

**Meeting Summary**  
**US 29 North Corridor Advisory Committee (CAC) Meeting #2**  
**March 26, 2015, 6:30 p.m. – 8:30 p.m.**  
**East County Regional Services Center**  
**3300 Briggs Chaney Rd. Silver Spring, MD 20904**

**Attendees**

<b>Corridor Advisory Committee (CAC) Members</b>			
Erik Amick	X	Matthew Koch	X
Carole Ann Barth	X	Peter Myo Khin	X
John Bowers	X	Rob Richardson	X
Brian Downie		Mike Rosenberg	X
Oladipo Famuyiwa	X	Ian Swain	X
Johnathan M. Genn	X	Joseph Tahan	X
Latisha Johnson	X	Eric Wolvovsky	
Bernadine Karns	X		
<b>Project Team</b>			
<b>Facilitator –</b> Alan Straus		<b>Facilitator Assistant –</b> Lauren Garrett	
<b>Consultant Project Manager –</b> Brian Lange		<b>Consultant Project Engineer –</b> Josh Crunkleton	
<b>State Highway Administration (SHA) Representative –</b> Tessa Young		<b>SHA Representative –</b> Joe Harrison	
<b>Lead Project Facilitator –</b> Andrew Bing		<b>County RTS Manager –</b> Joana Conklin	
<b>County Project Engineer –</b> Rafael Olarte			
<b>County Staff</b>			
<b>County Regional Service Center Director –</b> Jewru Bandeh			
<b>Public</b>			
James Bunch		Geri Rosenberg	
Jim Dishner		Dan Wilhelm	
Stephen Pour		James Williamson	
Harriet Quinn			

**Handouts**

Handouts to add to CAC Members’ study binders were distributed, which included the following:

- Meeting #2 Agenda
- Meeting #2 PowerPoint
- Existing Typical Sections Locations Map Draft (Figure 1)
- Existing Transit Operations Along US 29 Map Draft (Figure 2)

- Existing Bicycle and Pedestrian Facilities along US 29 Map Draft (Figure 3)

Meeting materials will be posted on the project website: [www.montgomerycountymd.gov/rts](http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/rts)

## **Introductions**

The facilitator opened the meeting with introductions by the project team, CAC members, and the public. The facilitator provided an overview of the meeting materials being distributed and the agenda for the meeting.

It was further emphasized that the CAC members' connection back to communities is very important. The members were urged to not let the brainstorming sessions we have at meetings end there; rather they are encouraged communicate back to project team members (via email) any additional topics you would like to discuss. During our meetings, a great deal of information will be provided to members to pass on to fellow community constituents.

## **CAC Member Feedback**

Based on the CAC Member Feedback Forms distributed as homework (at kickoff meetings) participation goals, topics, strengths, opportunities, and concerns were summarized. There were four primary themes:

- Purpose of the CAC group
- Improve transit system and service
- Inter-modal (how they relate) and multi-modal (different choices)
- Impacts and connections to businesses and communities.

From the CAC member feedback provided, two of the comments are a central focus of this meeting:

- To better understand the project development process
- A strategic plan for the improved transit is urgently needed.

CAC members are encouraged to provide feedback to the project team so it can be utilized throughout the project planning process and to shape future meetings.

## **Local Planning Process and Master Plans**

The project team explained State law requires localities to develop a master plan, which contains transportation components. These locally-generated master plans specify needs of the communities serving as the center of the planning process.

The County will often create Functional Master Plans, which provides a more detailed approach to addressing common issues that affect the County as a whole. More specifically, functional plans cover larger-area needs and functions like circulation systems (highways, transit, rail, airports, bikeways, etc.), parks and recreation, and environmental resources (protections and preservations). Frequently these functional plans are developed by or in close coordination with the County Executive.

A Countywide Transit Corridors Functional Master Plan (CTCFMP) was developed and approved in December 2013 by the County in response to a series of transit needs outlined in the local master plans. This Corridor Planning Study will build upon the recommendations in the CTCFMP. All analysis and information will be shared with the CAC members and general public and they will have an opportunity to provide input and feedback. The CTCFMP does not endorse specific design treatments; rather, it provides general suggestions that will need to be further investigated as part of this Corridor Planning Study. The FMP provides suggestions, which are then passed on to the Maryland State Highway Administration (SHA), who will then determine a path forward to address the needs of the US 29 Corridor.

The project will follow SHA general planning procedures and guidelines. While the project team examines the feasibility of recommendations from the CTCFMP, we will also be assessing how subsequent, more detailed phases of the study could be pursued, and if they are warranted. Currently, at this corridor planning study level of investigation, we are working to clearly identify and understand existing resources and operations as well as try to forecast the challenges the corridor will face in the future according to anticipated population, socio-economic, and land use changes.

### **Project Development and Schedule**

Project development can be broken down into four phases: planning, engineering, right-of-way, and construction, with public involvement occurring during each phase. Currently, we are in the preliminary planning stage of the project.

In Fall 2014 the project started with engineering analysis and environmental inventory and documentation. We intend to finish in Summer 2016. Areas of the project study include: engineering analysis, environmental inventory and documentation, traffic and ridership analysis, and public involvement. Although we have the corridor planning study scheduled to end Summer 2016, subsequent phases of public involvement, planning, and preliminary engineering will be necessary to obtain approvals before construction can begin.

Currently, we are at the point in the process where the project team is working to establish a project Purpose and Need, so that we can define the project as it moves through subsequent phases of planning and preliminary design. CAC member and public input will be a key elements the project team will consider while developing the project purpose and identifying the needs of the corridor and surrounding communities. As we make progress over the coming months, we will talk in much greater detail about proposed typical sections, preliminary concepts, environmental inventory, traffic operations analysis, ridership, and costs.

During the meeting, CAC members were very interested in the coordination with other corridors, schedule, and data sharing for the study. The project team stated that while there will be constant coordination with the other corridors, each study is very different and each contain their own unique elements that will require corridor specific planning and design approaches.

It was clarified as part of this preliminary planning study, we are going to incorporate elements that would typically be included in a larger scale study, but currently we are not going to fully complete the standard National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process. We are going to

closely follow the process and will work to be in compliance with Maryland Environmental Policy Act (MEPA). Once the final report is prepared, the intention is to submit a document that completely summarizes all the data analyses, concept development, evaluations, and public involvement elements so they can be passed on to the next stage of the project development process and utilized as part of obtaining MEPA/NEPA approvals.

This is a consolidated effort, but as many details will be covered as possible and we will be meeting frequently to share that information with the CAC members as it becomes available.

### **Review of Existing Roadway Conditions, Environmental Features, and Transit Service**

Although this group represents the northern section of the corridor, the existing conditions reflect the US 29 Corridor as a whole. The US 29 corridor covers an approximate 12-mile area with a mix of four-to-eight lanes of divided and undivided sections (typically six lanes). Stewart Lane/Lockwood Road is a two-lane undivided section.

The project team indicated there are 12 identified areas that represent a typical section <sup>1</sup> of the study area. Five of those areas were reviewed in greater detail.

- Typical Section A (Silver Spring Transit Center to Georgia Ave) – has six lanes divided
- Typical Section B (Georgia Ave to Sligo Creek Pkwy) – has six lanes undivided, some are reversible lanes
- Typical Section C (Sligo Creek Pkwy to New Hampshire Ave) – is an example of an urban environment to a suburban environment. Notice median widths are variable based on lanes, sidewalks are generally present.
- Typical Section D (Hastings Dr to Timberwood Ave) – is of the Four Corners area. Due to the proximity of the beltway, there are eight lanes divided by a median.
- Typical Section H (North of Paint Branch to Blackburn Rd) – in this area the speed limits are greater, there is a wider median with guard rails and no sidewalks
- Typical Section J (Lockwood Dr from Oak Leaf Dr to New Hampshire Ave) – has two lanes with an undivided section, parking and bike lanes

Assessing potential impacts to the environment includes completing initial environmental and socio-economic inventories. The inventory will include identification of streams, floodplains, wetlands, woodlands, parks, cultural resources, socio-economic characteristics, and coordination with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Department of Natural Resources.

Existing transit service will also be assessed. There are currently four major transit service operators along US 29. Throughout the study process, close coordination with these service operators will be required to understand and evaluate how Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) service could affect existing services. Additionally, a compilation of existing pedestrian and bicycle services along US 29 has been drafted to document existing and needed facility connectivity.

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<sup>1</sup> A typical section can be described as a representative example of the characteristics that are present in a certain roadway segment, such as number of travel lanes, shoulders, median, curb and gutter, sidewalk, bike lane, etc. and is not a reflection of every scenario on the corridor.

Following this portion of the presentation, there was discussion on existing conditions and coordination. Members mentioned that there is an active bicycling association for the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) that would have information regarding current cyclist and pedestrian challenges. Additionally, the Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission has their own division that focuses on bicyclist and pedestrians that will be included in discussions. The project team recognizes in some locations on-street bicycle lanes may not be warranted. One area of focus will be to determine how bicycle and pedestrian activity can be safely implemented and coordinated with the BRT enhancements throughout the corridor.

Both the state and county have experts that will look into the appropriate usages and application of bike lanes. An alternative to consider may be that the bike lanes should be on service or parallel roads instead of main roads for safety. This will all be part of the process to determine what is safest for the riders, best for connectivity, and what best fits the needs of the county and community.

Currently, Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) is completing a feasibility study for potential enhancements to the existing Z-line routes, which run along US 29. Right now it is too soon to say if or how existing Z-line services will be changed or impacted by the recommendations in the study.

There was concern raised that without the formal NEPA process impacts on environmental features and resources could be overlooked. It was reiterated that although the NEPA process is not happening right now, it does not mean it won't happen at all. Everything that is done now will be able to support the NEPA process if it does occur. An important distinction for this study (as compared to other projects that follow the SHA project planning process) is that here, SHA is following the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) process rather than the usual Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) process (the process most members are likely familiar with). The FTA process is very different than that FHWA, in that they do not get as involved in the planning review and approval process until the design is considered 30% complete. For this reason, the state and county are conducting this preliminary planning corridor study to determine if it is appropriate for this project to proceed to 30% design level where it can then enter the FTA NEPA approval process.

### **Purpose and Need**

As noted previously, the project team is at the point in the process where we are working on data collection and analyses required to develop the project purpose and need.

The purpose and need must be established at this time so that subsequent phases of the study can be defined, developed and compared against a baseline (no-build) condition. In order for the project team to determine the project purpose, needs must first be identified.

By identifying the needs of the corridor, we can define what the existing or forecasted problems are and then try to determine why the problems are occurring. At the same time, a well-defined project purpose keeps us focused on the major objectives and ensures they will be addressed, to some degree, before subsequent phases of project development can be recommended.

While there may be many ways to address the identified issues (as will be considered during the conceptual alternatives analysis), it is up to the project team to work with the public in order to determine the best options and provide recommendations on how to satisfy the purpose of the project and needs of the corridor.

Based on the feedback received during the initial project kickoff meeting and the feedback forms provided by CAC members, four basic needs categories were identified: Mobility, System Connectivity, Transit Demand, and Livability. While the categories are fairly general, they are also strongly tied to the feedback the CAC members have provided so far, but do not cover all possible needs – we hope the members can identify additional categories and related needs to be addressed. The four initial needs categories include:

- Mobility – How easy it is to move around your community and reach the desired destination
- System Connectivity – Specifically what are the different options available to improve and enhance mobility
- Transit Demand and Appeal – Considering existing and forecasted ridership and how to attract new riders
- Livability – This is a catch all for many elements that could fall in this category. It includes the factors that add up to a community's quality of life, which will be different for everyone.

### **Needs Group Exercise**

CAC members were split into two groups to list specific needs important to them and their community based on the four categories provided as a guideline. The following are notes from the discussion:

#### Group 1

- Overall connectivity to surrounding counties and communities (from Howard County to D.C.)
- Cost effectiveness of using BRT: move more people, improve quality of life, improve transit safety
- Environmental issues
- Safe, reliable, affordable, accessible to the public (local transit systems all take different forms of payment, schedule differences)
- New community facilities, hospital, etc...
- Maximize the user experience using BRT
- Encourage ridership, consider behavior changes (what makes people use the bus), it has to have a quality that is inviting

#### Group 2

- Make transit accessible, residential communities need easier access
- Where do residents work in the study area, where are they going, how will they get there?
- Turn 29 into an artery instead of the transit barrier it is now
  - Interconnectivity of modes, outreach, and communication of the BRT

- Current system is not credible, how do we promote a credible system?
- Updates completed now need to be forward-looking and reflective of the future
- Extend the BRT to Prince George's County, Howard County, DC, Baltimore to support the region
- There needs to be interconnectivity between all systems (Ride On, WMATA)
- Environmental impacts – Paint Branch Gorge caving in from earlier area development
- The socio-economic issues for the project must be addressed (outreach to immigrant population and low income developments)
- How does daylight savings time impact ridership – (during dark evening hours safety of children and women)
- Implement a possible spur to FDA
- Highlight the purpose of the BRT is not to supplement car traffic but eliminate it

### **General Public Comments**

- It would be nice for the public to be provided with the same handouts provided to CAC members.
- The meeting should take into account the other public meetings with other corridors in the area, and interconnection transferring from one transit line to another should be considered.
- Will modeling include other routes or are we only modeling ridership on US 29 and if it would be modeling traffic or ridership? The project team noted modeling would be completed for each of the corridors, independently. This includes the three active corridors, US 29, MD 355, and MD 586. At this time it is uncertain if the coordinated system of corridors will be modeled as part of this phase or later phases of study.

### **Logistics**

The next meeting date is to be determined, targeting mid to late May. The meeting will be held at the same time and location, from 6:30 p.m. - 8:30 p.m., at Eastern Montgomery Regional Services Center located at 3300 Briggs Chaney Road, Silver Spring, Maryland, 20904. This location is accessible via WMATA Routes Z6, Z8, and Z11 (note Z11 does not run past 8 p.m.) Parking is available onsite.

### **Next Steps**

The facilitator will communicate with the group via email with meeting logistics updates announcing the May date as soon as possible.

Following review by the internal project team, the meeting summary will be circulated to the members for feedback before being finalized.