

Meeting Summary

US 29 Central Corridor Advisory Committee

Meeting #16

Thursday May 31, 2018, 6:30 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.
Silver Spring United Methodist Church- Fellowship Room
33 University Blvd W, Silver Spring, MD 20901

Participants

CAC Members (X for in attendance, blank for regrets)			
Shruti Bhatnagar		Jeffrey McNeil- Eileen Finnegan	X
Samantha Blizzard	X	Karen Michaels	X
Louis Boezi		Brian Morrissey	X
Pat Connolly		Michael Pfetsch	X
Karen Evans	X	Michele Riley	X
Sean Gabaree	X	Sanjida Rangwala	X
Melissa Goemann	X	Eugene Stohlman	X
Larry Goldberg		James Williamson	X
Kevin Harris- Harriet Quinn	X	Lori Zeller	
Ken Jones	X	James Zepp	X
Jeffery Land	X	Clifford Zinnes	
Carole Ann Bath (North CAC Member)	X	Linda Keenan (South CAC Member)	X
Members of the Public		Affiliation	
Dave Anspacher		Maryland-National Capitol Park and Planning Division (M-NCPPD)	
Katie Mencarini		M-NCPPD	
Walker Freer		M-NCPPD	

Staff

Joana Conklin, MCDOT
Dan Hibbert, MCDOT

Rick Kiegel, Consultant Project Manager, RK&K
William Shuldiner, Foursquare ITP

Mike Nesselt, MCDOT

Corey Pitts, MCDOT

John Thomas, MCDOT

Dan Sheridan, MCDOT

Eric Sideras, MCDOT

Welcome and Introductions

The meeting commenced at 6:35 p.m.

Rick Kiegel of RK&K welcomed everyone and began introductions by staff and CAC members. He explained that this meeting would begin with him providing a short update about the US 29 BRT project as it moves through the final design phase. After this, a representative from MCDOT's Division of Transportation Engineering would give an introduction of the US 29 Mobility and Reliability Study and take questions from CAC members.

Project Update

Rick explained that the 85 percent design will be submitted to MCDOT in July which will allow the project team to complete the 100 percent design by October 2018. The platform length is currently being finalized since the project staff has a rough idea of how long each BRT vehicle will be. The platforms, ramps, and sidewalks will be placed to minimize any potential impacts on surrounding utilities that may occur once they have been built and while they are being constructed. The architects are also finalizing the placement of the platform amenities, such as the station marker, fare collection machines, and benches. The project team is finalizing stormwater management facilities and drainage relocation where necessary. Additionally, the BRT project team is working with the Maryland State Highway Administration (SHA) to approve a new traffic signal and crosswalk at Lanark Way.

On the topic of right of way considerations, Rick explained that Montgomery County has sent letters to all property owners where an easement will be needed to accommodate the project and the negotiation process will continue throughout the summer. Canopies and windscreens are currently being designed and will be standard at all BRT stations across the county. Finally, the project team worked with WSSC to get approval for the water and sewer utilities at the new Briggs Chaney Comfort Station.

Questions:

QUESTION (Q): How long are the buses? Will they be clean diesel vehicles?

RESPONSE (R): The buses are 60 ft. long so they will be able to serve the platforms, which will most likely be 55 to 58 feet long. These buses will be clean diesel.

Q: Will there be a traffic study for the new signal at Lanark Way?

R: No, a traffic study was not required but the request has met the State's signal warrant analysis.

Q: Is the project team concerned about traffic congestion on US 29 southbound because of the new traffic signal?

R: No, the county is confident that the traffic signals on US 29 will be timed so that there is no new congestion caused by the new signal.

Q: How do riders pay at the ticket vending machines?

R: Riders can use cash, credit cards, or SmarTrip cards to pay their fare.

Q: What are the specifications of the platform marker?

R: The marker will be about 13 feet high and will be placed above the canopy. There will be a screen at the bottom of the marker with real time arrival information and a map on the base of the marker.

Q: Will the new signal cause more people to turn left into the South Four Corners neighborhood when traveling northbound on US 29? Won't it result in more cut-through traffic?

R: The signal will only allow people to turn left on a protected green arrow which will last approximately 30 seconds. This means drivers will have to wait a long time to turn at this signal which should provide a deterrent to potential cut through traffic, since it may take them longer to access westbound University Boulevard by way of the South Four Corners neighborhood than simply by turning onto Westbound University Boulevard from US 29.

Q: When will the buses be procured?

R: Bus procurement contract proposals are due in June and a contract will be awarded by the end of the summer or early fall. The buses will be available by November of 2019.

Q: Where will the utility relocations be? Is the cost of the relocations included in the project budget?

R: 8 or 9 platforms need some utility relocation but some are much simpler while others require more time and resources. The cost is included in the project budget.

Q: Is there an opportunity for public comments on the new signal at Lanark Way?

R: Members of the public can submit feedback through the BRT website.

Q: Has the project budget changed?

R: No, the budget is still the same and includes the cost of the buses.

Q: What are the performance metrics that will be used to measure the performance of the BRT service?

R: Ride On will use the same performance metrics that they currently use for other routes, such as ridership and on time performance.

Montgomery County BiPPA Presentation

Rick introduced John (JT) Thomas who gave a brief introduction to Montgomery County's Bicycle and Pedestrian Priority Areas (BiPPA) Program which can be found at the link below.

<https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/dot-dte/projects/BicycleandPedestrianPriorityAreas/index.html>

US 29 Mobility and Reliability Study

JT then gave a presentation about the US 29 Mobility and Reliability study that was recently approved by the County Council. He invited CAC members to ask him questions or provide him with comments about various aspects of the study.

Information and documents from the US 29 Mobility and reliability study can be found at <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/dot-dte/projects/US29Study/index.html>

Comments:

- The new traffic signal at Lanark Way will not reduce the amount of traffic that is cutting through the South Four Corners neighborhood because this traffic is using the neighborhood to more easily access I-495.

- The Master Plan from 20 years ago explained the importance of a median on US 29. Removing this median as part of the dedicated lane BRT project would have a negative impact on the corridor.
- The new dedicated lane BRT plan will not help residents along the corridor, only transit riders north of White Oak, who make up a small percentage of residents living along US 29. MCDOT should focus on transportation options for those living in the middle of the corridor, not just north of White Oak.
 - Response: We have seen improvements for everyone along the MD 355 corridor as part of the Ride On ExtRa service that has recently started there. MCDOT can examine the possibility for more local bus service to help people access the BRT, especially south of White Oak.
- Issues related to dwell time are not the most pressing problem on US 29 so BRT will not help this, although the neighborhoods surrounding the corridor could benefit from more neighborhood circulators.
- There is high ridership on the Z buses, so there will be substantial demand for BRT service on the corridor.
- The dedicated lane will further box-in neighborhoods along the corridor and make it difficult to access them.
- MCDOT should work to improve the bike accessibility in the neighborhoods around the corridor.
- The BRT or Mobility Study team should upload a sketch of the new dedicated lane proposal to the appropriate website.
- The project team should verify the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (MWCOG) employment data when running their models since these were incorrect at one time.
- Take freight trucks traveling on US 29 into account when modeling is done.

Questions:

Q: This study seems like it has progressed rapidly if the council will get recommendations by the fall. Why is this being advanced so quickly?

R: The council will not get recommendations about the various study topics by Fall 2018, but only about whether to proceed. This will be an appropriate amount of time used to determine if the study topics need further examination.

Q: Will the newly elected County Council oversee this project next year?

R: Yes.

Q: It seems as if County Council has decided that the dedicated lane BRT plan is a foregone conclusion and should be implemented. Why are we discussing it if the decision has already been made?

R: The Council has only decided to study this plan, not to proceed with the project.

Q: Why is the dedicated lane BRT being advanced for study again when it has already been studied in the past?

R: The project team will use the old studies as a baseline to help inform the decision about the potential for a new dedicated lane BRT project.

Q: What are the actual parameters for what is to be studied as part of the Mobility Study?

R: The team is studying whether a plan for BRT service with dedicated lanes is possible on the US 29 corridor. It will share its findings with the US 29 CACs that are associated with the BRT project.

Q: Will traffic impacts be examined as part of the study?

R: Yes.

Q: Is there commitment from Maryland State Highway Administration (SHA) to work with the project team to review and comment on the study and public feedback?

R: Yes, they will review both the study and the public comments regarding it.

Q: The new limited Ride On service on US 29 does not appear to have high ridership. Why is the county looking at even more service on the corridor?

R: It takes six to nine months for people to reliably ride a new route with no marketing. Riders are traveling all along the corridor using this service and the county is working with WMATA to publicize the new route.

Q: Addressing road traffic impacts (such as the fact that US 29 is reduced to two lanes between New Hampshire Avenue and Stewart Lane) can help travel time. Is this considered when modeling is being done?

R: The team will use the initial BRT service as a baseline for modeling but can take future roadway improvements into account when modeling.

Q: How will the modeling be done? What is the timeframe? Who will do it?

R: First the Mobility Study team will consider the corridor and can use microsimulation to simulate traffic based on certain parameters. VISSIM uses traffic lights, transit, and other factors to identify benefits of each scenario, which will be shared with Council members and members of the public.

Q: What are the specifics of the scope of the dedicate lane BRT study? Does it include areas north of Tech Road?

R: The study is not currently scoped for areas north of Tech Road but the project will have the resources to study the area.

Adjourn

Rick Kiegel thanked everyone for attending and concluded the meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 8:45 p.m.