

MD 355 South Corridor Advisory Committee Meeting #14

April 27, 2021

6:30pm – 8:00pm

Held Virtually via Zoom

CAC members in attendance:

CAC members (marked with an “x” if Present)			
Nancy Abeles	X	Damon Luciano	
Barbara Moir Condos	X	Deborah Michaels	
Ryan Emery		Sasha Page	
Greg Ford		D. Todd Pearson	
Matt Gordon		Susan Roberts	X
Celesta Jurkovich		David Sears	X
Sylke Knuppel		Steven Wilcox	
Richard Levine			
Todd Lewers			

Stakeholders and members of the public in attendance:

Deborah Berger
Peter Benjamin
Juan Castro (M-NCPPC)
Pete Fosselman
Anne White

Staff in attendance:

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

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:

Dave Sears: Stated that the presentation talked about how the team would handle Germantown, and that there are three different routes that would be possible in the northern section. Dave stated that we can't be 100% sure of the future regarding where people want to live, work, etc., but that we can build the system in such a way that would be

flexible/considered providing flexibility for the future so that it's easier to accommodate change 15-20 years down the road.

R #1:

Randy Knapick: Responded by explaining that the three alignment possibilities for Germantown are Snowden Farm, 355, and Observation. Randy stated that the team is proposing Snowden Farm as we head north to Clarksburg to the north of Gunners Branch Rd, which is the approximate end of the fixed infrastructure. Randy explained that in this area there will be more mixed traffic with stations placed intermittently along the roadway, which allows for more flexibility than a fixed runningway. Randy stated that he doesn't think anything would preclude service to Germantown Transit Center in the future, and that they are proposing restructuring Ride On service in the near future, so there may be other opportunities to explore service to that location. Randy explained that we're also running service parallel with I-270, which will have express lanes with routes planned for alignment on those lanes running to the north. Randy stated that as you go further north, the more express-type services to places like Shady Grove or Bethesda become attractive as opposed to a BRT for the whole corridor. Randy explained that the niche that BRT is filling is to take care of trips shorter in length, and provide feeder service to places like Shady Grove. Randy stated that one of the attributes of BRT is its flexibility, meaning that there is capability to adjust routes and route patterns, depending upon how county grows over time, as well as COVID travel pattern changes and effects of 5-day per week commutes.

Q #2:

Deborah Berger: Asked about the traffic implications around the intersections of 355 and Tuckerman Lane and Old Georgetown Rd, which are both failed intersections and will be affected by the new Woodward High School and the new museum planned for these areas. Deborah states that these will all impact these roads, and that the community is concerned about negatively impacting side roads. Deborah explained that there is already congestion in this area and that there is already a lot of traffic overflow onto side streets, and when more people dodge Rockville Pike it will get worse. Deborah asked about how will we handle the situation?

R #2:

Corey Pitts: Responded by stating that we are constantly looking at these situations and trying to adapt and improve the system that we have. Corey explained that adding BRT is a move to try and shift more people into using transit up and down the corridor, and that if that effort is successful, there will be an opportunity to remove cars that are currently using the corridor. Corey mentioned an upcoming network analysis study that will help us determine where to best put service and optimize service, especially along congested corridors like Old Georgetown Rd. Corey stated that there's no single solution that will solve all of the problems, but that all of the efforts together work to deal with the issue.

Discussion:

Randy Knapick: Continued the discussion by stating that as far as BRT goes, we're interested in every toolkit strategy to improve speed and reliability of BRT, as well as improve the performance of the intersections we're passing through. Randy explained that one option is physically widening the road and adding traffic lanes, while another is using technological tools to help vehicles move better through the corridor. Randy stated that the team is

trying to look a bit more in detail and more critically at solutions for each intersection, using design and traffic analysis/simulation to see how movements would be in those areas. Randy stated that this is to help optimize flow through the corridor.

Deborah Berger: Deborah stated that the project team should not only consider Rockville Pike, but also address overflow on side streets, because the community is concerned about how all of this will impact the area.

Randy Knapick: Stated that the project team will consider this and that the message has been received.

Q #3:

Nancy Abeles: Stated that the street grid at Pike and Rose is being built-out with a cut-through to Executive Blvd. Nancy stated that she was looking at the TPB 2045 Constrained Projects list and noticed that the North Bethesda Transitway is still on their list. Nancy asked if this project still moving forward.

R #3:

Corey Pitts: Responded by stating that the North Bethesda Transitway project is planned to enter the planning phase in FY 24, which would start the planning process and then transition into design and construction as long as funding is continued. Corey explained that two corridors are considered – one from Rock Spring to Grosvenor and the other to White Flint. Corey stated that the planning study will help determine which of these makes the most sense, depending upon various factors. Corey explained that the County sees potential for this project moving forward, so that's why it is included in the TPB 2045 list.

Q #4:

Peter Benjamin: Referring to the presentation visuals, asked if the dots on the map represent BRT stations.

R #4:

Randy Knapick: Responded by stating that the dots do not represent all the stations, and that there are unmarked stations in between the dotted locations.

Discussion:

Peter Benjamin: Continued the discussion by asking if there is a map of where those stops would be.

Denny Finnerin: Explained that the map is on the project website and that she will share a link.

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:

Dave Sears: Stated that regarding Segment 5, worldwide or nationwide, the number one characteristic of an effective BRT that works, and that will achieve the objectives, is that it has to run in a dedicated lane. Dave stated that if we call something BRT that is stuck in traffic, then it's false advertising. Dave explained that he understands that taking property from businesses is sensitive, but thinking longer-term and countywide, he thinks that staying in mixed traffic is a real bad choice. Dave proposes to make a few business owners and politicians in Gaithersburg unhappy, but make BRT a success.

R #1:

Randy Knapick: Responded by stating that part of our analysis is trying to explain what the tradeoffs are in these segments, therefore allowing the decisionmakers to more easily make an informed decision. Randy explained that in some areas where you have a high-density of traffic signals, we have to consider how to move BRT through signals quickly. Randy explained that the project team is considering ways to shave off delay around the intersections in Gaithersburg to still get a lot of value for BRT, but reduce property impacts. Randy stated that once we come forward with more information, we can decide what the appropriate design decision is for these areas.

Discussion:

Dave Sears: Continued the discussion by stating that the tradeoffs don't have to be a choice, and that getting through signals more quickly can be part of using dedicated lanes as well.

Randy Knapick: Stated that these factors are complementary, and that the team is trying to analyze both to generate an informed proposal once the analysis is complete.

Q #2:

Dave Sears: Asked if the team could provide a summary of its conversation with officials in the City of Rockville.

R #2:

Randy Knapick: Responded by stating that the idea of taking the existing right-of-way and trying to be more creative with it was well-received by Rockville. Randy explained that the city was receptive to the fact that the team is trying to provide a good station location in Rockville Town Center area that connects with the Rockville Metro Station in that area.

Discussion:

Corey Pitts: Continued the discussion by stating that when we wrapped the last phase of work and presented alternatives, the Rockville City Council and mayor were generally supportive of the single runningway going through Segments 3 and 4, and the dual lane heading south toward White Flint. Corey explained that the team is continuing to carry that plan forward, and that it is also trying to make the single lane configuration operate in two

directions rather than one. Corey explained that we're looking at creative design solutions to operate as a bi-directional service, and that Rockville has been generally supportive of that.

Q #3:

Deborah Berger: Asked for the Pike District Connector Community meetings, has the team been working in conjunction with that group to verify what can be done to help our community deal with impacts from proposed developments?

R #3:

Corey Pitts: Responded by stating that as part of the facility planning group, MCDOT sees the plans for all developments and there is a lot of collaboration and shared information. Corey explained that the project team is trying to take as large and holistic picture about how this corridor is framed on both sides by its surrounding communities.

Q #4:

Richard Levine: Stated that he now owns a condo across from the Grosvenor Metro Station, and volunteers as an owner there to see what's going to be happening in that area. Richard asked if the project team has coordinated at all with WMATA about how buses using Rockville Pike will access Grosvenor Station in that area.

R #4:

Randy Knapick: Responded by stating that where there is a proposed BRT station at a WMATA station, the project team is coordinating with WMATA, which is looking at joint development opportunities at their stations. Randy explained that the project team stays in touch with WMATA to understand those development plans, looking to understand the future of new street alignments and pedestrian connections at those locations to anticipate how BRT can support those. Randy stated that the team is looking at redevelopments also, such as in the White Flint area.

Discussion:

Richard Levine: Continued the discussion by asking if there will be any right-of-way alignments at Tuckerman Lane & Rockville Pike, which is a very constrained area. Richard suggested that congestion could avoid that by running the buses through the station.

Randy Knapick: Stated that this is an interesting idea, and that we're looking at shifting the station south of Tuckerman to get access to the pedestrian tunnel. Randy explained that all of these options have tradeoffs, especially considering grade differences and narrow sidewalks. Randy explained that the team has flagged this as an area that deserves a revisiting, but has not yet solidified design alternatives at this point, hoping to have more to come as we move forward.

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:

Dave Sears: Asked the team to consider what Metro did at Dulles Airport, which as choosing to put the new Silver Line station pretty far from the actual terminal. Dave thinks that this

will be a real big problem and just doesn't make sense. Dave explained that some of the people riding the BRT do not want to offboard at Shady Grove, but for those who do, it seems that the southern location would discourage people from using BRT and Metro. Dave states he thinks that the transfer should be as easy as possible.

R #1:

Randy Knapick: Responded by stating that there are many different reasons why people would want to use the 355 system, and that the different planned BRT routes do different things. Randy explained that people can choose which routes to board depending upon where they're destination is, and that we're trying to find ways to fine-tune and reduce overall delays for passengers.

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:

Dave Sears: Stated that he understands that the team has coordinated with City of Gaithersburg to see if the roadway can be widened enough to ensure that BRT can run in dedicated lanes. Dave stated that he sees where the BRT station would be located, and that one consideration is to make it easy for local buses to connect with BRT. Dave stated that this means the transit center would be connected with the BRT station, which makes sense for BRT and the City of Gaithersburg. Dave stated that maybe the project team can negotiate both these items at once with Gaithersburg (transit center relocation and road widening).

R #1:

Randy Knapick: Responded by stating that there is much to talk about in Gaithersburg, as well as considerations for current landowners at the mall, while trying to keep everything in mind and come up with most advantageous options for the project.

Q #2:

Richard Levine: Stated that traffic signals are a real problem and that Montgomery County has some of the worst traffic signal phasing anywhere while not considering transit and Ride On Extra. Richard stated that for Medical Center Station, there are very short signals coming out of the NIH property and the station, and that even when there is no traffic on 355 it can take 2-3 cycles to get out of NIH, depending upon Walter Reed traffic. Richard stated that buses back up at Medical Center through multiple cycles. Richard stated that the County must get rid of the fixed phasing system and not always defer to the through street.

Conclusion



GetOnBoardBRT MD 355

BUS RAPID TRANSIT IN MONTGOMERY COUNTY

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.