of the area:

- Significant concentration of established employment in a suburban center.
- Metrorail station within a reasonable distance, but with limited access and no reasonable pedestrian connection (nearly a mile walk, and incomplete sidewalk network).
- Few households with significant increase projected
- The North Bethesda TMD, a well-established TMA active in this area, and extensive county TDM programs mean potential for easier implementation.



Only work end data was available for the Rock Spring Park study area, and driving alone constituted the major mode share for the area, 85 percent of work trips. Transit was only five percent of work end mode share.

**Table 3-1
Rock Spring Park Mode Share**

	Home End			Work End		
	Transit	Drive Alone	Walk/Bike	Transit	Drive Alone	Walk/Bike
Rock Spring Park	NA	NA	NA	5%	85%	0%

Source: 2000 Census Transportation Planning Package

Transportation System

The study area includes circulator roads within the center, while major arterials and major interstates bound the center to the northwest and northeast. Traffic congestion is an issue along Old Georgetown Road at the Rockledge Boulevard and Democracy Boulevard intersections, as traffic volumes tend to increase during peak hours. Along Rockledge Boulevard, near Walter Johnson High School, traffic volumes tend to be light to moderate. Most of the congestion occurs at the intersections of Fernwood Road/Democracy Boulevard, Rockledge Boulevard/Old Georgetown Road, and Old Georgetown Road/Democracy Boulevard. The bulk of traffic is moving toward I-270. Both I-270 spurs now have HOV-2 facilities that allow access to Rock Spring Park.

Figure 3-1 Rock Spring Park Land Use



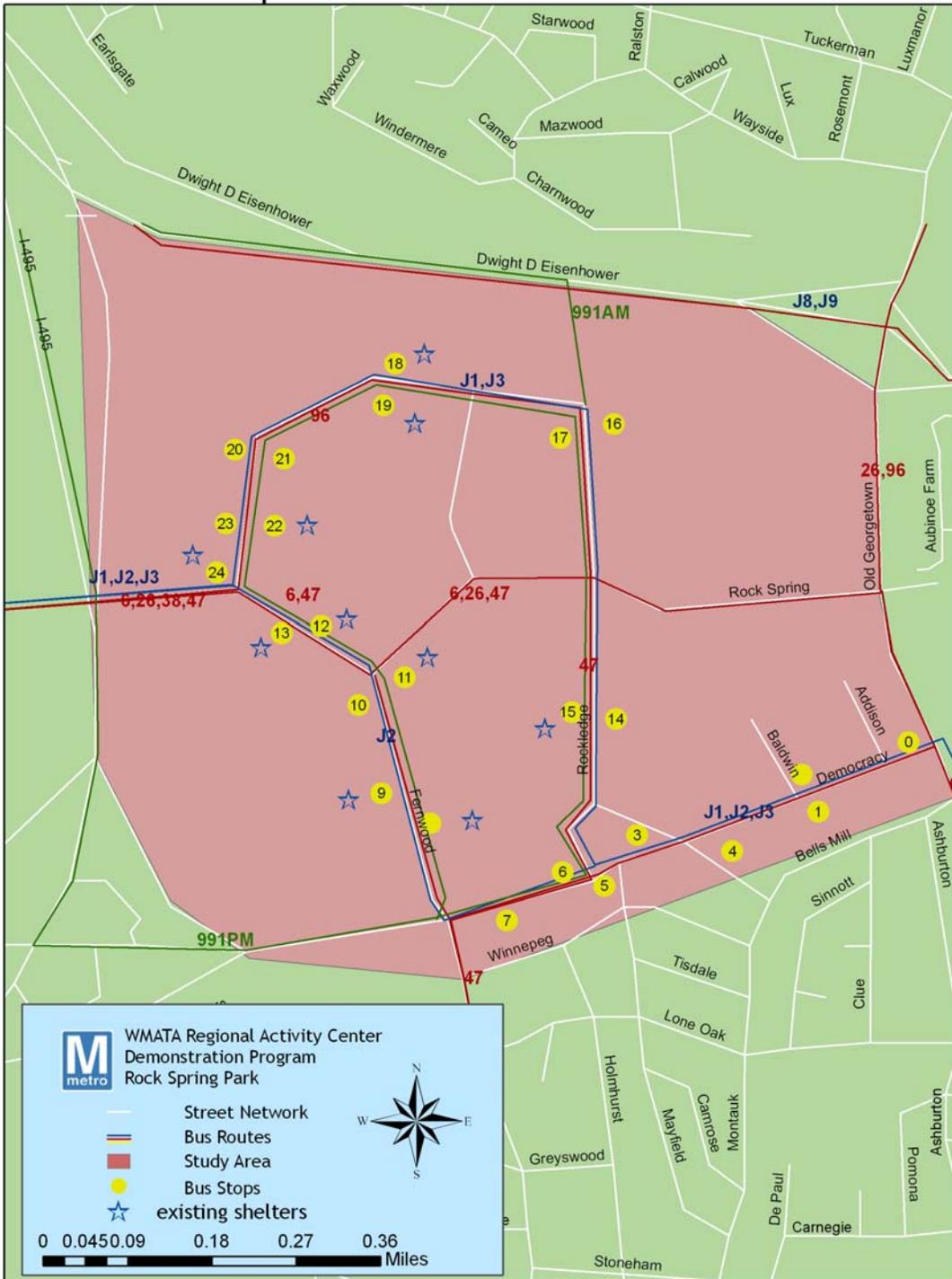
County regulations require that any employer with 25 or more employees must have a transportation mitigation program. Some Rock Spring Park employers are active participants in the existing transportation management association (the North Bethesda TMD operated by the Transportation Action Partnership (TAP) under the name North Bethesda Transportation Center (NBTC)), while others are less enthusiastic. There are several large offices with federal employees who have easy access to MetroChek. Other employers do participate, but less aggressively.

Pedestrian Environment

Although the activity center is characterized by an extensive sidewalk network that lines each major study area roadway, pedestrian activity is limited. There is no buffer between pedestrians and traffic, and limited pedestrian crosswalks and signals. There are also some missing connections between activity center uses, and parcels marked for future development do not yet have sidewalks. Also, there are long distances between marked crosswalks, which encourages jaywalking in the center. Any pedestrians between the new medium-density residential development in the northeast section of the study area would have a significant wait period to cross Old Georgetown Road. This means that, to some extent, Old Georgetown Road, would be a barrier for people getting to the activity center. Within Rock Spring Park, mature trees, benches, distinctive paving, and extensive lawns contribute to a generally pleasant pedestrian environment. However, the lighting is barely adequate to provide visibility and safety for pedestrians.



Figure 3-2
 Rock Spring Park
 Bus Routes & Stops



Transit Facilities and Operations

The primary streets within the study area contain 25 bus stops as shown on Figure 3-2. Of those, 12 stops have shelters. All stops with higher passenger volumes have shelters, except for one stop. Most of the stops have posted schedules and maps. The Transit Center at Westfield Shoppingtown Montgomery includes two bays and two attractive shelters within a short walk to the mall. An additional shelter on Westlake Terrace serves routes bypassing the transit center.

The mall owners have approached WMATA and Montgomery County with preliminary plans to modify the north area of the Mall and the entrance drive design on Westlake Terrace. They plan to add a food court on that side of the Mall and reorient the entrance to Westlake Terrace. The Mall owners have stated that they desire the transit center and will maintain it somewhere near its present location.

Transit services in the area include one Metrobus route with three sub-routings and five Ride On routes. There is also a shuttle service provided for NIH employees only. Bus lines and routings within the study area are shown in Table 3-2 and Figure 3-2. The nearest Metrorail stations to Westfield Shoppingtown Montgomery are Grosvenor, with a bus travel time of 10 minutes, and White Flint, with a bus travel time of 17 minutes.

**Table 3-2
Existing Bus Service within the Rock Spring Park Study Area**

<u>WMATA</u>	Headway	
	<u>Peak</u>	<u>Off-Peak</u>
Line J1/2/3 - Westfield Shoppingtown Montgomery-Silver Spring Westfield Shoppingtown Montgomery /RSP/Medical Center/Bethesda/Silver Spring	6	20
<u>Ride-On</u>		
Line 6 - Wheaton- Westfield Shoppingtown Montgomery Line Grosvenor Metro/Rock Spring Park/ Westfield Shoppingtown Montgomery	30	30
Line 26 - Glenmont- Westfield Shoppingtown Montgomery White Flint Metro/Rock Spring Park	25	30
Line 38 - Wheaton- Westfield Shoppingtown Montgomery Wheaton/White Flint Metro/Potomac/ (no RSP)	30	30
Line 47 - Rockville-Bethesda Westfield Shoppingtown Montgomery /Rock Spring Park/Bethesda Metro	30	30
Line 96 - Grosvenor-Rock Spring Park-Montgomery Mall (\$0.25)	20	20

SmartMover (Metrobus 14 to Tysons Corner) was discontinued in December 2003 due to low ridership. This route served the Westfield Shoppingtown Montgomery transit center.

The National Institute for Health (NIH) operates a shuttle for its employees that runs from its offices in Rock Spring Park to the main campus and near the Medical Center Metrorail station.



Transit Ridership

The heaviest passenger volumes in the study area occur at the Westfield Shoppingtown Montgomery transit center with 600 daily weekday boardings. Other high-volume stops include Fernwood Road at Rock Spring Drive with 70 daily boardings and Fernwood Road near Democracy Boulevard with 60 daily weekday boardings. Figure 3-3 shows daily weekday ridership at each stop. Table 3-3 shows bus ridership by route within the Rock Spring Park study area.

**Table 3-3
Bus Ridership within the Rock Spring Park Study Area**

WMATA

Route	Ave Weekday Ridership	AM Peak Riders 5:30 AM - 9:29 AM	PM Peak Riders 3:00 PM - 6:59 PM	Percentage of Daily Riders During Peak	Check Date
J1/2/3 Eastbound	3,483	425	1,579	57.5%	Apr-00
J1/2/3 Westbound	4,147	2,056	875	70.7%	Apr-00

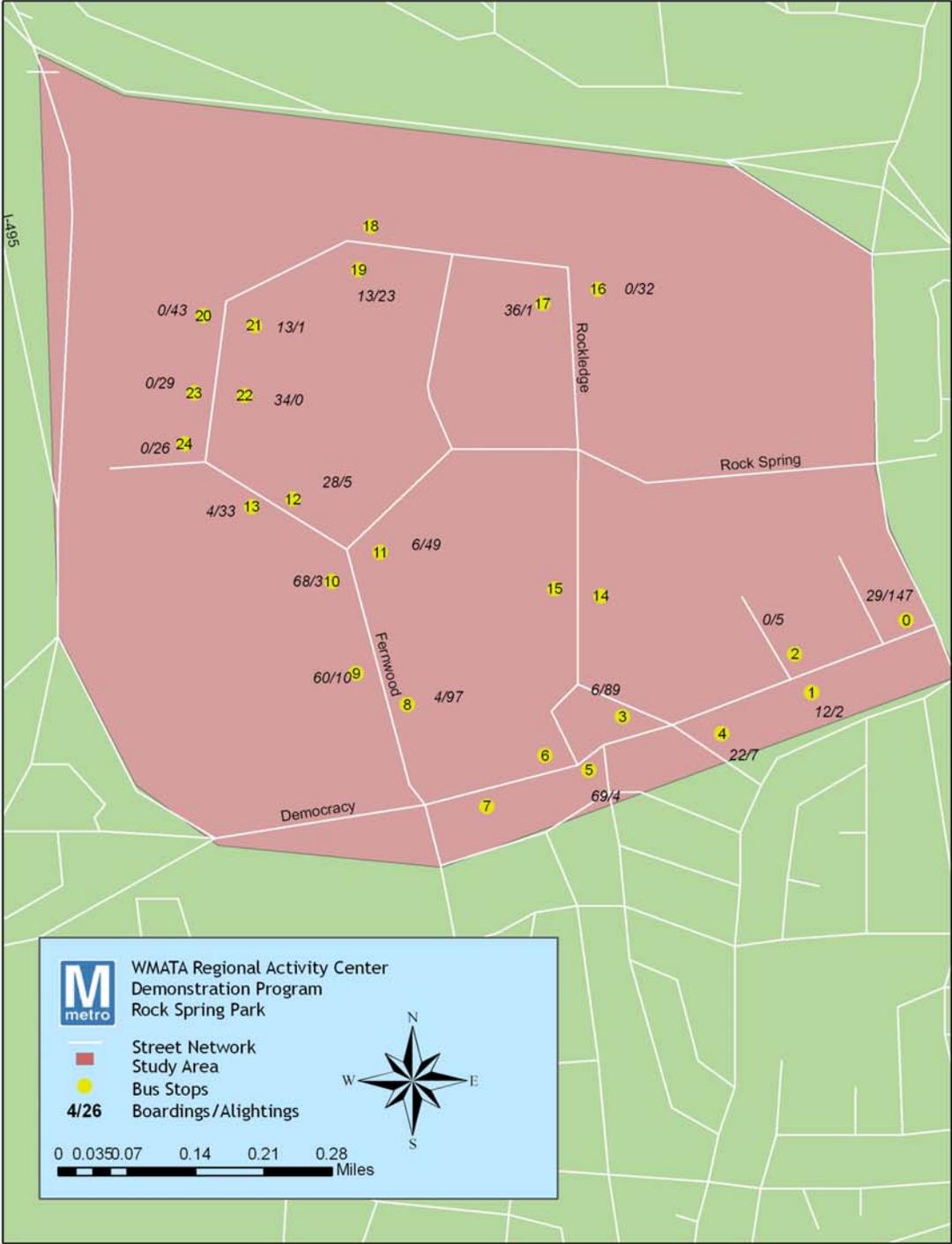
RideOn

Route	Ave Monthly Ridership	Est. Peak Riders	Percentage of Daily Riders During Peak
6	463	463	100%
26	2,709	1,157	43%
38	1,239	582	47%
47	1,078	526	49%
96	444	NA	

Ridership is from May 2002 - April 2003

Routes 6, 47, 96 are September 02 - Apr 03

Figure 3-3
 Rock Spring Park
 Boardings & Alightings by Stop



Needs and Opportunities

Rock Spring Park consists of office buildings filled with professional workers who tend to need and desire the automobile for errand running after work. The ready access to major roadways that, while congested, still provide swift access to the greater Washington DC/Virginia/Maryland region, a ready supply of parking, and no direct connection to the regional rail system, the choice transit service in the region, all contribute to low bus transit ridership in the center. Although Montgomery County aggressively markets alternate commute methods, there are still areas, such as Rock Spring Park, designed and developed with automobile access prioritized that are, and will continue to be, most easily accessible by car. In addition to this general observation, field review of Rock Spring Park did suggest some other needs and commensurate opportunities. The following significant needs were identified in the field review and stakeholder interviews:

Capital and Operational Issues

At the bus transfer facility, the two bus bays are insufficient for the volume of buses serving the area. At times more than two buses enter the facility, with a third bus usually alighting passengers from the bypass lane in the space between the first and second bus. A third bay would be advantageous for both bus operations as well as pedestrian safety and convenience. Neither WMATA nor Ride On schedules are posted at the transit center.

The transit center has its own entrance (which some autos mistakenly use), with buses mixing with autos exiting the mall parking. Buses laying over do so either at the transit center bays or in the mall parking area which mall management does not favor.

Throughout the center, long distances between marked crosswalks and too few pedestrian signal crossings encourage unsafe pedestrian activity. The center needs more well-maintained sidewalks and crosswalks. Although there are no marked bike lanes, the center's roadways are wide enough to accommodate traffic and bicycles. Signage encouraging motorists to share the roadway might be useful in encouraging bike travel.

Transit Operational Issues

Queues at intersections exiting Rock Spring Park in the evening peak period can become long enough that buses must wait through more than one signal cycle. Bus queue bypass lanes would be helpful, but should be considered as part of a longer-term capital improvement program, due to their potential to be expensive to implement in this location. Schedule reliability for the bus service to Grovesnor Metrorail station is poor, and frequency of midday service is low.

The routing of the RO96 circulator is viewed by passengers as confusing, with three different route patterns depending on the time of day. At times it serves Montgomery Mall but not certain stops in Rock Spring Park. Other times it serves Rock Spring Park but not Westfield Shoppingtown Montgomeryl.

Recommended Actions

Although stakeholder discussion suggested that Rock Spring Park employees would be very attracted to rail service for the center, the planning for that level of capital investment should be pursued in subsequent studies. The intent of the recommended actions for Rock Spring Park is to deliver services at a lower cost that will attract new and retain existing transit riders in the center.

Proposed Bus Service and Capital Enhancements

Service

Regional Bus Study Recommendations

- **Ride On Route 6**

This proposal adopted from the Regional Bus Study would extend the Ride On route 6 service schedule to provide service later in the evening. The last departure from Rockledge would be at 6:30 PM, arriving at Wheaton at 6:53 pm. This route is currently operated with small buses. Two additional small buses would be required.

- **Ride On Route 38**

The Regional Bus Study proposes to extend the weekday evening service of Ride On route 38 for one additional hour per day.

- **Ride On Route 62**

Per the Regional Bus Study, it is recommended that Ride On route 62 be extended from Shady Grove to Westfield Shoppingtown Montgomery. This would provide a one-seat ride from north of Shady Grove to the mall rather than the current bus-rail-bus trip. It was assumed that one trip per hour during peak periods would be extended to Montgomery Mall and the remaining Route 62 trips would be unchanged.

- **Potomac Circulator**

As recommended in the Regional Bus Study, the Potomac Circulator could connect the transit center at the mall and allow transfers to Metrobus J1, 2 and 3 at the mall, which provides a high level of service to Bethesda, NIH, and Silver Spring. This circulator would operate as a one-way loop during the week, operating from 7:00 AM to 7:00 PM at 30-minute headways.

Other Recommendations

- **Ride On Route 6**

Ride On route 6 provides weekly service between the Wheaton Metrorail station and the Montgomery Mall Transit Center. Existing service is provided at 30-minute headways during peak and off-peak periods. The frequency of service should be increased to 10-minute headways during both peak and off-peak periods.

- **Ride On Route 96**

Ride On route 96 provides daily circulator service between Grosvenor Metrorail station, Rock Spring Park, and Westfield Shoppingtown Montgomery. Existing service is provided at 10-minute headways during peak and 20-minute headways during off-peak periods.

Passengers complain that the routing patterns are confusing. Simplifying the routing for this route is recommended.

Capital

The demonstration program considered small-scale improvements that could enhance the service improvements. In particular, at locations where average daily boardings exceeded 50, shelters are proposed to enhance the quality of the transit experience for those daily users. In the Rock Spring Park study area, the following shelter location is recommended:

- Democracy Blvd at Old Georgetown Road bus stop

Given the high volume of transfers at the bus transfer facility at the Westfield Shoppingtown Montgomery (also known as the Montgomery Mall), WMATA should continue its active partnership with mall management to enhance the facility in this location. Additionally, recently Montgomery County signed an agreement with Clear Channel that gives Clear Channel the responsibility to construct, operate, and maintain bus shelters in the county's right of way.

Summary

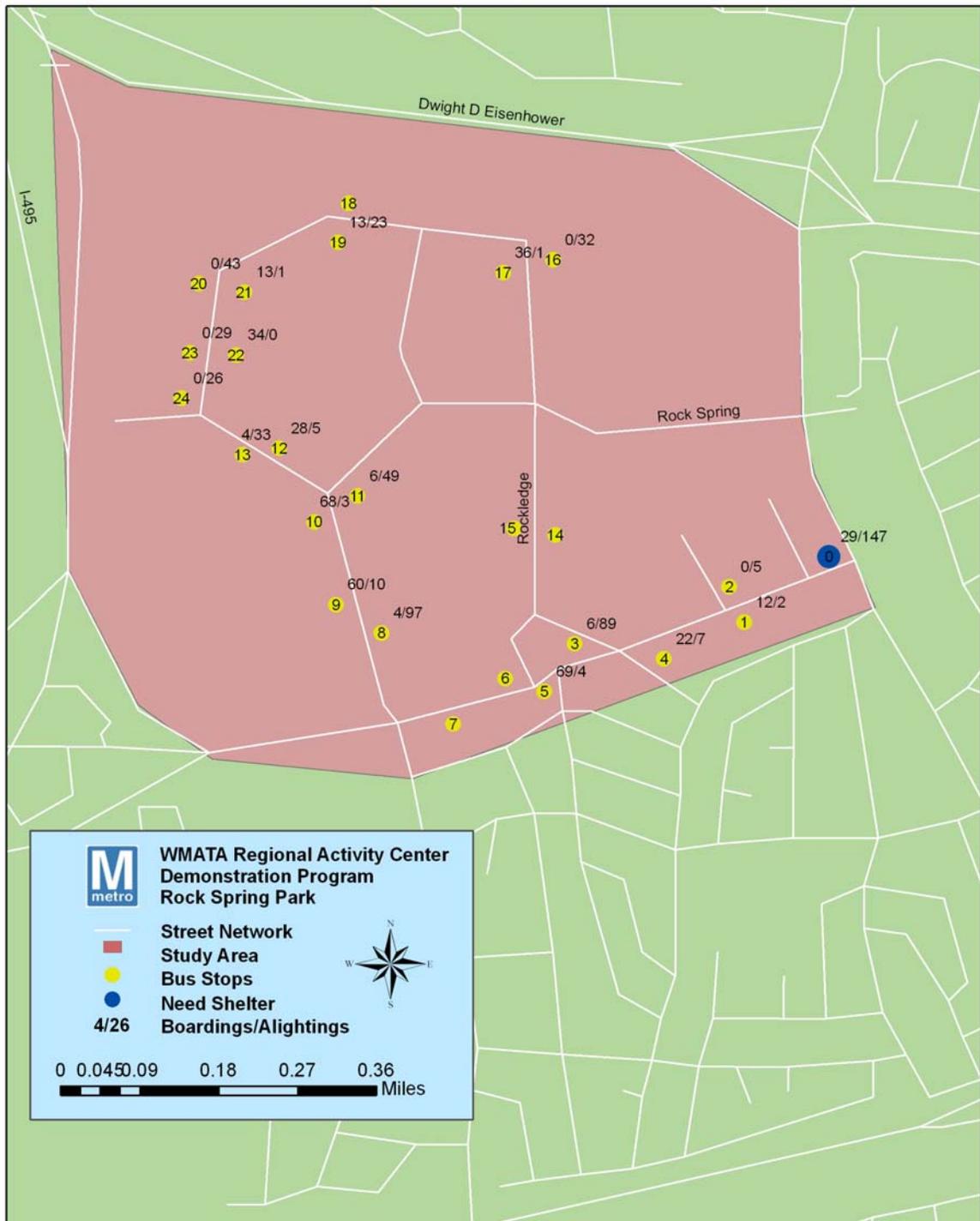
The bus service modifications described above for the Ride On routes consist of enhancements to existing service in terms of frequency and span of service and expansion in terms of route coverage. The recommended service would require an additional 9 buses at an approximate capital cost of \$3 million. The increase of annual vehicle revenue hours would be 23,000 and would cost Ride On about \$2.3 million annually to operate. The extended service, Route 62 from Shady Grove, to the Westfield Shoppingtown Montgomery would attract an estimated additional 29 passengers per additional revenue hour and appears to be the most advantageous of the service enhancements in the Rock Spring Park activity center.

The service improvements operations matrix is shown on the next page. Costs shown are in 2005 dollars. Service and capital improvements are shown on Figure 3-4.

Rock Spring Park Center Operating Matrix

Proposed Service Enhancements	Source	Additional Annual Vehicle Revenue Hours (VRH)	Additional Daily Peak Vehicles	Additional Annual Operating Cost	Additional Annual Operating Cost/VRH	Annual Ridership Change	Additional Capital Cost - Buses	Service Effectiveness: Ridership/ Revenue hours
RideOn 6: <i>Extend evening service</i>	Regional Bus Study Enhancements	283	2	\$22,500	\$79	3,500	\$530,200	12
RideOn 38: <i>Add evening service</i>	Regional Bus Study Enhancements	1,175	0	\$97,600	\$83	16,500	\$0	14
RideOn 62: <i>Extend service to Westfield Shoppingtown Montgomery</i>	Regional Bus Study Enhancements	1,000	1	\$105,200	\$105	29,300	\$363,400	29
Potomac Circulator: <i>Add weekday evening service</i>	Regional Bus Study Enhancements	3,000	1	\$395,400	\$132	44,500	\$265,100	15
RideOn 6: <i>Increase frequency of weekday service</i>	Regional Bus Study Enhancements	17,000	5	\$1,623,100	\$95	69,100	\$1,816,800	4
Center Total		23,300	9	\$2,335,200	\$100	172,400	\$2,975,500	7

Figure 3-4
 Rock Spring Park
 Shelter Recommendations



Supportive policies to promote transit use

In addition to the service and capital improvements described above, there are supportive policies and actions that will promote transit use at Rock Spring Park. Although these policies will enhance service in this center, it is possible that in order to capture the greatest number of new riders, a more significant amount of capital and service improvements may be required.

- Ensure that information and signage at bus stops is accurate and up-to-date.
- Develop a multimodal access guide for the center, demonstrating how to use transit to access nearby shopping and cultural destinations. This would be particularly useful for the new residents projected for Rock Spring Park and would enable them to take the bus to nearby shopping (White Flint and associated retail outlets along Rockville Pike).
- Coordinate with NBTC to promote car and vanpool program.
- Coordinate with Montgomery County DOT to repair and improve sidewalks and center roadways near bus stops to improve pedestrian access.
- Coordinate with NBTC to advocate for improved bike facilities in center, such as a bike garage and changing facility.
- Promote transit facilities and car sharing at future residential and office development. Draw upon existing WMATA partnerships with car sharing companies throughout the region.
- Work with Montgomery County to implement ITS improvements at stops and along routes that service Rock Spring Park.

Phasing and Timing of Activities

Implementing the service improvements, combined with an information and marketing campaign to all center employees, is the first set of effective improvements. Continued coordination with the NBTC and land use and redevelopment planners with Montgomery County will enable more flexibility and swift adaptation of service to evolving needs at the center. Of particular concern, when the 6000 new housing units in the center come on line, pairing that with new service, such as a shuttle, to encourage transit ridership will be critical to mitigating congestion levels in the center. In addition, close coordination will be necessary to carry out improvements to the bicycle and pedestrian network in the center.

Short-Term Actions

2006	Implement service improvements in next round of operations adjustments
2006-2007	Implement shelter improvement with the next round of capital improvements
2006	Provide updated route maps and schedules at all area bus stops
2006	Create and distribute access guide
2006-2010	Develop regular meeting schedule with Montgomery County traffic services and DPW to develop and implement traffic calming, cyclist and pedestrian facility improvements
2007	Prioritize Rock Spring Park RideOn and Metrobus routes among those that will be considered for ITS technology

Long-Term Actions

Develop current relationship and participate regularly in NBTC meetings to ensure swift resolution for center transit issues.

Potential Costs and Jurisdictional Responsibilities

As noted above, the recommended service would require an additional 9 buses at an approximate capital cost of \$3 million. Integrating WMATA buses into RideOn's planned electronic system to provide information on the next arriving bus, and providing a context-sensitive shelter at Democracy Boulevard will add to the cost. Information and marketing materials, while not negligible, will be somewhat less, due to the existing distribution network and advanced level of transit materials that the TMD offers.

Table 3-4 Potential Costs

Improvements	unit	Unit cost	Estimated Dollar Amount	WMATA	Montgomery County	Private
Capital						
Vehicles	9 buses	260,000	\$ 2,340,000		x	
New Shelters	1 shelter	10,000	\$ 10,000			x
maps & Signs	25 bus stops	500	\$ 12,500	x		
ITS display	1 display	25,000	\$ 25,000	x		
Crosswalk painting	10 crosswalks	120	\$ 1,200		x	
Transit guide for rock spring park area	10,000 guides	2	\$ 20,000	x		
total			\$ 2,408,700	\$ 57,500	\$ 2,341,200	\$ 10,000
Maintenance -- annual						
Shelters	1	200	\$ 200			x
Information updates	25	100	\$ 2,500	x		
crosswalks (repainting)	10	100	\$ 1,000		x	
total			\$ 3,700	2,700	1,000	200
TOTAL			\$ 2,412,400	\$ 60,200	\$ 2,342,200	\$ 10,200

Measuring Performance

One advantage to evaluation in Rock Spring Park is the presence of the NBTC and its established network of contacts among area employers.

Establish base level ridership for each stop/route

- **Do counts after improved information and signage are carried out**

Determine base level participation in the MetroChek program

- **Recount after information campaign and MetroChek outreach to employers in the area**

Conclusion

Rock Spring Park is a classic suburban activity center, established at the nexus of high-volume, limited access highways as a self-contained employment site that employees could easily access by car. That there is a significant degree of transit service and ridership at all is testament to the active implementation of Montgomery County's alternate commute policies and the high quality of existing service. The conclusion of the field review and stakeholder interviews for this activity center is that for it, and others like it, the best is already being done. To draw employees away from their car, a high-speed rail, or other significant, high-cost capital facility would be necessary. The best low-cost opportunities in this activity center and others like it are to enhance, support, and maintain the existing partnerships and programs that encourage transit use.