

US 29 BRT Open House Memorandum March 2017

Three public open houses were held in March 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; the Silver Spring Civic Center covered the southern portion of the project’s service area; Montgomery Blair High School covered the central portion of the service area; and White Oak Community Center covered the northern portion of the service area. All locations were accessible by transit. A total of 187 community members attended the open houses. Open house locations, dates, and times are listed in Table 1. The results of each interactive feature of the open house are included in this memorandum.

Table 1: Spring 2017 Open House Schedule

Open House Event Location	Date and Time	Participation
Silver Spring Civic Center 1 Veterans Place Silver Spring, MD 20910	Tuesday, March 7, 2017 6:30pm-8:30pm	79 Participants
Montgomery Blair High School 51 University Boulevard Silver Spring, MD 20901	Monday, March 13, 2017 7:00pm-9:00pm	51 Participants
White Oak Community Center 1700 April Lane Silver Spring, MD 20904	Wednesday, March 15, 2017 6:30pm-8:30pm	57 Participants

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.” Get on Board BRT giveaways were provided to any participants that complete 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 the features will be implemented as part of the Montgomery County BRT program.

Stop 2 – Explore the US 29 BRT Corridor: This stop more information about BRT on the US 29 corridor. The BRT service alignment was displayed on a large map with call out boxes describing unique features of the service area. The project timeline and budget, the project goals and objectives, and project benefits were also displayed. This area was specifically geared toward corridor specific questions and discussions.

Stop 3 – Improve Local Bus Service: The third stop described bus service planning concepts that could be implemented to improve the overall bus network’s service quality and capacity. The concepts were illustrated through infographics and accompanied text.

An interactive service planning tradeoff exercise was used to gather feedback from community members on their wants and needs regarding the coordination of local bus service with the new BRT service. Results of the activity are provided in the Feedback section of this memo.

Stop 4 – Learn about BRT Station Amenities: The fourth stop focused on the potential architectural features and amenities of the BRT stations, based on work being completed through a Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments Transportation Planning Board Transportation/Land Use Connections Program Grant.

Boards displayed early concepts of the BRT prototype station design, the types of amenities included, and the various station design options that could be implemented along the corridor based on location-specific land use characteristics.

Participants were invited to answer the question “Describe in one word how a design might reflect the character and quality of Montgomery County?” This was presented on a projector screen and responses were aggregated into a digital word cloud. Results of the activity are provided in the Feedback section of this memo.

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

Community Feedback

Comment Cards

The project team engaged 187 participants and received 90 comment cards through this round of open houses. The most frequent topic cited in the feedback was local bus service planning, with about one third of comments addressing this issue. This helped the project team understand community members’ concerns about how the BRT might impact local bus service levels. The US 29 BRT program will consider recommendations to improve and bolster existing service local bus service in coordination with the design of the BRT service.

Many of the comments also mentioned the location of the proposed BRT stations. Several participants commented that stop locations should be added in various areas along the corridor, including: near FDA, Franklin Avenue, White Oak, and Sligo Creek. A few participants commented on the need to limit the number of station locations along the service corridor to ensure that the BRT travels quickly along the corridor.

Several people commented on the hours of operations for the BRT service, including a request for additional service hours before and after peak periods. Some commenters expressed concern about potentially losing existing Metrobus Z-line bus service along the US 29 corridor, with five people

indicating that they use Metrobus frequently. These comments will benefit the local bus service planning effort to consider connections to stops that are important to the community.

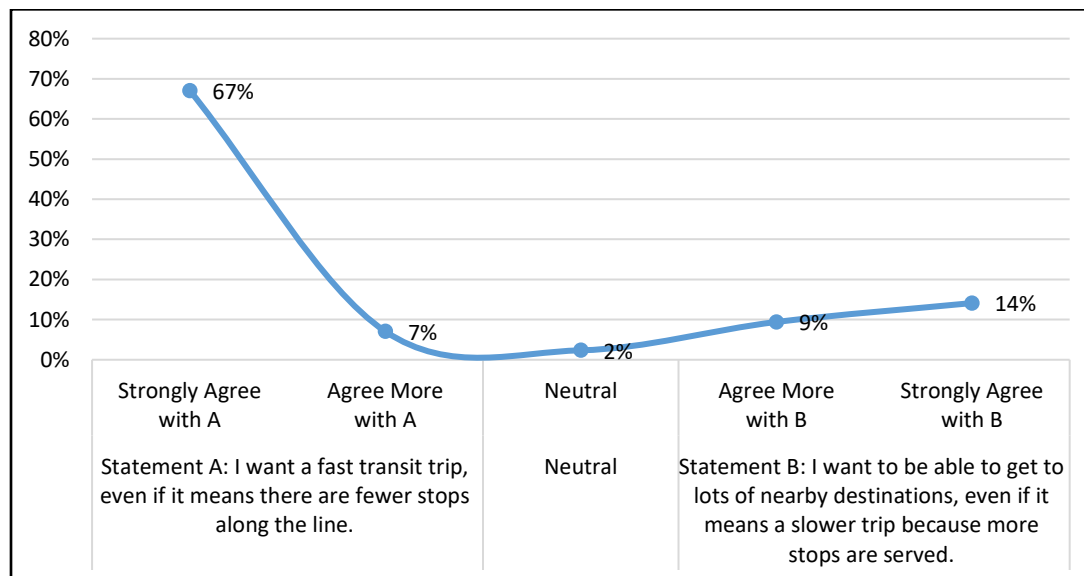
Concerns about the potential effects on traffic were noted by 14 people in the open house feedback. Two people noted that they believe that the amount of traffic will not change, as much of the traffic comes from north of the corridor. Four people expressed concerns about the BRT's use of the traffic lanes. Overall, commenters expressed uncertainty about the type of traffic changes to expect with the rollout of the BRT system. Seven commenters expressed concern around bike and pedestrian access and safety along the US 29 corridor. Some were troubled by the lack of crosswalks near BRT stations and the risk for jaywalking. Some commenters addressed the cost of the project, with thoughts on how else the money could be spent. This information will be useful in developing bike and pedestrian accommodations and in educating the public about the project's minimal impacts.

Overall, more than half of the comments were neutral in nature, focusing on specific features rather than clearly supporting or disapproving of the project. Most comments about outreach were positive, indicating that the open house sessions were informative.

Stop 3: Trade-Off Exercise

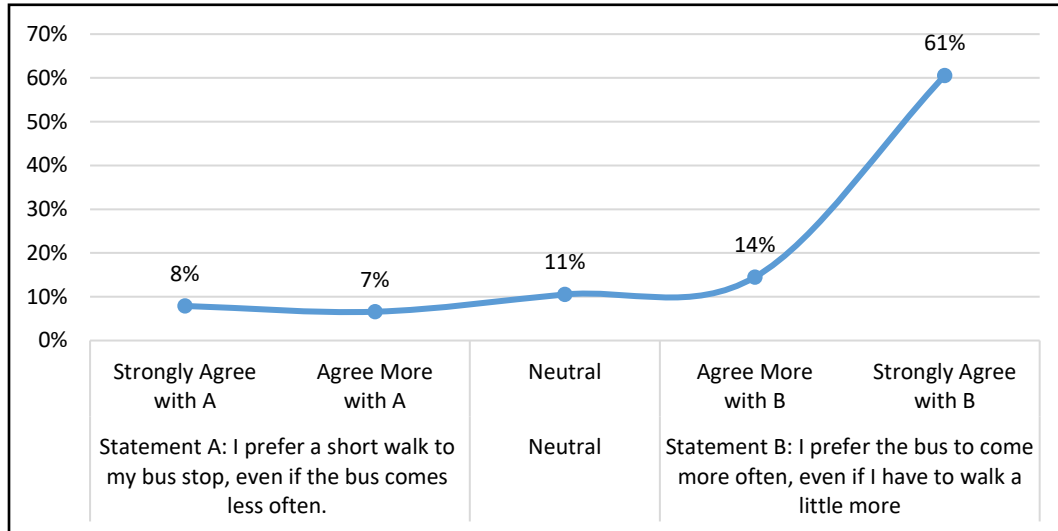
Participants at each open house had the opportunity to provide input for a series of trade-off questions to indicate their preferences for future improvements to local bus service at Stop Three.

Figure 1: Speed Trade Off



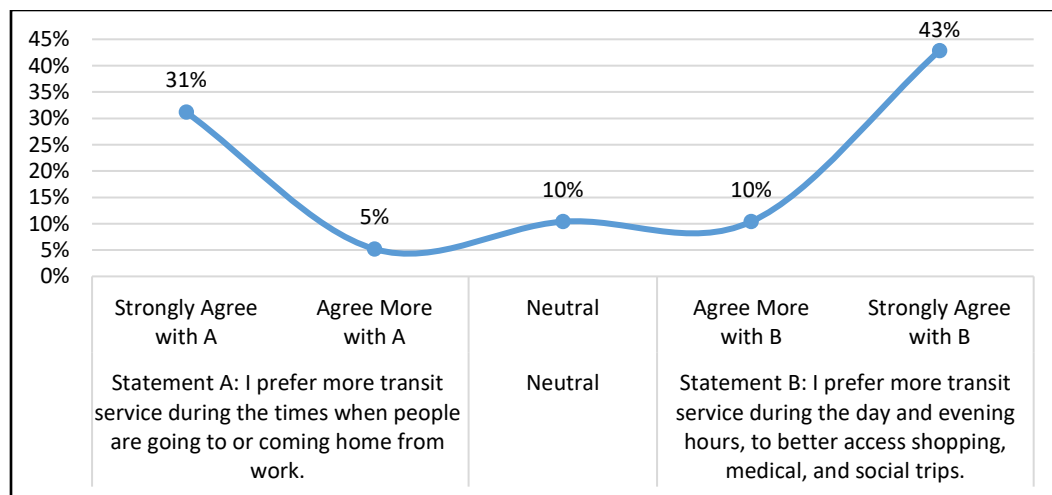
In the speed trade-off (**Figure 1**), 74 percent of participants preferred a faster trip with fewer stops, while 23 percent of residents preferred more stops. This shows there is a demand for BRT and limit stop service.

Figure 2: Walking Trade Off



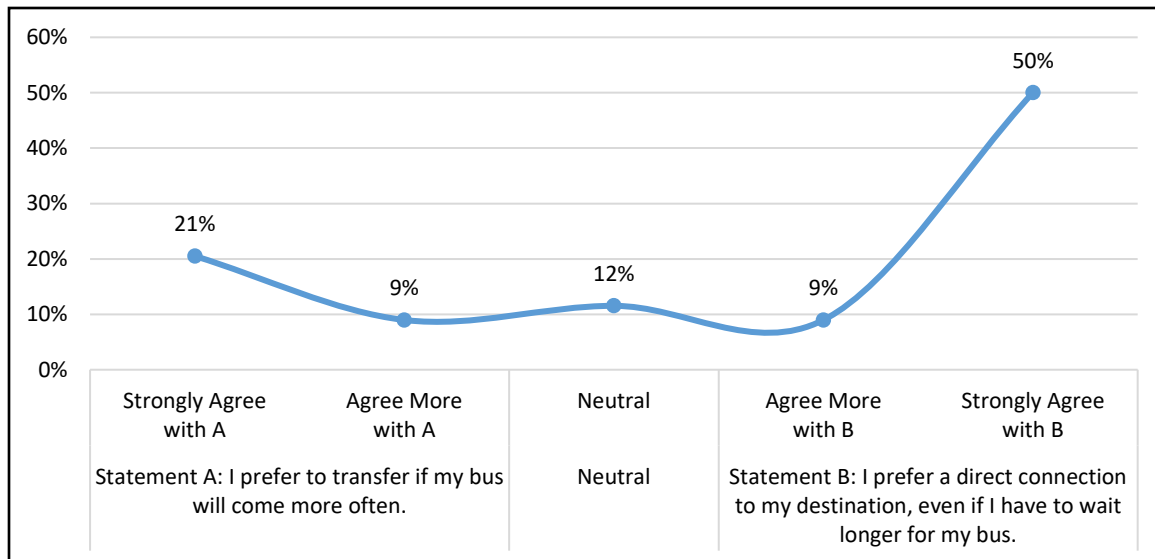
In the walking trade-off (**Figure 2**), 75 percent of participants preferred frequent bus service even if it means more walking, while only 15 percent of participants preferred a short walk to a bus stop, even if it means the bus comes less often. This preference displays a desire for frequent service with more limited spacing.

Figure 3: Peak Trade Off



When asked if they prefer transit service during peak work hours or if they prefer transit service during the day and evening hours, participants were split: 36 percent preferred work hours, 53 percent service during the day and evening, and 10 percent were neutral, indicating a strong demand throughout the day (**Figure 3**).

Figure 4: Transfer Trade Off

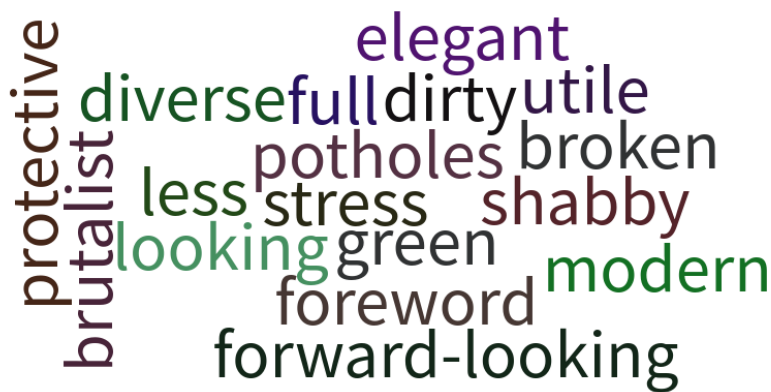


In the transfer trade-off (Figure 4), 59 percent of participants preferred a direct connection, even if it means waiting longer for the bus, while 30 percent preferred to transfer if it means the bus will come more often. This trade-off indicated that although there is a clear preference to prevent transferring in the system, some transfers may be needed to increase service frequency.

Stop 4: Word Cloud Activity

Participants at each open house were asked to describe the characteristics of Montgomery County that they would like to see reflected included in the BRT station design by adding words to a digital word cloud at Stop 4. The word cloud figures are shown below.

Figure 5: Silver Spring Word Cloud Activity



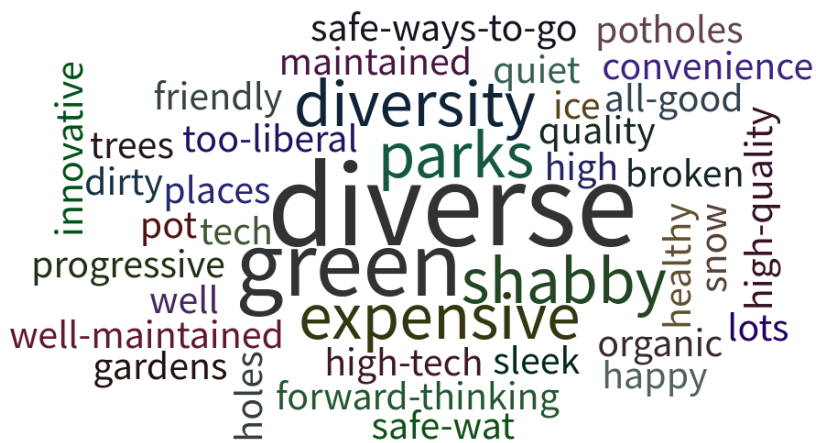
At the Silver Spring Open House, respondents used words such as protective, diverse, elegant, dirty, broken, green, forward-looking, modern. These words appeared in the digital cloud in similar font sizes, which indicates they each were entered one or two times.

Figure 6: Montgomery Blair High School Word Cloud Activity



At the Montgomery Blair High School Open House, the words “diverse” and “green” appeared much larger than other words, indicating that they were entered many times. Other entered words included traffic-reducing, first-class, comfortable, wheels, quality, elderly, mindful, accessible, and smart.

Figure 7: White Oak Word Cloud Activity



The word cloud at the White Oak Open House contained the largest number of words, and again “diverse” and “green” were larger than other entries. Other words appearing in large font were parks, shabby, and expensive. Smaller words included too-liberal, friendly, happy, organic, forward-thinking, high-tech, holes, well-maintained, healthy, convenience, and innovative.

One key observation from this activity is that sometimes participants are interested in sharing their perspective and concerns rather than answering the question at hand. However, it is apparent that community members celebrate the diversity in Montgomery County and that sustainability is important. Community members also understand that there is an aging population that will need accessible transit service in the future. Some community members are concerned about the potential expense and quality of the project.