

MD 355 North Corridor Advisory Committee Meeting #10 Summary
May 18th, 2017 from 6:30 to 8:00 PM
Upcounty Regional Services Center
12900 Middlebrook Road, Germantown, MD 20874

Attendees

Members	
Stephen Cohn	David A. Rosenbaum
Nallathamby Devasahayam	Peter Shaw
Richard Lindstrom	Gary Unterberg
Mark Pace	Ronald Welke
Era Pandya	
Apologies	
Paula Bienenfeld	Tom Savoie
Dennis Cain	Margaret Schoap
Jerry Callistein	Gail H. Sherman
Helen Triolo	Goke Taiwo
Cherian Eapen	John Francis Torti
Stephen Hendrickson	Andrew Williamson
Peter Henry	Kam F. Yee
Kathie Hulley	Paul Yanoshik
James Martin	Joel Yesley
Dayssi Morera	
Staff	
MTA -- Kyle Nembhard	Facilitation Staff – Andrew Bing
MTA – Jackie Seneschal	Study Team – Alvaro Sifuentes
Montgomery County DOT – Tom Pogue	Study Team – Chris Bell
Montgomery County DOT – Darcy Buckley	ZGF – Otto Condon
Montgomery County DOT – Rafael Olarte	ZGF – Christopher Somme
Montgomery County DOT – Bruce Johnston	Ross Slosser – City of Gaithersburg
	Steve Aldrich -- MNCPPC
Guests	
Philip Maxon – Lane Construction Co.	
Gannett Fleming -- Denny Finneran	

Handouts

Handouts provided to CAC Members included:

- Agenda for CAC Meeting #10
- Presentation for CAC Meeting #10
 Mapping for Alternatives 3C and 4C

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

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

Introduction

Facilitator Andrew Bing welcomed attendees, introduced meeting content, and outlined the agenda. He explained his role this evening as facilitator and reminded the group that the study is transitioning from State to County oversight for the next phase. At the next meeting, County's study team will be introduced to the members. He asked all the attending members to introduce themselves. Andrew welcomed Steve Cohn as a new CAC member.

2017 Public Open House

Kyle Nembhard explained that the purpose of this meeting was to discuss the results of this phase, as summarized in the Conceptual Alternatives Report. He provided a summary of the project public open houses held in February 2017. Approximately 120 people total attended the two open houses, which were held in Germantown and Rockville. The open houses covered the following topics:

- The project planning process;
- Explaining what the BRT concept is;
- The four BRT conceptual alternatives under study;
- Qualitative results of the study analysis; and
- BRT station design concepts.

Kyle then reviewed highlights from comments staff received at the open houses. These included

- The need for safe accommodations for bike lanes within the roadway;
- The fact BRT service may be in competition with parallel Metrorail service along this corridor;
- Concerns about lane repurposing along with support for concepts' attempt to stay within existing roadway (this was especially true in sections 3 and 1 of the corridor);
- The need for sidewalk access to various stations, especially station near Grosvenor Metro;
- The need for coordination between this corridor's and the MD 586 corridor's BRT projects;
- The importance of integrating BRT service into the local bus network; and
- Numerous specific comments on Section 1—Bethesda to Grosvenor, and Section 7—Middlebrook Road to Redgrave Place/Clarksburg outlets. The completion of Observation Drive and the use of it for the BRT was felt to be very important.

Question (Q): Will the extension of Observation Drive be done by developers?

R: Bruce Johnston noted it is in the County's Capital Improvements Program (CIP) budget.

Q: Is it a developer funded project?

R: No, as a County-funded project. Kyle said staff had based its assumptions in the projections on the fact that this road will be completed.

Conceptual Alternatives Report

Kyle reviewed the content of Conceptual Alternatives Report, highlighting how the CAC members played a role in providing comment on each section of the report. The planning study was started in 2015. He noted this was the first time the State has involved an advisory group so early in the planning stages of a project.

Kyle noted that the core elements of a BRT Conceptual Alternative include the running way, the station locations, and the service plan. There were four BRT conceptual alternatives identified within the study (Alternatives 3A, 3B, 4A, and 4B). There are now two identified as the “Refined BRT Alternatives” which will be carried forward for further evaluation. They will henceforth be identified as Alternative 3C and 4C. Alternative 3C is primarily characterized by a running way in the median of the roadway. Alternative 4C is primarily characterized by a running way along the curb of the roadway.

Kyle noted that a No Build Alternative (Alternative 1) and a Transportation System Management (TSM) Alternative (Alternative 2) would also be studied in the next phase. He gave an overview of TSM, which include elements such as

- Transit Signal Priority (TSP);
- Queue jumps; and a
- Limited number of stops.

Kyle then described key takeaways considered in arriving at the two refined BRT alternatives.

- The decision on whether to run the BRT in the median versus in the curb lane in Sections 2, 4 and 6 will influence running way decisions for Sections 1, 3 and 5.
- Median running of the BRT along MD 355 results in faster travel times.
- Curb running BRT along MD 355 results in fewer impacts and lower costs.
- Higher ridership occurs on the BRT when it runs along Observation Drive in the northern segment as opposed to MD 355.
- Approximately 15 percent of the total corridor ridership is generated at stations south of the Grosvenor Metrorail Station.
- Lane repurposing in Section 3 has the greatest overall negative impact on traffic.
- Operating in mixed traffic in Section 1 has the least impact on overall person throughput (the County will study additional, potential mitigation strategies with lane repurposing conditions).

Q: When you say 50 percent more riders, what's the baseline?

R: Chris Bell explained we're talking about 50 percent more riders when we use Observation Drive compared to the other alternative routes.

Refined Alternatives Advancing to the Next Phase

Kyle reviewed aspects of the refined BRT alternatives, starting with Alternative 3C, which features BRT service between the Clarksburg Outlets and the Bethesda Metrorail Station, primarily in dedicated median lanes. The BRT would run in mixed traffic in Section 1. But this would not be just like a local bus, since BRT has many other features that make it faster. Sections 2, 4, and 6 would have two dedicated BRT lanes in the median where feasible. Section 3, Rockville Town Center vicinity, would feature one dedicated median lane. The team will evaluate how best to operate this section, but we do not envision taking away any lanes of traffic. Section 5 would have one dedicated median, bi-directional BRT lane, accomplished through lane repurposing. In Section 7, the BRT would run in mixed traffic along Observation Drive.

Kyle summarized Alternative 4C next, which features BRT service between the Clarksburg Outlets and the Bethesda Metrorail Station, primarily in curb lanes. Section 1 would have one dedicated curb BRT lane in the peak direction. The peak direction would maintain all the existing lanes for traffic and one lane in the non-peak direction would be repurposed for peak-direction BRT. Sections 2, 4, and 6 would have two dedicated BRT lanes in the curb where feasible. Section 3 would have a dedicated curb lane in the southbound direction for BRT and turning movements. It would function like a permanent lane shift. The northbound curb lane would have BRT running in mixed traffic. In Section 7, the BRT would run in mixed traffic along Observation Drive. This assumes Observation Drive would be complete. The option of routing the BRT in the curb along MD 355 from Redgrave Place to Middlebrook Road in Section 7 may be considered if the widening of MD 355, as envisioned in the County's Master Plan of Highways and Transitways, is pursued as a separate project.

Kyle reviewed the alternatives screening and selection process. He noted that the next phase will require exploring the tradeoffs between alternatives.

Q: Were there any special problems with the Rockville area? A central station planned there might present challenges due to the MD 586 BRT alignment.

R: Jackie Seneschal noted the MD 586 [Veirs Mill Road corridor] project is not planning to add an additional BRT station at the Rockville Metro.

BRT Station Design

Darcy Buckley introduced the next section of the meeting dealing with BRT station design work. She explained that the County received a grant from the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments' Transportation/Land-Use Connections Program, to develop station prototypes for the future county-wide BRT network. The work was being done in partnership with architecture firm ZGF. She introduced Otto Condon of ZGF. Otto outlined the topics to be covered in his segment of the presentation.

- Station Design Goals;
- Best Practice Examples;
- MCDOT BRT Stations – Types and Amenities;
- Previous Community Input;
- Design Opportunities – Local Materials and Sustainability; and
- The Station Family – Adaptation to Capacity and Context.

He noted his project is looking for stations that fit into the community and do not simply appear to have been dropped down into the local environment.

He explained station design goals, listing six: 1) easy to find; 2) accessible; 3) safe and comfortable; 4) context sensitive; 5) maintainable; and 6) be a good life-cycle investment (the cost should make sense and be affordable).

Q: How will the stations interface with the local Ride On bus stops?

R: There are still some policy decisions to be made regarding sharing BRT stations with local bus service. It also depends on site specific aspects.

Q: Will this be worked out in the design phase?

R: Yes, many factors will be considered. But the stations will be elevated somewhat to allow for level boarding into the BRT buses.

He presented photographs of shelters from BRT systems across the world, from Chile to Brazil, Canada to the United States. Otto pointed out various aspects of shelter design to meet the above goals. He then presented station design types, in two broad categories: side-loading and center-loading. To encourage ownership and attractiveness to patrons you need to be creative and seek to utilize elements that reflect local needs, such as well-ventilated shelters that were designed especially for the hot climate of Arizona.

Otto discussed potential station amenities and features, such as design, public art components, customer service items such as WiFi connections and heaters, and landscape aspects. While the designers recognize the landmark aspect of Metro's design, members of the community have spoken out to not emulate the bulky concrete look Metro has. The station design team will be evaluating such input. The station markers may be "smart" in the sense that they'll contain technology to assist patrons, such as next bus information.

Stations should protect patrons from the weather. They could contain advertising to provide revenue to the system. They should be landscaped, which he believes is an important value to residents of the county. He suggested that stone may be an appropriate material for some station elements due to the large number of quarries in the county and county's history as a regional source for stone. Photovoltaic panels could bring in a sustainability aspect to the stations.

Otto next covered community input received at the open houses through a "word cloud" exercise that was given at the events.

He then went through a series of station prototype designs that reflected the modular design characteristic his company is pursuing under the grant. This flexibility allows for station design that is context sensitive, and also allows for expansion should future ridership dictate it. These designs spanned a simple marker and canopy for an urban streetfront and shared sidewalk configuration, to multiple canopies for a high capacity double station configuration for use at park and ride lots, for example. Otto addressed some of the concerns previously raised about interaction with bikes and sidewalks.

The canopies can be either expanded or an additional canopy can be installed, should station usage steadily increase and require greater patron protection from the elements. Stations can also be adapted to micro weather conditions, such as a location prone to high winds in one direction.

Q: Metro has a station manager at each of their stations. Metro also chose not provide public restrooms. Can we consider those aspects?

R: Regarding restrooms, we'll provide them in certain locations for the bus operators. It's a policy decision regarding public restrooms. Regarding on-site station managers, that depends on the level of ridership. In some locations, we've looked at communication devices, such as blue buttons. It is again a policy issue as to the level of services provided, based partially on cost considerations.

Q: Did you focus on the Corridor Cities Transitway [CCT] station designs, since they've done quite a bit of work in that respect?

R: It's been enjoyable to look at stations from all over the world to gather best practices. The CCT's stations are pretty large. We think there are opportunities for us to develop some really innovative concepts for Montgomery County.

Q: Are there always be going to be overlaps with the CCT?

R: Kyle responded that the CCT may run parallel with the MD 355 BRT until they finally meet up at Observation Drive.

C: You could get a lot of redundancy.

R: MD 355 acts as a natural barrier.

C: But the CCT crosses over I-270 at some point.

R: There is a bit of overlap at one segment to the north. But we'll be watching the ridership of the two lines. Otto also noted there will be strong emphasis on communication so riders know clearly which place to go to catch a transfer.

C: There should be 911 emergency communication options.

Next Steps

Darcy explained the next steps for the project. She noted MCDOT is pulling together a study team and developing an action plan. The State will continue to be a key stakeholder in the project. There will be a high level of continuity and sharing of knowledge from the previous team. The new study team will be conducting a detailed analysis of the refined BRT alternatives, as well as No Build and Transportation System Management (TSM), for this corridor.

The two CACs for this corridor, MD 355 North and MD 355 South, will continue to meet. The CAC members will be hearing from the County over the summer with updates on the project. We're planning to hold the next CAC meeting this fall.

Andrew thanked the committee members for their commitment thus far, and stated that he expected the transition to County oversight of the project to forward smoothly. He expressed his pleasure with working with the members up to this point and adjourned the meeting.