

MD 355 South Corridor Advisory Committees (CAC) Meeting #6 Summary
March 7th, 2015 | 6:30 PM – 9:00 PM
Montgomery County Executive Office Building
101 Monroe Street, Rockville, Maryland

Attendees:

Members	
Nancy Abeles	Celesta Jurkovich
Josh Arcurio	Eleanor Kott
Peter Benjamin	Tony Kouneski
Elizabeth Crane	Richard O. Levine
Ryan Emery	Jeremy Martin
Miti Figueredo	Philip Neuberg
Greg Ford	Ralph Schofer
Roger Fox	David Sears
Victoria Hall	Anne White
Jerry Garson	Steven Wilcox
Apologies	
Bill Carey	Sasha Page
Francoise Carrier	Andy Palanisamy
Barbara Condos	Todd Pearson
Jay Corbalis	Chad Salganik
Kristi Cruzat	Eric Siegel
Ronit Dancis	Ana Sobalvarro
Jad Donohoe	Gerard Stack
Debbie Friese	John Alex Staffier
Peter Katz	Emily Vaias
Todd Lewers	Francine Waters
Damon Luciano	Jon Weintraub
Patty Mason	Max Wilson
Deborah Michaels	
Staff	
Lead Facilitator – Yolanda Takesian	AECOM Station Design – Kyle Kramer
Study Team – Alvaro Sifuentes	AECOM Station Design – Todd Connelly
Facilitation Staff – Andrew Bing	MTA – Kyle Kramer
Facilitation Staff – Liz Gordon	Montgomery County DOT – Emil Wolanin
AECOM Transit Service/Forecasting– Chris Bell	Montgomery County DOT – Tom Pogue
Facilitation Staff – John Paul Weesner	Montgomery County DOT – Rafael Olarte
MTA – Jacquelyn Seneschal	Montgomery County DOT – Darcy Buckley
MTA – Rick Kiegel	Montgomery County DOT – Joana Conklin
MTA – Kyle Nembhard	Montgomery County DOT – Phil McLaughlin
MTA -- Laura Barcena	City of Rockville –Barry Gore

Handouts

Handouts provided to CAC Members included:

- Agenda for CAC Meeting #6
- Presentation for CAC Meeting #6
- Service route and proposed station location map
- Ridership map for Ride On routes 46, 55 and 75
- County Executive letter to Montgomery County Council
- Summary of CAC Meeting #5

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

www.montgomerycountymd.gov/rts

Introduction

Yolanda Takesian welcomed attendees, introduced meeting content, and outlined the agenda.

Montgomery County BRT Project Update

Joana Conklin explained the County Executive's recent letter sent to County Council. The letter outlined his plan to continue the MD 355 BRT Corridor Planning Study which focuses on the long term implementation of BRT in the corridor. The County Executive requested that \$5M be approved by the County Council and is asking for the State to fund the additional \$5M that is needed to complete the corridor planning study up until the selection of a Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA). In addition the County Executive recommended implementation of two short term transit improvements along MD 355. The first would be a limited stop priority service, called Ride On Plus, from the Lakeforest Transit Center to the Medical Center Metrorail Station. The service would operate in mixed traffic but would include improvements such as enhanced bus stops and potential implementation of Transit Signal Priority (TSP). The second proposed service is peak period express bus service from Clarksburg to the Shady Grove Metrorail Station. Both of these services can be implemented in the next 18-24 months.

(Question) Is one of the alternatives express bus?

(Response) No, in the short term the County Executive has proposed Ride On Plus, which is similar to WMATA's MetroExtra service, operating in mixed traffic. The Ride On Plus service is not an alternative to BRT, and it is likely it would be replaced in the future by BRT service. This interim service would be considered part of the No Build alternative.

(Comment) But some express bus service on New Hampshire Avenue is considered BRT service.

(R). The MetroExtra service on New Hampshire Avenue does not fit all of the characteristics used to typically define BRT.

(Q) How will the Ride On Plus be different than BRT?

(R) The Ride On Plus will be limited stop bus service that includes elements like transit signal priority (TSP), clearly identifiable vehicles, and improvements to bus stops. It will not have raised platform stations, separate running ways, off-board fare collection, and other characteristics commonly associated with BRT.

(C) I'm worried this will be a step backwards because it will not be a full BRT, but the smaller improvements will come to be accepted as BRT.

(R) This is not considered BRT by the County and the MD355 BRT Study will continue as normal. If anything, this project could be considered interim service prior to the implementation of BRT (which may require purchasing additional right-of-way and will take more time to implement). It could begin to create the potential for higher ridership on the eventual BRT as the new Ride On Plus service will more convenient than the existing bus service.

(Q) How will the Ride On Plus and TSM [Transportation System Management] be figured into the current MD 355 BRT Study?

(R) At this moment the County Executive has requested the funding for the Ride On Plus but the County Council has yet to approve it. We cannot modify our No-Build model until such time as these transit improvements have actually been planned and funded. At that point in time the Ride On Plus will be considered part of a “No Build” scenario as it is implemented. Additionally, information gathered from the MD 355 BRT Study, plus additional public input will be solicited during the project process for Ride On Plus.

(Q) Will Ride On Plus be a 24 hour service?

(R) The current proposal is for the Ride On Plus to be a peak period service.

Draft Preliminary Purpose and Need

Rick Kiegel provided an update on the Draft Preliminary Purpose and Need document and the results of the February Open House. He thanked the CAC for their participation and input; he indicated that 81 comments were received from eight MD 355 CAC members by the deadline for comments. The team is currently reviewing and developing responses to those comments for distribution to the CAC prior to the public meeting sometime in April. All comments received after the February 12th deadline will still be reviewed and responded to but it will happen after the public open house. Some of the comments included concerns about the modeling method, the conceptual alternatives, and the types of trips the alternatives will serve.

Rick emphasized that the Draft Preliminary Purpose and Need is a working document, and changes will be made based on CAC member comments before it is presented to the wider public.

(Q) Do you have a sense of when the responses will be submitted?

(R) It will happen prior to the public open houses, sometime in mid-April.

(C) If we're going to do a whole draft purpose and need, the Ride On Plus has to be considered as an option because according to Montgomery County's manual, that's BRT. We have to see what the speed of the BRT will actually be in comparison to Ride On Plus and whether it's worth the extra expense.

(R) The VISSIM modeling being conducted for the long-term study will address bus speed for the various conceptual alternatives under consideration. That modeling does not assume the existence of the proposed Ride On Plus service, which has not yet been acted upon by the County Council. In any study like this, while existing conditions may change, we need to forge on and cannot restart the modeling over and over again as conditions on the ground change. We are proceeding in this phase of study using the base conditions described in the draft preliminary purpose and need document that you've seen. If the County makes a decision regarding Ride On Plus and implements it, that service will be included as part of the No Build alternative in further rounds of modeling as part of future phases of project study.

(C) There is a need for metrics to help define the purpose and need, and we have not seen this yet.

(R) The selection and screening process is still being developed. Once it is established it will be available for review and comment.

Public Open House

In late April or Early May, the project team is planning two Public Open House meetings with identical information presented in both. The meeting format will be an informational open house for the public to attend at any time and go through a series of boards and have staff available to answer questions. The timeframe of the open houses will be 6:30 PM to 8:30 PM. The open houses will seek to educate the public on BRT, introduce participants to the ongoing study, present information on the draft preliminary Purpose and Need, review existing conditions, and obtain public feedback on all of these subjects. The CAC members have already seen all of the information that will be presented at these open houses, and are asked to help supplement the project team's considerable public outreach efforts to ensure high attendance. The public outreach will include postcards to 71,000 addresses, delivering flyers to all the local government buildings, and public service announcements in local radio stations.

(Q) My community meeting will be held in the near future – how do I relate the information about the upcoming public meeting?

(R) Please let Yolanda know about any HOA or Community Meetings that are upcoming and we will be sure to give you copies of the agenda or poster announcing the public meeting in digital form to forward to your listservs or other community engagement platforms (Facebook, Twitter, etc.)

(Q) Will the meeting be held somewhere accessible by bus?

(R) Yes, it will be at two schools near the corridor, Gaithersburg and Bethesda Chevy Chase high schools.

Conceptual Alternatives Modifications

Rick Kiegel discussed where the study currently is in the process. The data collection and existing conditions analysis are still underway as is the development of the Draft Preliminary Purpose and Need. The study is currently looking at the Conceptual Alternatives which will ultimately lead to the Alternatives Retained for Detailed Study.

(C) We should not be moving into conceptual alternatives without knowing the details of the County Executive's Ride On Plus alternative. We don't have sufficient information about the proposal that may be implemented to move into conceptual alternatives. How can we study full BRT alternatives that impact high numbers of left turns if we have not received results of analysis of the proposed Ride On Plus service.

(R) If funding to implement the Executive's proposal is approved, we will analyze it within the modeling for the study; until then, it will not be included in the modeling efforts. MCDOT is currently studying how the interim service will operate so the service can respond to demand and build ridership that will be attracted to the proposed BRT-type service. In the meantime we continue to study the full range of build alternatives.

(C) No Build is always an alternative. Could we include Ride On Plus as a part of the No Build alternative?

(R) Yes, if Ride On Plus is implemented it will become part of the No Build alternative and then there will be a TSM alternative and Build alternatives for study.

Rick reminded the CAC that an analysis alternative consists of three components: the running way design, the service's station locations, and a service plan. Tonight's discussion will cover station locations and service plan. Given the length of the corridor it was not feasible to include running way types in tonight's discussion; running way types being considered and their locations will be discussed at the next meeting.

Since the last meeting the team has made some changes to the project based on comments from the CAC and other members of the public. Some of the modifications made as a result of CAC insight include:

- Moving the King Farm Boulevard BRT Station into the Shady Grove Metrorail Station
- Serving the Lakeforest Transit Center
- Looking at an additional alignment along Observation Drive that terminates at the Clarksburg Outlets
- Preparing a service plan that works differently for different market areas

Alvaro Sifuentes presented the complete list of station location and alignment modifications being developed as an initial set of conceptual alternatives. He presented these changes relative to the Countywide Transit Corridors Functional Master Plan (CTCFMP), which was the starting point for the MD 355 study. Alternatives proposed for study have evolved as a result of more detailed analysis, perspectives from CAC members, coordination with Montgomery County DOT, and planning undertaken by the cities of Rockville and Gaithersburg. The CTCFMP showed recommendations for stations within the city limits of these two municipalities but acknowledged that the cities would be expected to help to refine the proposed locations within their jurisdictional boundaries. Those currently proposed are consistent with the most recent planning undertaken by Gaithersburg and Rockville.

Alvaro referred members to the handout “MD 355 BRT Study Preliminary Service Plan Route Patterns and Station Locations” showing:

- Functional Master Plan station locations retained (in blue),
- Functional Master Plan stations eliminated (in red),
- new station locations (in green), and
- an alignment alternative.

(Q) Are the recommendations also being made consistent with the Bethesda Sector plan?

(R) Yes, the station location recommendations are consistent with those in the Bethesda Sector Plan.

The following bulleted list describes the changes and reasons for the changes to the proposed station locations.

- Montgomery College (Rockville) – The CTCFMP made a recommendation to stop at the intersection of MD 355 and Mannakee Street. This is a short distance away from the campus itself. CAC members told us that significant numbers of college students take transit and that a connection into the campus would be useful. The proposed service plan will have a connection coming from the southern end of the study into the campus.

(Q) Only 464 people get off at Montgomery College; that is not a very large number.

(R) A large number of students attend the college; we recommended this station for testing and, depending on the results of the analysis, we will determine if that location is suitable.

- The Gude Drive station is being moved to Indianola Drive due to high levels of congestion and turn lanes at the Gude Drive intersection which is also planned to be converted to an interchange. The density to access the station is also low, so the station was relocated further north to better serve the residential community.

- The MD 355 at King Farm Boulevard station is being relocated to the Shady Grove Metrorail station to directly serve the Metro.
- The station at Shady Grove Road is being eliminated. This intersection is also very congested with many turn lanes. Land use densities are also low.

Station locations in the City of Gaithersburg are based on the City of Gaithersburg BRT study.

- Cedar Avenue / Fulks Corner Avenue has been added because it is only a few blocks from the MARC station and would serve as a transfer point into the MARC station.
- Brookes Avenue which is just north of the Father Cuddy Bridge has been relocated a block north to the intersection of Chestnut Street/Walker Avenue. The bridge serves as a major barrier to pedestrians and the recommended location better serves residential and commercial areas.
- The next three stations were discussed together. From south to north the intersections along MD 355 are Odenhall Avenue, Lakeforest Boulevard and MD 124. MD 124 is a very congested intersection with many turn lanes; it was identified in the Gaithersburg City BRT study as a poor location for a station due to safety concerns. Since the MD 124 station was eliminated, the study recommended moving the proposed Odenhall Avenue station one block north to better serve the Lakeforest Mall. A new station has been introduced at the Lakeforest Transit Center to serve as a transfer point to many other local bus routes.
- The MD 27 Ridge Road station has been eliminated because of the levels of congestion at the intersection and the ability of the area to be served by a station at Shakespeare Boulevard. The station at West Old Baltimore Road was eliminated given low land use densities and the lack of pedestrian access.
- Shawnee Lane was less than 1000 feet from the proposed station location at Foreman Boulevard to the south which serves the Clarksburg High School. The team recommends that the Shawnee Lane stop along MD 355 be eliminated because of the short distance between stations.
- As suggested in a previous MD 355 CAC meeting, a potential alignment has been added along Observation Drive. This alignment recognizes that much of the planned future development in this area occurs along Observation Drive. The station at Middlebrook Drive is recommended to be eliminated because it will be the transition point from a dedicated lanes cross-section to mixed traffic operations. The next few stations along Observation Drive are proposed to be Holy Cross Hospital, Montgomery College (Germantown), Shakespeare Boulevard, Milestone Center Drive, COMSAT, Shawnee Lane, North of MD 121 (Future Clarksburg Town Center) and at the Clarksburg Outlets, the proposed terminal station.

(Q) Has anyone tabulated the dwelling units in relation to the stations to forecast ridership?

(R) This will be eventually considered once the station locations are determined.

(C) *It seems there are many changes to the northern portion of the MD 355 Corridor, but none in the southern portion.*

(R) Based on the results of tonight's workshop there could be further modifications to the station locations in the southern portion of the study area.

(C) *There is significant grade change between the Pooks Hill Station and the Cedar Lane Station making a merging or removal of a station problematic.*

Station Area Plans

Kyle Kramer presented a short introduction into station area planning and showed an example of urban analysis in the vicinity of the Halpine Road Station that includes identifying land uses, street connections, and barriers to potential riders that might otherwise use the station.

(Q) *Will this examine ¼ mile radius circles or ½ mile radius circles?*

(R) ¼ mile radius circles from the station location are generally considered an industry standard for how far people will walk for services. This is beneficial in designing station area plans, however, when designing for a given capture area for transit ridership, the ½ mile radius circle is used because potential riders will travel slightly farther to reach quality, efficient transit.

Service Operation Planning Elements

Chris Bell presented the various service planning elements that will be considered in the modeling of the 22-mile BRT Corridor. This will include information on the proposed BRT, changes to the existing Ride On WMATA and other services that potentially duplicate or compliment the BRT service along the corridor. Chris noted that there will be two models that will be developed concurrently, (1) a travel demand model using the information provided by MWCOG to predict future ridership, and (2) a VISSIM model which will incorporate many other elements to indicate how the service might operate within the corridor. He also explained the service plan that his team will test including:

- 4 minute headways (15 buses per hour) during the peak;
- 6 to 8-minute headways, (7-10 buses per hour) during the mid-day for different sections of the corridor; and,
- Reducing frequency of the current Ride On routes 46 and 55, as complimentary BRT service is introduced.

(Q) *Why does the purple route have two different stops, one at Grosvenor and one at Bethesda?*

(R) We will be testing a Grosvenor terminus and a Bethesda terminus.

(Q) *Will the model be detailed enough to be able to tease out peak conditions for certain uses (like the Medical Center) that have different peak conditions from the normal usage?*

(R) Yes – we should be able to tease out of the model those various conditions and unique situations.

(Q) *At 4-minute headways, how will you keep the buses from bunching?*

(R) The 4-minute or 8-minute headways are to begin preliminary testing and discover answers to questions exactly like this one – if it is determined that bunching would occur, then we would test operation alternatives that would help solve these issues and other issues that may arise from the preliminary testing.

Breakout Exercise

The rear section of the meeting room had a number of tables set up in an open house format. CAC members were invited to visit as many of the five corridor segment tables and the Transit Service table as they wished. The corridor segment discussions would focus on major destinations adjacent to the proposed station areas, likely routes to the proposed stations, routes to proposed stations that need attention to be more pedestrian or bike friendly, and adequate links to other generators or networks of users including neighborhoods, office areas, biking corridors, etc. Members were also asked to include suggestions to refine station locations or terminal stations in the service plan. All comments would be noted.

Tables were setup with maps to show the areas listed below. The geographic table maps included MARC and Metrorail routes and stations, Ride On and Metro bus routes, major trip generators, and local streets.

1. Bethesda Metro Station to Grosvenor Metro Station,
2. Security Lane to Rockville Metro Station,
3. Mannakee Street to Shady Grove Metro Station,
4. Education Boulevard to Professional Drive,
5. Middlebrook Drive to Redgrave Place, and
6. BRT operations and the study model.

Breakout Exercise Group Report-Out

Facilitators for each table area were asked to quickly summarize the most salient issues that were discussed by the CAC Members during the breakout exercise. The summary follows:

Bethesda Metro Station to Grosvenor Metro Station

The two tables with stations located along the segment of MD 355 between the Bethesda Metro Station and the Grosvenor Metro Station reported the following discussion with CAC members:

- BRT on the corridor could well serve local shopping trips, since the nearest grocery and big box stores are between Metro stops.
- Participants were amenable to seeing tests for a service plan that terminates at Grosvenor, since the southern portion of the corridor overlaps with the Metro Red Line.
- Congestion from employees exiting Medical Center was seen as a major cause of delay, and better transit access might be a way to alleviate some of that.
- Running BRT vehicles into the Medical Center Metrorail Station was seen as a concern given the high number of buses that already go into the station. Members were concerned it would slow the service and increase congestion there.
- Removal of the station at Cedar Lane was widely supported by participants because the location has a lot of traffic congestion and is inaccessible by potential users surrounding the station.
- Bicycle and pedestrian connections are difficult from dense residential areas near the corridor and should be enhanced.

Security Lane to Rockville Metro Station

The two tables showing station locations along the segment of MD 355 between Security Lane and Rockville Metro Station discussed the following items:

- The Metrorail tracks and wide, wide busy roads are significant obstacles to pedestrians and bicycles.
- The Templeton Place station was seen as not serving as many destinations as other stations.
- Between Edmontson and Rockville Metro, several important shopping destinations and the high school are not well served by bicycle and pedestrian connections.
- A lot of medium to high density residential buildings are under construction in this area.



Manakee Street to Shady Grove Metro Station

The table that focused on the station location along the segment of MD 355 between Manakee Street and the Shady Grove Metro Station discussed the following items:

- On the subject of running way type, the discussion focused on Rockville Town Center.
- The group noted that the Rockville BRT Town Center Integration Study Report shows two dedicated median running lanes in the southern portion of the Town Center.
- Right-of-way is constrained all the way to Gude Drive. It might be appropriate to consider mixed traffic in this area.
- Concern about the number of running-way type transitions from BRT to Metro.

Education Boulevard to Professional Drive

The table that focused on the station locations along the segment of MD 355 between Education Boulevard and Professional Drive did not receive any CAC member comments.

Middlebrook Drive to Redgrave Place

The table that focused on the station locations along the segment of MD 355 between Middlebrook Drive and Redgrave Place had no particular CAC member comments.

Transit Service, BRT Operations and the Study Model

The table that focused on BRT operations and the study model reported the following discussed items:

- Concern about cutting local service so significantly;
- Discussion of pedestrian access to Twinbrook Station from MD 355; and,
- Concern about having high enough frequency on Saturdays.