

**MD 355 North Corridor Advisory Committee Meeting #8 Summary
October 19th, 2016 from 6:30 to 9:00 PM
Upcounty Regional Services Center
12900 Middlebrook Road, Germantown, MD 20874**

Attendees

Members	
Dennis Cain	Mark Pace
Jerry Callistein	David A. Rosenbaum
Nallathamby Devasahayam	Peter Shaw
Peter Henry	Helen Triolo
Kathie Hulley	Gary Unterberg (new member)
Richard Lindstrom	
Apologies	
Paula Bienenfeld	Gail H. Sherman
Cherian Eapen	Goke Taiwo
Stephen Hendrickson	John Francis Torti
Dayssi Morera	Ronald Welke
James Martin	Andrew Williamson
Era Pandya	Paul Yanoshik
Tom Savoie	Kam F. Yee
Margaret Schoap	Joel Yesley
Staff	
MTA -- Kyle Nembhard	Facilitation Staff – Yolanda Takesian
MTA – Jackie Seneschal	Facilitation Staff – Liz Gordon
Montgomery County DOT – Joana Conklin	Study Team – Chris Bell
Montgomery County DOT – Darcy Buckley	Study Team – Alvaro Sifuentes
Montgomery County DOT – Rafael Olarte	Study Team– Krishna Patnam
Facilitation Staff – Andrew Bing	

Handouts

Handouts provided to CAC Members included:

- Agenda for CAC Meeting #8
- Presentation for CAC Meeting #8
- BRT Draft Conceptual Alternatives
- Station and Service Route Map
- Summary of CAC Meeting #7

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

<https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/BRT/md355north.html>

Introduction

Facilitator Yolanda Takesian welcomed attendees, introduced meeting content, and outlined the agenda. She explained that the meeting was the first of a two-part review of the analysis of BRT alternatives; this meeting would include an open house format by topic area for members to understand the analysis performed. The next meeting will include a shorter presentation and working session to receive member input on which alternatives can be removed from consideration or refined to move to the next stage of more detailed study.

Corridor Planning Process

Kyle Nembhard recapped the process from the last meeting in the Spring of 2016. Since then, the project team has been testing at a high level four BRT conceptual alternatives for the corridor (Alternatives 3A, 3B, 4A, and 4B). At the conclusion of this phase of study, the team will have refined and selected the alternatives that will advance to the next, more detailed round of analysis. In the next phase of study, which will last approximately two years, the study team will perform more in-depth analysis on the refined and selected build alternatives, along with the No Build (Alt. 1) and the Transportation Systems Management (Alt. 2) Alternatives.

This CAC meeting and the next one will provide opportunities for the members to offer comment that will help staff refine and select the BRT Build Alternatives for testing.

Kyle provided a refresher on some of the materials introduced last spring regarding the Conceptual Alternatives. The Conceptual Alternatives are composed of three main components:

- 1. Running way:** The general options being considered for Build Alternatives are median-running and curb running BRT, with variations as to whether to terminate BRT service at Grosvenor or continue to Bethesda, and whether to continue north of Middlebrook Road on MD 355 or on Observation Drive. There are a few specific locations where modified runningway configurations, like a bi-directional section, are being considered.
- 2. Station location:** Since the beginning of the summer some initially proposed station locations based on the Countywide Transit Functional Master Plan have been either consolidated or eliminated based on CAC feedback,.
- 3. Service plan:** The service plan, which was included as a handout, is the same for all alternatives and follows the termini based on the proposed BRT alternative.

(Comment) Redgrave Place is in the Clarksburg Historic District; it's shown as a possible terminus, but the BRT could never get all the way there because the road can't be widened in the historic district.

(Response) The project team understands that this is a concern and will be discussing historic resources and property impacts during the next meeting when members will also be asked to provide input on which alternatives should be moved into the next phase of detailed study.

(C) The Historic District problem should be solved first, before adding BRT, since traffic is already untenable on 355 in Clarksburg.

(R) This subject can be covered in more detail during the group breakout discussion portion of the meeting.

(Question) Will we be able to discuss project scheduling and timing in relation to other planned road and transit construction projects?

(R) Yes, again, at the breakout discussion.

Screening Criteria Results

Alvaro Sifuentes reiterated that this meeting would focus only on the results of comparing the BRT Build Alternatives. The four BRT Build Alternatives were compared to one another, on a high level, based on six screening categories. This meeting's screening categories show how the alternatives performed for Transit Ridership, Travel Times, Person Throughput, and Accessibility. The next meeting will add Costs and Property Impacts to the performance discussion. He explained the concepts of person throughput which refers to how many people each section of roadway is expected to move under each alternative, and accessibility, which refers to the projected number of additional households that have access to jobs and activity centers due to the installation of the BRT alternative.

Alternatives are being compared to one another and presented as "higher," "medium," or "lower." The higher, medium, lower ranking is based on the standard deviation of the results. This same methodology was used throughout all screening criteria and would account for small and large variability in the results. During the next phase of study, specific numbers will be presented after detailed analysis is performed. This higher level discussion was designed to allow this meeting to focus on what elements of the BRT alternatives tested should be dropped from further consideration and what elements should continue to be studied.

The analysis presented at this meeting answers six questions at a high level.

- How does Observation Drive compare to Maryland 355, in the northernmost end of the study corridor?
 - Observation Drive has higher ridership.
 - Lower congestion would allow the BRT to operate quickly in mixed traffic on Observation Drive.
 - Important activity centers are planned along Observation Drive.
- How do the two southern termini (Bethesda and Grosvenor) compare?
 - 15 percent of the ridership is generated by extending service South of Grosvenor. This is true both in that portion and in the central portion of the corridor, north of Grosvenor, because it provides greater access to important activity centers.
- What is causing differences in ridership for new BRT service between BRT alternatives?
 - Higher ridership along Observation Drive alignment (greater number of large trip generators).
 - Extending service to Bethesda increases ridership by expanding the BRT market and providing access to additional activity centers.

- In general, the median running way sections have shorter BRT travel times generating higher ridership within those sections.
- What are the effects of lane repurposing?
 - Transit person throughput increases on all alternatives and all alignment sections compared to the No Build alternative.
 - In general, total person throughput decreases in sections where lane repurposing is being proposed due to a decrease in auto person throughput (caused by increased traffic congestion).
- How does the bi-directional section operate?
 - It creates longer travel times due to buses having to wait to pass one another.
 - Longer travel times lower the ridership projections.
- How do the median vs curb running ways compare?
 - Median options result in shorter BRT travel times, in general.
 - Median alternatives also generate higher ridership.

(Q) Would we only be building one or the other alignment on the north end, Observation Drive or MD 355?

(R) We can continue studying both alignments north of Middlebrook Road. At this stage the question is whether or not we have enough information to drop anything from further consideration.

(Q) Where do the ridership assumptions come from?

(R) These are based on the regional model. All the results presented today are model-based results that either come from the regional model or a VISSIM model used for travel times purposes.

(Q) Observation Drive has the CCT planned on it, so it wouldn't have to operate in mixed traffic would it?

(R) If the CCT is built, this BRT would take advantage of that separated right of way. Until then, the assumption is that it will operate in mixed traffic because the projected traffic doesn't warrant a designated right of way for the BRT.

(C) When Observation Drive is built it will pull traffic off of MD 355, causing more traffic for the BRT to be stuck in.

(C) If you take BRT to the Clarksburg Outlets, lots of people will use it, but you'll need to provide significant park and ride capability.

(C) Getting BRT service through Bethesda is going to be challenging; the road is nearly impassible as it is.

(R) Yes. It is possible that section will operate no faster than a standard bus. This will be further analyzed.

(C) Zoning changes for the Bethesda Sector Plan allows taller buildings and upcoming development could be a wildcard trip generator.

(R) These things might also slow operation in this section.

(Q) At one point we were considering a reversible system, as opposed to bi-directional; is that still being considered?

(R) We may revisit this, but we didn't include it in the current set of conceptual alternatives because in some corridor sections there isn't a clear peak direction at most times of day.

(Q) Was the bi-directional operation slower than mixed traffic?

(R) It was slower than lane repurposing. We didn't compare it to mixed traffic at this time because the mixed traffic alternatives will be analyzed in more detail later.

(Q) How will pedestrians get safely to the median?

(R) They are expected to wait for a pedestrian signal phase to cross. We did not specifically look at this at this juncture. Signal timing would be adjusted to create a safe crossing condition for pedestrian. A median station requires riders to cross traffic lanes every time they access a stop, but it's half as many lanes as if they had to cross the whole street, as they currently do, for one of their directions of travel.

(Q) If you have a difficult time fitting through Gaithersburg, could you use the CCT alignment in that area?

(R) The City of Gaithersburg determined that MD 355 was the right alignment for BRT in that area. We're coordinating with them.

(Q) Why are there three service plan routes along the corridor, instead of one end to end route?

(R) The model predicts that very few people would want to make the end to end trip. Additionally, there is more demand in some sections, and you can add buses to the sections with more demand. Shorter routes allow better reliability, too.

(Q) BRT is going to be in addition to the services we already have, right?

(R) Correct. As presented at the previous meeting the frequency for these other services will need to be studied further.

(Q) When will costs be discussed?

(R) Next week, at our next meeting.

Tabletop Exercise

Yolanda Takesian concluded the formal part of the meeting and said that staff would be available to discuss the results of this analysis one-on-one and in small groups. She invited members to take as much time as they need to ask questions of project team staff so they would feel that they had a sufficient understanding to participate in the development of alternatives for further study that would be the focus of the next CAC meeting.