

LOCUST HILL CITIZENS' ASSOCIATION

9719 Bellevue Drive
Bethesda, Maryland 20814

September 6, 2012

Via Electronic Mail and US Mail.

Ms. Barbara Solberg
Mail Stop C-102
Office of Highway Development
Maryland State Highway Administration
707 N. Calvert Street
Baltimore, Maryland 21202

Dear Ms. Solberg:

This letter provides the Locust Hill Citizens' Association's ("LHCA") initial response to your August 24, 2012 letter regarding proposed studies and alternatives analyses with respect to the BRAC Cedar Lane projects.

At the outset, we are very appreciative of SHA's decisions: (1) to study a proposed "hybrid" alternative that is intended to move traffic more efficiently through the Rockville Pike-North Wood Road intersection, particularly by reducing the "weave" conflict between exiting Walter Reed traffic and traffic turning right at Cedar Lane; and (2) to conduct additional cost-benefit analyses of Phase 4 in light of SHA's decisions regarding the hybrid alternative.

After discussing your August 24 letter with our traffic engineer, Joe Cutro, we make the following observations and suggestions with respect to the additional analyses SHA will be undertaking:

1. Traffic volumes used in the analyses. Your letter states that SHA plans to base its modeling to evaluate the hybrid option on the original 2011 traffic projections, rather than SHA's March 2012 traffic counts. We may comment later on the use of the 2011 projections. However, we note that the weave problem could increase as the volume of northbound Rockville Pike traffic turning right onto Cedar Lane increases and also as the volume of traffic exiting the North Wood Road gate increases. We believe SHA's modeling efforts should take this circumstance into consideration.
 - a. Right-turn traffic. According to Mr. Cutro, the March 2012 traffic counts found that the proportion of traffic turning right onto Cedar Lane was higher than anticipated by the original 2011 projections. Since the volume of right

turns is a key factor in the weave issue, we believe an appropriate method for generating the number of right-turn movements used in SHA's modeling efforts would be a "hybrid" of applying the observed March 2012 *proportion* of traffic turning right to the total *volume* of northbound traffic specified in the projections for October 2011. In this regard we note your letter states that the 2012 traffic counts "provide useful information regarding changes in traffic patterns, post-BRAC," while you also believe those counts underreport peak hour traffic volumes through the study area. The suggested "hybrid" approach takes both factors into account.

- b. Traffic exiting Walter Reed. We understand that traffic mitigation projects under the BRAC program are intended to address the increased traffic volume resulting from the BRAC consolidation process. However, LHCA believes it is prudent, when choosing among alternative configurations for a BRAC project, to take into consideration which option would be more effective when "stressed" by planned future traffic increases. For example, Walter Reed is about to release an Environmental Impact Statement proposing projects that include several hundred additional on-base parking spaces. It would thus seem appropriate to run "what if" scenarios for each option based on an increase in exiting traffic proportionate to the percentage increase in on-base parking spaces.
2. Alternative scenarios for Phase 4. LHCA is hopeful that your analyses will show that the proposed hybrid solution is the most appropriate configuration for the North Wood Road exit and that that, under the hybrid solution, it would not be cost-beneficial to construct Phase 4 as currently envisioned. However, we believe SHA cannot reach the contrary conclusion—that the hybrid solution should be rejected and Phase 4 constructed as planned—unless SHA further conducts a "what-if" traffic analysis of building lane capacity between Wilson Drive and North Wood Road as an alternative configuration of Phase 4. LHCA believes this is particularly so given SHA's NEPA responsibility to evaluate less disruptive alternatives.

Your letter explains SHA's previous rejection of added lane capacity on four grounds, which we will discuss in turn:

- a. Elimination of operational benefits of the free right turn. Your letter states that extending the lane "to the south of North Wood Road would eliminate the free right turn and thus decrease the operational benefit." We agree that this outcome may well be the case. However, the balancing of effects between the two approaches may be sufficiently data-driven that it would be appropriate to model the trade-off. This trade-off could assess the impact on throughput of losing the free-right turn against the potential benefits of eliminating all weave possibilities by separating right turn traffic below North Wood Road and of increasing lane capacity through the intersection. If undertaken, this what-if study might be based on the use of right-turn and exit traffic assumptions as discussed in 1(a) and (b).

- b. Impact on fence line. The distance between the fence line and Rockville Pike expands significantly north of the Wilson Drive intersection. Thus, any movement of the fence line, if at all, might only be in the immediate vicinity of the intersection.
- c. Impact on view shed. Prior communications between Locust Hill and Naval Support Activity-Bethesda indicate NSA-B relies significantly on input from the State Historic Preservation Officer regarding the view shed issue. Since the impact of Phase 4 on the Locust Hill Historic District is also before the Officer, the view shed issue, if a current concern, might be amenable to resolution through the Historic Preservation review process.
- d. Metro shaft. Mr. Cutro had inspected this facility on an earlier site visit. The shaft is a large concrete-topped structure with a hatch parallel to Rockville Pike about 8 feet from the Pike side of the structure. Mr. Cutro noted that the sidewalk might be rerouted over the structure with the concrete surface becoming part of the sidewalk. If so, there would be about 10 feet of space between the inside of the Rockville Pike curb line and the structure, sufficient to allow an additional lane without any need to modify the structure significantly.

We look forward to a continuing dialog as your analytic efforts move forward.

Sincerely,



Jim Turner
President, Locust Hill Citizens' Association

Cc: Julie M. Schablitsky, SHA-EPLD (via email)
Anne E. Bruder, SHA-EPLD (via email)