

MD 355 South Corridor Advisory Committees (CAC) Meeting #1 Summary
February 28, 2015 | 11:00 AM – 12:30 PM
Montgomery County Executive Office Building
101 Monroe Street, Rockville, Maryland

Attendees:

Members	
Nancy Abeles	Todd Lewers
Joshua Raymond Arcurio	Damon C. Luciano
Peter Benjamin	Jeremy Martin
Bill Carey	Deborah Michaels
Francoise M. Carrier	Sasha Page
Barbara Moir Condos	Ananda (Andy) Palanisamy
Jay Corbalis	D. Todd Pearson
Elizabeth Crane	Chad Salganik
Kristi Cruzat	Ralph Schofer
Ronit Dancis	Eric Siegel
Jad Donohoe	Ana Milena Sobalverro
Ryan Emery	Gerard Stack
Greg Ford	John Alex Staffier
Roger Fox	Emily Vaias
Victoria (Tori) Hall	Francine Waters
Celesta Jurkovich	Jon Weintraub
Peter Katz	Anne (Jan) W. White
Anthony (Tony) Kouneski	Steven P. Wilcox
Richard O. Levine	Max Wilson
Apologies	
Miti Figueredo	Patty Mason
Debbie Friese	Philip Neuberg
Jerry Garson	David Sears
Eleanor Kott	
Project Team	
Facilitator – Yolanda Takesian	Facilitation Team
Study Team – Alvaro Sifuentes	Joe Harrison, Jr (SHA)
	Conor Semler
County Staff	
Tom Pogue, Montgomery County DOT	David Anspacher, Park & Planning
Drew Morrison, Councilman Berliner’s Office	
Public	
David Winstead	Paul Seder

Handouts:

Binders with project information were distributed to CAC members, along with materials for participating in discussion exercises during the CAC meeting. At the end of the meeting, each member received a printed map of the corridor, along with instructions for using it to communicate additional ideas back to the facilitator in advance of the second CAC meeting.

The binders included:

- MD 355 South staff list
- List of MD 355 South CAC members
- Map of all proposed BRT Routes
- Map of the MD 355 study corridor
- Glossary of terms
- Overview of the CAC selection process and participation roles
- Generic copy of the CAC invite letter
- CAC self-nomination form
- CAC kickoff meeting agenda
- Copies of all of the day's presentations from both the general and CAC sessions
- CAC mission statement
- CAC ground rules

Introductions:

Each CAC member, project staff and public participant, gave their name and affiliation or interest in the project.

CAC Member Session:

The first activity asked CAC members to write one or two observations from the earlier session. Participants were asked to record items that were noteworthy, interesting, or important from the morning's presentation. Then, several CAC members shared their observations with the group, building on previous comments to create a complete list of preliminary thoughts and questions the study should answer. The following items were identified:

- BRT Attributes
 - The Los Angeles project could be a good example for Montgomery County. The demonstration quickly became a solution for the community. Ridership results are very impressive.
 - Did congestion decrease after implementing the BRT system?
 - BRT needs to be seen as part of an integrated system. The objective of the system should be focused on total transit throughput.
 - Segments should be evaluated separately
 - Eugene's BRT system experienced an increase in ridership based on branding alone.
 - How can we integrate branding and ITS onto current bus system?
 - Provide more information on BRT flexibility. How does BRT adapt to different areas?
 - The images of BRT from the presentation don't show traffic levels/congestion.
 - BRT is able to attract "choice" commuters
 - The presentation did not seem objective, and only offered pro-BRT information. What are the down sides of BRT compared with other options? There should be a discussion of trade-offs (e.g. taking a lane of traffic).

- How can we make BRT work without widening? There are concerns about increasing the roadway width of Wisconsin Avenue in Bethesda and pedestrian crossing issues that could result.
- More information on the rapid increase in BRT in the U.S. is desired, specifically related to system size and speed.
- How will BRT interact with emergency vehicles?
- BRT is a menu of options. Pre-paid boarding and level boarding platforms are examples of menu items.
- The quality of investment in everything on and along the corridor (above and beyond the bus) makes a huge difference to travel time and the rider experience.
- By Cliff Henke's definition, BRT can be a local circulator or a bus in mixed traffic with minimal stations
- How is BRT funded and financed?
- Bus Rapid Transit or Rapid Transit System? Does it matter? Is it just semantics?
- What are good examples of BRT funding models?
- Montgomery County/MD 355 Corridor
 - No single transit solution fits all neighborhoods within every corridor in Montgomery County.
 - Funding
 - The County Executive brought up an important question on funding. How will we pay for the system? He has ideas; others have their ideas. Will the project go through a federal funding process? If so, that changes the way the project evolves and can impact outcomes.
 - What can Montgomery County learn from Metro's funding failures?
 - How will BRT affect congestion in Montgomery County? Is there public and verifiable research specific to Montgomery County that demonstrates how congestion will be impacted?
 - Traffic congestion is expected to increase by 70 percent
 - Is Montgomery County's traffic signal infrastructure compatible with the demands of BRT and transit signal priority technology? How can ITS be integrated into the bus system we have now?
 - BRT service along MD 355 could supplement and reflect Red Line service. It could be useful during Metro repairs and service disruptions.
 - How does MD 355-South corridor service differ from Metro? Is it primarily a low cost way to augment capacity? Do we anticipate much transfer traffic?
 - How will the service interconnect with the Red Line? How will BRT and local bus both fit on MD 355?
 - Metro must function for transit to be viable in Montgomery County.
 - Montgomery County needs to prepare for changing demographics. The Goldman-Sachs report on Millennials indicated that 30 percent do not want to own a vehicle. How will the County cater to them?
 - MD 355 has significant pedestrian safety issues, including fatalities. How will this project ensure people can access the stations safely? How can we make crossing MD 355 or accessing central stations unintimidating?
 - What are the future transportation and population numbers and where will they be concentrated?
 - Any additional infrastructure should support and work cohesively with current infrastructure.
 - This is the first real statewide effort in the U.S. to implement BRT. Will that be a good solution or worse solution form Montgomery County?

- For communities further out (i.e. Potomac Woods/Montgomery Square) we have to make sure bus routes feeding into the MD 355-South corridor are reliable to increase ridership on the RTS
- Nighttime service will be important. MD 355-South includes Rockville, White Flint, and Bethesda.
- 77 percent of future growth in the County will be closely bound to the MD 355/ I-270 corridor.
- Interesting that buses could leave the route to serve special destinations. Some key destinations are a little off MD 355 corridor.
- Delighted to see Montgomery County taking serious efforts to prioritize transit. Putting your money where your mouth is shows a lot of commitment.
- Economic Development
 - More discussion on the economic development impact of BRT is needed.
 - What about this project will bring business to the County? Specifically, what are the mechanics of the BRT system that will make high level businesses decide to locate here?
 - The County Executive spoke about economic sustainability. More details about BRT impacts on business or economic development.
 - Smart transit to support economic growth means smart economic growth to support transit.
- This process/study
 - What is the CAC's role on this project? On what subjects should the CAC provide input? Is the focus on the physical elements of the system (e.g. route design, features) or financing and public support?
 - It is unusual that this project starts with a technology solution (BRT). Usually transportation projects start with a study of traffic patterns and needs before identifying what type of transit investment to make.
 - We need to understand the modeling assumptions. How does this system overlay with Metro? Who is being served by the system?
 - The CAC lacks economic diversity
 - A lot of planning has already occurred. How does the work that has been done and the Functional Master Plan inform this process?
 - The usual federal process separates AA and PD. Doing it in the federally specified way, while reflecting the best of intentions (discouraging land speculation), effectively prevents the consideration of urban design issues while the route is being finalized. When it comes to route placement and adjacent development, the devil is in the details. There's a communication issue too: Citizens can't understand the impacts of a proposed route until it's rendered in a fairly granular way.
 - The alternative—mixing both processes—particularly in conjunction with strong citizen engagement, builds community ownership of the resulting plan.
 - Is federal funding anticipated for the corridors? If so, will we have the flexibility to mix phases?

Map Exercise:

CAC members used three large maps and color coded sticky notes to answer the questions below, and, where appropriate, indicate the location of the subject their comments addressed. Participants discussed their answers with each other and with facilitators as they worked.

- *How do you/people you know use transit?*
 - **General**

- Shopping, meetings, appointments
 - Home, daycare, and work all along the corridor
- **Bethesda**
 - Ride Metro from Bethesda to Downtown
 - Some commuting; some shopping
 - Use Metro to go to work, home, or to venues in DC
 - Commute to DC on Metro
 - Commute to work
 - Volunteer, shop, both northbound and southbound
 - Commute to job and recreation
 - Bus to Friendship Heights
 - Metro to Downtown DC from Bethesda
- **Medical Center Metro**
 - Occasionally use Metro to get Downtown
 - East Bethesda citizens typically walk to Metro (Medical Center or Bethesda). Few seem to use RideOn or Metrobus—too unpredictable
 - Access Metro by walking on MD 355
 - Bus stop outside our community for travel north and south into DC
 - Peak: To get to Metro, NIH, Bethesda
 - Off-Peak: recreation, shopping, medical appointments
- **Grosvenor**
 - Residents around Grosvenor must travel either north or south along MD 355 to reach any of their major activity centers
 - Grosvenor Metro mostly to connect to the Medical Center and Bethesda occasionally
 - Grosvenor has weak connections to local streets – have to cut through parking lots to walk home; poor street connectivity and trails. “Miss is as good as a mile!”
 - Use the Red Line to travel from Grosvenor Station to Downtown DC and also Chevy Chase and Bethesda trips for business and pleasure.
 - Walk from home to Grosvenor Metro to commute to Downtown DC for work
 - To get to Strathmore Campus
 - Grosvenor to downtown, Bethesda, and Friendship Heights on Metro
- **White Flint**
 - Park-and-Ride lot at MD355/Montrose Parkway is seldom used and has no sidewalks.
 - Live and work on corridor
 - Drive from N Bethesda to Bethesda daily; take Metro to DC from White Flint
 - Metro to DC
 - Lots of jobs moving to Fishers Lane. Not enough parking.
 - Shopping
- **Potomac Woods**
 - RideOn routes 42 (to White Flint) and 47 (Rockville-Bethesda). White Flint is closest Metro to Potomac Woods/Montgomery Square
 - Many people drive to Metro on weekends.
- **Twinbrook**
 - Use MD 355 to reach Metro Station for commuting
 - For shopping, particularly those young folks who live in condos near NIH

- **Rockville**
 - Travel to Montgomery College Rockville
 - Commute to DC
 - Walk to bus; Metro to DC occasionally
- **Shady Grove**
 - Daily commuting both business and personal (One car family with four kids)
- *For what purpose do you use the corridor?*
 - **General**
 - Use corridor to go to Masonic Lodge, shopping, or to access Beltway or I-270
 - Live on the corridor, commute to job using existing buses
 - Drive on weekends on Rockville Pike to run errands and buy groceries (between Grosvenor and Twinbrook)
 - Family uses MD 355 corridor for shopping and commuting to work. Not so much for recreation or school access.
 - Use corridor for all access to shopping, recreation, and entertainment
 - Shopping, dining, groceries, attending CAC meeting
 - To commute to work, take children to after-school activities, to get downtown DC for meetings and entertainment, to get to Strathmore, to get to Rockville for business, shopping on weekends and nights
 - Shopping and recreation
 - **Bethesda**
 - Commute to work, shop, play
 - Commute to NIH, DC
 - Commute to volunteer; shop
 - Commute to work daily on Wisconsin Ave in Bethesda and use it for almost all purposes
 - **Medical Center Metro**
 - Drive the corridor north to shop in Rockville and south for entertainment in Bethesda
 - All sporadic uses and at no predictable time
 - Work, shopping, recreation, biking, entertainment
 - Staff on Board U.S. Navy property run to and from work
 - Patients use the corridor to access medical care
 - **Grosvenor**
 - Travel to Strathmore to attend events
 - **White Flint**
 - Commute, shop
 - Shopping, often at Whole Foods or REI
 - Shopping
 - Run errands, get to volunteer work, get to medical appointments, shopping
 - Going between Rockville Town Center and White Flint shopping (congested)
 - **Twinbrook**
 - Shopping
 - Commute to DC
 - Commute to school
 - Commute to meetings from Twinbrook Metro to DC

- Doctor, other services
 - Shopping (especially Target, Congressional Plaza)
 - Nightlife at Rockville, White Flint, Bethesda
 - People use cars in this area
 - Shopping, dining, beginning in 2016 will be commuting to Twinbrook
 - **Rockville**
 - Attend school at RM
 - Library
- *What would make taking transit more attractive?*
 - **General**
 - Well-lighted, safe stations
 - Coordination (time, location) with Metro
 - Weekend reliability
 - Easy crossing major roads, especially MD 355 & Viers Mill Road
 - Access to grocery
 - Easier access to Metro
 - Improved feeder bus service to Metro
 - More frequent connectivity. The stops are too far apart
 - More reliability
 - Frequency, speed, distance between stops
 - More accessible/efficient to use/more frequency and pedestrian friendly
 - MetroCard requirement limits the ability for visitors and families to use transit
 - Convenience, hours and operations, reliability, comfort, safety
 - Regular transit between more closely spaced stops than the Metro in dedicated lanes that will bypass congestion could replace local car trips
 - Cost efficiency, supporting the infrastructure
 - Predictability (how often does the bus come?)
 - Ability to accomplish multiple errands/tasks in one trip on transit
 - If BRT runs every 10-20 minutes
 - Speed, improved waiting environment, fewer conflicts/better managed conflicts with cars and pedestrians
 - More attractive, more express, faster buses that go all the way to Bethesda to Rockville
 - Frequent service, long hours; faster travel than regular buses; low fares; comfortable, clean vehicles and stations.
 - **Bethesda**
 - Connection to Friendship Heights
 - Clean and beautify the Bethesda Metro station
 - More frequent RideOn feeder service to stations, more reliable on timing
 - **Medical Center Metro**
 - Improved predictability and frequency between Walter Reed and Cedar Lane
 - This is a residential area and not an activity center, so 24/7 use is low
 - **Grosvenor**
 - Make Grosvenor area more accessible
 - Land use that puts origins and destinations closer to transit

- Office and multifamily (mixed use) within 800 feet of station
- Continue Metro cars past Grosvenor to White Flint without changing cars
- **White Flint**
 - Make White Flint area more enticing for walking
 - Pedestrian and bicycle access
 - Recommend a new station location at Montrose Parkway/Pike & Rose
- **Twinbrook**
 - Need good access to Twinbrook Metro and Twinbrook houses
- **Rockville**
 - Improved feeder bus service to Metro
- *How do you see BRT on MD 355 making the corridor more attractive?*
 - **General**
 - Improve access to recreation in the north, such as Seneca Creek State Park and Great Seneca Stream Valley Park
 - Rockville-Bethesda has a lot of recreation/nightlife options. BRT can help stimulate nighttime economy.
 - Relieved congestion
 - Getting around to children-friendly places (library, parks)
 - Level access to bus with stroller or grocery cart
 - Reducing auto traffic so it's easier to drive
 - Reducing congestion, more transportation options, alternative to Metro
 - A system that is attractive and easy to use – high frequency, comfortable, and accessible
 - Create more opportunities and demand to build office buildings along the corridor and make them easy to get to
 - Filling the wide gaps between Metro stops
 - Complement Metro service
 - Economically attractive for businesses
 - More Millennials who want a car-free life will be drawn to MD 355
 - Like to see bike lanes and BRT on MD 355
 - BRT could bring travelers to a more efficient metro therefore reducing SOVs on an arterial roadway that's congested
 - Do not believe BRT will inherently make the corridor more attractive. It is a local circulator. In may enhance access.
 - Connect east and west of MD 355 by improving pedestrian facilities
 - Improved pedestrian amenities
 - More shopping
 - BRT allows us to rethink curbs, right-of-way beautification, lighting, and power lines as roadways are modified for BRT.
 - More attractive buses and stations; happy riders
 - Beautification of median; better access between metro stations as a draw to new residents and businesses.
 - **Bethesda**
 - Increase travel choices and flexibility

- Reduce traffic if the “theory” works. Many people make multiple stops in cars. Will they do that on BRT? Maybe if cost is low or on/off stops allowed.
 - **Medical Center Metro**
 - Between Walter Reed and Cedar Lane, BRT is somewhat redundant to Metro. There actually needs to be more RideOn feeder buses to service interior residential areas
 - **Grosvenor**
 - Increasing travel choice bringing more patrons to Strathmore
 - **White Flint**
 - Increased travel choice
 - White Flint Mall redevelopment
 - Stations closer together than current Metro stops is a plus
 - Anything that makes it easier for a pedestrian to navigate Rockville Pike would be good. If BRT narrows the road and slows traffic, that’s good.
 - White Flint Sector Plan dedicated RTS lanes; dedicated bike lanes; 6 rows of trees; wide sidewalks; pedestrian safe haven
 - Improved accessibility from the Twinbrook Neighborhood
 - **Twinbrook**
 - Make it easier to shop without a car (Montrose Crossing Shopping Center)
 - Twinbrook residents can’t access MD 355 except through Metro Station, only when it’s open. When not open, people need to use Twinbrook Parkway or Edmonston Drive. Need may be access bridge
 - Develop more housing and mixed use projects within ¼- and ½-mile radius of Metro
 - **Rockville**
 - Make Rockville access more attractive for people living in Bethesda
- *What concerns do you have?*
 - **General**
 - Signal timing on Pike inadequate for seniors to cross Rockville Pike
 - Bikeshare in neighborhoods would increase access to corridor
 - Needs to be much more safe and convenient for pedestrians
 - Federal funding requires separate alternatives analysis (AA) and project development (PD), which prevents massaging of land use while alignments are being nailed down. Suggest that this process blend both.
 - Pedestrian safety
 - How will it impact current congestion? What ridership impacts are being considered?
 - Consistency, cost, reliability/frequency, number of stops
 - Frequency of buses; extended late night trips (particularly northbound)
 - Additional service along MD 355 is not necessary. Access is the issue.
 - Impact on personal property
 - Flow of emergency vehicles in already congested area
 - Cost
 - Duplication of service
 - BRT will be redundant with Metro and bus service and will consume travel lanes for cars with little reduction in car trips resulting in greater congestion.
 - No concerns; all positives

- Keeping walkability
- Realistic funding
- Maintaining better functioning Metro
- Attractiveness of system and safety
- Encouraging good development and integration with the system.
- Reducing available lanes on MD 355 could make an already congested road unusable. BRT in mixed traffic will not be very effective or attractive.
- Want to be able to use my bike along the corridor for transportation.
- BRT lanes might create literal and psychological divide between East and West Bethesda
- Low budget will mean a cheap visual result (no graphics, poor design, no bike paths)
- Reliability of Metrorail Red Line matters to potential feeder service.
- **Bethesda**
 - How can Bethesda access northeast County
 - Potential widening of Wisconsin Avenue a real negative. Bad for pedestrians and street retail/activity
 - Lanes narrow upon entering Bethesda. How will we fit a BRT lane?
 - Terminates at Bethesda Metro; any consideration to extending to Friendship Heights?
 - Multijurisdictional possibilities (e.g. going in to DC to serve the Georgetown Area)
 - Ending the MD 355 South corridor at Bethesda would miss connections to Friendship Heights.
 - If MD 355 South BRT ends at Bethesda, the County should fund the extension of WMATA Routes 30N, 30S, 31, and 33 from Friendship Heights to Bethesda.
 - This would serve Rockville-Bethesda-Georgetown corridor with a two-seat ride and provide redundancy for the Red Line
 - Loss of any lane would be a disaster for traffic. I drive in downtown Bethesda daily and see what happens when one lane closes.
 - Allowing buses to go to front of line and get through intersection first might work
 - Can Red Line handle additional ridership?
- **Medical Center Metro**
 - Losing a lane near NIH would be a disaster
- **Twinbrook**
 - Lots of pedestrian traffic. Narrow sidewalks.
 - Area around Twinbrook is very pedestrian-unfriendly and needs many improvements in order for BRT to be attractive for destinations in this area (many shopping destinations in particular).
 - Between Walter Reed and Cedar Lane is the tightest point on MD 355 South with homes and institutions; not businesses. Communities could be harmed if MD 355 had to be altered
 - Important to have stop at Halpine Road to transfer to Red Line
- **Shady Grove**
 - MD355/Shady Grove Road is incredibly dangerous intersection for pedestrians

Mission Statement and Ground Rules:

Each CAC member was asked to read over the provided mission statement in their binder. Ground rules for conduct within the CAC were explained, but as this is not a voting body, but an advisory one, they are mostly guidelines for respectful and productive interaction.

Logistics:

Members preferred that future meetings be further south and suggested a location in Bethesda. Another location will be investigated for the 3rd CAC meeting.

Homework:

CAC members collected their printed map, the explanation of the “homework” exercise which is reproduced below, and -- when request -- a self-addressed envelope. The homework exercise was to be completed by March 10th 2015 and either mailed or scanned back to the facilitator.

Next Steps:

The next MD 355 South CAC meeting has been scheduled for the evening of April 14th, 2015. Further communication is necessary to schedule following meetings.

Non-Member Contributions:

A CAC observer suggested that the CAC members become familiar with an FTA study focusing on the characteristics of BRT for decision making. The document can be linked from the project website and in the meantime found at http://www.fta.dot.gov/documents/CBRT_2009_Update.pdf