



MID-COUNTY CITIZENS ADVISORY BOARD

Isiah Leggett
County Executive

Ana L. van Balen
Director

January 29, 2014

County Executive Leggett
101 Monroe Street
Rockville, MD 20850

Dear County Executive Leggett:

The Mid-County Citizens Advisory Board (MCCAB) is supportive of the County Council's decision to approve the Countywide Transit Corridors (CTC) Functional Master Plan. This was a necessary step toward addressing our region's traffic congestion, ranked among the worst in the nation. The MCCAB has repeatedly supported the concept of Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) since 2009,¹ and would like to renew our support for the construction of this system in the Mid-County region. Mid-county residents would benefit tremendously from the increased access throughout Montgomery County and the greater metro area that BRT would provide.

There are some important recommendations that MCCAB suggests be carefully considered as the CTC Functional Master Plan and a BRT system are implemented:

- Build the system incrementally.
- Fund the BRT using County, State and Federal funds rather than through Special Taxing Districts.
- Conducting ongoing public outreach is critical.
- Avoid construction that reduces the number of existing traffic lanes.

Build the System Incrementally

The MCCAB believes that the County should build the BRT system incrementally with a focus on alleviating areas currently experiencing severe traffic congestion. Although planning for conditions of future growth is critical, a BRT system that provides near-term benefit to residents will help build public support for further BRT system expansion.

The MCCAB believes that a comprehensive BRT system integrated into the regional transportation system should be built incrementally. Initial construction should start small, with plans to construct a pilot system that focuses on connecting residents to their places of employment, and on supporting economic development within the County. This pilot system should consist of North-South (Georgia Avenue) and East-West (Viers Mill Road) routes, establishing a connected system that could be expanded in the future. An incremental approach would help prove the BRT system's viability in Montgomery County.

Fund BRT Using County, State & Federal Funds Rather Than Through Special Taxing Districts

¹ MCCAB Letter to Council President Phil Andrews, May 19, 2009; MCCAB Letter to County Executive Isiah Leggett, July 29, 2011.

BRT users and taxpayers will be best served with a system that is reliable and financially sustainable. The approach that we suggest above, starting small and building incrementally toward a wider network, will provide County residents greater assurance that a BRT system is being built with cost-benefit sensitivities in mind. While the MCCAB supports the use of County funds for construction of the BRT system, we recommend that the County should vigorously pursue State and Federal funding. A BRT system will benefit the entire region's transportation network, and therefore the MCCAB believes the cost of the system should be borne by the region, including the Federal government, which will benefit by the BRT's moving large numbers of civil servants to and from work. Although the MCCAB has supported the creation of special taxing districts supporting economic development and services in urban districts,² we believe this mechanism is not appropriate for funding improvements to the County's transportation network.

Conducting Ongoing Public Outreach is Critical

In planning for the BRT, the County's outreach effort to County residents is critical, and should include many public hearings throughout the County and opportunities to submit written comment as part of the decision making process. County residents have many questions regarding: dedicated and repurposed lanes; placement of BRT system parking lots; and the impact of BRT system infrastructure on local neighborhoods. The success of the BRT system in Montgomery County will depend on the support of these communities.

Avoid Construction that Reduces the Number of Existing Traffic Lanes

The MCCAB believes that any decisions made about the use of dedicated or repurposed lanes should be made on the basis of evidence and after careful technical study. Traffic congestion is overwhelmingly a major quality of life issue for many residents. Many residents are therefore very wary of anything that may appear to lengthen their already lengthy daily commutes. Based on public input to date, we recommend avoiding repurposing lanes for BRT unless a compelling case can be made, after study on a route-by-route basis, that such repurposing will alleviate traffic congestion over a short time horizon.

We are grateful to the Council for creating a policy vision for the County that addresses one of the most pressing issues for its residents. We believe implementation of this vision will be supported by ongoing public dialogue, broad-based funding support, and a network that places a first priority on alleviating the worst corridors of traffic congestion that run through the heart of our County. We believe that such an approach will engender strong support by County residents for BRT, as the benefits become increasingly apparent with its implementation.

Sincerely,



Kieran McHargue, Chair
Mid-County Citizen's Advisory Board

² MCCAB Letter to County Executive Isaiah Leggett, Dec. 19, 2013.