

November 2017 Open House Memorandum US 29 Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Project

Three public open houses were held in November 2017 to educate the public on the US 29 Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) project. Each open house location covered a key part of the project area: the Silver Spring Civic Building covered the southern portion of the project’s service area; Montgomery Blair High School covered the central portion; and East County Regional Service Center covered the northern portion. All locations were accessible by transit. A total of 179 community members attended the open houses. Open house locations, dates, and times are listed in **Table 1**. The results of each interactive features of the open house are included in this memorandum.

Table 1: November 2017 Open House Schedule

Open House Event Location	Date and Time	Participation
East County Regional Service Center 3300 Briggs Chaney Road Silver Spring, MD 20904	November 15, 2017 6:30pm-8:30pm	43
Montgomery Blair High School 51 University Boulevard Silver Spring, MD 20901	November 16, 2017 7:00pm-9:00pm	75
Silver Spring Civic Building 1 Veterans Place Silver Spring, MD 20910	November 20, 2017 6:30pm-8:30pm	61
Total Attendance:		179

Publicizing the Open Houses

The open houses were advertised in a diverse array of print and online news media,¹ as well as through Facebook and Twitter paid ads and on MCDOT’s website. Postcards advertising the November open houses were mailed to 34,000 households. A virtual open house² was created for the *Get on Board BRT* website that mirrored the open house experience in order to provide an option to participate without attending in person.

¹ Print and online ads advertising the open houses appeared in the following news media: Washington Post Express, Montgomery County Sentinel, Korean Times, Washington Chinese Daily News, El Pregonero, Washington Informer, El Tiempo Latino, Doi Nay, Epoch Times, and World Journal. Online only ads appeared on WTOP.com and The Patch - Bethesda, Rockville, Gaithersburg, and Germantown.

² November 2017 Virtual Open House URL: <http://getonboardbrt.com/us-29-project-november-2017-virtual-open-house/>

Open House Stations and Activities

The concept and design of the open house events was intended mirror the experience of riding a BRT service through a series of designated “station stops.” Each stop reflected the overall brand of the “Get on Board BRT” theme. Get on Board BRT giveaways were provided to participants that completed all five interactive areas. A children’s activity area was provided so that the children of the event’s attendees could engage in a transit related craft activity.

Stop 1 – Welcome to Get on Board BRT: This introductory stop included both general information about BRT and elements of the US 29 BRT project, such as off board fare payment, Transit Signal Priority (TSP), and bicycle and pedestrian improvements. It also included the US 29 BRT operations plan and the project schedule and budget.

Stop 2 – Current Transit Conditions on US 29: This stop characterized the current Ride On and WMATA local bus services as they relate to the preliminary BRT service alignments presented via a wall mounted map. At this stop, open house attendees were asked to provide feedback via colored lines and stickers on the map indicating what transit trips they currently make and which they’d like to make but currently cannot in the US 29 corridor. Participants were also asked to identify areas where pedestrian and bicycle travel is perceived to be unsafe. This feedback will be used to support future service planning and project related improvements. The US 29 existing conditions report was also available for participants to review the detailed analyses performed on the existing transit services along the corridor and the corridor transit market assessment.

Stop 3 – BRT Station Architecture: This stop focused on the station architecture, design options and station amenities. Boards displayed images of the station prototypes and design elements from the TLC report³ and project team staff explained the prototypes, components and concepts. Participants gained an understanding of what the Flash BRT stations may look like and how they may be customized to different locations based on space and context.

Stop 4 – BRT Station Civil Design: At this stop, a series of boards displayed the civil designs for each of the 11 BRT station locations. The designs included information on the size and location of each station platform, any potential changes to surrounding pavement, and new amenities around the stations such as landscaping, stormwater management, and bikeshare.

Stop 5 – How to Stay Involved: The final stop included a board with additional details on how to stay involved in the US 29 BRT Project. This includes details of the Corridor Advisory Committees, upcoming community events and meetings, and other information regarding the project website and social media efforts.

³<https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/BRT/Resources/Files/MWCOG-BRT-Report-July2017lr.pdf>

Public Feedback: Current Transit Conditions on US 29 Map Exercise

Participants were asked to draw a line on the map to represent their travel patterns in the US 29 corridor and to use a specific color based on the time of day and day of the week they made each trip. Most of the lines drawn on the maps represented north-south trips along US 29 that started or ended in Silver Spring, though some lines were drawn to show east-west trips along Randolph Road or University Boulevard.

Participants also had the opportunity to identify areas where pedestrian and bicycle conditions are perceived to be unsafe and improvements are needed. Four Corners, Burnt Mills, White Oak, the US 29/Stewart Lane intersection, Tech Road, the US 29/Fairland Road intersection, Greencastle Road, and Burtonsville were identified as especially unsafe to walk. Participants also identified pedestrian infrastructure improvements that they would like to see in Downtown Silver Spring. Areas identified that are particularly unsafe for biking included Four Corners, Burnt Mills, White Oak, and Briggs Chaney Road.

Public Feedback: Comment Cards

The project team engaged 179 participants and received 37 comment cards through this round of open houses. Across all of the comments, 18 included specific suggestions for the project team to consider in the next phase of the project.

The most common feedback noted was pedestrian safety concerns, which were mentioned in 25 comments. Many comments included specific suggestions for various locations along the corridor, including constructing bridges to carry pedestrian walkways above the intersections at Four Corners and to install pedestrian signals at several intersections.

Five comments provided feedback related to bus service in the project corridor. Some commenters expressed concern that the BRT stations would not be adjacent to local bus stops for Metrobus and Ride On services, that there would not be enough fare validation machines at each station, and about the location of the BRT station at the Silver Spring Transit Center. The proposed high frequencies, especially when compared to existing weekend services, were received very positively. Finally, there were multiple requests for more information on how existing Metrobus and Ride On services would change when the BRT service is launched.

Eight comments addressed bicycling in the project corridor. Some open house participants said they would not consider riding a bicycle anywhere along US 29 due to the hazardous conditions and perceived risk of fatal accidents. However, other participants said that they liked the existing bicycle and pedestrian paths along Sligo Creek and the Northwest Branch. The most common location for suggested bicycle infrastructure was between the Shoppes of Burnt Mills and the Paint Branch Trail, and also between the Shoppes of Burnt Mills and Northwest Branch. Other areas of concern included Four Corners and the Beltway Interchange. Some participants suggested that in addition to evaluating the placement of Capital Bikeshare stations in the study corridor itself, MCDOT should also evaluate where bikeshare docks could be located within nearby neighborhoods, enabling people to bike between their homes and the BRT stations.

There were also several general comments regarding the project. Some attendees recommended that MCDOT work with local youth when creating the public art that would appear at BRT Stations. Other comments remarked that the US 29 BRT project should recruit or create local organizations to keep BRT stations clean once BRT service begins.

The majority of the seven negative comments expressed skepticism that BRT would improve traffic or travel times by transit in the US 29 corridor and raised specific concerns about how the project would negatively impact nearby neighborhoods. Two comments raised questions about potential impacts to properties at or near proposed stop locations.

Some attendees had specific questions for the project team, including the exact placement of bikeshare docks near BRT stations, figures supporting the reduction of traffic in the project corridor upon BRT implementation, and specific pedestrian infrastructure improvements. A few of these commenters expressed a desire for more meetings and presentations regarding the US 29 BRT project or direct follow-up from a member of the project team.