

**MD 355 South Corridor Advisory Committee Meeting #10 Summary
May 16th, 2017 from 6:30 to 8:3 PM
Bethesda Chevy Chase Regional Services Center
4805 Edgemoor Ln, Bethesda, MD 20814**

Attendees

Members	
Nancy Abeles	Sylke Knuppel
Joshua Arcurio	Richard Levine
Peter Benjamin	Damon Luciano
Kristi Cruzat	Jeremy Martin
Greg Ford	Deborah Michaels
Roger Fox	Sasha Page
Jerry Garson	D. Todd Pearson
Victoria Hall	Chad Salganik
Celesta Jurkovich	Francine Waters
Peter Katz	Jan White
Apologies	
Barbara Condos	Susan Roberts
Jay Corbalis	Ralph Schofer
Elizabeth Crane	David Sears
Matt Gordon	Eric Siegel
Ryan Emery	Ana Milena Sobalvarro
Debbie Friese	Gerard Stack
Eleanor Kott	John Alex Staffier
Tony Kouneski	Michael Tardif
Todd Lewers	Steven Wilcox
Staff	
MTA -- Kyle Nembhard	Facilitation Staff – Andrew Bing
Montgomery County DOT – Joana Conklin	Facilitation Staff – Juliana Bing
Montgomery County DOT – Darcy Buckley	Study Team – Chris Bell
Montgomery County DOT – Rafael Olarte	Study Team – Alvaro Sifuentes
Montgomery County DOT – Tom Pogue	ZGF – Otto Condon
Montgomery County DOT – Sogand Seirafi	ZGF – Chris Somme
Montgomery County DOT – Dan Sheridan	Foursquare ITP – Michael Weinberger
Montgomery County DOT – Dan Hibbert	MNCPPC – Tom Autrey
WMATA – Jamaica Arnold	
Guests	
David Winstead	Gannett Fleming – Steven Hawtof

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:

<https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/BRT/md355south.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 then asked all the attending members to introduce themselves.

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;
- 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;
- Numerous specific comments on Section 1—Bethesda to Grosvenor--and Section 7—Middlebrook Road to Redgrave Place/Clarksburg outlets.

Question (Q): Was there any reaction or opinion about running BRT on curb side versus median?

Response (R): Tradeoffs were noted for both options.

Q: Why is there no discussion of the proposed Ride On Extra service just announced?

R: The team is aware of the planned new service, and it will be incorporated into the No Build assumptions in the next phase.

Comment (C): But they're going to build stations in connection with Ride On Extra, then destroy them [when the BRT stations are constructed].

R: There will be a presentation on the planned BRT stations later in this meeting. [The Ride On Extra shelters will be the same as regular bus shelters, and can be relocated in the future.]

Conceptual Alternatives Report

Kyle reviewed the content of the Conceptual Alternatives Report and highlighted how the CAC members played a role in providing comment on each section of the report.

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.

Limited number of stops. Kyle then described key takeaways considered in arriving at the two refined alternatives. These included

- 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).

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: How will you study the dynamics of the section inside the Beltway after the BRAC improvements are made and continue to go into effect? How will you handle the changing situation at this location?

R: Kyle responded there will be constant communication between the study team and the engineers involved with this area and with the State as they make the improvements in this area.

Q: How do you operate on MD 355 in Section 7 where it's only a two-lane road?

R: Alvaro Sifuentes noted this segment of MD 355 is planned to become a four-lane road. We're suggesting operating in this section initially on Observation Drive on the existing pavement. Kyle noted if MD 355 is widened later, we would then consider application of BRT.

Q: On Ride On Extra they're proposing installing TSP. What's the difference between this TSP and what the BRT would use?

R: Chris Bell responded that the team will be looking at where MCDOT installs TSP for Ride On Extra, so that the BRT uses those same locations or systems, while potentially adding additional TSP sites. Alvaro also noted the BRT study will also be looking at queue jumps as part of Alternative 2 (TSM).

Q: Will the analysis in the next phase look at future road improvements?

R: The model will include everything in the Fiscally Constrained Long Range Plan (CLRP) for 2040.

C: Member noted that there were things in the [related Master] Plan associated with BRAC that have yet to become reality.

Q: Member noted there was previous discussion of looking at the median strip between the Beltway and downtown Bethesda. Will this be looked at in the next phase?

R: Yes, we're still looking at lane repurposing in this segment of the corridor in Alternative 4C.

C: We've been working with the team looking at every inch of the ground between Grosvenor and downtown Bethesda. We have lots of issues of concern. We've mentioned the BRAC improvements. We need a very detailed explanation of the "ground truths" of what has been considered and where we go from here.

R: Andrew noted there is a lot continuity that will be carried forward into the next phase of the study.

Q: Regarding 4C, in some sections it looks like there are bike lanes that go along the running way. How do pedestrians cross those to reach the stations?

R: Alvaro noted we need to show bike lanes per State requirements. If there are bike lanes, BRT bus operators will need to be observant of bike riders.

C: Member noted some places put the bike lane behind the station to avoid these conflicts.

Q: How do you prioritize which alternatives or options make the most sense?

R: Andrew noted the study team used objective criteria to refine the alternatives. Kyle said there is no set criteria that drives a decision. Input is obtained from many sources, then elected officials must make a final decision.

Q: What's the advantage of median versus curb operation?

R: The median tends to run a little faster, but has more impacts associated with it. Chris noted we did not compare specific speeds, but we looked at overall run times for each design.

C: A member stated that not providing the quantitative data to justify the selection of alternatives as part of the public participation process seems unbelievable.

C: A member stated there was a study done by ITDP in 2012. They suggested doing system-wide planning before planning specific lines. He said he had discussed this with County and State staff, they listened, and they told him this will be looked at in the next phase. He didn't see any reflection of it here.

Q: The member said when he looked at the corridor today, there are many curb cuts that make biking and walking dangerous and unappealing. Is there a way to get the bike lane off the street and reduce the number of curb cuts?

R: Darcy Buckley responded the State has assumed a standard five-foot bike lane on the road. But we expect we'll be taking a closer look at the bike lane and evaluating options. She saw the illustration on the current plans as simply a place holder for a bike facility of some sort. The State has a waiver process if needed.

Q: Will there be a sidewalk along the full corridor?

R: We'll need to look at this aspect more closely in the next phase of the study.

C: A member noted another study that recommended putting all the bikeways and sidewalks in the service lanes. We've been through this analysis before.

C: There's a history of road recommendations in the southern section of the corridor that need to be considered.

R: As we move into the next phase, these factors will be considered.

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. They included

- 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 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). 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.

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. 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.

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

He went through a series of station prototype designs that reflected the modular design characteristic. This flexibility allows for station design that is context sensitive and allows for expansion should future ridership dictate it. These designs spanned a simple marker and canopy for an urban street front 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.

Q: Wouldn't the trees depicted interfere with power lines?

R: We'll need to evaluate each station site individually. Some varieties of trees do not interfere with overhead lines. Some locations have underground wiring. It's important for stations to enhance the environment, not be imposed upon it.

Q: It doesn't appear that the drawings accommodate fare payment machines for pre-board payment, correct?

R: We're evaluating different types of machines. We're assuming they will be present. We're looking at smaller machines that fit under canopies.

Q: Is this going to be an honor system?

R: That's a policy decision, but we're considering how to manage fare collections as part of the station design process. We're inclined to cleaner, more open designs, but recognize the need for enforcement.

Q: Has your firm done design work for systems around the world?

R: Yes, including design work in Seattle.

Q: A member commented that this seems like a high level of detail given that the team has constantly told the CAC we're in the early design stages. He liked the modularity concept, but did the grant scope push toward this level of detailed design?

R: Darcy noted that we're in the preliminary design phase for the US 29 BRT project. This grant will help us plan for the stations that will be used in this first BRT project to become operational.

Q: Land use is a critical factor. Is this being considered with station design?

R: We're looking at station locations with varying land use configurations, including commercial, high residential and others. We have modular design options that will serve varied needs of any particular BRT corridor.

C: Don't all the factors of the service, such as alignment issues, need to be decided before you get into such specific designs?

R: It gets down to design choices. We've heard comments from all sides of the spectrum regarding what type of station is constructed. We believe having a set of design options that fit varied ridership needs and service operational needs will place the County in an ideal position.

Q: Why design big stations when there is no ridership to justify it?

R: We feel its good design to have varied choices rather than some simple bus stop design.

C: The factors of the service, such as alignment issues, should to be decided before you get into such specific designs.

Q: Does the canopy design using solar panels need to be dependent upon the station situation?

R: We'll be taking into account protection of the patrons as well as environmental considerations, such as light. Varied station designs allow for use of glass versus opaque materials. In some urban contexts, you

may want opaque designs. In some contexts, you might use photovoltaic panels to allow the shelter to generate its own power.

Next Steps

Darcy explained the next steps for the project. She noted that 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. We're planning to hold the next CAC meeting this fall, at which time we'll have a schedule of the topics to be covered in future CAC meetings.

Q: Can you advise us of the RFP [request for proposals for the contractor to manage the next phase of the study] when it is announced so we could comment upon it?

R: We'll be using an existing contract. We can't discuss details of the contractor at this point.

Q: It won't be a State contractor, correct?

R: Correct. The County will have its own team.

C: Being involved with the contract selection process would give us ownership.

R: Darcy said she just didn't come prepared to talk about the selection process. But we'll certainly discuss project schedule in the fall.

Q: A member noted the development in the southern portion of the corridor may not be occurring on schedule, which would affect how the BRT project should be staged. He advocated a five-year plan to stage the project that would tie its implementation to the level of land use. Will you put that into the scope of the contract?

R: We'll take that into consideration.

Q: What are the next steps for the project?

R: Chris Bell relayed that there has been extensive data generated from the first phase which the new team will need to evaluate. A detailed analysis of the refined BRT alternatives as well as No-build and TSM will take place in the next study phase, and the CACs will continue to meet to provide input and comment on the study project as it proceeds.

Q: Can you explain why there wasn't a stand-alone contract process instead of an existing off the shelf contract arrangement? Other systems outside the US have shown much higher ridership figures. We'd suggest getting a specialized contractor who could develop a proposal that would deliver really stellar performance.

R: Darcy advised she was not able to speak to contractor selection matters.

Q: Will the County commit to getting back to us on the decision criteria that went into the contracting decisions going forward?

R: Yes, we will provide you with more information on this in the future. [Please note: all of the County's contracts are competitively bid according to Procurement Regulations and County Code.]

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