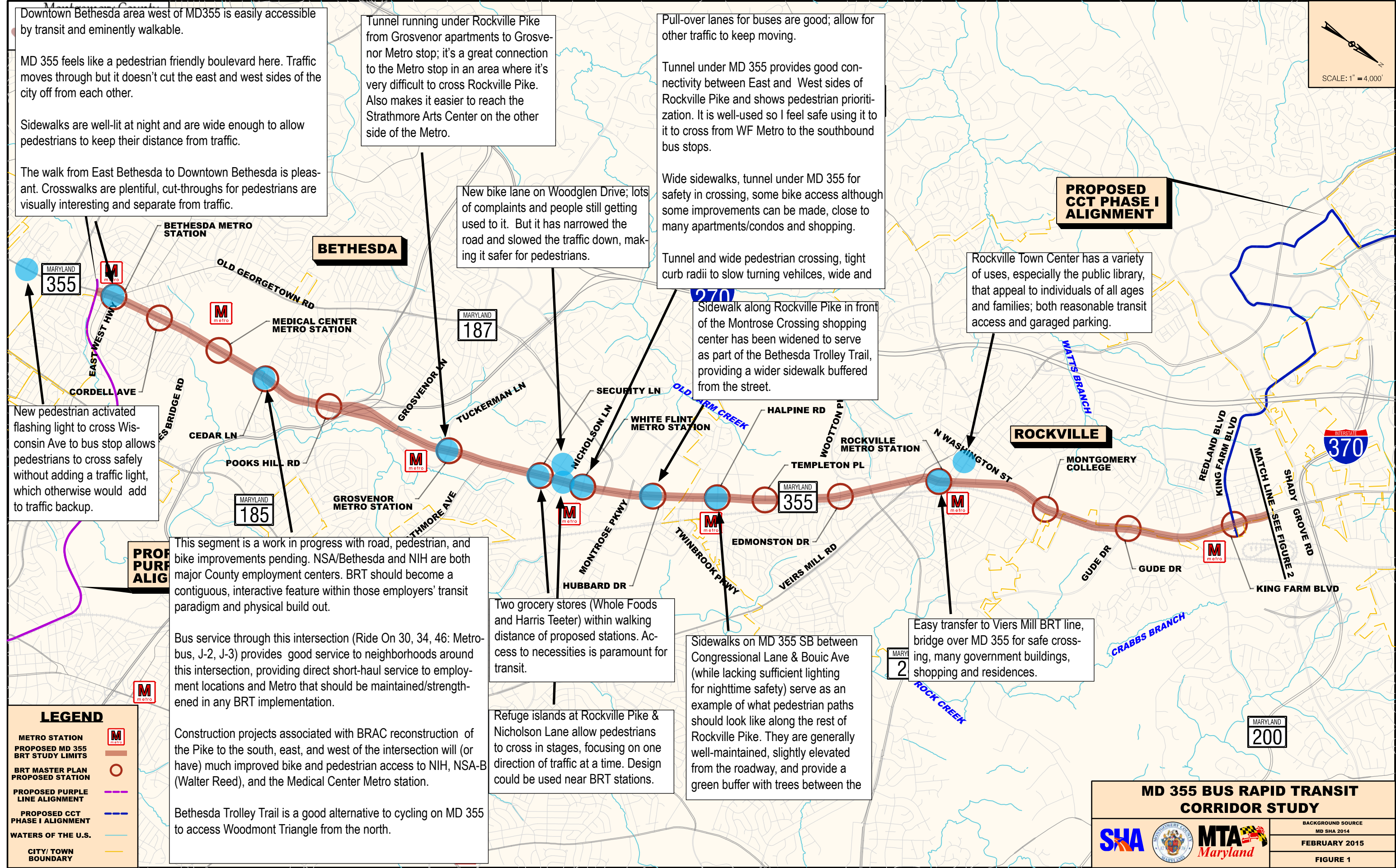
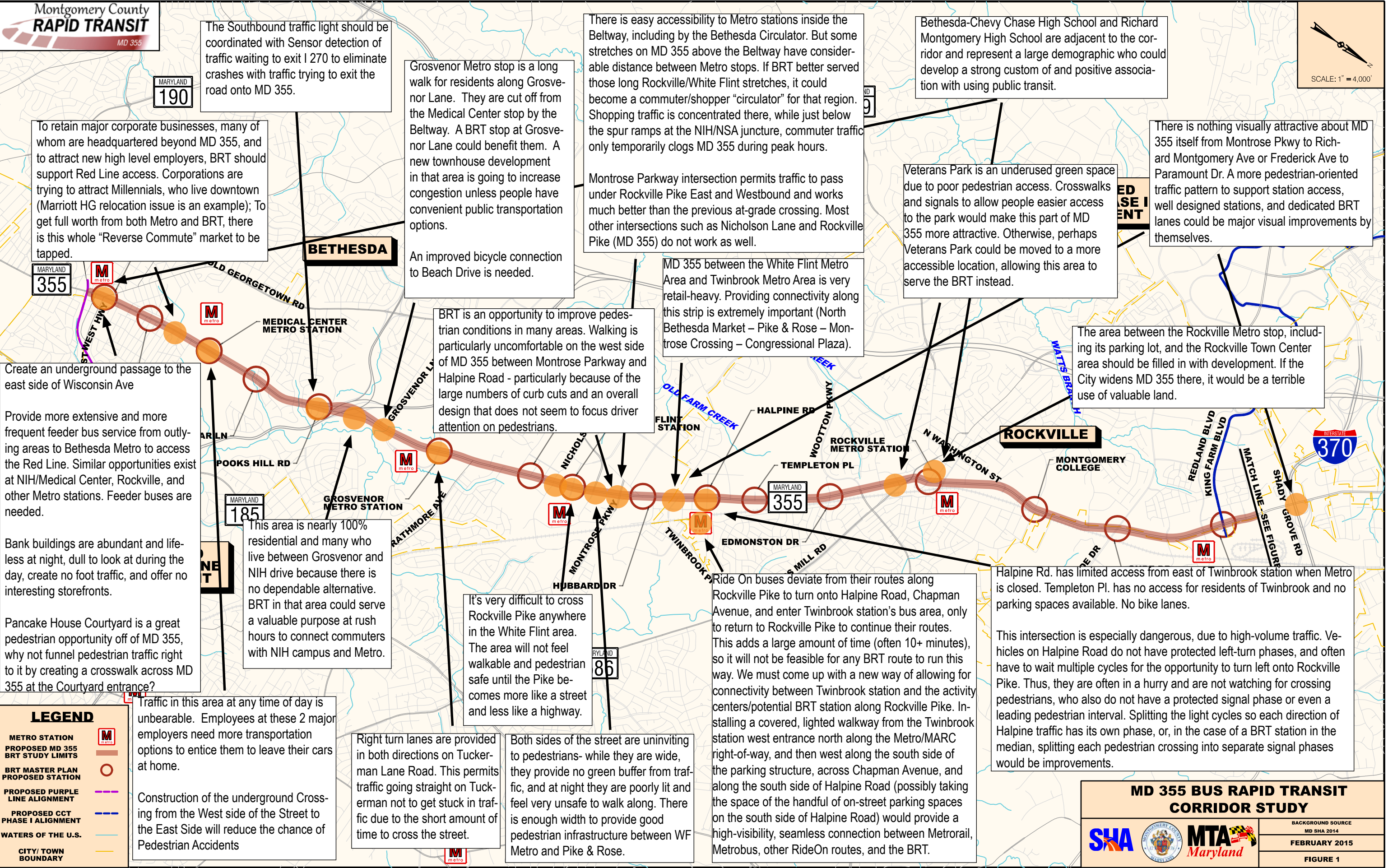


MD 355 South: Mapped “Strengths” from CAC Kickoff Meeting Homework Exercise



MD 355 South: Mapped “Opportunities” from CAC Kickoff Meeting Homework Exercise



MD 355 South: General Comments from CAC Kickoff Meeting Homework Exercise

Strengths

This is an opportunity to fulfill MWCOG’s Transportation Planning Board’s directive to “Think Regionally and Act Locally.” Their findings show the biggest bang for the buck and greatest necessity is to bring existing transit infrastructure to best function and promote regional connectivity. MD 355 BRT should not undermine Metro but fill its gaps to support regional objectives.

The local business community has articulated the need for BRT up and down I 270 and around I 495, including across to Virginia. In addition to more realistically serving interstate and regional commuters during peak commuting hours, implementation of BRT on these highways would free up space for better Baltimore, interstate, eastern seaboard trade/delivery access.

Sidewalk coverage along both sides of the street.

Walk lights and crosswalks seem to be located appropriately for the most part. Timing is great.

The County Ride On system is large and robust, feeding riders to metro stops now and could do the same effectively for BRT stations. However, the frequency of buses on Route 34 which I do use hampers building consistent ridership. I can walk to either the Bethesda or Friendship Heights metro in 15 minutes. If I’ve missed a 34 bus, I can generally walk to the station faster than waiting for another bus except perhaps during peak periods, when I debate what to do. Others raised this during the discussion at the kick-off meeting. To create a culture of bus users in our suburban environment, the buses must run with greater frequency. I know that is the goal of BRT vehicles but the feeders need to do so as well.

In general, the Metro stops work well and I find the Medical Center stop especially functional. While there are frustrating times when the WMATA escalators or elevators don’t work, coming from my neighborhood the pedestrian flow into and out of the stations is good, as is the kiss and ride drop-off/pick-up areas, and the bus stops at these stations. (Pedestrian flow across Wisconsin Avenue into Walter Reed could be improved, but that improvement is already planned.)

The 1,200 homes in my East Bethesda community are within walking distance to the Bethesda and/or Medical Center stops along the Red Line. Using Metro for commuting is the most obvious way these stops play a significant positive role in my community. Red Line stops are also a great benefit to the teenagers in our community, many of whom attend B-CC HS, and get tremendous independence and opportunity from access to the Red Line. (For example, the rowing team uses Metro to reach Thompson’s Boat House.)

I find it a pleasure to walk from East Bethesda into Downtown Bethesda - the sidewalks are fine, the crosswalks on MD 355 are plentiful enough, the cut-throughs for pedestrians are visually interesting and removed from traffic (such as the mosaics along the pathway between Wisconsin and Woodmont Avenues next to the Original Pancake House, or the paths along the fountain in front of the Chevy Chase Trust building at the corner of East-West Highway and Wisconsin Avenue). A walk might take me to the grocery store, the library, Strosnider’s hardware store, CVS, a stop for coffee and to check my email, and then to meet my son at B-CC High School for a walk over to his music lesson at Bach 2 Rock.

While I sometimes denigrate “The Pike” -- mostly because it is not so visually attractive with its endless stretch of commercial signs and power lines -- nevertheless the stretch from Tuckerman Lane north to Shady Grove Road is unmatched for the great diversity and affordability of stores and services found along it (as well as on the smaller roads that run perpendicular and parallel to it one block in). Thus, I go there a lot even though it’s not so pretty. Even the town ‘dump’ (aka the Shady Grove Transfer Station) is a gem: it looks like a tidy office park and could not be easier to use; I often took my kids to the recycling center there as a fun and educational outing.

Shopping centers along Rockville Pike have their nearest bus stop located away from the primary vehicle access points. For example, in front of Federal Plaza the bus stop is located in the middle of the property, whereas the two primary vehicle entrances from Rockville Pike are located on the north and south ends of the property. Not only does this reduce conflicts between pedestrians and vehicles attempting to enter the property, but it also presents the opportunity for “branding” of pedestrian-specific access points to each major activity center (e.g., putting up an entrance archway with the property name, etc.). This would benefit both the property and the BRT system, by drawing attention to the property’s location as well as to the fact that there is easy access to the property via BRT.

MD 355 South: Comments from CAC Kickoff Meeting Homework Exercise

<p>Opportunity Crossing MD355 as a pedestrian is unfriendly at best and dangerous by design at worst.</p> <p>Sidewalks should be wider to allow for pedestrians to feel safe. Sidewalks could be set back with a grass verge between sidewalk and street. Also, wider sidewalks would allow pedestrians to pass easily, especially if pulling carts.</p> <p>At major intersections stop all traffic for pedestrian crossing. Allow pedestrians to cross diagonally.</p> <p>If the traffic lights could be synchronized at a speed slightly below the speed limit at non- peak times in one direction and have signs indicating the direction like Los Angeles, California traffic flow would be improved. On Old Georgetown Road the traffic lights could be synchronized in the other direction. This will speed up the Ride On buses and all other traffic on both routes.</p> <p>All intersections on MD 355, Rockville Pike should have traffic detection sensors for all traffic movements (for example 3 Northbound, 3 Southbound 1 for Left Turn Northbound and 1 for Left turn Southbound. On the cross streets there would be 2 or 3 Eastbound and Westbound. There would be one or two for all left turn lanes East and Westbound.) This would permit computer control of each intersection so there is no time wasted in changing the direction of traffic or pedestrians when no one or vehicles are trying to use the traffic lights.</p> <p>Planning for BRT stations needs to proactively take into account the safety of getting to them. How users will cross multiple lanes of dense traffic needs careful thought. Metro stations have had to be retrofitted with underground tunnels and new entrances to allow access from one side of MD 355 to the other. BRT stations also need wide enough sidewalks or buffers leading to stations to ensure riders are not splashed by passing cars. To create a bus culture, potential barriers must be identified and considered in the planning process. Will our planning studies provide information about such needs in the route design?</p> <p>Some of the traffic congestion in Montgomery County is pass-through traffic. Are there ways to address this by integrating regional services/ express bus with BRT service and Metro?</p> <p>The issue of ROW needs to be examined. How much ROW is actually available along the corridor? The Master Plan as approved was supposed to eliminate any identification of cross sections and ROW needs/constraints. However, it is already being discussed in development plans for Bethesda. See discussion of the issue at http://robert-</p>	<p>dyer.blogspot.com/2015/03/brt-right-of-way-concerns-delay-8008.html The developer and attorney are both members of the MD 355 South CAC.</p> <p>Recent business community comments (e.g. by Marriott’s CEO) indicate that for businesses to locate in Montgomery County, good Metro access is needed to attract employees throughout the region. This means that Metro integration should be a BRT planning focus, keeping in mind that employees from DC, VA, and eastern Montgomery County travelling to locations along MD 355 and the CCT will be counter-peak commuting.</p> <p>Much of the traffic inside the Beltway is to/from I-270. Reducing congestion on this segment needs to be integrated with implementation of better express bus service using I-270’s express lanes.</p> <p>A demonstration project is preferable to a permanent BRT. Given the bigger problem of a lack of sufficient bus access to the Metro Red Line, it is not clear that a BRT on top of the Metro Red Line from Rockville to Bethesda will be helpful. Without any reliable data on this, a demonstration project would be helpful to determine the need.</p> <p>Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School and Richard Montgomery High School are adjacent to the corridor and represent a large demographic who could develop a strong custom of and positive association with using public transit. Encouraging teens to take public transit not only creates a custom, it also reduces the amount of teen driving, which is the riskiest category of driver. But are we fully encouraging that? For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Why is the Kids Ride Free program limited to certain days and hours?• Why can Youth Cruiser SmarTrip Cards only be purchased at the TRIPS Commuter Stores?• Why not enable:<ul style="list-style-type: none">• online purchasing of the Youth Cruiser (with eligibility based on MCPS student ID, and an alternative for non-MCPS students), and• a mobile app that allows teens to use their smartphones in lieu of SmarTrip Cards to ride the vehicles and to know when the transit vehicles are approaching? <p>Why even charge kids at all? Better to keep these inexperienced drivers out of their cars and encourage a custom of bus use from the start.</p> <p>Starting at the Chevy Chase Trust building (at the corner of East-West Highway and MD 355) and walking north along MD 355, my banking options are unprecedented! Sun Trust, Bank of Georgetown, United Bank, CitiBank, Wells Fargo, Beal Bank... But who walks into banks</p>	<p>anymore? I do all my banking online or via ATMs, and bank buildings are boring. They’re lifeless at night, dull to look at in the day, create no foot traffic, and offer no interesting storefronts -- so why aren’t they all located facing the alleys and dumpsters and let the fun stores face the street? Frankley, the Pumphrey Funeral Home is a far friendlier visual asset to the streetscape on this stretch of MD 355 as compared to all these banks. The Golden House restaurant, even with its tacky lemon yellow roof, is far more fun to walk by at any time of day or evening, than these dull banks.</p> <p>Sidewalks along Rockville Pike are very narrow, adjacent to the busy road, and cross countless driveways/shopping plaza entrances. Need to widen sidewalks, install buffers between pedestrians and vehicles (preferably with trees), and provide better visibility for pedestrians crossing various driveways/entrances (painted crosswalks, “Turning Vehicles Yield to Pedestrians” signs, etc.)</p> <p>Dedicated lanes can contribute to a brand image of a more urban, vital corridor and signal a commitment to alternatives to driving that may send an important message about how people can expect to be able to use the corridor differently in the future. (This particularly applies in areas that are dominated by strip malls, e.g. north of Montrose Parkway.)</p>
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