

CORRIDOR ADVISORY COMMITTEE (CAC)
 US 29 MEETING SUMMARY
 WEDNESDAY, APRIL 24, 2024
 7:00 PM – 8:30 PM

ATTENDEES:

CAC Member and Public Attendees	
Stephanie Helsing – GSSCC	Harriet Quinn (CAC)
Michele Riley- Silver Spring United Methodist Church (CAC)	Tina Slater- Purple Line Now (CAC)
John Holden (CAC)	Dan Wilhelm- Resident (CAC)
Marc Posner (CAC)	James Williamson
Luis Boezi- Burnt Mills Hills Citizens Association (CAC)	Steve Ashurst
Rob Richardson (CAC)	Kevin Harris (CAC)
Peter Gray (CAC)	Joan Johnson (CAC)
Michael Larkin (CAC)	Don Slater
David Hondowicz	Matthew Koch (CAC)
Timothy Soderquist (CAC)	Cicero Salles
Clifford Zinnes	Sanjida Rangwala
James Williamson (CAC)	Karen Michels
Jewru Bandeh	Brian Downie (CAC)
Alex Herman (CAC)	Peter Myo Khin (CAC)
Chris Wilhelm	Caller 202-642-7534
Caller 301-681-3591	

Montgomery County Staff and Consultant Team	
Collin Hayward	MCDOT
Jiaxin Tong	MCDOT
Rebecca Mellema	MCDOT
Corey Pitts	MCDOT
Rex Lloyd	STV



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Kristin Hileman	STV
Jacob Smith	STV
Matt Storck	STV
Jessica Brunson	STV
Shelley Bailey	Sensis
Jillian Welborn	Sensis

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PRESENTATION OVERVIEW

Welcome and Introductions

- Montgomery County DOT Project Manager, Collin Hayward, welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced the project team.
- Consultant Shelley Bailey gave a brief overview of meeting expectations and Zoom software.
- Collin Hayward reviewed the agenda and the purpose of the meeting.

Project Overview

The Montgomery County Department of Transportation (MCDOT) recently completed construction on a new transit line, the Flash, along US 29. Flash is a bus-based rapid transit (BRT) system with features that improve reliability, so you can get where you need to go quickly. US 29 Flash is currently operating between Silver Spring and Burtonsville. MCDOT recently completed the US 29 Mobility & Reliability Study to identify improvements to the US 29 Flash that would improve corridor travel time, increase pedestrian and bicycle access, and improve reliability for all transportation modes along the corridor. Based on this study, the median bus lane hybrid alternative has been selected to move into design.

MCDOT has initiated work to complete preliminary engineering (35% design) for US 29 BRT Phase 2, which includes the recommended median bus lane hybrid concept. The study area includes the existing US 29 Flash BRT corridor from Tech Road to Sligo Creek Parkway. Task order activities will include community outreach, stakeholder engagement, design development, and cost estimate development.

Project Presentation

- Collin and the Consultant team provided a presentation of US 29 expanding on the following:
 - Defining BRT
 - Recent changes from the US 29 Mobility & Reliability Study
 - Incorporation of updated intersections and prioritized safety components
 - Timeline of US 29 Phase 2 and project goals
 - Purpose of reconnecting with the CAC and updating membership
 - Design considerations and new arrangement for US 29
- Consultant Shelley Bailey guided a Q&A session to:
 - Gain feedback and insight on how the CAC and members of the public would like to be engaged in future US 29 meetings
 - Questions for MCDOT and Consultant staff
 - Follow-up questions on the US 29 presentation and project

Questions and Comments from Attendees

Comment: The Median Lane alternative wasn't the recommended alternative in 2020, and it's not the recommended alternative in the November 22 report either. If you look at the summary on page 21 of the



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mobility study, it states that clearly. So I just want to be careful that when we talk about the Median Lane alternative, it's not the alternative that actually shows the best improvements for the corridor on any measure. It has twice the number of failed intersections as the Managed Lane, and for all forms of transit, the Median lane is slower.

Response: The Median Bus Lane Hybrid option we will be carrying forward was predetermined for our project team. We'll review the mobility study, and if there's any information that will help this project moving forward, we can take from it. If there are concerns about the results of that study or how we got here, you can email our team share with us. I could circulate that within MCDOT and provide to other people.

Question: The East County Development Plan has been percolating for years. Related to how the county is going to spend resources to help on the development, which involves all kinds of residents and residential and retail, etc. As you're developing this part of the county how are you interpreting that East County plan?

Response: We will review the East County Development Plan moving forward. The mobility study would look at something like that in selecting the alternative. At this point, our purview is really to take what has already been recommended and design and engineer it. We'll go look at that plan, take that into consideration and try to work through that.

Question: Could you reiterate exactly what is still up for decision making? What's open for influencing?

Response: We have a selected concept, the median bus lane alternative. We're taking those project limits we showed you and attempting to design a corridor that would accommodate a bus in the median lane. The entire design to 35% is what we're trying to get feedback on. If someone wants to disagree with the median lane alternative that would be a little out of our purview, because we've already been given a recommended concept and alternative to consider. If there is anything associated with implementing the design that the CAC would like us to consider we would like to hear those.

Comment: My main concern is making sure that State Highway actually follows their own rules and standards when it comes to things like speed limits, and so forth, and also that it's really taken into account that people are concerned about bike and pedestrian priorities. We don't really have the last half mile or so access, but this serves the bike rider for 3 miles. It's the only access crossing in between Piney Branch and Randolph Road for bikers. So that's 6.5 miles, and therefore I think it's extremely important that bikers be able to get through from one side of US 29 to the other into East County, and vice versa.

Response: Bike compatibility and infrastructure are a big part of what we're doing. In terms of this project, we have a whole portion of the scope dedicated to bike and pedestrian infrastructure along the corridor,



so that will absolutely be considered going forward.

Question: Recently, the Viva White Oak, a big project in East County, announced that they're moving forward with the project. There's also the New Montgomery College Education Center in that general area. Are you studying how the connection would be either through a feeder service or you know how that's going to work with all the projects that are happening in that general area? The transfer would be very important, in addition to having the bike lanes and pedestrian access.

Response: That is something we'll definitely look at. Adjacent projects and how our infrastructure interacts with other county infrastructure is something we will want to consider. We acknowledge that that residents in the area are not only riding US 29. It's about people getting where they need to go, whether that's school or running errands. We'll be looking at those factors as we're developing the 35% design and reaching out to get input on that.

Comment: I remember seeing the data that showed that the Managed Lanes seemed to be better for the projected travel times and level of service. However, I think there were reasons that the County Council chose the Median Lanes and questioned that study. Without litigating it too much, I would also suggest that when you introduce this, maybe next time you could go through that. I think it had to do with assumptions of future traffic patterns and who would be riding the bus versus driving. And that was why the folks on the policy side questioned the results of that Managed Lane study.

Response: We'll note that and follow up accordingly.

Comment: I'm not sure how many folks are here today know the scope of developments that's actually been announced for the eastern region within the White Oak Science Gateway area. Tenants are coming on board very rapidly to the end of the Master Plan area in White Oak. We have the Hillandale Gateway. The hospital has already built a hotel. Right after that we have the White Oak Town Center. So, most of our plans and our strategies were really not based on some of what we are. You know what we now have realized, either those developments that proximity or along the US 29 corridor. So, one of the things my office plans to do is recommend to the consultant to perhaps bring together all the developers to engage them in this conversation. One, the major partner with Proconti for the Viva White Oak they are already meeting with the county level and at the state level, and other government entities including the County Council. We're going to have to take a step back and reassess how we involve feedback from the developers. Also, perhaps offer the opportunities to this group here on a different date, have our office do an overview on all the development. There's history to what was, what is now, and what we anticipated, what's in the pipeline. This coordination could be very, very vital as we move towards a final product.



Response: We would love to be involved in any of those conversations. We will make note to follow up, just to make sure we're in the loop. Whatever we can do to be involved and provide any information needed as part of that discussion, we would love to.

Question: I'm speaking as someone who uses the Flash and continues to use the Flash. Does the engineering maximize the number of people who would use the Flash? Does the engineering maximize the people who have a choice not to use the bus, but now, because of improvements, they would choose to take the bus? That's something I hope the engineering is taking into account. And also, is it safe to get to that bus by walking or biking? Are you thinking about someone who's using that bus to access that service? When you see a ridership number, I would hope people take into account what are the impediments because there are serious impediments. If you are not lucky enough, now we have more students in east county, where you take back from Burtonsville.

Response: This corridor sees an incredible diversity of uses. There are shopping centers, residential, and large employers. So, a lot of our engineering is not just looking at the curves, and how we fit the Median lanes in but the station locations. How are they accessed, but how can you comfortably and safely get from where you are to your destination via the bus service. That's a huge part of the engineering we're doing to. This feeds into that whole idea that we're not only designing a bus route, but also providing a transportation solution and we need to think about all the different ways people get to the bus, people use the bus, and how it affects them.

Comment: You talked about how we will holistically plan this with pedestrians and bicyclists in mind. I wanted to stress that we need to from the very beginning what's the good speed for automobiles, for pedestrians and cyclists (not just moving cars through the corridor fast). Right now, cars travel at 40-45 miles an hour or faster. We want traffic to slow down. That we can narrow lanes from the very beginning of the project, which will make it much safer for cyclists and pedestrians and that will also induce drivers to drive more slowly. This goes back it being safe for people to walk along the corridor, bicycle along the corridor and be able to access the stations. For example, one of the engineers who was advocating for Managed Lane even pointed out that one of the advantages of that is that they wouldn't have to put traffic signals in at streets like Crestmoor Drive, which sort of, ignores the fact that pedestrians need that traffic signal to be able to cross the street to get to a bus stop, and drivers in my neighborhood have been wanting a traffic signal there to safely make left turns into and out of the neighborhood. Think about form of traffic calming and it helps the quality of life along the corridor.

Response: We have received a lot of feedback about concerns about the traffic speeds, the desire for traffic calming, and for improved infrastructure for pedestrians. That that's absolutely being considered. That's one of the main reasons we're also meeting with SHA monthly because we want to make sure they're in the loop and aware of what the communities and the members of the corridor may want in terms of traffic calming. We want to have them in the discussion early, so we can make sure that those



types of things could be implemented in a fashion that everyone finds acceptable.

Comment: I'm an avid biker. I ride between 150 and 200 miles a week. I would encourage deprioritizing bike access along US 29. We want to make it safe for buses and cars and bikes and people, and sometimes we just can't do it all. We're already making it, in my opinion, more dangerous for pedestrians, because we're asking them to get into the median to get to the bus and then they may have to contend with a bike lane. So you're trying to get across a bike coming past and then get over to the median. No bikers are going to ride on 29. No matter what we do, we're not going to make it safe.

Response: We want to look at it holistically. But to your point, we only want to build a facility that is safe, so we don't want to stick a bike lane on US 29 if no one's going to use it or you don't feel protected. We're still going to consider all the users on the corridor, but we only want to implement a facility that is safe for the users and that works with all the working parts of transportation.

Comment: It was mentioned that the White Oak Town Center is going to be opening. They're going to have an Amazon Fresh and some other things very soon. That is located right at the Tech Road BRT station. There's a very big problem with the Tech Road BRT station in that you're always going to have to cross the highway, either going somewhere in the morning or coming back in the afternoon. One way you're going to have to cross the street and it's a horror. You have 3 lanes of traffic, maybe even 4 on one side, and it's the part where I think the speed limit there is 50. There are always a lot of pedestrians there in the restaurants on the east side. The west side is residential, and they have the 7 Day Adventist World Headquarters there, too. You have people walking from one side to the other to get the various buses. There's sort of a problem with the way the buses are and this is related to the way where they go. Some buses stop on the west side of Tech Road, like Ride On number 10 and Metro Z8. Other buses like Metro Z6 and Z11 stop on the east side of the street. There are other situations like that, too where some buses, even during rush hour, only go to one side of the street, so people have to cross the street. Maybe try to fix the problem by adjusting the bus route so that at least during rush hour people don't have to cross that street.

Response: We do coordinate with Ride On and Metro in terms of our facility. That could be an item that we flag and see if we can get the right people in the room to discuss those types of things. We want to make sure we're looking at it holistically. We're trying to take everything into account. We want the best solution for the community.

Comment: There were a few design options presented in one of the earlier studies, some of which included design of certain stations or having the buses come out from the median at the station areas because a station on the side of the road has its benefits, as well as its drawbacks. There are other ways, given the safety issue in the medians. Although you're saying the median is what's decided, there are these



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other designs of the stations that I do hope you'll pursue.

Response: Yeah, absolutely. We've done that in some other areas of the county where you pull the bus out to the outside curb that the people boarding the bus are not in the middle. That's something we'll be looking at wherever applicable.

Comment: Would like to see MCDOT comments on bike walking access to New Hampshire Avenue.

Response: Yes, the goal is to provide more information and a preliminary layout of the corridor concept in the next meeting.

Comment: I want to cycle but the sidewalk is narrow; US 29 is a funnel there is no other way for people to get to east county; no other crossing NW branch trail; forced to take US 29 but don't want to feel unsafe.

Responses: Acknowledged. Part of scope is a share use path. We will get community input for what bike facility to incorporate.

Comment: I want to push back on deprioritizing any mode; everyone who wants to get through that corridor (if no other choice) can do it safety; for people commute west of US 29 to FDA using bike make sense for time, environment; appreciate staff for soliciting comments.

Responses: Acknowledged.

Comment: Consider bike storage at stations. Consider students and older adults for shopping.

Responses: Acknowledged.

Question: Where we are in the process? How can we provide feedback on current phase 2 BRT?

Responses: We just started at 5% if we put in number. Today we are going over goals and project limits; if you have experience with FLASH, we mainly look for feedback on anything relevant to phase 2. We will provide opportunities for feedback on design concept.



Question: When is next meeting, in person? Better conversation in person. Even if hybrid with corridor map shown for in person attendees. Can we show ROW impact? Will SHA be involved in these meetings future?

Responses: We can plan for a hybrid meeting for the next CAC. We could certainly request a SHA representative to be present at the meeting.

Question: Do you have a website? All the information on website is gone. Status of that?

Responses: All old information is archived and you can still access them.

Question: Does the project need to go through NEPA or local regulation?

Responses: Specific NEPA process will be determined based on funding source. The project scope includes coordination with Montgomery Planning and other local stakeholders.

Comment: Riding bus is not an option for people that bring equipment to business; no matter how fast; Managed Lane results in most travel time savings for all modes. Median BRT may not support land use; crazy idea because they want to use BRT to support land use and housing problems (can't help housing); I am speaking from someone who is generally supportive of public transit and BRT and offended how taxpayer money is spent.

Responses: Refer to previous response regarding Managed Lane option.

Comment: On narrowing travel lane, I suspect that's happening. The suggestion earlier that is a good thing; is a fallacy – it presents greater danger for pedestrians and for vehicles on narrower lane.

Response: Lane narrowing is considered for multitude of reasons, including ROW impact. No decision is made. We are presenting an idea and we will talk through it more.



Frequent Discussion Topics

- Bike and pedestrian priorities: Considerations of accessibility at stations
- Left turn restrictions at intersections
- Adherence to the Mobility & Reliability Study and the latest corridor design
- Travel times and level of service
- Safety and turning movements at Burnt Mills
- Impact of cut-through traffic
- Narrow sidewalks and lane widths

Discussion Notes Summary

- A participant stated there seems to be uncertainty and to take the Mobility Study into consideration more.
- A participant brought up SHA (State Highway Administration) concerns about bike and pedestrian priorities and how the council members spoke of the managed lane option
- A participant asked if the county is studying connections through a feeder service.
- A participant asked about the projected travel times, level of service, and the policy side.
- A participant brought up concerns about ridership and maximizing the people who choose not to ride the bus. In addition, concerns related to dangerous intersection points at Burnt Mills were expressed.
- A participant emphasized the importance of lane widths, and expressed concern about people flying through intersections and wanting to slow them down and make safety a priority.
- A participant brought up a problem at Tech Road; with people desperately stranded, but less so on the east side where the restaurants are located.
- A participant expressed concern over in the area of East County---seems like a funnel that goes in a general direction, feels unsafe, narrow sidewalks
- A participant recommended having the next CAC meeting be hybrid, and including a meeting where CAC members can mark up the corridor and comment. The participant also expressed a concern with looking at the impact of cut-through traffic.

Meeting Sign Off

- Collin Hayward and Shelley Bailey thanked attendees for their time and questions.

