

**MD 355 North Corridor Advisory Committee Meeting #5 Summary
December 10, 2015 from 6:30 to 9:00 PM
Upcounty Regional Services Center
12900 Middlebrook Road, Suite 1300
Germantown, MD 20874**

Attendees:

Members	
Paula Bienenfeld	Mark Pace
Dennis Cain	Peter L. Shaw
Jerry Callistein	Gail H. Sherman
Nallathamby Devasahayam	Goke Taiwo
Cherian Eapen	Helen Triolo
Kathie Hulley	Ronald C. Welke
Richard Lindstrom	
Apologies	
Stephen Hendrickson	Margaret Schoap
Peter Henry	John Francis Torti
James Martin	Andrew Williamson
Dayssi Morera	Paul Yanoshik
Era Pandya	Kam F. Yee
David A. Rosenbaum	Joel Yesley
Tom Savoie	
Staff	
Facilitator – Mary Raulerson	Maryland Transit Administration – Kyle Nembhard
Lead Facilitator – Andrew Bing	State Highway Administration – Jamaica Arnold
Montgomery County DOT – Joana Conklin	Facilitation Staff – Yolanda Takesian
Montgomery County DOT – Tom Pogue	Facilitation Staff – Liz Gordon
Montgomery County DOT – Rafael Olarte	SHA Consultant Project Manager – Alvaro Sifuentes
Maryland Transit Administration – Kevin Quinn	Maryland National Park and Planning Commission – Aaron Zimmerman
Maryland Transit Administration – Jackie Seneschal	City of Rockville – Barry Gore
Maryland Transit Administration – Rick Kiegel	
Public	
Jerry Garson	Brian O’Looney

Handouts

Handouts provided to CAC Members included:

- Agenda for CAC Meeting #5
- Presentation for CAC Meeting #5
- Summary of CAC Meeting #4
- Breakout exercise handout
- Additional binder dividers
- County Executive's recent remarks regarding economic development plan

Meeting materials and video of the meeting will be posted on the project website:

www.montgomerycountymd.gov/rts

Introduction

Facilitator Mary Raulerson welcomed attendees, introduced meeting content, and outlined the agenda.

BRT Project Management Team Update

Kevin Quinn, the Director of Planning and Programming with the Maryland Transit Administration (MTA) introduced himself to the CAC members and described the role that MTA plays in the State of Maryland. Kevin explained the recent change in project management roles. Montgomery County Department of Transportation (MCDOT), the Maryland State Highway Administration (SHA), and MTA are still the project partners for this project, but MTA has replaced SHA as the lead agency. This is due to changes to the State's transportation program, with the changes to transit projects such as the proposed Purple Line and the proposed Baltimore Red Line, and additional highway projects added to SHA's program. He emphasized the consistency of the team members in terms of agency staff and consultant team; if anything, MTA is simply adding resources to the project, including Jackie Seneschal to help oversee the BRT projects and ensure consistency in how we are approaching BRT statewide and within Montgomery County, and Rick Kiegel as the Corridor Manager for MD 355.

Question: *Is MTA just taking the lead on this project, or will MTA be the eventual funding agency for the BRT project? Much of the project is planned for State roads.*

Response: *The budget for this process has been shifted from SHA to MTA. As for actually operating any service that is implemented, we're in the very early planning stages and not ready to answer that question.*

Question: *Are you a traffic engineer?*

Response: *No. I'm a transit planner.*

Clarification of County Executive Statement

Joana Conklin explained the County Executive's recent statement to the press, particularly that he is not currently calling for the legislation to create a Montgomery County Transit Authority, or similar entity, though he does think that such an entity is necessary. He has asked MCDOT to continue the work on this BRT project with the State. He has also asked MCDOT to look into less expensive options that could be implemented more quickly to improve transit on the corridor, and perhaps a phased approach that identifies things that can be done before full implementation of BRT. Joana also clarified information from a recent Washington Post article that identified the project limits for MD 355 as being from Bethesda to Rockville. Joana stated that the facts in the article were incorrect and that the directive from the County Executive was to look at improvements from Bethesda to Clarksburg for short term options.

Question: *If there's no Montgomery County Transit Authority, who runs Ride On?*

Response: *Ride On is actually a division of the Department of Transportation, like the traffic division, for example, and will continue to operate as a division of MCDOT. The Executive was talking about a separate Authority with its own funding source, similar to WMATA.*

Question: *In terms of realizing the master plan, the Corridor Cities Transitway (CCT) was meant to serve Clarksburg. Now that the CCT is stalled, this BRT project as a substitute solution is not acceptable.*

Response: *We're looking at both. We're still moving forward with Phase I of the CCT and the County supports the entire project (both Phases 1 and 2).*

CAC Member Comment: *Let's be realistic, there's no billion dollars for phase 1 of CCT, let alone phase 2.*

Response: *The state does have 80 million dollars allocated for the CCT. Just a few weeks ago, we completed 30% design and we intend to take it to 100% design. Though you are right, it's not funded for construction. We're committed to taking a look at the design and looking at right-of-way and construction costs to get it to fundable levels.*

Question: *You said that the CCT is 30% designed. Can you put the 30% plans on the website?*

Response: *Traditionally we've never released plans at the draft stages. And it could give an advantage to certain teams that may bid on the contract.*

Question: *These aren't private documents, we pay for them, and the public would be interested.*

Response: *We will be having a public hearing on our environmental document.*

Question: *So you have environmental documents? Can you share those?*

Response: *We can't share those until they're approved by FTA and released for public review.*

Response: *We'll get back to you on how best to share the documents.*

Project Process and Schedule

Jackie Seneschal addressed how her task for the evening was to put what we are currently doing in the context of the ongoing planning process. She explained that the current process we are working under presumes that

some portion of the BRT project will be eligible for funding through the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), so the project team has sought to create a process consistent with the FTA guidelines that will lay the groundwork for the State and Federal environmental processes.

An important difference between the FTA and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) process is that the FTA process only allows a project to be in the project development phase for two years. Project development is the phase where the environmental documentation and 30% drawings are completed. The CCT hasn't officially entered into that process. The CAC is currently going through a process to select a Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA) that would then be evaluated under the federal environmental review process. The federal process could ask a future project team to examine options beyond this locally preferred alternative.

Jackie introduced a flowchart showing the activities the planning process is currently engaged in. The team is finalizing a Draft Preliminary Purpose and Need document to release to CAC members for review.

CAC Member Comment: *You keep using NEPA language, but this isn't a NEPA process at all. My advice is to stop using NEPA language because it's extremely misleading. This is not a purpose and need document. There hasn't been any scoping. Please replace "Purpose and Need" with some descriptive language that describes what this document actually is.*

Response: *We have referred to this consistently as a preliminary purpose and need document, not a formal NEPA purpose and need document. It does however include some information that will be useful in the formal environmental process.*

Ms. Seneschal explained that the project team will give CAC members a chance to comment on this document, and the project team will address those comments before it is shown to the wider public. This document will also include Goals of the Project that the State has developed with Montgomery County. During this meeting CAC members are being asked to further educate the team with their knowledge of the corridor and how BRT might be accommodated in the corridor.

The team is working toward selecting alternatives that will be retained for detailed study (ARDS). These alternatives will include a no build alternative, a Transportation System Management alternative, as well as reasonable and feasible BRT concepts. The whole process for which the project is currently funded will work toward answering the question of what concepts are reasonable and feasible and worthy of further study. The flowchart only shows what we are currently funded for leading to the selection of ARDS.

A milestone schedule of the overall process was explained. Milestones in color are the ones that we are currently funded for; milestones in tan are not yet funded. According to the schedule we would be able to get to an LPA in early 2019.

Question: *On your prior slide, you talk about identifying funding. How will that happen? Is it certain?*

Response: *It is by no means certain. It will involve conversations between the State and the County. Ultimately funding for any capital project is the decision of elected officials.*

Question: *You say that "we" will select a locally preferred alternative; who is we?*

Response: *That will be a decision made between appropriate officials at Montgomery County DOT and MDOT. Additionally, it may go through County Council, depending on how it gets funded.*

Question: *So the advisory group has no role?*

Response: *The advisory group will provide advice, and that will be important, but the final decision will be from officials.*

CAC Member Comment: A CAC member requested that all present staff introduce themselves.

Response: *Staff introduced themselves.*

Goals & Objectives / Preliminary Purpose and Need

Rick Kiegel introduced the Preliminary Purpose and Need document. The purpose of the presentation was to recap the members on some of the work that was done in CAC Meetings #2 and #3 and how that information helped shape the Preliminary Purpose and Need Document and the Goals and Objectives for the corridor. In meeting #2, a main topic of discussion was needs and values. The presentation included images of the “rating” from that meeting, and members’ comments on needs and values. Those comments were aggregated with comments from other agencies to develop goals and objectives. In meeting #3 we introduced the purpose and need language of the project to the CAC members.

Rick mentioned that the work that we are doing is developed from a whole variety of sources, including the CACs and several other organizations. These different sources have helped us define the purpose and need and goals and objectives for the project that will ultimately lead to measures of effectiveness.

Question: *What are the measures of effectiveness?*

Response: *We have developed a preliminary list but are not final yet. The county developed some preliminary measures of effectiveness and presented those to the RTS Steering Committee so you can find those on the Montgomery County website (montgomerycountymd.gov/rts). However since those were developed by the County we are now going through a process with the State to determine what measures we can actually quantify and when.*

Question: *Can you provide us with a specific example of a measure of effectiveness?*

Response: *For example, ridership. How many people would be using the system comparing this alternative to the other alternatives? Property impacts; how many properties will be impacted for this alternative compared to the other alternatives? We will come back to you before we go to the public with a list of what those measures will be.*

Question: *Will the measures of effectiveness change before they go out to the public after we have had a chance to review?*

Response: *Jackie responded that she would imagine there may be some changes. One of the things we get from the CAC is an understanding of how we need to communicate with the public.*

Question: Are you taking into consideration M-83 as part of the no-build network?

Response: Yes, M-83 is in the Financially Constrained Long Range Transportation Plan (CLRP) and this is the no-build network that we will be using to compare alternatives.

CAC Member Comment: M-83 is not a new road. It is the completion of a little bit of a road. We have both ends but no middle.

Question: Do you know why the MD 355 BRT goes into Clarksburg? Why is it in the Master Plan?

Response from CAC Member: The original plan had the BRT ending at Shakespeare Boulevard. It took testimony before the County Council to extend the limit of the BRT since the public has no faith that CCT will ever be done.

CAC Member Comment: The County is using BRT as a pretext to not build the transportation infrastructure.

Rick emphasized that the preliminary purpose and need is a working document, and changes will be made based on CAC member comments before it's presented to the wider public. The project team seeks to compare the different concept alternatives to one another based on the project needs. A current project focus is developing quantifiable goals and objectives, along with quantitative measures of effectiveness for each of the needs, to make this comparison.

The first goal introduced was improving quality of transit service and the objectives under that goal. The second goal looks at what does the transit system do to enhance the quality of life. The third is related to multimodal opportunities and where we can provide better choices to those that ride transit. Another goal is to develop transit services that support master planned development, thinking about the needs of the future. The last goal is related to sustainability and cost effectiveness.

The Preliminary Purpose and Need document is being written in the same format as the NEPA purpose and need so that the process can be as efficient as possible, finding ways to use a lot of the work in the current project phase for the formal environmental process. Rick said that later in the week of 12/14 or the week of 12/21, that document will be shared with the CAC members with comments from the CAC members due before the end of January.

Question: In a real NEPA process you receive comments on a document, and all of those comments must be presented publicly and addressed. Are you going to do that with this document?

Response: Not with this document. This is a living document, a working document. Once you get into a formal NEPA process, then you have to record all of the comments in that way.

Question: I would like to see everyone's comments. Can't you just send us a comment matrix so we can see everyone's comments at once?

Response: Yes, we can do that for the CAC members' comments.

CAC Member Comment: This process is totally different than NEPA, and the “need” identified would in that process be something like “we need some kind of transit to accommodate future traffic in the corridor,” it wouldn’t be like in this process, where the purpose is identified as building BRT.

Response: We’re going to continue with this preliminary purpose and need, and get your comments. It will function as a guiding document for comparing alternatives.

Conceptual Alternatives Development

Alvaro Sifuentes described how the development of the Preliminary Purpose and Need and CAC member input on the document are critical milestones to begin the development of the conceptual alternatives. A conceptual alternative has to be defined from Bethesda to Clarksburg and is comprised of three elements. The running way, station locations and the service plan. The running way describes the physical location of the BRT and the interaction with the surrounding environment. The station locations identify the specific location of BRT stops. Finally the service plan describes the operational characteristics of the BRT including (headways/service frequencies, hours of service, and bus routing)

RUNNINGWAY

At CAC meeting #3 a series of running way options was introduced. The different options are not meant to be applied from beginning to end, but are meant to be mixed and matched along the corridor. Not every option is appropriate for every segment of the MD 355 corridor. The considerations for the different running way options deal with the different tradeoffs between them related to the operation of the BRT, traffic, visibility, connectivity and impacts associated with the different options.

BRT in Mixed Traffic

BRT under this option would operate in mixed traffic with all traffic on the road operating within the existing roadway footprint. The BRT would be subject to the same delay and congestion experienced on the roadway. This BRT option could include enhanced transit features such as fewer stops and minor operating improvements like transit signal priority (TSP).

BRT Queue Jump Lanes

BRT under this option would also operate in mixed traffic with all other vehicles on the road within the existing roadway footprint. This option would however include BRT queue jumps at intersections where feasible. The BRT queue jump lane would allow the BRT to get in the front of the queue and, through a protected signal phase, getting ahead of all other vehicles still waiting at the signal. This BRT option could also include enhanced transit with limited stops and minor facility improvements such as TSP.

Reversible / Bi-Directional Dedicated BRT Lane

This option would provide a lane dedicated to the BRT. The difference between the two options is the way the BRT operates. Under a reversible BRT lane, directionality of the dedicated BRT lane would be

determined by peak hour demand. Peak direction BRT buses in the one-way reversible lane would stop at new BRT stations, while off-peak direction BRT buses will operate in mixed traffic and could use existing bus stops retrofitted for BRT. The bi-directional dedicated BRT lane would serve BRT buses traveling in both directions. What is necessary to meet that operational characteristic is a passing zone located every so often. The dedicated lane can be achieved via an additional lane or repurposing of an existing travel lane.

Dedicated Median BRT Lanes

Under this option, BRT buses would operate in dedicated lanes located in the median. This option would provide the highest level of service compared with other BRT options since the BRT would operate in the median. However by being in the median, left turn movements would only occur at signalized intersection or under a protected movement. Many of the existing mid-block crossings along MD 355 would need to be closed and the movements relocated to the nearest signalized intersection. The dedicated lanes can be achieved via additional lanes or repurposing of existing travel lanes.

Dedicated Curb BRT Lanes

Under this option, BRT buses would operate in dedicated lanes located curbside. Since the dedicated lanes are on the outside near to the curb, these lanes would have to be shared with local buses and all right turn movements to and from MD 355. This reduces the efficiency of the BRT travel times. The dedicated lanes can be achieved via additional lanes or repurposing of existing travel lanes.

STATION LOCATION

The second component of an alternative is the station location. The project began with the station locations as identified in the Countywide Transit Corridors Functional Master Plan but has since made revisions based on input from the Cities of Rockville and Gaithersburg. The considerations for the location of the station include the adjacent land use, proposed development, ease of access and connectivity to existing and proposed transit service. A few pictures of both median and curb stations were presented.

OPERATIONS PLAN

The third and final component of an alternative is the service or operations plan. This plan discusses the bus routings and spurs the bus may take to serve a specific area, the transfer points to existing and proposed transit service, and the headway or frequency of the buses at particular point along the corridor. A sample operations plan was presented for discussion purposes.

Question: *Are these real photos in your presentation? None of them have any cars in them. Are they photoshopped?*

Response: *They're real photos except for the few that are identified as concepts in their caption.*

Breakout Exercise

The CAC members broke into groups based on their stated area of interest to look in-depth at opportunities and challenges of accommodating BRT on specific geographic sections of the corridor. One group looked at the section of MD 355 through Rockville Town Center, from Edmonston Drive to Mannakee Street. The other group looked at the section of MD 355 from Shakespeare Boulevard to Redgrave Place.

Each group designated a recorder and reporter to present their discussion to the wider group of CAC members. The groups were asked to consider questions related to the general topic areas of running way types; station locations; and service and operations.

The CAC members were instructed that the purpose of the breakout sessions is to receive individual feedback, comments, concerns and ideas and to allow the CAC members to dialogue with each other. The purpose is not to seek consensus or agreement on any ideas shared by fellow CAC members.

Breakout Exercise Group Report-Out

SECTION 3 - SHAKESPEARE BOULEVARD TO REDGRAVE PLACE

The group that focused on the segment of MD 355 from Shakespeare Boulevard to Redgrave Place reported the following highlights from their discussion to the wider group:

- On the subject of running way type, the preference among some participants was for a two lane median-running BRT, but the group noted that this option comes with the largest right of way impacts of the running way types presented.
 - From Shakespeare Boulevard to Ridge Road, the number of lanes on MD 355 drops from six to two, so that is the source of the concern regarding right of way impacts.
 - The group's preference for a two lane median running BRT in their segment was further clarified with "where feasible."
 - During later phases of the project, the group felt that the team should look at the impact of two lane median BRT on properties, especially where right of way is constrained.
 - The intent on MD 355 north of Shakespeare Boulevard was never for a particular BRT running way type, because the original plan had the BRT service ending at Shakespeare Boulevard, with every third bus going up to Clarksburg in mixed traffic, as a way to connect Clarksburg to the BRT service.
 - Group members had concerns about the impact on pedestrian crossings of a wide running way type.
- On the subject of station locations, surroundings and access, the group had concerns about the planned terminus at Redgrave Place. Articulated buses needing to turn around or wait might be hard to fit.
 - One alternate recommendation was to locate the terminus elsewhere, perhaps close to the Exit 18 interchange with 270.
 - Substantial parking supply should be provided at the terminus station because it's possible that traffic from 270 may want to park and transfer to the BRT service.

- The group agreed that a station at MD 355 and Shakespeare Boulevard is necessary. However, efforts should be made to accommodate more parking.
 - That particular area has a lot of economically challenged people nearby who could be well served by the BRT.
- Feeder bus service will be important for people from surrounding areas to access the BRT.
- On the subject of service and operations, the group suggested considering alternate routes north of Ridge Road, such as Observation Drive, which would connect the BRT to the CCT, and wouldn't require widening 355. The other alternate was to provide an alignment east of MD 355 through Ridge Road and use Snowden Farm Parkway and Mid County Highway and terminate on the west side of I-270 at the outlet mall.
 - Going over 270 to the proposed outlet mall could be useful, and would provide parking.
 - Headways should be good and service should be 24 hours.
 - Perhaps smaller buses could be used for off peak.
 - Peak service should connect well to Metro.

SECTION 1 - EDMONSTON DRIVE TO MANNAKEE STREET

The group that discussed the segment of MD 355 between Edmonston Drive and Mannakee Street reported to the wider group the following highlights from their discussion:

- On the subject of running way type, the discussion focused on Rockville Town Center to Montgomery College's Rockville Campus.
 - The group noted that the confluence of Metro, MD 355 BRT, and Veirs Mill BRT suggested the area should be designed to serve as a transit hub.
 - The group noted that the area is very "landlocked" and constrained from a right of way/space standpoint.
 - The group discussed queue jumps, dedicated and reversible BRT lanes to accommodate BRT service within the constrained corridor.
 - The group discussed re-assigning lanes for the peak periods to BRT and HOV.
 - Stone Street was suggested as an alternate to MD 355 as a route for the BRT through this area.
- On the subject of station locations, surroundings and access, the group focused on providing pedestrian access to BRT within the Town Center.
 - Would it be possible to use campus space and local roads to form a "loop" that prioritized BRT traffic from both MD 355 and Veirs Mill?
 - Neighborhood redevelopment and the land use change of the linear parking lot adjacent to the Metro station were discussed.
 - Space constraint was the biggest challenge in this area.
 - There will be some "pain" to advance any attractive and useful BRT service.
- On the subject of service and operations, the group envisioned an all-day service. The group suggested headways of four to six minutes in rush hour, of less than ten minutes for middle parts of the day, with maximum headways of around 12 minutes in the evenings, to make the service attractive.
 - One fare card should be able to be used across all transit services in the area.
 - On all subjects, the group focused on tradeoffs.

Additional Question & Answer Session:

Question: *What is the City of Rockville's plan for BRT?*

Response: *The report should be posted any day now. It discusses a tunnel option to have through traffic in the tunnel and local traffic and BRT on the surface.*

Question: *What is the status of BRT in the City of Gaithersburg?*

Response: *The City of Gaithersburg has conducted its own study on BRT along a mile of MD 355. They presented the results of the study to their City Council and that presentation is on their website.*

Additional Question & Answer Session from Public:

Public Comment: *The proposal is to have a stop at MD 355 and Shady Grove Road. My recommendation is to have a stop at Shady Grove Metro.*