

## Meeting Summary

**US 29 Mobility and Reliability Study**  
**US 29 Corridor Advisory Committee (South, Central, North)**  
**Meeting # 18**  
 Tuesday, November 16, 2021, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.

### Participants

29 South CAC Members (X for in attendance, blank for regrets)			
Alan Bowser		Tom Lansworth	
Ilhan Cagri		Tracey Lewis	
Barbara Ditzler	X	Anita Morrison	X
Sean Emerson		Dan Reed	
Roberta Faul-Zeitler		Herb Simmons	
Brian Feit		Tina Slater	
Juanita Stewart		Brad Stewart	
Avi Helpert		Mel Tull	X
Linda Keenan			
29 Central CAC Members (X for in attendance, blank for regrets)			
Shruti Bhatnagar		Jeffrey McNeil	X
Samantha Blizzard		Karen Michaels/Larry Dickter	
Louis Boezi		Brian Morrissey	
Pat Connolly		Michael Pfetsch	X
Karen Evans	X	Michele Riley	
Sean Gabaree	X	Sanjida Rangwala	X
Melissa Goemann		Eugene Stohlman	
Larry Goldberg		James Williamson	X
Kevin Harris		James Zepp	
29 North CAC Members (X for in attendance, blank for regrets)			
Fisseha Adugna		DeAndre Morrow	
Carole Ann Barth		Peter Myo Khin	X
Brian Downie		Rob Richardson	
Oladipo Famuyiwa		Julian Rosenberg	
Latisha Johnson		Sebastian Smoot	
Bernadine Karns		Joseph Tahan	
Matthew Koch		Eric Wolvovsky	
Dan Wilhelm	X		

Members of the Public	Affiliation
Harriet Quinn	
Rachael Evans	
Jay Elvove	
Jean Cavanaugh	
Jesse Cohn McGowan	M-NCPPC Planning
Lauren Campbell	M-NCPPC Planning
Allison Scott	
Rick Kiegel	
Jewru Bandeh	East County Regional Services Center Director

**Staff**

Corey Pitts, Project Manager, MCDOT	Paul Silberman, Consultant (Mead & Hunt)
Joana Conklin, MCDOT	James Bunch, Consultant (Mead & Hunt)
Darcy Buckley, MCDOT	Kyle Roberts, Consultant (Mead & Hunt)
Eric Sideras, MCDOT	Matt Storck, Consultant (STV)
Sandra Marks, MCDOT	Jacob Smith, Consultant (STV)
	Michael Gifford, Consultant (RK&K)

## Welcome, Introductions and CAC Roles

The meeting commenced at 6:30 p.m.

Corey Pitts welcomed everyone and a role call with brief introductions was made. He then gave a brief overview of how to use Zoom.

## Previous Study Summary

Corey Pitts then provided a summary of the previous US 29 Mobility and Reliability Study. Its purpose is to identify improvement(s) on US 29 that complement the investment in US 29 Flash from Burtonsville to the Silver Spring Transit Center, to: Improve corridor travel time and reliability for all modes; Increase pedestrian and bicycle access and safety. The options evaluated to date included:

- Full-time Dedicated Median Bus Lane
- Rush-hour Bus/ HOV Lanes
- Intersection Improvements at select locations
- System/ Demand Management measures to reduce non-recurring congestion and encourage carpooling

- Pedestrian and Bicycle improvements for better access (Silver Spring to Tech Road)

An overview of each of the above was then provided along with a comparison of costs, key performance measures, and impacts. The Bus/HOV Lane alternative was recommended as the most cost-effective (lower costs, better travel times, etc.).

The project team discussed several questions raised by the Planning Board and County Council Transportation and Environment (T&E) Committee regarding the initial study relating to how the Median Bus Lane was studied. The County Council T&E Committee request additional study be completed.

### **Follow-on Study (Goals, Objectives, and Proposed Alternatives)**

Paul Silberman then summarized the Mobility Study Continuation goals, objectives, and proposed alternatives. The goals and objectives include:

- Optimize median bus lane alternative
- Assess independent utility of the spot improvements
- Confirm/revise modeling assumptions
- Confirm/revise conceptual costs

And the proposed alternatives for further study are:

- Median Bus Lane with Common Intersection Improvements
- Optimized Median Bus Lane
- Value Engineering of Median Bus Lane
- Hybrid Option
- Short Term/ Interim Improvements

Value engineering will be applied across all the proposed alternatives during the effort.

### **Pre-Breakout Room Questions/Chats**

Prior to the breakout room questions and comments were put into the chat, and the end of the common session.

The pre-breakout room chat is provided below:

*Comment: Not in favor of median lane. Prefers Bus/HOV lane.*

*Question: How we are determining that the public and decision makers are supportive of bus-HOV-median concept? They did not hear strong support for the median option. Was there a survey?*

*Response: There was a survey done, and we did find that the majority seemed to be in favor of the Bus/HOV Lane concept, but it was not overwhelming. There were more questions regarding how the alternatives were treated and were they evaluated fairly.*

*Comment: Median in theory should be closest to a "real" BRT, which should be like a rail line and the most efficient. This only works if it's through the entire corridor, not only in parts.*

*Question: Would the Metro and private buses be using the median bus lanes or just Flash/Ride On?*

*Response: The local buses (Metro and Ride On) probably would not be able to use the median bus lane because we couldn't relocate all the curbside stops to the median. Private buses could potentially use the lane if they don't need stops beyond the Flash stations.*

*Comment: Remember, this is also a walking route for kids attending Blair HS*

*Comment: I just don't see a way to add lanes and avoid making it more dangerous, and it's already dangerous. Sidewalks aren't passable near the 495 on-ramp.*

*Question: What do we know about 29 BRT ridership in these early days?*

*Response: Provided later in the meeting as 1800 riders per average weekday*

*Comment: Not in favor of median lane. Prefer Bus/HOV lane. Burnt Mills school is making changes that will put entrance on Prelude Drive, so we need the light at Oak Leaf to avoid the school traffic.*

*Comment: Agree if this is going to be a true BRT the key word is Rapid not sitting in traffic with the cars*

*Comment: Safety should be the primary concern.*

*Comment: I agree, we need safer access to the stops, especially the one on Timberwood.*

## **Breakout Rooms**

### **South Corridor Breakout Room:**

The South Corridor Breakout Room discussion summary is provided below:

*Question: Why didn't the median bus lane extend further south than Sligo Creek Parkway? There would be a benefit to extending it into downtown Silver Spring.*

*Comment/Question: There was a desire by at least one person to have dedicated bus lanes in the curb lane of US 29 into downtown Silver Spring beyond Sligo Creek Parkway. Moving toward downtown, it is more residential, more locations for pedestrians to access. Can US 29 be reimagined as more of a boulevard, with pedestrian medians/refuges?*

*Comment: Pedestrians feel exposed due to narrow sidewalks/no buffers and narrow shoulders.*

*Question: Is there a study for dedicated lanes (from this year) from downtown Silver Spring to I-495? Should consider dedicated bus lanes all the way into Silver Spring.*

*Comment: Signalize the US 29 intersection with Granville Drive/Hastings Drive. SHA has been involved, but a status update is desired for that signal. States that pedestrian safety is at risk.*

*Question: Is the County considering the impact of electric vehicles, 5G, connectivity to speed up vehicles? What impact would this have on the analysis results? New technology should be considered as part of the process.*

*Comments: Other Safety/Operational Issues cited:*

- *Speeding on US 29. Cited US 29 near Sligo Creek Parkway as an example location.*
- *Speed limits should be lowered – look at design elements/treatments to facilitate this.*
- *There should be No Turn on Red at US 29/Sligo Creek Parkway.*
- *Look at a westbound right turn only lane configuration on Sligo Creek Parkway at US 29 (rather than the proposed shared through-right lane). Would like this to be included with any option at this intersection.*

*Question: Bus ridership – if there is more transparency about numbers from the County, can there be more buy in from the public?*

*Comments: Silver Spring Transit Center BRT Issues:*

- *Delays at the boarding platforms*
- *Can the BRT boarding platform be at the first level instead of the second level?*
- *Better wayfinding can lead to better BRT ridership (includes downtown Silver Spring)*

*Comment: Most important criteria to consider in the continuation study are:*

- *Bus speed – want to see a benefit in using the bus vs a car. Can help to get a shift in mode.*
- *Pedestrian safety*
- *Reliability*

### **Central and North Corridors Breakout Room:**

The Central & North Corridor breakout room discussion is provided below:

*Comment: - Takes Flash to Four Corners from Transit Center and takes as long as any other bus. Hard to know that you need to go to second level to get the Flash- would increase ridership to move stop to first floor. Second floor means you're automatically adding travel time.*

*Comments:*

- *Stewart Lane needs work*
- *Overpass bridge over NH bridge- highest priority would be expansion of the bridge*
- *Four Corners to Sligo creek next priority*

- Comments: To consider in a hybrid plan:
  - Need to get to dedicated lane, likes the idea of HOV with BRT
  - Some intersections need to be improved- would not do NH Ave intersection
  - Need improvements at Stewart Lane
  - Time delay is biggest factor
- Comments:
  - Agrees with Stewart Lane recommendations– need pedestrian improvements and safe crossing to BRT
  - If BRT is in traffic, it's just a bus, needs a dedicated lane to be BRT- need to do something at Four corners to beltway

*Comment: Development coming is going to be important to consider as we plan for the BRT corridor*

*Comment: Communities south of N.W. Branch supported exploring HOV option- There is a concern about number of buses that would be excluded from BRT lanes as proposed:*

- Pedestrian safety.
- Impact of commercial ROW taking.
- New Hampshire Ave. intersection is biggest bottleneck on the corridor- needs to be addressed to improve mobility.
- Stewart Lane pedestrian safety a concern.

*Comment: Traffic impacts start before New Hampshire Ave to beltway- that whole stretch you can't take more ROW, need to keep 3 travel lanes the whole way. Need to account for planned development*

*Comment: Need feeder system to get riders from communities to BRT. Burtonsville RFP may impact the park and ride at the north end of the corridor. Should incorporate into the plan- maintain the transit center even during redevelopment.*

*Comment: If you don't get BRT out of traffic won't get ridership- people won't change mode*

*Comment: Keep the two advisory panels appraised of the projects*

*Comment: People are not switching from WMATA to Flash because they are being better served by another service- one seat ride. Need to look at O-D and where demand is.*

*Comment: There's no one alternative that works the whole way- must be a hybrid- sees 5 different stretches. Find best mix to reduce travel time.*

*Comment: Agrees with suggestions on hybrid plan. Key is to ensure safety through the corridor as transition configuration along the corridor.*

*Comment: You can study ridership at Lockwood station to understand how people choose to get to their destination.*

*Comment: Pedestrian movements around stations must be safe. North of White Oak there are limited access roads so need to consider access to the stations. Need to consider cost and needs to be economical and done quickly.*

*Question: How has Covid impacted planning- how is ridership changing? Work scenarios are changing.*

*Question: Where do we see BRT and transit going? Should we be looking beyond Montgomery County to Howard County since this is a long-term transit investment?*

*Question: How will infrastructure bill help fund this project?*

*Comment/Question: There were service changes after launch of BRT- the FDA detour makes the trip longer – will that be looked at again? Do we know ridership at FDA- we should look at that again?*

*Comment: FDA employees will be coming back in January.*

*Question: I would be remiss if I didn't raise the question about including a stop at Sligo Creek or Franklin Avenue, so that the inside-the-Beltway neighborhoods could benefit from the improved accessibility.*

*Question: Request for ridership data was also made.*

## **Summary/ Open Questions and Comments**

The combined meeting reconvened at around 8:00 p.m.

Eric Sideris summarized the South Corridor comments and discussion. The highlights include:

- Consider extension of the median lane to Downtown Silver Spring and the Transit Center, or the provision of dedicated bus lanes in the curb to improve overall BRT performance.
- Concerns over pedestrian safety particularly inside the Beltway and consideration of shoulder or sidewalk widening and the design of individual intersections. There is an overall desire to make US 29 more friendly to pedestrian and other active modes. A question regarding signalization of the intersection at Hastings and Granville was raised.
- Toward the end there was a discussion on improving BRT ridership overall, and particularly on the impact of the Transit Center configuration and operations suppressing ridership by not having a direct 1<sup>st</sup> level connection in and out.
- Most important criteria were bus speeds/competitive travel times, pedestrian and overall safety, and reliability

Sandra Marks then provided a summary of the Central & North Corridor comments and discussion. The highlights include:

- Very similar topics as in the South Corridor were brought up.
- Pedestrian safety throughout the corridor and particularly at key intersections such as Stewart Lane.
- Access does impact ridership and good access to/from the neighborhoods is critical.
- The New Hampshire Ave. Bridge is a bottleneck that causes travel time and reliability issues and should be resolved. was also raised as a concern.
- Travel time is the key in order to make BRT successful. Get the buses out of the congested car traffic.
- Also need to coordinate with the planned development in the corridor.
- The “Hybrid” model/alternative is something to look at closely and is likely to have potential.
- Travel time and cost and the ability to implement in a timely manner are key measures of effectiveness.

Corey Pitts then highlighted the schedule and next steps including a public meeting on December 16 at 6:30 p.m., additional CAC meeting in late winter and early spring, and a public meeting number 2 in the Spring of 2022. A report and recommendation are expected in the Summer of 2022.

Corey provided his email [corey.pitts@montgomeryCountyMD.Gov](mailto:corey.pitts@montgomeryCountyMD.Gov). for further comments and communication.

The meeting adjourned by Corey Pitts at 8:20 p.m.