

MD 355 North Corridor Advisory Committee Meeting #6 Summary
March 16, 2016 from 6:30 to 9:00 PM
Montgomery County Executive Office Building
101 Monroe Street
Rockville, MD 20850

Attendees:

Members	
Richard Lindstrom	Goke Taiwo
Mark Pace	Helen Triolo
Era Pandya	Ronald Welke
David A. Rosenbaum	
Apologies	
Paula Bienenfeld	Tom Savoie
Dennis Cain	Margaret Schoap
Jerry Callistein	Peter Shaw
Nallathamby Devasahayam	Gail H. Sherman
Cherian Eapen	John Francis Torti
Stephen Hendrickson	Andrew Williamson
Peter Henry	Paul Yanoshik
Kathie Hulley	Kam F. Yee
James Martin	Joel Yesley
Dayssi Morera	
Staff	
Lead Facilitator – Mary Raulerson	MTA – Rick Kiegel
Study Team – Alvaro Sifuentes	Montgomery County DOT – Tom Pogue
Facilitation Staff – Andrew Bing	Montgomery County DOT – Rafael Olarte
Facilitation Staff – Yolanda Takesian	Montgomery County DOT – Darcy Buckley
Facilitation Staff – Liz Gordon	Montgomery County DOT – Joana Conklin
AECOM Transit Service/Forecasting– Chris Bell	MCDOT (Ride On) -- Deanna Archey
AECOM Station Design – Todd Connelly	

Handouts

Handouts provided to CAC Members included:

- Agenda for CAC Meeting #6
- Presentation for CAC Meeting #6
- Service route and proposed station location map
- Ridership map for Ride On routes 46, 55, and 75
- County Executive letter to Montgomery County Council
- Summary of CAC Meeting #5

Meeting materials and video of the meeting will be posted on the project website:

www.montgomerycountymd.gov/rts

Introduction

Facilitator Mary Raulerson welcomed attendees, introduced meeting content, and outlined the agenda.

Montgomery County BRT Project Update

Joana Conklin explained the County Executive's recent letter sent to County Council. The letter outlined his plan to continue the MD 355 BRT Corridor Planning Study which focuses on the long term implementation of BRT in the corridor. The County Executive requested that \$5M be approved by the County Council and is asking for the State to fund the additional \$5M that is needed to complete the corridor planning study up until the selection of a Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA). In addition the County Executive recommended implementation of two short term transit improvements along MD 355. The first would be a limited stop priority service, called Ride On Plus, from the Lakeforest Transit Center to the Medical Center Metrorail Station. The service would operate in mixed traffic but would include improvements such as enhanced bus stops and potential implementation of Transit Signal Priority (TSP). The second proposed service is peak period express bus service from Clarksburg to the Shady Grove Metrorail Station. Both of these services could be implemented in the next 18-24 months. Both of these improvements would need County Council funding authorization which should be completed during the Council's budget deliberations. These conclude by late May of this year.

(Question) County Council says Ride On bus service from Clarksburg to Shady Grove Metro will start Spring of 2017, is that correct?

(Response) Yes, around May, near the end of the fiscal year.

Draft Preliminary Purpose and Need

Rick Kiegel provided an update on the Draft Preliminary Purpose and Need document and the results of the February Open House. He thanked the CAC for their participation and input; he indicated that 81 comments

were received from eight MD 355 CAC members by the deadline for comments. Some of the comments included concerns about the modeling method, the conceptual alternatives, and the types of trips the alternatives will serve. The team is currently reviewing and developing responses to those comments for distribution to the CAC prior to the public meeting sometime in April. All comments received after the February 12th deadline will still be reviewed and receive a response, but that response will happen after the public open house.

Rick emphasized that the Draft Preliminary Purpose and Need is a working document, and changes to it will be made based on CAC member comments before it is presented to the wider public.

(Q)What did you mean when you said land use was outside of the control of the County?

(R) Montgomery County doesn't independently determine land use and development assumptions in the model. Assumptions about how much growth will occur and where it will go is discussed and agreed upon at the regional level, through a process that includes all of the member jurisdictions and staff of the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments. That land use information goes into the model we use.

Public Open House

In late April or early May, the MD 355 project team is planning two Public Open House meetings with identical information presented in both. The meeting format will be an informational open house for the public to attend at any time and visit a series of display boards with staff available to answer questions. The timeframe of the open houses will be 6:30 PM to 8:30 PM. The open houses will seek to educate the public about BRT, introduce participants to the ongoing study, present information on the draft preliminary Purpose and Need, review existing conditions, and obtain public feedback on these subjects. The CAC members have already seen all of the information that will be presented at these open houses, and are asked to help supplement the project team's considerable public outreach efforts to ensure high attendance. The public outreach will include postcards to 71,000 addresses, delivering flyers to all the local government buildings, and public service announcements in local radio stations.

(Q)When will you set dates for the public open house?

(R) We'll set them within the next week or so.

Conceptual Alternatives Modifications

Rick reminded the CAC that an analysis alternative consists of three components: the running way design, the service's station locations, and a service plan. Tonight's discussion will cover station locations and service plan. Given the length of the corridor it was not feasible to include running way types in tonight's discussion; running way types being considered and their locations will be discussed at the next meeting.

Since the last meeting the team has made some changes to the project based on comments from the CAC and other members of the public. Some of the modifications made as a result of CAC insight include:

- Moving the King Farm Boulevard BRT Station into the Shady Grove Metrorail Station
- Serving the Lakeforest Transit Center
- Looking at an additional alignment along Observation Drive that terminates at the Clarksburg Outlets
- Preparing a service plan that works differently for different market areas

Alvaro Sifuentes presented the complete list of station location and alignment modifications being developed as an initial set of conceptual alternatives. He presented these changes relative to the Countywide Transit Corridors Functional Master Plan (CTCFMP) which was the starting point for the MD 355 study. Alternatives proposed for study have evolved as a result of more detailed analysis, perspectives from CAC members, coordination with Montgomery County DOT, and planning undertaken by the cities of Rockville and Gaithersburg. The CTCFMP showed recommendations for stations within the city limits of these two municipalities but acknowledged that the cities would be expected to help refine the proposed locations within their jurisdictional boundaries. Those currently proposed are consistent with the most recent planning undertaken by Gaithersburg and Rockville.

Alvaro referred members to the handout “MD 355 BRT Study Preliminary Service Plan Route Patterns and Station Locations” showing:

- Functional Master Plan station locations retained (in blue),
- Functional Master Plan stations eliminated (in red),
- new station locations (in green), and
- an alignment alternative.

The following bulleted list describes the changes and reasons for the changes to the proposed station locations.

- Montgomery College (Rockville) – The CTCFMP made a recommendation to stop at the intersection of MD 355 and Mannakee Street. This is a short distance away from the campus itself. CAC members told us that significant numbers of college students take transit and that a connection into the campus would be useful. The proposed service plan will have a connection coming from the southern end of the study area into the campus.
- The Gude Drive station is being moved to Indianola Drive due to high levels of congestion and turn lanes at the Gude Drive intersection which is also planned to be converted to an interchange. The density to access the station is also low, so the station was relocated further north to better serve the residential community.
- The MD 355 at King Farm Boulevard station is being relocated to the Shady Grove Metrorail station to directly serve the Metro.
- The station at Shady Grove Road is being eliminated. This intersection is also very congested with many turn lanes. Land use densities are also low.

Station locations in the City of Gaithersburg are based on the City of Gaithersburg BRT study.

- Cedar Avenue / Fulks Corner Avenue station has been added because it is only a few blocks from the MARC station and would serve as a transfer point into the MARC station.
- Brookes Avenue station which is just north of the Father Cuddy Bridge has been relocated a block north to the intersection of Chestnut Street/Walker Avenue. The bridge serves as a major barrier to pedestrians and the recommended location better serves residential and commercial areas.
- The next three stations were discussed together. From south to north the intersections along MD 355 are Odenhall Avenue, Lakeforest Boulevard and MD 124. MD 124 is a very congested intersection with many turn lanes; it was identified in the Gaithersburg City BRT study as a poor location for a station due to safety concerns. Since the MD 124 station was eliminated, the MDOT study recommends moving the proposed Odenhall Avenue station one block north to better serve the Lakeforest Mall. A new station has been introduced at the Lakeforest Transit Center to serve as a transfer point to many other local bus routes.
- The MD 27 Ridge Road station has been eliminated because of the levels of congestion at the intersection and the ability of the area to be served by a station at Shakespeare Boulevard.
- The station at West Old Baltimore Road was eliminated given low land use densities and the lack of pedestrian access.
- Shawnee Lane was less than 1000 feet from the proposed station location at Foreman Boulevard to the south which serves the Clarksburg High School. The team recommends that the Shawnee Lane station along MD 355 be eliminated because of the short distance between stations.
- As suggested in a previous MD 355 CAC meeting, a potential alignment has been added along Observation Drive. This alignment recognizes that much of the planned future development in this area occurs along Observation Drive. The station at Middlebrook Drive is recommended to be eliminated because it will be the transition point from a dedicated lanes cross-section to mixed traffic operations. The next few stations along Observation Drive are proposed to be Holy Cross Hospital, Montgomery College (Germantown), Shakespeare Boulevard, Milestone Center Drive, COMSAT, Shawnee Lane, a site north of MD 121 (Future Clarksburg Town Center) and at the Clarksburg Outlets, the proposed terminal station.

(Q) Are the MD 355 and Observation Drive alignments mutually exclusive?

(R) Yes, they are alternatives to each other.

(Q) Are there no stops between Milestone and Clarksburg?

(R) There are several remaining stops, we've only included the stations that got changed in the list, not the stations that remained the same.

(Q) Which stations will have parking?

(R) COMSAT and the terminal stations.

Station Area Plans

Todd Connelly presented a short introduction into station area planning and showed an example of urban analysis in the vicinity of the Cedar Avenue station. This included identifying land uses, street connections, and barriers to potential riders that might otherwise use the station.

(Q) Where's the actual station on this figure?

(R) The station location is included, but the actual station has not yet been designed.

(Q) What sort of footprint are you thinking of for the station?

(R) Station sizing hasn't happened yet, and will be based on ridership and vehicle size.

Service Operation Planning Elements

Chris Bell presented the various service planning elements that will be considered in modeling the 22-mile BRT Corridor. This will include information on the proposed BRT, changes to the existing Ride On, WMATA, and other services that potentially would duplicate or compliment the BRT service along the corridor. Chris noted that there will be two models that will be developed concurrently, (1) a travel demand model using the information provided by MWCOG to predict future ridership, and (2) a VISSIM model which will incorporate many other elements to indicate how the service might operate within the corridor. He also explained the service plan that his team will test. It includes the following aspects:

- 4 minute headways (15 buses per hour) during the peak;
- 6 to 8-minute headways, (7-10 buses per hour) during the mid-day for different sections of the corridor; and,
- Reducing the frequency of the current Ride On routes 46 and 55, as complimentary BRT service is introduced.

(Q) What are the a.m. and p.m. peak periods used for study?

(R) They are 6:00 to 9:00 a.m. and 3:00 to 7:00 p.m.

(Q) Will there be timed transfers with other systems?

(R) That would be evaluated later, while doing specific scheduling.

(Q)What will the fare be?

(Response)The assumption is that it will follow the County fare policy and match Ride On.

(Q)Why does the service plan show colored routes that overlap, but none run end to end? Will there be no end to end service?

(R) Going all the way from Clarksburg to Bethesda, under this scenario, would require a transfer. We're analyzing whether end to end service would be needed.

(Q)Would an end to end trip with a transfer be one fare or two?

(R) It would follow WMATA and Ride On fare policies. Transfers would follow the policy as well.

Breakout Exercise

The rear section of the meeting room had a number of tables set up in an open house format. CAC members were invited to visit as many of the five corridor segment tables and the Transit Service table as they wished. The corridor segment discussions would focus on major destinations adjacent to the proposed station areas, likely routes to the proposed stations, routes to proposed stations that need attention to be more pedestrian or bike friendly, and adequate links to other generators or networks of users including neighborhoods, office areas, biking corridors, etc. Members were also asked to include suggestions to refine station locations or terminal stations in the service plan. All comments would be noted.

Tables were setup with maps to show the areas listed below. The geographic table maps included MARC and Metrorail routes and stations, Ride On and Metro bus routes, major trip generators, and local streets.

1. Bethesda Metro Station to Grosvenor Metro Station,
2. Security Lane to Rockville Metro Station,
3. Mannakee Street to Shady Grove Metro Station,
4. Education Boulevard to Professional Drive,
5. Middlebrook Drive to Redgrave Place, and
6. BRT operations and the study model.

Breakout Exercise Group Report-Out

Facilitators for each table area were asked to quickly summarize the most salient issues that were discussed by the CAC members during the breakout exercise. The summary follows:

Bethesda Metro Station to Grosvenor Metro Station

The table with stations located along the segment of MD 355 between the Bethesda Metro Station and the Grosvenor Metro Station reported the following discussion with CAC members:

- No significant CAC comments, except to agree with the often heard comment from the South meeting that the Cedar lane station location should be studied.

Security Lane to Rockville Metro Station

The table showing station locations along the segment of MD 355 between Security Lane and Rockville Metro Station discussed the following items:

- Discussion centered on placement of the Rockville station and the plan to defer to the decisions made by the City of Rockville in this location.
- It's difficult to locate a station in that area, as there are emerging pedestrian needs and limited space.
- Students from the high school could be a user group but pedestrian connections would need to be strengthened.

Mannakee Street to Shady Grove Metro Station

The table that focused on the station locations along the segment of MD 355 between Mannakee Street and the Shady Grove Metro Station discussed the following items:

- The number of Ride On trips taken by Montgomery College students was noted as an indication that students may use the service heavily.
- There are planned transit facilities on the MC campus that could complement the service.
- Significant pedestrian barriers including the Metro tracks separate many of the nearby neighborhoods from the planned BRT service.

Education Boulevard to Professional Drive

The table focusing on the station locations along the segment of MD 355 between Education Boulevard and Professional Drive discussed the following items:

- A member expressed support in moving the station into the Lakeforest Transit Center.
- Members also expressed support for the planning being done in Gaithersburg.

Middlebrook Drive to Redgrave Place

The table focused on the station location along the segment of MD 355 between Middlebrook Drive and Redgrave Place discussed the following items:

- Members are largely supportive of study of the Observation Drive alignment as an alternative.
- The Montgomery College representative member discussed specifics for station locations within the college.