RTS Steering Committee Meeting
4 December 2012
4:00 pm – 6:00 pm
9th Floor Conference Room
1010 Monroe Street
Rockville, MD 20850

Voting Members In-attendance

Al Roshdieh – Montgomery County Department of Transportation
Casey Anderson – Maryland National Capital Parks and Planning Commission
Joe Beach – Finance
David Dise – Department of General Services
Leif Dormsjo – Maryland Department of Transportation
Jonathan Genn – Transit Task Force
Marc Hansen – County Attorney’s Office
Shyam Kannan – Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority
Steve Silverman – Economic Development
Frank Spielberg – Technical Expert
Dan Wilhelm – Transit Task Force
Mark Winston – Transit Task Force

Other Attendees

Carolyn Biggins – Montgomery County Department of Transportation
Larry Cole – Maryland National Capital Parks and Planning Commission
Gary Erenrich – Montgomery County Department of Transportation
Brady Goldsmith – Management and Budget Office
Edgar Gonzalez – Montgomery County Department of Transportation
Bruce Johnston – Montgomery County Department of Transportation
Rich Kiegel – Maryland Transit Administration
Tom Street – Office of the County Executive
Emil Wolanin – Montgomery County Department of Transportation
Stacy Wagner – Montgomery County Department of Transportation

Introductions and Purpose of Meeting

The meeting began with introductions. Voting members were asked to provide additional background information to better understand the responsibilities and background of members.

Steering Committee Mission and Schedule

Al Roshdieh led the discussion about the Mission of the Rapid Transit Steering Committee (RTSC). A copy of the full mission statement was included in the packet of handouts. The Mission of the RTSC is to support and provide advice to the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) and the County Executive in the implementation of a Rapid Transit System in the County, within the framework of adopted and soon to be adopted Master Plans in the County, and within the fiscal constraints and overall policy direction of the County Executive.

Discussion followed on the responsibilities of the RTSC. MCDOT would like the RTSC to have a good understanding of all the studies that have been completed. Also, the RTSC is to provide guidance on the funding of the project, the organizational structure, the transparency, and the schedule of implementation. The expectation is that staff presenting to the committee would lead the discussions with input from the experts. A question was asked about the studies referenced and what the expectations of the RTSC’s participation and how the RTSC would know when their work is done. Al Roshdieh mentioned that the supplemental appropriation is before the Council for approval by the January 2013 meeting. We will bring to the Steering Committee the scope of work we want to give to consultants and have the RTSC give guidance and advice. We will either have the consultants on-board or we will look at consultants used by other organizations doing similar work.

We got into the narrowness of the mission statement from a question. RTSC felt there was a timeline constriction on the mission and how we would tie into other counties and the District of Columbia in the future. It was included that the section “other responsibilities” would include the cooperation with other regional transit plans with respect to Regional Multi-model Integration.

MCDOT will post links to studies and presentations.

There was agreement to explore adding to the Responsibilities to support regional transit initiatives.

Overview of Studies and Reports

Gary Erenrich gave an overview of Councilman Elrich’s initiatives, which was started in 2008. Mr. Elrich laid out a concept/vision for RTS, to connect all areas of the County, understanding that the County couldn’t build all the roads needed. It was noted that we would need to use medians of existing roadways to connect activities centers with transportation hubs. MCDOT took that concept (map on page 7 of the PowerPoint presentation), and did a County-wide feasibility study, concerned with ridership, and funding. This report was published in 2011 (see page 8). The study added several layers of screening of roadways, assumed priorities and where growth areas would be planned. MCDOT came up with the map on page 11. The Summary of Preliminary Findings can be found on page 12. This takes into account that there will be a decrease in operating costs for Ride On and Metrobus, but there will be an increase in other costs. Page 13 shows what we will need to do with the currently bus fleet and the maintenance system. It has also been noted that a regular 40 ft. bus could be used for the RTS.

Mark Winston discussed the County Executive’s Rapid Transit Task Force Report. The task force was formed in March 2011. They issued their report in May 2012 which built off the feasibility study. The system must be viewed as a network, not individual corridors, and we must move people around the County, not just up and down the county using current roads. The Task Force also had to take into account real estate matters. This foundation of thinking lead to the report. Mark Winston showed a slide of the proposed busses (showed an articulated bus in a median corridor). The question was asked if the median uses astro turf – the answer was no. Oregon has certain laws enacted that made them design their system around trees.

Most Essential Values for Vehicles:

1. Sleek and stylish
2. Wireless
3. Real-time information provided on arrivals and departures

Stations of Quality must haves:

1. Safe and weather proof
2. Distinctive
3. Level boarding
4. Off vehicle collection of fares (similar to metro)
5. Real-time system information provided on trains

The question was asked if the vehicle were non-fossil fuel. The answer was they could be, but there would be additional costs (LA uses a natural gas bus). One of the problems with the cost is that there is no domestic bus transit industry. Hopefully demand will encourage the industry to grow thus lowering prices.

161.5 total miles over 4 corridors is the ultimate build out, hopefully it will eventually tie into other areas including Northern Virginia.

Divided into 3 Phases – trying to limit disruption to surface roads, but can’t completely eliminate.

Built on the work of others, there is an on-line report with 800 pages of indexes that lays out our vision and more concrete. We would like to see this built more quickly than other currently public works.

Al Roshdieh told the committee that there would be a dedication section on the MCDOT website for this project.

Gary Erenrich reported on the two organizations that ran another study – the Institute for Transportation and Development Policy (ITDP) and LOGIT (a consulting firm specializing in the areas of supply chain and transportation) through the Rockefeller Foundation. The Rockefeller Foundation gave money to fund the study thru ITDP. They’ve defined a gold, silver and bronze standard. ITDP is working with the Rockefeller Foundation to establish gold standard RTS, and are working is several other areas, including Chicago. Their mission seems to be to work with Rockefeller Foundation towards implementing gold standard BRT. They have worked with Pittsburgh and Cleveland. Through an MOU MCDOT agreed to work with them with no cost to the County. Because of their international work, they have contracted with LOGIT. LOGIT is a Brazilian firm that has never worked in the US, but has worked everywhere else with ITDP. We had the privilege to work with them; they looked at our 4 corridors in P1 of RTS report and they analyzed 3 different scenarios for these corridors. They assembled all the base line data. LOGIT went through all our individual layers of GIS, and they figured out how to solve all these network issues and created a baseline network. The goal was to look at the levels of riders per hour. The corridors were MD 355, US Route 29, Veirs Mill, and Georgia Ave. The Corridor Cities Transitway (CCT), the Inter County Connector (ICC) and Randolph Road were left out of the study. The highest ridership is US 29 going to Silver Spring. MD 355 was an initial disappointment since it only had 200-300 per hour at peak as opposed to the minimum standard of 1200. However, the recommendation for a gold standard corridor is MD 355 due to the land use issues. ITDP felt US 29 was more of an express bus corridor. They considered Veirs Mill to be a good corridor, and so was Georgia Ave. Cleveland (Healthline) and LA (Orange) are both bronze standard in the US.

ITDP came up with 3 service plans for consideration.

The models are

1. only BRT busses can use it.
2. all busses can use, but only certain ones can stop at the stations (only left side entrance)
3. all busses can use all roads and stations (cuts down on number of busses to buy)

The reason this is important is you need to add the busses into the capital budgeting with doors on both sides.

ITDP submitted a report for County Executive and created a service plan for all the busses for these 4 corridors.

MCDOT is not the client, only an interested party

Larry Cole discussed the Coutywide Transit Corridors Functional Master Plan. Planning staff began work in August 2011 looking over the 150 miles to decide what right of ways can be used for RTS and need to go in the Master Plan. When you add up all the numbers, it would be triple the lane miles of the ICC. So they looked at what could be accomplished by lane repurposing.

Larry Cole presented slides showing riders per hour per directions for the corridors begin studied.

Rick Kiegel, of the Maryland Transit Administration (MTA), gave a quick update on some MTA projects. He handed out two newsletters to committee members – Georgia Ave (GA) and Veirs Mill (VM) BRT studies. These were sent out to the community to let them know what was happening. Both have good ridership. These are projects that are truly sponsored by Montgomery County. Six million dollars to the state to study Veirs Mill and five million dollars for Georgia Avenue study.

The Veirs Mill project is to connect the upper areas of the Red Line. Service the northern connection between these two legs – 6.7 miles long – part of it falls in Rockville city limits. There are 16 road sections between Rockville and Wheaton. Includes service roads, have vertical issues to deal with, houses in the way. Also have the crossing of Rock Creek. On this project we’ve had our first public meeting in May 2012. Had 50-60 members of the community show up; introduced project to community. Complete purpose and need. MTA is planning to have a public workshop in March 2013. There is one portion east bound that is already a dedicated bus lane. We are in pretty good shape.

MD 97, Georgia Avenue project, had its first open house in June 2012. About 4 months behind VM project. This is 7 miles long from Glenmont up to Olney. Since the roads are wider in this area, the proposal is for a two lane median operation. There will be one section that operates on MD 108 to access the hospital. Still fine tuning purpose and need. Need to look at traffic impact on MD 28, Inter-county Connector (ICC or MD 200), etc. This was assigned to State prior to the Task Force being set up. It’s on the Transit Master Plan.

The next handout was a newsletter on the Corridor Cities Transitway (CCT). This was originally part of the I270/15 study. Due to financial restraints, the State is slowing down work projects on I270, and only doing areas that need immediate attention. It was decided that the CCT is large enough to stand on its own. The state recommendation is to continue studying the CCT. It’s estimated that by 2040, the CCT will have 47,500 riders per day with an entirely dedicated facility for 15 miles, which has been set aside. The plans only have 2 residential taking and 1 business taking. BRT is the way we are moving forward on. The plan is for this to be a premium service. Want to build in phases. Phase 1 would be 9 miles and cost $545 million.

Kittleson Study – developers and property owners funded independent study to look at plans to build so we can lower costs and get is done sooner. Because some of these routes will be running on neighborhood and adjacent streets we want to minimize the length and amount of closures due to construction.

Gary Erenrich took a few minutes to discuss the Purple Line, which is two years ahead of the CCT schedule. It will be a light rail from Bethesda to New Carrollton. Ridership forecasts show it at about 74,000 riders per day in 2040 with a cost of two billion dollars. Need money to do final engineering and construction. State has preliminary funding for engineering. MTA is hoping to have final environmental impact study completed this summer.

Al Roshdieh then did a quick summary of the Proposed FY 13 CIP Supplemental. We are expecting this to be approved towards the end of January. The County Executive wants to move on Phase 1 of the task force recommendation. MCDOT expectation is to submit a CIP to the Council for FY14 for US 29, MD 355, and Georgia Avenue (South). This is to cover service planning and integration study; we need to study pedestrian and bicycle access to station because access is critical. Need to come up with stations that meet these needs. There is a pilot study for transit signal priority of MD 355 at three intersections which just started. Need to study park and ride facilities to serve corridors and stations since this will have a direct impact on ridership. The County as needs to hire a consultant to look at the best was to operate, design, build and maintain RTS system and integrate with Ride On and Metrobus.

Al Roshdieh went over the planned schedule for the next few meetings. At this time, there was a discussion about having a web site set up that is password protected for the RTSC to share documents and information. Also need to make sure everyone has contact information for other members.

It was decided that Tuesdays from 4:00 pm to 6:00 pm are the best time to schedule meetings since it would not interfere with any council meetings that are usually held at 7:00 pm.

Al ended the meeting at 6:05 pm.