

Meeting Summary
US 29 South Corridor Advisory Committee (CAC) Meeting #2
March 31, 2015, 6:30 p.m. – 8:30 p.m.
Silver Spring Civic Center
1 Veterans Place Silver Spring, MD 20910

Attendees

CAC Members			
Louis Boezi	X	Karen Michels (alternate Larry Dickter)	X
Alan Bowser		Bernice Mireku-North	X
Marie-Michelle Bunch	X	Anita Morrison	X
Ilhan Cagri	X	Brian Morrissey	X
Carmen Camacho		Michael Pfetsch	X
Barbara Ditzler	X	Shane Pollin	X
Sean Emerson	X	Mark Ranze	X
Karen Evans	X	Dan Reed	X
Roberta Faul-Zeitler	X	Michele Riley	X
Joseph Fox	X	Herb Simmens	
Sean Gabaree	X	Tina Slater	X
Melissa Goemann	X	Julie Statland	X
Larry Goldberg	X	Brad Stewart	X
Bradley Gude	X	Eugene Stohlman	X
Kevin Harris	X	Chris Wilhelm	X
Linda Keenan	X	James Williamson	X
Rebecca Lentz-Fernandez	X	Teddy Wu	
Tracy Lewis		Lori Zeller	X
Harold McDougall	X	James Zepp	X
Jeffrey McNeil	X	Clifford Zinnes	X
Project Team			
Facilitator – Jennifer Kellar		Facilitator Assistant – Lauren Garrett	
Consultant Project Manager – Brian Lange		Consultant Project Engineer – Josh Crunkleton	
County Rapid Transit Services (RTS) Manager – Joana Conklin		SHA Representative – Joe Harrison	
Lead Project Facilitator – Andrew Bing		MTA Representative – Kyle Nembhard	
County Project Engineer – Rafael Olarte		SHA Representative – Kenya Lucas	
County Staff			
County Regional Service Center Director – Jewru Bandeh		County Regional Service Center Director – Reemberto Rodriguez	
Public			
Harriett Quinn		Melvin Tull	
Paul Seder		Dan Wallace	

Handouts

Handouts to add to CAC Members' study binders were distributed, which included the following:

- Meeting #2 Agenda
- Meeting #2 PowerPoint
- Existing Typical Sections Locations Map Draft (Figure 1)
- Existing Transit Operations Along US 29 Map Draft (Figure 2)
- Existing Bicycle and Pedestrian Facilities along US 29 Map Draft (Figure 3)

Meeting materials will be posted on the project website: www.montgomerycountymd.gov/rts

Introductions

The facilitator opened the meeting with introductions by the project team, CAC members, and the public. The facilitator provided an overview of the meeting materials being distributed and the agenda for the meeting.

CAC members expressed concern about when they will be given the opportunity to ask questions and provide feedback during this meeting and future ones. The project team explained that we are very early in the initial planning phase and will use the first part of the meeting to explain the project parameters and data gathering process. This will be followed by an interactive exercise focused on gathering input about purpose and need. Questions from members will be taken, time permitting, between sections of the presentation. Our goal is to allow plenty of time for questions and input, but we also have presentation material to convey in order to provide a framework achieving overarching objectives.

It was emphasized that CAC members' connection back to their communities is very important. All of the meeting materials in the CAC member binders and meeting summaries are posted online so that they are accessible not only to CAC members, but also to members of the public. CAC members were asked to please share information and gather input from their neighbors and colleagues, and direct them to the website for more information.

CAC Member Feedback

Based on the CAC Member Feedback Forms distributed as homework at the kickoff meetings, participation goals, topics, strengths, opportunities, and concerns were summarized. Overall, participants are interested in this forum as a learning opportunity, the ability to provide a voice for others, and how input from the CAC members will be used. CAC members are encouraged to provide feedback to the project team so it can be utilized throughout the project planning process and to shape future meetings.

Local Planning Process and Master Plans

The project team explained State law requires localities to develop a master plan, which contains transportation components. These locally-generated master plans specify that the needs of the communities serve as the center of the planning process.

The County Planning Commission will often create Functional Master Plans (FMP), which provides a more detailed approach to addressing common issues that affect the County as a whole. Functional Plans cover larger-area needs and functions like circulation systems (highways, transit, rail, airports, bikeways, etc.), parks and recreation areas, and environmental resources (protections and preservations). Typically these functional plans are developed in close coordination with the County's Executive Branch staff.

A Countywide Transit Corridors FMP (CTCFMP) was developed and approved in December 2013 by the County Council in response to a series of transit-related needs outlined in the local master plans from around the county. This Corridor Planning Study will build upon the recommendations in the CTCFMP. All analysis and information will be shared with the CAC members and general public and they will have an opportunity to provide input and feedback. The CTCFMP does not endorse specific design treatments; rather, it provides general suggestions that will need to be further investigated as part of this Corridor Planning Study. The CTCFMP provides suggestions, which are then passed on to the Maryland State Highway Administration (SHA), who will then determine a path forward to address the needs of the US 29 Corridor.

The project will follow SHA general planning procedures and guidelines. The project team fully intends to address the feasibility of what is in the CTCFMP. While determining feasibility from the CTCFMP we will be assessing if later phases of study are warranted. Right now during the planning stage we have to clearly identify and understand existing and forecasted conditions along the corridor. These conditions include ridership, traffic, environmental, and socio-economic impacts.

Project Development and Schedule

The project team explained project development can be broken down into four phases: planning, engineering, right-of-way, and construction. We are currently in the early planning stage of the project. Based on the results of this corridor planning study, we will enter a more detailed planning stage, which would include documentation and analysis to be in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) or Maryland Environmental Policy Act (MEPA). Public involvement is a major factor for all phases of the study. Each step of the way the project team will be sharing information and receiving feedback from CAC members.

Based on the kickoff meeting feedback, CAC members wanted to know a schedule for the elements of the project. The project team responded that Fall 2014 is when the project started with preliminary data collection and environmental inventory efforts. We intend to finish in Summer 2016. Areas of the project study include: preliminary concept engineering, environmental inventory and documentation, traffic and ridership analysis, and public involvement. Although we have the corridor planning study scheduled to end Summer 2016, there will still be additional phases of public involvement, planning, and preliminary engineering necessary to obtain approvals before construction could begin. **The project team indicated we will meet as regularly as possible with CAC members each step of the way.**

CAC members expressed interest in the completion of the NEPA/MEPA process and the benefits of completing it. Not only is there a benefit to the environment, but by completing the NEPA

process there is a federal funding benefit also. If federal funding is an option, the community would want that option explored so the County or State doesn't carry the entire financial burden. Right now the County has decided not to enter the NEPA process. The project team indicated it must first identify the project feasibility and fully understand the project area before initiating the NEPA/MEPA process. If it is determined that future phases would require us to enter into the NEPA/MEPA process, we would do that in future planning and engineering phases. All of the planning and analysis that is collected will be utilized if the NEPA/MEPA process is completed at a later time.

There was a discussion initiated by a CAC member about New Hampshire Avenue (MD 650), with some members stating that previous studies completed determined MD 650 was a viable option for Bus Rapid Transit (BRT), more so than US 29. It was asked if US 29 is going to be the only focus for this study or if MD 650 might be included. The County responded that this project's scope includes the US 29 Corridor only, as set forth by the County Council and the State's Consolidated Transportation Program (CTP). Every one to two years, the County Council and County Executive draft a joint Transportation Priorities letter that gets sent to the State to help set funding priorities. A Priorities Letter was sent to the State just recently, and planning for the MD 650 BRT is currently a lower priority than other transportation projects. The Montgomery County Department of Transportation (MCDOT) and the Maryland SHA have been given the US 29, MD 355, and MD 586 BRT projects to plan and implement; staff does not determine what should be scoped and funded. CAC members should contact County Council members if they wish to express a desire to see another area studied, such as MD 650.

During tonight's meeting, the project team stated we are going to discuss existing conditions and the purpose and need for this project. As the project progresses, we will talk about typical sections, preliminary concept engineering, environmental inventory, traffic analysis, ridership and costs. Topics such as station design, architecture and area planning, technology requirements, and the BRT vehicle will not be addressed during this phase of the project. That information will be discussed during later phases.

Review of Existing Roadway Conditions, Environmental Features, and Transit Service

Although this group represents the Southern section of the project, the existing conditions take into consideration the entire corridor. The US 29 Corridor covers an approximate 12-mile area with a mix of four-to-eight lanes of divided and undivided sections (typically six lanes). Stewart Lane/Lockwood Road is a two-lane undivided section.

The project team indicated there are 12 identified areas that represent a typical section ¹of the study area. We will review five of those in greater detail.

- Typical Section A (Silver Spring Transit Center to Georgia Ave.) has six lanes divided
- Typical Section B (Georgia Ave. to Sligo Creek Pkwy.) has six lanes undivided, some are reversible lanes

¹ A typical section can be described as a representative example of the characteristics that are present in a certain roadway segment, such as number of travel lanes, shoulders, median, curb and gutter, etc.

- Typical Section C (Sligo Creek Pkwy to New Hampshire Ave.) is an example of an urban environment to a suburban environment. Notice median widths are variable based on lanes, sidewalks are generally present.
- Typical Section D (Hastings Dr. to Timberwood Ave.) is the Four Corners area. Due to the proximity of the beltway, there are eight lanes divided by a median.
- Typical Section H (North of Paint Branch to Blackburn Rd.) has a greater speed limit and a wider median with guard rails and no sidewalks
- Typical Section J (Lockwood Dr. from Oak Leaf Dr. to New Hampshire Ave.) has two lanes with an undivided section, parking and bike lanes

CAC members asked about features such as the Beltway intersection, the Four Corners intersection with University Boulevard, the Northwest branch bridge (which floods frequently), and the New Hampshire Road bridge where the lanes narrow and asked why these were not highlighted in the presentation. The project team stated these items were not overlooked; rather, we were displaying typical sections of US 29 and did not intend to detail all features of US 29.

A CAC member said this was not a good use of the group's time; that this information should have been distributed in advance so members could review it prior to the meeting and use this time to express opinions and ask questions. In response, the project team will discuss this concern and will try to identify opportunities to provide materials to members in advance of subsequent meetings. That said, there are many members who may not have the background or experience with the detailed handout materials, leaving them with an unclear understanding of what and why we are exploring specific data, processes, and design elements. Therefore, the project team will review all materials at the meetings to ensure every member has had a chance to comprehend and ask questions about the data and analysis we are presenting. We want to work with all members to be certain they are comfortable with the materials and understand it well enough to capably report back to the groups and communities they represent.

Another member said a visualization of what the project area may look like with BRT would be useful to see. The project team explained that we are at the point where we need to complete our initial inventory of existing conditions, analyze available data, and work with the public to understand the issues and needs of the corridor in order to identify potential impacts before we can develop and provide visualizations. Once conceptual plans are completed, they will be shared.

The project team explained that assessing potential impacts to the environment includes completing an inventory of natural environmental resources, culturally significant elements, and sensitive socio-economic elements and communities. The inventory will include identification of features like streams, floodplains, wetlands, woodlands, parks, cultural resources, documentation of sensitive socio-economic communities, and will be done in coordination with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Department of Natural Resources.

Existing transit service will also be assessed. There are currently four major transit service operators along US 29. Throughout the study process, close coordination with these operators will be required to understand and evaluate how BRT service could affect existing services.

Additionally, a compilation of existing pedestrian and bicycle services along US 29 has been completed in draft form to better understand where more connective facilities may be needed.

Purpose and Need

The project team explained at this point in the study process, purpose and need must be established, which will define subsequent phases of the study. In order for the project team to determine the project purpose, needs should first be identified. The resulting document will be used as the baseline condition that all proposed improvements will be referenced back to in order to show how they address the defined needs (issues and concerns) and satisfy the project objectives (the purpose of the study).

Needs summarize what the existing or forecasted problems are and why the problems are occurring, while the purpose explains what the major objectives are and why they will be addressed by the project.

The purpose and need provide fundamental support for later phases. While there are many ways to address the identified problems (conceptual alternatives analysis), the project team will work with the public to evaluate the options and provide recommendations on how to satisfy those needs. Throughout all project phases, we will try to satisfy those identified purposes and needs.

A CAC member asked if “no-build” could be one of the options determined out of the feasibility study. The project team confirmed that a no-build option is typically considered in any planning study.

Based on the feedback received during the initial project kickoff meeting and the feedback forms provided by CAC members, the project team highlighted four basic need categories --Mobility, System Connectivity, Transit Demand, and Livability--described below:

- Mobility – How easy it is to move around your community and reach the desired destination
- System Connectivity – Specifically what are the different options available to improve and enhance mobility
- Transit Demand and Appeal – Considering existing and forecasted ridership and how to attract new riders
- Livability – This is a catch all for many elements that could fall in this category. It includes the factors that add up to a community’s quality of life or take away from it, which will be different for everyone.

Interactive Exercise

At each of the five CAC member tables, discussions took place to specify needs important to the members and the communities they represent based on the four categories that were provided as a guideline. The following are notes from the discussion:

Table 1:

- Consider the BRT outlook for 2040, planning for the future
- Current US 29 conditions are not good for transportation existing today
- The White Oak master plan calls for several million square feet of business and entertainment facilities for future development. People will work, live, play in same community.
- Development plans in Howard County and Prince George’s County will also increase demand on US 29
- Concern about BRT stop locations and station sizes
- The Master Plan calls for widening the overpass on US 29 to New Hampshire Ave. as part of the County’s concept on how to improve US 29
- Improve traffic facilities without destroying or diminishing current quality of life
- Pedestrian safety issues

Table 2:

- System connectivity – ability to bike, walk, to bus or take to train
- Predictability of travel time for all directions
- Limiting adverse impact on right of way
- Not deteriorating movement of people
- Don’t make things worse on US 29 at rush hour in any section of the corridor
- Expense of the system
- System connectivity – not just moving local bus riders to BRT
- System connectivity do not lose local bus connectivity at expense of BRT
- Transit appeal – ridership studies defining gap, future ridership projections
- Livability – improve pedestrian safety and access crossing US 29
- Livability – economic advantage of proximity to riders

Table 3:

- Transit needs of White Oak development
- Congestion relief
- Cleaner air
- Needs vary by the time of the day
- Data collection -- need data origin destination studies, gaps not being filled, ridership studies
- Need better bus shelters
- Need incentive to get out of cars and ride bus
- Pedestrian safety
- Current bus service coordination
- Best mix of modal usages
- Need to know what is missing with current system

- What are the elements of the BRT system that fits the specific needs of the community?

Table 4:

- Need more data on population
- Need frequency and reliable uses of buses to reach transportation (close end communities need bus services)
- Traffic flow issues using 29 as cut through (BRT will not address this)
- Access to bus services within communities, close in neighbors cannot get to bus service without already traveling 2 miles from front doors
- Livability – maintain 4 corners shopping centers, pedestrian shopping centers, minimize damage to existing communities
- Affordability – cost to riders and tax payers for the solutions
- System utilized now needs to be relevant for future. Plan for future not past.

Table 5:

- Don't make congestion in the area worse
- Broad financial support
- More attractive than current alternatives, get out of cars on buses
- Needs to connect to riders in Howard County
- Needs access to work, school, and entertainment
- Frequency needs to be studied and accurate
- Need to be accessible to those with mobility concerns
- Needs to be supportive of local business
- Improve air quality
- Support biking and walking
- Be affordable
- Safety and pedestrian friendly

General Public Comments

- Is the CAC being involved too early in the planning process for this project? It seems that once the feasibility study has been completed and the recommendations have been made, or at least data collection completed, that would be the point where CAC members could provide feedback. The project team explained we are currently on the ground floor of the planning project and we believe it is best to get the members involved early in order to prepare for later phases of the study.
- There is a Silver Spring Citizens Advisory Board meeting April 13th at 7:00 p.m. at the Silver Spring Civic Center that County Council member Nancy Floreen and Department of General Services Director David Dise will be attending.

Logistics

The next meeting will be held on Tuesday, June 2, from 6:30 p.m. - 8:30 p.m., at White Oak Community Center, 1700 April Lane, Silver Spring, Maryland, 20904. This location is accessible via Ride-On Route 10 and Metrobus Routes Z6 & Z8. The buses stop on Stewart Lane at April Lane. Parking is also available onsite.

Next Steps

Following review by the internal project team, the meeting summary will be circulated to the members for feedback before being finalized.