



9. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

9.1 Public Meetings and Workshops

Purpose and Need Public Workshop - November 15, 2004

The first public workshop was held on November 15, 2004 at the Neelsville Middle School in Germantown to present the project’s Purpose and Need and the Environmental Site Assessment that was prepared solely for the Midcounty Highway/Middlebrook Road Facility Planning Study. One hundred eighty eight (188) people attended the workshop. The majority of comments focused on concerns with potential environmental, property, and traffic impacts associated with the proposed extension of Midcounty Highway.

Alternatives Public Workshop - December 12, 2007

A second public workshop was held on December 12, 2007 at the Seneca Valley High School in Germantown to present the project’s Purpose and Need and eleven preliminary alternatives. The presentation included an overview of the environmental features, the advantages/disadvantages of the alternatives, potential impacts of the alternatives, and the initial recommendation that Alternatives 1, 4, 7, 9, and 11 be retained for detailed study. One hundred fifteen (115) people attended the workshop, including three County Council members’ representatives. Eighteen written comments were received at the workshop and a total of 445 comments were received during the subsequent comment period which ended on March 8, 2008. Major themes of the comments included:

- 113 comments opposed any alternative that impacts the Dayspring Farm Retreat property, either by physical impact or by (especially) noise
- 64 comments requested a mass transit alternative (including the CCT)
- 108 comments favored the No-Build/oppose all build alternatives
- 37 comments mentioned impacts to parklands and/or green space
- 50 opposed any alternative that widens Brink or Wightman Roads (especially Alt. 4)
- 71 comments supported Alternative 9 (Master Plan Alignment)

Comments favoring or opposing a specific alternative included the following:

Alternative	Favor	Oppose
1 No Build	108	2
2 (TSM/TDM) Intersection Improvements on MD 355	13	3
3 Brink – Wightman-Montgomery Village Ave	1	3
4 Brink-Wightman-Goshen Road	18	51
5 MD 355	13	3
6 Master Plan Alignment- Watkins Mill Road-MD 355	1	4
7 Master Plan Alignment-Middlebrook Road-MD 355	0	7
8 Master Plan Alignment-Lower Watkins Mill-MD 355	2	10
9 Master Plan Alignment	71	92
10 Brink-Wightman-Snouffer School-Muncaster Mill Road	5	1
11 Master Plan Alignment-Upper Watkins Mill Rd-Stedwick-Mont Village Ave	4	6
Northern Terminus Option A	2	1
Northern Terminus Option B	0	1
Northern Terminus Option C	2	2

Community Meeting - January 15, 2008

At the request of the Montgomery Village Foundation Board of Directors, a power point presentation describing the eleven preliminary alternatives was given at the North Creek Community Center. Approximately 200 people attended. A handout was provided to describe the eleven alternatives, their advantages and disadvantages, and the team recommendation for further study. A question and answer session followed the presentation.

Community Meeting - October 26, 2009

At the request of the Greater Goshen Civic Association (GGCA), a power point presentation was given at Gaithersburg Church of the Nazarene to update the GGCA concerning the status of the study. Alternatives 1, 2, 4, 5, 8, and 9 were identified as the alternatives being proposed for detailed study. Approximately 25 people attended.

Community Meeting - October 13, 2010

The Greater Goshen Civic Association and Clarksburg Civic Association were briefed at the Germantown Fire Station 34 on the status of the preliminary alternatives. Joe DaVia, USACE, briefed the approximately 30 attendees on the federal process.

Community Meeting - September 27, 2011

At the request of the Montgomery Village Foundation and the Greater Goshen Civic Association, a power point presentation describing the advantages and disadvantages of the Alternatives Retained for Detailed Study was given at the Goshen Elementary School. Displays of Alternative 4 Modified and Alternative 9 were available for public viewing. A question and answer session followed the presentation. Approximately 200 people attended.

Public Workshop - June 6, 2012

An open house was conducted at the Watkins Mill High School. A handout was provided, and plans of Alternatives 4 Modified, 5, 8, and 9 were on display. Approximately 330 people attended, and approximately 400 people provided written comments. The comment period closed on September 7, 2012. The major themes of the comments included:

- 145 comments cited loss of property values
- 146 comments mentioned concerns about property acquisition
- 155 expressed concern about environmental impacts
- 57 commented on community fragmentation
- 60 cited safety and security concerns
- 60 expressed concern about air quality
- 20 expressed concern about Dayspring
- 34 commented on project costs
- 53 favored improving transit

Comments favoring or opposing a specific alternative included the following:



Alternative	Favor	Oppose
1 - No Build	68	81
2 - TSM/TDM	33	6
4 Modified - Brink-Wightman-Snouffer School-Muncaster Mill	15	274
5 - MD 355 with Service Roads	55	8
8A - Master Plan Alignment Truncated at Watkins Mill Road	7	26
8B - Truncated Master Plan with Northern Terminus Option B	6	26
8D - Truncated Master Plan with Northern Terminus Option D	6	28
9A - Master Plan Alignment	176	37
9B - Master Plan Alignment with Northern Terminus Option B	19	146
9D – Master Plan Alignment with Northern Terminus Option D	21	149

9.2 Meetings with Environmental Agencies

The following regulatory and resource agencies have been involved throughout the Midcounty Corridor Study planning process:

- Concurring Agencies:
 - US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), lead agency
 - US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)
 - Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE)
- Reviewing Agencies:
 - US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS)
 - Maryland Historical Trust (MHT)
 - Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR)
 - Maryland State Highway Administration (SHA)
 - Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC)
 - Montgomery County Department of Parks (MCDP)
 - Montgomery County Planning Department
 - Montgomery County Department of Environmental Protection (MCDEP)
 - City of Gaithersburg

December 8, 2006

The project team met with the USACE, EPA and MDE for a field walk to review the project’s alternatives currently being evaluated. The following topics were discussed in detail and have been subsequently considered in the project:

- Addition of a TSM/TDM alternative;
- Further description of the quality of the impacted resources;
- Inclusion of an alternative that follows Watkins Mill Road across Great Seneca Creek;
- Inclusion of an option to the Master Plan alternative to minimize impacts to the North Germantown Greenway Stream Valley Park;
- Inclusion of options to the Master Plan alternative that avoid Wildcat Branch;

- Evaluation of bridging the entire floodplain at the Master Plan alternative crossing of Great Seneca Creek;
- Inclusion of an alternative between MD 27 and Middlebrook Road (subsequently labeled Alternative 7).

March 28, 2007

The project team met with USACE, MDE, and EPA to present the preliminary impacts for Alternatives 3 through 11 and Master Plan Alignment Northern Terminus Options A through C.

- For Alternatives 7 and 8, USACE asked to extend them to I-270 and review the respective I-270 interchanges for capacity. (Note: Following the meeting, Alternatives 7 or 8 were found not to have a traffic impact on the I-270 interchanges at MD 124, Watkins Mill Road, and Middlebrook Road.)
- M-NCPPC requested that potential impacts to FIDS habitat and County RTE species be evaluated.

July 20, 2007

The project team met with the environmental agencies to preview the revised preliminary recommendations for ARDS. EPA was unable to attend.

- The recommended ARDS include Alternatives 1, 2, 4, 8, 9, and 11 and Master Plan Alignment Northern Terminus Options A and C.
- M-NCPPC recommended Alternatives 1, 2, 4, 5, 9, 10 (with Master Plan Alignment Northern Terminus Option A), and 11 be retained for detailed study.
- The USACE recommended that Alternatives 1, 2, 5, 7, and 8 be retained and Alternative 9 be dropped from further consideration. They advised they would wait for public comments before stating an opinion about Alternative 4. Optional alignments should also be provided for Alternative 9 in the Whetstone Run stream valley if it is retained.

April 10, 2008

The project team met with the agencies to review the County's revised ARDS recommendations.

- MCDOT's recommended ARDS included Alternatives 1, 4, 5, 8 and 9 and Master Plan Alignment Northern Terminus Options A and C.
- MCDOT presented two new concepts for Alternative 5: 1) Alternative 5 with Service Roads that would reduce access points within the project area from 82 to 42 and travel time by 1.0 minute; and 2) Alternative 5 with Interchanges at Montgomery Village Avenue, Watkins Mill Road, Middlebrook Road and MD 27 and a grade-separated movement at the Midcounty Highway/ Montgomery Village Avenue intersection that would reduce the number of access points from 82 to 54 and travel time by 5.6 minutes. Alternative 5 with Service Roads was agreed to be included in the list of recommended ARDS.

- USACE recommended that Alternative 2 (TSM/TDM) and Alternative 7 be retained.
- MDE stated they do not favor Alternatives 8 or 9 due to the magnitude of impacts.
- MCDOT agreed to distribute a draft ARDS concurrence package for agency review and comment.

November 17, 2009

The environmental agencies were briefed on the studies conducted to reduce aquatic impacts to Alternative 9 and the revised recommendations for ARDS.

- MCDOT presented an analysis of seven alternative bridges at the Alternative 9 crossing of Great Seneca Creek and three alternatives for the crossing of Whetstone Run.
- USACE and EPA requested further study of a bridge at Great Seneca Creek that requires no stream armoring or relocation, spans both the primary and secondary channels, and whose cost is compared to the total project cost in determining practicability.
- MDE agreed with USACE and EPA recommendations but would like a field review of the crossing site; MDE would prefer stream bank armoring instead of stream relocation.
- USACE and MDE generally agreed to pursue the Option 3 of the alternatives for the Whetstone Run crossing of Alternative 9. USACE requested justification for not pursuing Options 1 and 2 and requested further minimization in design.
- MCDOT's recommendation for ARDS included Alternatives 1, 2, 4, 5, 8 and 9 with Master Plan Alignment Northern Terminus Options A and C.

September 15, 2010

The environmental agencies were convened to discuss responses to agency comments on the June, 2010 Draft ARDS report.

- MCDOT recommended dropping Alternative 10 because it is not effective at diverting traffic from MD 355.
- USACE and EPA recommended retaining Alternative 10 because it is projected to impact fewer linear feet of stream than Alternative 4.
- MCDP presented a sketch of a proposed Northern Terminus Option D.
- Several agencies were uncomfortable dismissing Option B prior to knowing whether Option D would work.
- All agencies supported dropping Option C, Option A Modified, and Option C Modified.
- MCDOT explained that Alternative 7 is not effective at diverting MD 27 traffic from MD 355, and recommended dropping it from further consideration. It was agreed that it would not be retained as a stand-alone alternative, but the environmental document will discuss that the selection of a truncated master plan alignment is a possible outcome.

May 24, 2011

MCDOT met with USACE to discuss the appropriate level of NEPA documentation, the schedule, and a joint public hearing.

- USACE advised that, at this time, it does not appear that an EIS will be required.
- USACE advised that the April 2008 EPA-USACE Mitigation Guidance will apply to this project, therefore, USACE cannot make a permit decision until they have final mitigation plans for whichever alternative is identified as the Preferred Alternative.
- If USACE determines that a public hearing is necessary to satisfy USACE regulations, then USACE would prefer that the hearing be conducted jointly with MDE in order that both agencies' hearing requirements can be fulfilled at the same time.

September 7, 2011

MCDOT met with M-NCPPC to discuss the Northern Terminus Options.

- M-NCPPC expressed concern that selection of Option D could require an amendment to the *Preservation of Agriculture & Rural Open Space Functional Master Plan*. M-NCPPC is also concerned about the impact of Option D on land use in the Agricultural Reserve.
- A shift in the alignment of Option A would not require an amendment to the Master Plan.
- Option A and Option D would each impact Wildcat Road, a Rural Rustic Road.
- A portion of Option A and Option D is within the Clarksburg Special Protection Area.
- The possibility exists that Blunt Road could be closed through North Germantown Greenway Stream Valley Park. Rob Gibbs will inquire with the Parks Maintenance staff to determine whether this would create a problem for them.

November 4, 2011

MCDOT met with USACE and MDE to discuss their participation in the NEPA/404 process.

- All parties agreed to document the environmental impacts in a Draft Environmental Effects Report (EER).
- MDE agreed to participate in a joint public hearing, provided a permit application is received in advance, and there is appropriate advertisement of the hearing. USACE indicated there is a high probability that USACE will participate in a joint hearing, but reserves their final decision until after reviewing the permit application and EER.
- Final mitigation plans for aquatic impacts will be needed before USACE can issue a permit.
- Both MDE and USACE agreed that piping streams is more destructive than relocating streams. MDE advised that properly designed and constructed stream

relocations are considered to be self-mitigating, which means the new channel is considered to constitute full mitigation for the loss of the original channel.

November 28, 2011

MCDOT briefed MCDP on the current alternatives. MCDP provided the following input:

- The project must comply with County regulations governing Special Protection Areas.
- MCDP must be satisfied with the impacts and mitigation for the Preferred Alternative before M-NCPPC can recommend it to the Planning Board.
- MCDP reiterated that, of the three Northern Terminus Options, Option D would be their preferred option.
- MCDP is concerned about fragmentation of parkland and FIDS habitat, the additional impacts needed for stormwater management measures, loss of sensitive plant and animal species, colonization by invasive species, and loss of forest.
- There should be measurable parameters to determine the success of any mitigation site.
- MCDP previously approved use of their parkland to construct wetland mitigation site SC-21 when it was originally proposed as an ICC wetland mitigation site.

November 29, 2011

A wetland jurisdiction determination was conducted with USACE and MDE for the wetlands in Blohm Park. Both agencies concurred with the proposed changes.

January 12, 2012

A site visit was conducted with the environmental agencies to review possible stream mitigation sites. Based on comments received subsequent to the site visit, all agencies agreed to advance the lower 700-foot portion of mitigation site GSMS 413-12.

March 13, 2012

The interagency review team was convened to present Alternatives 4 Modified and Alternative 9, including the three northern terminus options.

- Issues concerning Alternative 4 Modified were discussed, including well and septic impacts, alignment shifts to reduce residential impacts, retaining walls, unsignalized intersections, and changes in access as a result of the proposed median.
- EPA questioned whether the six-lane cross section could be reduced, whether the median could be reduced, whether a sidewalk could be eliminated. EPA questioned why Alt 4 and Alt 10 were not both retained. (On January 14, 2011, EPA concurred with the ARDS recommendations to merge Alt 4 and Alt 10 into one alternative called Alt 4 Modified.)
- The open and closed typical sections of Alt 9 were presented. The three northern terminus options were also discussed. Both historic properties along Option D were determined not eligible for the National Register. The safety and operations concerns

with Option B were discussed. Option A has been shifted to reduce environmental impacts.

- Three potential intersection options at the Seneca-Whetstone community were discussed.
- Three bridge options for crossing Whetstone Run, north of Watkins Mill Road, were discussed. MDE advised that the relocation of Whetstone Run would be considered a temporary stream impact. MCDOT showed a worst-case stream relocation, but DNR recommended reducing the length of stream relocation shown.
- South of Watkins Mill Road, the alignment of Alt 9 has been shifted westward to avoid Whetstone Run. The shared use path would be constructed on a 220-foot long bridge over Whetstone Run; the bridge would have five feet of underclearance.
- Mitigation for ephemeral streams will be through the regenerative restoration of ditches that convey storm water discharges from older neighborhoods that were developed without storm water management.

August 6, 2012

MCDOT briefed City of Gaithersburg officials at City Hall concerning the impacts of Alternatives 8 and 9 on Blohm Park, and the traffic benefits of the various alternatives.

- City officials expressed concerns about the potential impact to the bird-watching gazebo in Blohm Park.
- City officials inquired about projected levels-of-service at the MD 124/MD 355 intersection and the Christopher Ave/Russell Ave intersection, under the various alternatives.

Following the meeting, a written response to questions was provided to the City. The City subsequently responded with a letter dated August 24, 2012. Their letter expressed the following positions:

- The City opposes Alternative 5 because it would increase traffic volumes on MD 355 and require property acquisition from businesses. It was noted that Alternative 5 does not address the inclusion of an RTV system along MD 355, as proposed by the County Executive.
- The City opposes Alternative 8 because it would require property acquisition from businesses and would re-route traffic along City streets at the southern end of Alternative 8. Alternative 8 would also impact Blohm Park.
- Alternative 9 would fundamentally change the form and function of Blohm Park. Should this alternative be selected, the City requested MCDOT arrange an exchange of County-owned parkland to replace the impacted City-owned park acreage, relocate the gazebo, provide a parking lot, and provide active recreation facilities such as a skate park.

November 15, 2012

MCDOT briefed EPA and USACE at EPA's office in Philadelphia.

- MCDOT summarized the alternatives retained for detailed study and discussed the purpose for each element of the typical section.
- MCDOT discussed the planned growth of the MD 355/I-270 Technology Corridor.
- MCDOT presented several modifications of Alternative 4 Modified which resulted in a further reduction of impacts on neighborhoods.

November 29, 2012

MCDOT met with the MCDP at Park Headquarters to discuss mitigation. The following information was exchanged.

- MCDP will provide information on several locations of potential wetland mitigation sites on park property. MCDOT will be required to obtain Planning Board approval of the use of County/Commission owned parkland for non-park purposes. MCDP must recommend the proposed park uses to the Planning Board.
- Regarding forest mitigation, the ratio of replacement trees to impacted trees could exceed 1:1 if an analysis shows that the replacement saplings are insufficient to replace the function of the impacted mature trees.
- A potential forest/parkland mitigation site in the Agricultural Reserve was discussed, and preliminarily appears favorable to MCDP. A functional assessment will determine whether the proposed parkland mitigation site is sufficient to offset the impacts to parkland.
- MCDP is potentially amenable to the concept of offering the City of Gaithersburg a parcel of Commission-owned parkland located within City limits, to help MCDOT offset the loss of 2.5 acres (worst case) in Blohm Park.
- MCDP was invited to provide a list of potential stewardship projects.

December 12, 2012

An interagency meeting was conducted at M-NCPPC Headquarters.

- MCDOT presented the plans of Alternatives 5 and 8, and discussed the MD 355/I-270 Technology Corridor.
- MCDOT discussed the contents of the preliminary Draft Environmental Effects Report, distributed the report, and asked the agencies to provide comments.

9.3 Newsletters

Four newsletters and one update have been distributed residential and business property owners, as well as area civic and homeowner associations located along the study corridors:

May 2004 Newsletter: Announcement of the Midcounty Highway/Middlebrook Road Facility Planning Study. This newsletter provided a project overview, a location map to identify the project limits, and the MCDOT's project contact information.

October 2004 Newsletter: Invitation to attend the Midcounty Highway/Middlebrook Road Facility Planning Study Public Workshop on November 15, 2004.

October 2007 Newsletter: Invitation to attend the Midcounty Corridor Study Public Workshop on October 25, 2007.

October 2007 Update: Announcement of the cancellation of the October 25, 2007 Midcounty Corridor Study Public Workshop and the rescheduled December 12, 2007 Midcounty Corridor Study Public Workshop (rescheduled at the request of the community).

April 2011: Announcement of the Alternatives Retained for Detailed Study. This newsletter provided a map and a description of the Alternatives Retained for Detailed Study.

May 2012: Announcement of the June 6, 2012 Midcounty Corridor Study Public Workshop.

9.4 Project Website

The project website, www.montgomerycountymd.gov/midcountycorridorstudy, was launched in December 2007 to provide the public with additional access to project information, documents, status updates, public notices, and input on the following subjects:

- Project Overview
 - Project Background
 - Project Team
 - Project Area Map
 - Schedule and Process
 - Purpose and Need
- Environmental
 - Environmental Process
 - Environmental Inventory
- Alternatives
 - Alternatives maps
 - Impacts Summary
- Public Involvement
 - Frequently Asked Questions
 - Comment Form
- Public Outreach
 - Public Workshops/Meetings/Hearings
 - Newsletter

The website was also periodically revised to provide the public with up-to-date project information.