

Meeting Summary

US 29 Central Corridor Advisory Committee

Meeting #15

Tuesday, March 6, 2018, 6:30 p.m. – 8:30 p.m.
 Silver Spring United Methodist Church- Parlor Room
 33 University Blvd E, Silver Spring MD 20901

Participants

CAC Members (X for in attendance, blank for regrets)			
Shruti Bhatnagar	X	Jeffrey McNeil	
Louis Boezi	X	Karen Michaels	X
Marie-Michelle Bunch		Brian Morrissey	
Karen Evans	X	Michael Pfetsch	
Joseph Fox		Michele Riley	X
Sean Gabaree		Eugene Stohlman	
Melissa Goemann	X	James Williamson	X
Larry Goldberg	X	Teddy Wu	
Kevin Harris		Lori Zeller	
Ken Jones		James Zepp	X
Jeffery Land		Clifford Zinnes	
Carole Barth	X	Linda Keenan (US29 South CAC)	X
Members of the Public		Affiliation	
Harriet Quinn			

Staff

Corey Pitts, Project Manager, MCDOT
 Joana Conklin, MCDOT
 Bruce Johnston, MCDOT
 Dan Hibbert, MCDOT
 Mike Nesselt, MCDOT
 Clayton Evans, Arts on the Block
 Kristine Aono, Arts on the Block

Rick Kiegel, Consultant Project Manager
 Allison Scott Berkheimer, RK&K
 Monica Meade, RK&K
 Jessica Alvarez, Foursquare ITP
 Joshua Diamond, Foursquare ITP
 William Shuldiner, Foursquare ITP

Welcome and Introductions

The meeting commenced at 6:35 p.m.

Rick Kiegel of RK&K welcomed everyone. He explained that because the project was moving into Final Design, he will now be serving as meeting facilitator. The main project contacts are now Rick, and MCDOT's Joana Conklin and Corey Pitts.

US 29 Mobility and Reliability Study

Bruce Johnston of MCDOT introduced the US 29 Mobility and Reliability Study. This study was approved today (3/6/18) by the County Council. This study will look at the feasibility of a median busway on US 29, south of Tech Road. This study will include reviewing all the previous studies and models which have looked at US 29 and evaluate the benefits and impacts of those recommendations. It will identify potential mobility enhancements for local buses, autos, BRT, pedestrians, and bikes. It will look at strategies such as signage and striping, and consider impacts to neighborhood access. Cost-effectiveness will also be an important consideration in this study. Any strategies showing merit would need to be adopted and advanced through design. Notice To Proceed will be issued to the contractor shortly. The CACs will be kept up-to-date on the progress of this study.

Comments:

- There is concern that the money for this study will not be enough to cover all the things that need to be looked at.

Questions:

QUESTION (Q): Does this study include cars? And pedestrian safety?

RESPONSE (R): Yes.

Q: Will the CACs be asked to provide input on this study?

R: Public input will be solicited, and members of the CACs would be welcome to provide comments.

Q: This sounds like the decisions have already been made.

R: MCDOT has not predetermined anything - this is a study.

COMMENT (C): We have asked for help with cut-through traffic in the neighborhoods and this will make things worse.

R: This study is more than a BRT study. It is focused on many aspects of mobility and will look at impacts to local neighborhoods.

C: *The role of the CAC is being devalued by it not being allowed to review and comment on this study.*

R: The US 29 Mobility and Reliability Study is a separate project from the US 29 BRT project and is much broader than the BRT. The role of this CAC is to comment on the design of the US 29 BRT. The new study may impact two stations: University Boulevard and Burnt Mills (a median would not be installed at the Fenton Station because of the physical constraints). CAC members will be updated on the progress and results of the study and are welcome to participate in that study's public process.

Meeting Overview and Project Update

Rick Kiegel provided an update of the project status. There have been noteworthy modifications to four stations and some of the Bikeshare stations have been moved. The Bikeshare changes are to create more of a hub and spoke network, rather than a linear system.

At the end of November 2017, the 35 percent design was completed. The project is now ready to move into 85 percent, and then 100 percent design. This includes details such as finalizing the station architecture, platform design, and the landscaping. When the plans are finalized, they will be ready to turn over to the contractor to build. As part of this detailed design, the cost estimate will become far more precise. The cost estimate at 35 percent included a large contingency to cover the undetermined aspects of the project. As the plans get more refined and the materials are better quantified, the contingency goes down. The County will review the cost estimate and compare it to the bids received for the project.

The project is also preparing to go through the County's Mandatory Referral process. We will submit the project to Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC) and they will give us comments. We will develop responses. Following that, there will be a public meeting with a presentation to the Planning Board.

Questions:

Q: How does the federal Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) grant relate to the cost? Does this mean the design has already been decided? Does the project have a cost already?

R: The 35 percent plans included a cost estimate of \$15-20 Million for construction, which is consistent with the cost estimate provided for the TIGER grant.

Q: Why did the Transit Task Force assume a cost in the billions and include a maintenance facility?

R: The Transit Task Force cost estimate was for an entire BRT network which required a new maintenance facility because of the number of new buses required. The County has two bus bays available which the US 29 BRT can use. Each bus bay can handle 6-7 buses, so this is sufficient for the US 29 BRT service.

Q: What is the “make or break” number for ridership for the BRT?

R: There is no make or break number for ridership. The project is moving forward.

C: The BRT is supposed to get people out of their cars and it is supposed to address the congestion on US 29, but it does not address all the people getting on the beltway. Only about a third of the traffic on US 29 is going to downtown Silver Spring.

R: The goal of BRT is not just to get people out of their cars, but also to provide better, faster, and more reliable service for the people who use the bus. MCDOT recognizes that only a portion of automobile users in the corridor are potential riders and is implementing this service to attract more of them.

Arts On The Block

Clayton Evans, Deputy Director of Arts on the Block (AOB), and Kristine Aono, Teaching Artist, made a presentation about Arts on the Block. Under an apprenticeship program called Pour Your ART Out (PYAO), AOB works with local high school students who apply to be in the program. Teaching artists act as mentors, and the students are given real world experience in the design and creation of public art, including the opportunity to meet with clients. Mr. Evans and Ms. Aono showed examples of AOB work and explained that the art for this project would likely be rectangular mosaic panels made of unglazed porcelain tiles. The images would be developed reflecting community input gathered at the upcoming project open houses.

Breakout Sessions - Design Updates

Rick Kiegel and Alison Scott Berkheimer, both of RK&K, led two breakout sessions to go over the design updates. The updates include modifications to four stations and changes to the Bikeshare locations.

Fenton Street Station

The northbound Fenton Street station has been moved to the south side of the intersection.

The previous location had physical constraints on the platform size because of limited sidewalk space and business access. In addition, immediately south of the intersection is a stop for local

buses. The BRT bus would have to wait for those buses to clear and then pull forward to line up tightly to the BRT station platform.

For this reason, the northbound Fenton Street Station has been relocated just south of the existing bus stop. The bus will be able to easily pull up to the curb, as it will already be in the right lane. Because this is in downtown Silver Spring and space is very constrained, the station will not include a canopy. However, the building adjacent to the proposed station has a covered recessed area that could be used by riders if the weather is bad. Because there are utilities close to the building, the platform would not extend all the way to the building face. In addition, because there is an alley just south of the new station location, the platform would be limited to 20 feet long. Only the center door would be near-level boarding, but the front door would also be available to anyone in a wheelchair who requires the use of the ADA ramp.

Comments:

- This location is a little challenging for pedestrians since the bus shelter makes the sidewalk narrower here. This is especially a problem since the opposite side of the street is crowded due to crowds of people going to the Fillmore.

Questions:

Q: Will deliveries in the alley be affected by the new bus stop location, especially when the trucks are leaving to turn north on US 29 and the BRT is arriving?

R: The BRT won't pose more of a problem than existing traffic in the right lane.

C: Having the stations (BRT and Local bus) so close together may create bus bunching.

R: Between the intersection and the BRT platform there is space for up to three 40-foot buses at the local stop. The BRT bus would be required to remain in the right behind the other buses until it reaches the BRT platform. After passenger alighting and boarding the BRT bus could move into another lane to pass the local buses.

Q: Did you consider moving the northbound station another block south?

R: No, we thought this would make the station platforms too far apart and would impact other businesses.

Northbound University Boulevard Station

The northbound University Boulevard station has been moved south to the intersection with Lanark Way.

The previous location was in the right-turn lane for eastbound University Boulevard. It was also immediately past the exit for the Montgomery Blair High School parking lot. This could create conflicts with traffic. Because of the turn lane to eastbound University Boulevard, and because the right-most through lane ends after westbound University Boulevard, the BRT bus would

need to move over two lanes to the left in a very short distance. While the previous location was closer for transfers to other bus routes, these factors made it not an optimal location for the stop.

The proposed new location is approximately 300 feet south of University Boulevard, between Lanark Way and the exit for the school parking lot. There is an existing local bus stop at this location, which would be shifted north about 50 feet. SHA has decision-making authority about the addition of new signals on US 29, but if approved, the intersection with Lanark Way would be signalized and a new pedestrian crosswalk created to provide safe pedestrian across US 29.

Comments:

- A signal at Lanark Way could result in more cut-through traffic in the neighborhood by people who want to avoid the intersection of US 29 and University Boulevard.
- You should consider pedestrian-activated signals during peak times and a loop detector off-peak. This would mean that there is a green light but not a green arrow at peak times.

Questions:

C: The new signal could result in back-ups through the University Boulevard intersections.

R: The new signal and the signals at University Boulevard would be synchronized to minimize this.

Q: What factors are considered when adding a new signal?

R: The length of traffic queues, crash history, pedestrian activity, etc.

Q: Has the team talked to the police and traffic enforcement? They may be able to provide information that would support the proposal. SHA is very slow to approve new signals.

R: The location of the BRT station would provide further justification for these pedestrian safety enhancements. Initial reaction from SHA has been positive. This location has been on SHA's radar for a long time.

Q: Have connections to other bus routes been considered?

R: Yes, this is a downside of moving the station farther away from University Boulevard. The shift is about 300 feet.

Q: There are many students at dismissal. This may create some hazards. Students near the curb may stand in the "splash zone" when it is raining.

R: The slightly higher platform (12 inches) provides some protection from splashes. Also, this is a 20-foot-wide platform, so there is room to stand well away from the curb.

Tech Road Station

The Bikeshare stations have been removed from this location. At this point, there are not many bike destinations in the vicinity. As future development occurs, the demand may come as well, and Bikeshare could be added. The sidewalk on the southbound side to the park-and-ride lot remains.

Comments:

- People will probably cross midblock (particularly Prosperity Drive) if their destination is the retail on the southeast side of US 29.

Questions:

Q: What about dockless bikeshare? It appears to be much more popular in the area.

R: The dockless bikeshare currently in Silver Spring is being tested at this time. There is no certainty that they will remain, and at this time, Montgomery County is still part of the Capital Bikeshare system.

Briggs Chaney Park and Ride Station

The County has decided not to buy buses with doors on both sides because there are very few manufacturers of these buses in the US and doors on the left-hand side of the vehicle results in elimination of seats inside the bus. US-made buses are required under the Federal Transit Administration's (FTA) Buy America Requirements. This would mean that the County would have little leverage in negotiating prices.

As a result, the station at the park-and-ride has been redesigned to locate a sawtooth bus bay on the right side of the bus loop for BRT. Layover spaces will be on the left side of the loop. The buses will pull up to the station stop, unload passengers, and then pull over to the left to layover. If necessary, the driver could loop around by pulling out of the bus area and reentering. This will be the pattern when the bus returns to service. Local buses could also use this layover area, so buses would no longer layover on the street. This station still includes a bus operator comfort station.

Another change is a reconfiguration to separate the transit area from the access to the park-and-ride. Both regular vehicles and buses will use the entrance off Gateshead Manor Way, but the buses will turn left into the dedicated transit area, while the cars continue forward into the park-and-ride lot. The existing center entrance to the park-and-ride will be eliminated.

Questions:

Q: Have you coordinated with WMATA about these changes?

R: There have been meetings with WMATA and they are looking for additional layover space, so they were in favor of this design.

Bikeshare Locations

A map was presented showing the changes to the Bikeshare locations. The map showed the location of the original nine facilities, some of which were eliminated, and the new locations of the new facilities. The current plan has ten facilities. As stated earlier, the Bikeshare changes are to create more of a hub and spoke network, rather than a linear system. Now, the Bikeshare locations are clustered at activity centers or near areas of denser housing development. These bike stations are just the initial stations. More will likely be added in the future.

Questions:

Q: What about regular bike racks? Are they included at the stations?

R: All stations will include bike racks for privately-owned bikes, and passengers will also be able to bring their bikes on the buses. There will be hooks on the buses to hold the bikes upright, or passengers can simply hold their bikes beside them.

Q: Will the level of Bikeshare use justify and sustain the system?

R: We are hoping that by changing the system to a hub and spoke system, we will encourage more ridership.

Local Bus Service Concepts

Jessica Alvarez and Joshua Diamond of Foursquare ITP presented maps of the existing bus services along the corridor, and maps of some suggested changes to the bus routes. Examples were shown for feeder bus routes, crosstown bus routes, and express bus routes along the corridor. Participants were asked to review both sets of maps and provide comments for needed service types, levels of service and coverage along the corridor. It was emphasized that the maps showed proposed concepts that are still under discussion at this time. WMATA and Ride On are different agencies and both have their own processes (including public outreach) to implement service changes.

General Comments:

- Many of the residential neighborhoods would benefit from small buses serving as neighborhood shuttles or circulators.
- It is important to consider the actual walkshed, not simply a circle on a map.

- People may not be willing to walk to a transfer point, especially in inclement weather.

Questions:

Q: Will WMATA implement these changes? What if WMATA decides that higher BRT ridership means local bus stops should be eliminated?

R: Both WMATA and Ride On will consider these proposed changes and the CAC comments. WMATA has their own public outreach process for any service changes. This CAC input is just the beginning of the discussion.

Map 1 – Downtown Silver Spring to University Boulevard

Comments:

- Concern about loss of the Ride On #8 and #21 buses.
- It is important to maintain the existing service from Northwest Four Corners to the Forest Glen Metro station
- Not everyone is going to downtown Silver Spring.

Questions:

C: We don't want cuts to local service to support the BRT. You need both services. The local service provides access to the BRT.

R: Agreed. The purpose of this exercise is to see if resources that are currently used for duplicate service on US 29 could be better used in the corridor, either covering areas that need service, or functioning as feeder service.

Q: How will people get to the SSTC if the #8 is taken away (near Dale Drive)?

R: This service was not being used at high levels, which is why this portion of its route is being considered for elimination.

Map 2 – Burnt Mills to Stewart Lane

Comment:

- FDA runs many shuttles for their employees. They could eliminate some of them by providing short shuttles to the US 29 BRT.

Questions:

C: Eliminating the #21 service on US 29 means local riders will have less local service to areas in between BRT stations.

R: This evaluation will closely consider the potential impacts associated with each suggested change. It is possible that some local service could be converted to better neighborhood service with connections to BRT and other routes.

C: There should be BRT on New Hampshire Avenue.

R: MCDOT staff has recommended that money be put in the FY 21 budget to study that.

Map 3 – Tech Road to Castle Ridge

Comments:

- Many students cross Old Columbia Pike midblock at Paint Branch High School.

Map 4 – Briggs Chaney to Burtonsville

Questions:

Q: What is the projected ridership from Burtonsville?

R: WMATA has seen ridership increases here and is considering adding midday trips to the Z7 (it currently runs peak period service only).

Adjourn

Rick Kiegel thanked everyone for attending and reminded them to go to the Open Houses, March 15, 20, and 21. All three Open Houses will have the same information, so pick the one that is most convenient!

The meeting adjourned at 8:30 p.m.