

**MD 355 Central Corridor Advisory Committee Meeting #14**

April 22, 2021  
6:30pm – 8:00pm

*Held Virtually via Zoom*

**CAC members in attendance:**

CAC members (marked with an “x” if Present)			
Joshua Raymond Arcurio		Anthony Kouneski	
Peter Benjamin		Jeremy Martin	
Jay Brinson		Chad Salganik	
Elizabeth Crane		Eric Siegel	
Kristi Cruzat		Ana Milena Sobalvarro	
Roger Fox	X	Gerard Stack	
Jerry Garson	X	Michael Tardif	
Peter Katz		Zachary Trupp	X
Arnold Kohn		Francine Watters	

**Stakeholders and members of the public in attendance:**

Pete Fosselman
Amy Ginsburg
Abbe Milstein
MiYo Park (City of Gaithersburg)
Peggy Schwartz

**Staff in attendance:**

MCDOT staff	Consultant team members
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Corey Pitts, MCDOT Division of Transportation Engineering, Planning Section Manager</li> <li>Joana Conklin, MCDOT BRT Program Director</li> <li>Denny Finnerin, MCDOT Consultant Project Manager</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mike Chamberland, Stantec</li> <li>Lori Adgate, Stantec</li> <li>Randy Knapick, IBI Group</li> <li>Nick Hart, IBI Group</li> <li>Andrew Pease, IBI Group</li> </ul>

**Meeting Introduction, Zoom Instructions & Protocol, Attendee Introductions, and Agenda Overview**

Corey Pitts welcomed all attendees and introduced the meeting by covering the following items:

- The meeting format (via Zoom)
- Instructions for using Zoom
- Meeting protocols for Zoom use
- Introductions of the MCDOT team

Denny Finnerin continued the meeting overview by introducing the consultant team members in attendance, as well as providing an overview of the agenda and a summary of the meeting objectives.

### **MD 355 Bus Rapid Transit Project Refresher**

Denny Finnerin provided a refresher about the MD 355 BRT project by covering the following items:

- Project purpose
- Overview of MCDOT's FLASH BRT Program
- MD 355 corridor overview
- Project design segments
- Overview of Alternative B Modified, which was the selected outcome as a result of Phase 2 Planning efforts
- Project update regarding progress made, current schedule, and key milestones

### **MD 355 Project Update & Schedule**

Denny Finnerin provided an update about the project status and its schedule by covering the following items:

- Current status of the project
- Progress made and work still to come
- Project timeline
- Key milestones

### **Presentation & Focused Discussion**

Randy Knapick facilitated the detailed presentation, starting with an overview of BRT service planning, which covered the following topics:

- BRT service planning refinement
- Overview of the alignment shared by the planned 355 BRT and Veirs Mill Road BRT
- The initial Phase 2 service plan, which includes four route patterns (Clarksburg to Montgomery College-Rockville, Germantown to Montgomery College-Rockville, Lakeforest Transit Center to Grosvenor Metro, and Montgomery College-Rockville to Bethesda)
- A summary of proposed revisions to the service plan, with four altered route patterns (Clarksburg to Shady Grove, Milestone to Shady Grove, Lakeforest Transit Center to Grosvenor/White Flint Metro, and Montgomery College-Rockville to Bethesda)

To conclude this section of the presentation, Randy paused to allow for questions and group discussion:

Q #1:

Jerry Garson: Stated that WMATA has proposed reducing service to one train per half hour to Shady Grove and stopping the rest at Grosvenor Station. Jerry stated that 30-40% of stores at Clarksburg are already shut down for good. Jerry asked if WMATA has 30-min service only, is the BRT service viable? Jerry states that he doesn't think that rail will come back, and commuters will probably only be going into DC between Tuesday and Thursday each week.

Jerry thinks that FLASH on 29 is getting ridership now just because it is free and that we should think about whether or not our plan is viable.

**R #1:**

Randy Knapick: Responded by stating that the BRT plans are based on 2040 projections, but that Jerry brings up good points about how transit will change. Randy explained that plans in southern two thirds of the corridor are geared toward transit dependent travel, and that the real goal serving north of Germantown is providing quality transit for people's daily living needs. Randy stated that service workers in Milestone area, Montgomery College area, etc., can be served by BRT, which is geared toward those users more so than commuters and who may often ride an express service instead.

**Discussion:**

Jerry Garson: Continued the discussion by asking if the project team is going to redo the traffic analysis on 355? Jerry stated that traffic patterns have totally changed, with peak traffic now on Saturdays, and that weekday peaks occur anytime between 6am and 12 noon. Jerry thinks that the project team should be cognizant of what WMATA is going to do. Jerry asked if the project team is going to have a bus going to a closed Metro station? Jerry stated that all indications show many people will not be vaccinated, and COVID will last a long time.

Randy Knapick: Stated that the project team is looking at traffic very closely with the State Highway Administration (SHA), and that it is looking at changed commute patterns to make sure project is responsive. Randy also stated that since BRT runs through traffic, traffic analysis makes a difference in how BRT will perform.

Jerry Garson: Stated that peak traffic times have changed countywide.

**Q #2:**

Meeting Participant: Asked how FLASH is performing on Route 29.

**R #2:**

Corey Pitts: Responded by stating that he hasn't looked at specific ridership data. Corey explained that, anecdotally, the route is performing very well compared with other routes with 7.5 minute headways during peaks currently. Corey explained that there are two route patterns currently that perform with that headway, and that there is an off-peak 15 minute frequency. Corey states that the County looking into station design issues and that Ride On staff is reporting that the service is operating well without the normal hiccups/bugs that are typical for new routes. Thinking about constructability of stations, Corey stated that the County wants to consider lessons learned and will continue to monitor 29 FLASH service.

**Q #3:**

Abbe Milstein: Asked if there is any consideration of running a BRT line into White Flint? Abbe stated that her question has to do with Mark Elrich's idea for a COVID-19 global response center at White Flint.

**R #3:**

Randy Knapick: Explained that the project team is looking at proposed redevelopments at White Flint, which would be served by 355 BRT, and that numerous lines would provide good frequent service in White Flint vicinity.

Continuing the presentation, Randy proceeded to provide details about the BRT runningway, which covered the following topics:

- BRT runningway refinement
- A detailed summary of Segment 3 (Dodge Street to College Parkway)
- A detailed summary of Segment 5 (Montgomery Village Avenue to Summit Avenue)
- A description of corridor-wide preliminary engineering refinements, including next steps related to design and analysis

To conclude this section of the presentation, Randy paused to allow for questions and group discussion:

Q #1:

Jerry Garson: Asked whether or not these discussions are based on conversations with property owners. Jerry stated that he thinks right now property owners would be happy to get rid of their properties at low prices since there are lots of commercial and office vacancies, which might be promising for eminent domain.

R #1:

Randy Knapick: Responded by explaining that as the project team looks at Segments 3 and 5, it is responding to input from cities, not property owners. Randy explained that once the project team has design alternatives that are more solidified, it could reach out to property owners.

Discussion:

Jerry Garson: Continued the discussion by stating that people want to work from home and that governments have an interest in keeping properties owned. Jerry explained that things are changing and that the team has to redo traffic models and rethink where people are working. Jerry stated that there are many vacant stores and for lease signs along Rockville Pike.

Randy Knapick: Explained that these are things that would be brought forth to city governments, which would be the ultimate decision-makers.

D. Finnerin: Stated that one thing important to remember is that the team isn't planning this for today's scenario, but for 10-20-30 years into the future. Denny stated that the team is not necessarily looking at parcels as they exist today, but at their development potential, particularly in central area of Rockville Pike, where many commercial buildings are older. Denny explained that these could potentially be redeveloped in the future into more mixed commercial-residential-retail developments, which is how the cities are considering these parcels wanting to minimize impacts as much as possible. Denny stated that there is an understanding about the existence of unknowns and that the team is navigating an interesting environment, but is continuing to move forward with a future goal in mind.

Jerry Garson: Stated that if we're looking into the future, we should be thinking about self-driving vehicles. Jerry stated that most people would want to take these instead of transit and that this will likely happen soon after COVID is over. Jerry explained that Uber could potentially undercut the cost of a bus ride and that many people would not want to be on mass transit.

Q #2:

Abbe Milstein: Asked about the fact that it seems like changes you're talking about are making BRT less rapid, with more in-traffic running. Abbe stated that if we do too much of this, we won't have BRT.

R #2:

Corey Pitts: Responded by stating that this is a mischaracterization. Corey explained that we're only changing from one Segment (5), and that other segments are remaining the same. Corey stated that we're trying to make runningway in Segment 3 operate in both directions rather than just one and that overall the project team is trying to further enhance the service and be respectful of the fact that it runs through multiple jurisdictions, while also improving performance. Corey explained that there is potential for a BAT lane in Segment 5, speeding up service but also retaining access to businesses.

Discussion:

Amy Ginsburg: Continued the discussion by stating that she wanted to see a single lane down through Bethesda. Amy asked if this plan has gone anywhere.

Corey Pitts: Explained that the project team did look at this during our last phase of work, specifically turning MD 355 into a managed roadway like Downtown Silver Spring (create the bus lane in peak direction, which means a loss of the median). Corey explained that the public was resoundingly not in favor of this plan, which resulted in the current proposal being for mixed traffic use. However, Corey stated that traffic volumes and patterns are changing so we're watching this with interest, as this could open up an opportunity to look at a BAT lane or multipurpose lane into Bethesda.

Q #3:

Chat Participant: Asked for a definition of "BAT Lane."

R #3:

Randy Knapick: Responded by stating that a BAT like is like taking a right lane and thinking of it as a bus-only lane, but that allows people entering and exiting businesses to use the lane and allows for turning traffic. Randy explained that this has been pioneered in use for multiple BRT systems around the country and can have very good operational effectiveness under the right circumstances.

Continuing the presentation, Randy proceeded to provide details about the plans and considerations for the BRT at Shady Grove Metro. He concluded this section of the presentation to allow for questions and group discussion:

Q #1:

Jerry Garson: Asked if WMATA is only going to serve Shady Grove every 30 minutes, why should there even be a bus going into Shady Grove? Jerry explained that ridership is down 90% there, and states that before we spend any money on this, we should wait until everything stabilizes so we know how to best invest in new service. Jerry stated that everything is changing and that he doesn't know how we can make plans assuming that everything is going to come back. Jerry stated that all indications are that Metro ridership is not coming back in the near future. Jerry asked if the project team has actually read the proposals for running trains to Shady Grove every half hour?

R #1:

Randy Knapick: Responded by stating that it's hard to predict how things are going to change in the long-term. Randy explained that having no BRT service at Shady Grove would mean missing one of the main destinations along the corridor. Randy stated that right now, the project team is looking at the data it has and is monitoring changes related to commuting and traffic patterns, and it is making sure we stay nimble to those and refine our vision accordingly.

Discussion:

D. Finnerin: Continued the discussion by stating that Jerry can take comfort in the fact that we are not going to construction right away. Denny explained that we are still in preliminary design and that we do have time to adapt as necessary.

Continuing the presentation, Randy proceeded to provide details about the plans and considerations for the BRT at Montgomery College-Rockville. He concluded this section of the presentation to allow for questions and group discussion. There were no questions or comments from meeting attendees related to this portion.

Continuing the presentation, Randy proceeded to provide details about the plans and considerations for the BRT at Lakeforest Mall. He concluded this section of the presentation to allow for questions and group discussion:

Q #1:

Jerry Garson: Stated that he thinks relocating the transit center to Russell Ave makes sense. Jerry asked if the project team has talked with Fedex about their new hub to the northwest of the 355/124 junction? Jerry asked if the team has discussed with Fedex how many trucks they have and how they might impact the corridor?

R #1:

Denny Finnerin: Responded by stating that the team has talked with the City of Gaithersburg about this and it is something under consideration.

Discussion:

Randy Knapick: Continued the discussion by stating that the team is considering putting additional stations in that area, and that the Fedex hub plays into it since it is a big job creator and major employer.

### Conclusion

Denny Finnerin concluded the meeting by explaining the next steps in the process, including upcoming CAC meetings in the fall, as well as by providing the url for the MD 355 Project Website and contact information for herself and Corey.