



MONTGOMERY COUNTY PLANNING DEPARTMENT
THE MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION

May 20, 2009

Ms. Barbara Solberg, Assistant Division Chief
State Highway Administration
Office of Highway Development
707 North Calvert Street
Baltimore, MD 21202

RE: Contract No. MO593593A21, BRAC Intersection
MD185 (Connecticut Avenue) at Jones Bridge Road and
Kensington Parkway

Dear Ms. Solberg:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the plans for this project. In addition to our detailed comments, we would like to highlight two issues, one about the Bethesda BRAC projects in general and one having the greatest potential to change the impact of this project concerns the accommodation of Kensington Parkway at the MD355/Jones Bridge Road intersection.

Bethesda BRAC Projects

We would like to bring your attention to the overall guidance in the Bethesda-Chevy Chase (B-CC) Master Plan concerning transportation improvements.

The B-CC Master Plan states, *"In a developed area such as Bethesda-Chevy Chase, traffic growth cannot be easily served by highway expansion without causing serious impacts on adjacent residential properties. Additional transportation service in B-CC should be based on an expanded and vigorous program of transit and other mobility services."*

"Transportation Goals and Objectives

Achieve a significant shift of new travel from auto use to transit and other mobility alternatives.

- a. Provide an expanded and vigorous program of expanded transit and other mobility services and facilities.*
- b. Provide only moderate highway improvements, such as redesign of some intersections rather than addition of lanes to roads.*
- c. Provide improved access and safety for pedestrians and bicyclists."*

Prior to these projects being reviewed by the Planning Board under the Mandatory Referral process, we request that we be provided with a description of the actions that will be undertaken to address these transportation goals. Of the four proposed Bethesda BRAC projects, **the current design for the MD185/Jones Bridge Road appears to be the most out of scale with what is intended by “moderate highway improvements” and in our view is not consistent with the B-CC Master Plan.**

We believe that this design also needs significant improvement to accommodate pedestrians and bicyclists adequately. The proposed typical sections that show curb-attached sidewalks on one or both sides of the road; most of the proposed sidewalks on this project are adjacent to the curb even, for example, at the southeast corner of the MD185/Jones Bridge Road intersection where the roadway would be widened by more than thirty feet. Buffers at least five feet wide should be provided to separate sidewalks from roadways. On-road bike lanes should be provided on Jones Bridge Road, per our Master Plan and SHA’s guidelines; on-road bike accommodation should also be provided on MD185. Adequate, safe pedestrian and bicycle accommodation and access to transit are higher priorities than roadway widening that exceeds what is recommended in the Master Plan.

In addition to the functional aspects, the B-CC Master Plan addresses the need to retain and enhance community character by recommending that trees be planted in landscaped buffers between curbs and sidewalks and in the medians of major roads, including the three State highways impacted by the Bethesda BRAC: MD355, MD187, and MD185.

Kensington Parkway

This road previously provided access to the ramp to the Inner Loop of the Beltway but has not served that function for several years and SHA’s traffic staff said in a project meeting that the current traffic volume on this road is low. To relieve the pressure on the traffic signal at MD185/Jones Bridge, we recommended that SHA staff analyze the effect of prohibiting southbound lefts from Kensington Parkway to allow the time in the signal cycle to be reallocated to the other two roads, reducing the need for widening.

We repeat that recommendation and believe also that SHA should evaluate making the block of Montrose Driveway between MD185 and Kensington Parkway one-way westbound and installing a traffic signal on MD185. The left turns now made from southbound Kensington Parkway at the MD185/Jones Bridge Road (including the #33 Ride-On bus) could be accommodated at this location. A median pedestrian refuge should be provided between the bus stops on either side of MD185 at Montrose Drive. The Master Plan specifically recommends that safe crossings be provided at this location and that a traffic signal be considered.

We request that SHA analyze the recommended configuration. While there would be some impact to the short block of Montrose Driveway, the elimination of a signal phase for

Kensington Parkway likely would reduce the impact on the other two roads, as well as the scope and cost of this project.

1990 Bethesda-Chevy Chase Master Plan

Connecticut Avenue (MD185)

The Master Plan calls for six lanes to be retained on MD185 but states that at-grade improvements for safety and capacity should be made at the Jones Bridge Road intersection, including sidewalks and safe pedestrian crossings, as well as safe access to and from Spring Valley Road. At the southern project limit at Manor Road, capacity and safety improvements are recommended as well as a safe pedestrian crossing.

The project proposes to take five homes to accommodate the widening on the east side of MD185 north of Jones Bridge Road. The Master Plan supported the purchase of the four homes that have their sole access from MD185 (with the condition that they be resold) if needed to permit the relocation of the on-ramp to the Inner Loop from Kensington Parkway to MD185, while the MD185 median was concurrently to be increased in width to fourteen feet so that it could be landscaped. The ramp relocation was completed several years ago without the median widening and without these takings.

Jones Bridge Road

The Master Plan calls for improving Jones Bridge Road east of MD185 “to primary standards as necessary”, stating also that “wider roadway would have impact on abutting residences”. The County’s standard for a Primary Residential Road has a 36-foot pavement width. The proposed project would about double the existing pavement and would extend about ¼-mile east of the intersection.

Between MD355 and MD185, the Master Plan recommends that the existing roadway width be retained except where intersection improvements are needed. The proposed widening is in excess of what would normally be expected for intersection improvements.

Detailed Comments

Only one of the four legs of the MD185/Jones Bridge Road/Kensington Parkway intersection has a proposed pedestrian refuge; the other legs should be modified as follows:

- The median on the south leg should be extended north to provide a pedestrian refuge.
- The median on the west leg should be widened to six feet and extended east to provide a pedestrian refuge.

- With the elimination of the left turn from Kensington Parkway, consider extending the median on the north leg of MD185 south and providing a pedestrian refuge and a marked crosswalk.

The plans show a significant portion of the brick boundary wall along the west side of MD185 and the south side of Jones Bridge Road being removed and not replaced. While our view is that the scope of improvements for this project should be reduced such that the wall would remain intact, its disposition needs to be called out clearly.

A median pedestrian refuge and crosswalk should be provided on Jones Bridge Road between the bus stops at Platt Ridge Drive.

A median pedestrian refuge should be provided on Jones Bridge Road at Spring Valley Road.

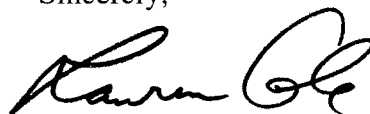
A handicap ramp is needed at the southeast corner of Jones Bridge Road at Montgomery Avenue, just east of the bus stops.

A median pedestrian refuge should be provided on the north leg of MD185 at Manor Road. Consider moving the bus stop on the west side of MD185 300 feet north of the intersection closer to the crosswalk to encourage a safer operation for transit patrons.

A pedestrian refuge should be provided in the median of MD185 between the bus stops on the north side of Woodlawn Road.

This project will require a Mandatory Referral review by the Planning Board. Please provide responses to the above comments with the submission for that review. If you have any questions or comments concerning this letter, please call me at 301-495-4528.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lawrence Cole", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Lawrence Cole, P.E.
Highway Coordinator

cc: District 16 Delegation
District 18 Delegation
Bob Simpson
Phil Alperson
John Carman