

**US 29 North Corridor Advisory Committee
Meeting #10
Thursday, April 6, 2017, 6:30-8:30pm**
East County Regional Services Center
3300 Briggs Chaney Rd
Silver Spring, MD 20904

Participants

CAC Members (x for in attendance, blank for regrets)			
Fisseha Adugna	X	Peter Myo Khin	X
Carole Ann Barth		Shane Pollin	
John Bowers		Rob Richardson	X
Brian Downie		Mike Rosenberg	
Oladipo Famuyiwa		Joseph Tahan	X
Jonathan Genn		Dan Wilhelm	X
Kevin Gunthert		Eric Wolvovsky	X
Latisha Johnson		Ayana Lambert	
Bernadine Karns			
Matthew Koch			

Staff

Michael Weinberger, Foursquare ITP

Chris Conklin, MCDOT

Rick Kiegel, RK&K

Darcy Buckley, MCDOT

Tom Pogue, MCDOT

Rafael Olarte, MCDOT

Dan Hibbert, MCDOT

Rebecca Martin, Foursquare ITP

Josh Diamond, Foursquare ITP

Phil Shapiro

Members of the Public

Sebastian Smoot, Good Hope Estates Civic Association

Harriet Quinn, Fairland/MoCo Civic Federation

Nick Perfili, WMATA

Tamika Gauvin, MTA

1. Introductions

a. Welcome from new facilitator, for preliminary design phase of project

Michael Weinberger, meeting facilitator, introduced himself and provided an overview for the meeting. He explained that Montgomery County will be leading the project through design and implementation. He recognized that he is new to the process, and that the CAC members know each other and have been attending meetings for two years. (NB: This is a new effort led by Montgomery County, instead of the State of Maryland, and in support of this effort the County has launched a new public involvement effort supported by the County's consultant Foursquare ITP.) Michael then reviewed the agenda for the meeting.

b. Introductions

All present introduced themselves by name, association, and relation to the project, beginning with members.

c. Digital Voting Activity

Michael walked the members through an introductory digital voting exercise.

- In which zip code do you live?
 - 20904 - 100%

- In which zip code do you work?
 - Potomac, MD 25%
 - VA 25%
 - Retired 50% (20904)

- How do you get to work?
 - Drive alone 75%
 - Walk 25% (driving secondary)

- If you do ride bus service, how often do you use it?
 - Never 75%
 - Monthly: 25%

Participants estimated that this is representative of the larger group. They believe that transit doesn't work well in Montgomery County, so most residents drive cars.

- Word Cloud for BRT
 - Responses: Speed, rapid, express, bus, traffic

- BRT elements that are most important for a successful project:
 - Limited stop premium service: 25%
 - Dedicated busway/lanes: 75%

Michael commented that while a dedicated lane is a defining feature of a BRT system, there are many additional features.

- What are the biggest selling points for BRT to the public?
 - Responses: Need, Drive, Frequency, time, decongestion

- What is the greatest barrier to public buy-in for the BRT projects?
 - Responses: Adding new vehicles to the road; excessive, frequency, far, new

Michael commented that change can be hard, and it is necessary to make sure that people understand what the BRT system is. Advocating for heavy or light rail may be a more difficult

sell, while BRT is a more affordable way to get reliable service into a community. The fare for the BRT will be the same as Ride On fares.

- Best tools to educate public:
 - All of the above 100%

Michael thanked members for participating. He mentioned that the Southern committee meeting was held earlier in the week, and that the purpose of these meetings is to bring together advocates and skeptics alike. He recognized that many people in this meeting are excited about the project.

2. Expectations

Michael reviewed the expectations of the CAC from the draft CAC Program Plan. The CAC is an advisory committee, not a decision-making group. The purpose is to provide guidance on design and implementation. The project team would like feedback from the CAC, but the CACs will not decide what the project team will do. In addition, the CAC will assist in public outreach for the project, helping the project team make connections in the community and ensuring that the project team receives diverse perspectives.

3. Project Schedule and Update

Chris Conklin explained that the County recently briefed the County Planning Board and the County Council's Transportation and Environment Committee, and that he would present the same slides to the CAC members today as were used in these briefings. His slides provided a description of the project.

He began by restating the project goals: to improve quality of transit service, increase choices, and enhance quality of life. There is significant master planned development along the corridor, and expanded transit options are a component of being able to meet the needs of the new development. Given traffic congestion on US 29 and other corridors, the project will add expanded transit options to these areas in a sustainable and cost-effective way. Attracting choice riders will increase the sustainability of the project.

US 29 is already one of the busiest transit corridors in Maryland. Maryland Transit Administration (MTA) and WMATA run lines through this corridor, including WMATA's Z lines. During non-peak periods, bus trips along the corridor take 20% more time than automobile trips because the buses must stop frequently. But during peak periods, bus trips are up to 60% longer than car trips, reflecting the greater ridership during peak hours. Existing buses have some bus on shoulder abilities, but overall, buses and cars experience the same delays. The corridor is diverse, with many residents that are minority, foreign-born, medium-income, or that speak a language other than English. 12% of residents do not have access to a car and 30% have access only to one vehicle, making transit important. There are over 9,000 senior citizens and over 11,000 residents with disabilities.

There are major employers on this corridor, including the Food and Drug Administration, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and Discovery Communications. The corridor currently has about 61,000 jobs, a number which is projected to grow to 80,000.

This project relies on a study conducted by the Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) over the past 1-2 years. The study determined the station locations based upon the functional master plan,

and property and environmental impacts. The property and environmental impacts in the study show various property impacts depending on varied conceptual alternatives. This would include a worst-case scenario, but the County is not moving forward with the most impactful parts of the plan. There will be no property displacements with the approved BRT project. There may be minor property takings for stations, but the County is trying to keep these as minimal as possible.

The study showed that a managed lane could encourage increased high-occupancy (HOV) traffic in place of single-occupancy traffic. While encouraging ridesharing is one of MDOT's goals, the study showed there would also be significant traffic impacts from repurposing of a lane. Chris noted that the idea is not ready for implementation—this would require further study in the future. He emphasized that the BRT project on US 29 would utilize only the shoulders north of Industrial Parkway and operate in mixed traffic in the southern segment all the way to downtown Silver Spring.

MDOT's study also examined completely rebuilding the shoulders for bus-on-shoulder, which would be expensive. Because there is already existing bus-on-shoulder service, the County plans to use that for this BRT project. MDOT's study had an estimated cost of \$80-140 million. The County's BRT project will cost \$31.5 million (down from an original estimate of \$67 million), \$10 million of which will be paid for with federal grant money.

However, the US 29 project, which is in the preliminary design phase, now draws from the strongest elements of MDOT's work, including station locations, ridership estimates, and transit signal priority (TSP). About 40% of the corridor has existing space for bus-on-shoulder service.

The BRT will have the same hours of operation as Metrorail and will operate seven days per week. Vehicles and stations will be uniquely branded with their own logo. There will also be bike and pedestrian improvements that will link neighborhoods with BRT stations. In addition, Howard County is beginning to advance their BRT planning as well.

This BRT project will have all the elements of traditional BRT projects, including dedicated lanes, off-board fare collection, branded stations and vehicles, frequent headway-based operations (the time between buses at a station), and Transit Signal Priority (TSP) at up to 15 intersections to encourage streamlined service. TSP will help the buses stay on schedule, moving efficiently up and down the corridor. Most BRT projects in the United States have less than 50% of the route as a dedicated lane.

The project team expects strong ridership for the program. In 2020, when the service is projected to start, ridership projections estimate 13,000 daily riders, with approximately 4,000 new transit riders. This means that some people who currently use transit will choose to use the BRT instead (approximately 2/3 of estimated BRT users). Ridership will continue to grow through 2040 and beyond. The BRT will provide improved transit reliability in a corridor where transit is currently not very reliable.

In comparing this BRT system to other BRT and light rail systems in the US receiving federal money, the US 29 BRT is expected to have higher ridership than almost half of all other BRT systems and to perform better than some of the light rail systems as well.

The US 29 BRT system will provide substantial savings in terms of travel time. It is expected to be 22-33% faster than existing transit options, in part due to offboard fare collection and boarding simultaneously through multiple doors. When comparing the US 29 BRT travel time savings with other BRTs, the US 29 BRT outperforms more than half of the other systems.

The US 29 BRT is expected to provide a significant economic benefit to this part of the county, with a net benefit of \$269-520 million. The development of the White Oak Science Gateway area depends heavily on the presence of the US 29 BRT. It will improve accessibility for the community, increase regional connections, and provide better access to current and future employment centers. It will provide consistent, all-day service on the corridor, increasing current service to midday and evenings in addition to peak service. The BRT will match Metrorail service hours. Existing local service will be evaluated and potentially changed to provide better service in coordination with the BRT. Although decisions about local service have not yet been made, potential changes include adjusting frequency and coverage, moving location of stops, changing routes, and extending routes.

Although the cost may sound like a very large number, this is an affordable transportation investment. The total investment is \$31.5 million, with the bulk of funds going towards buses (\$14 million) and stations and stops (\$13 million). In addition, the project includes \$1 million for TSP, which will give the bus additional green light time; and \$2 million for bicycle and pedestrian improvements. The project is funded in part through a \$10 million TIGER grant, with the remaining funds from the County.

The Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) grant is a USDOT program that began through a recovery act after the Great Recession. It was continued because of its benefit to communities. Only 5% of grant applications were accepted, and MCDOT's was one of them. This project did well based on the benefit per federal dollar of investment. The grant is currently in its final stages of approval. The project is working on NEPA clearance and is categorically excluded from other NEPA analysis.

The project is currently in the Project Design stage, which will conclude in 2018. Service is expected to start in 2019-2020 after a project construction phase.

Member Question (Q): A member asked if there any concerns about a potential holdup of the TIGER grant.

Response (R): Chris answered that the TIGER grant was marked as an FY2016 project, and all Trump administration changes have been to FY2017-2018 projects. Therefore, the team does not expect any holdup to this TIGER grant.

Michael reviewed the project schedule, which is currently at the beginning of the project design phase. Three open houses were held in March. The 35 percent preliminary design phase will run from March to October, 2017. This involves planning station infrastructure, local bus service recommendations, and review of project elements such as Transit Signal Priority (TSP). Each month, CAC meetings will cover these topics. The goal is to include a diverse set of voices and reaching people where they already are.

The branding for the project, including the recent announcement of its new brand name, "Flash", has already begun. The public outreach phase will include community updates and longer-form community meetings to address specific issue areas. In April, the team will analyze the local bus service and make recommendations. In May, the environmental NEPA process will be completed. In June, employer and employee focus groups will occur, as well as bike and pedestrian improvements and TSP considerations. In July, the project team will conduct a live survey for the public and will present results back to the public through an open house, likely in the fall of 2017. The project team will conduct targeted efforts to ensure that diverse perspectives are collected.

4. Document Overview

a. CAC Program Plan

Michael reviewed the CAC Program Plan. There are four upcoming meetings scheduled, and he reviewed the topics for each. In May, the meeting will cover station siting and architecture. In June, the meeting will cover bike and pedestrian accommodations, TSP, and environmental documentation. The August meeting will examine the BRT operations plan and recommendations for local bus service. Each meeting will provide ample time for comments from CAC. The project team will also host community meetings throughout this phase to collect public feedback. The final CAC meeting for this phase will cover topics that have not been captured in other meetings. He noted that this is the CAC agenda during the preliminary design phase, and is not the end of the CAC schedule.

Q: A member asked about the station siting conversation in Meeting #11 in May. The member requested that the project team address the three BRT corridors that will cross US 29, discussing how the systems will work together (specifically at Randolph Road, New Hampshire Avenue, and University Boulevard). The member asked if the public will have a chance to provide feedback on the proposed local bus service changes.

R: Josh Diamond, service planner, responded that the team is currently looking through data to understand market conditions and existing service for WMATA and Ride On, and the next step will be to collect individual stories of transit riders. The team will use this information to make service better for people who want to use it, making all transit in the area better. Michael noted that in May-August, the team will present recommendations.

Chris asked Michael to clarify the timeline. This section of the project is for preliminary design, and that will be completed in September (not the entire project). Michael requested that members email the team their questions and comments, and said the team will be very responsive.

Q: A member asked how this system will work with other developments in the eastern part of the county, including the hospital, White Oak, and the expansion of the FDA. The member commented that the hospital doesn't exist today, White Oak doesn't exist, and the FDA plans to add 6,000 employees, and these are considerations that will not come out of conversations with current employers. Many employers may already have their own bus or shuttle systems for their employees, and those systems could be converted to BRT traffic.

R: Michael noted that this happens in DC when bus lines replace east-west shuttles and riders switch to the available bus lines.

C: The member suggested discussing shuttles with existing major employers.

C: One member commented that the project team should work with Dr. Ellie Giles of Worksource Montgomery. She currently works to connect employers and employees. He suggests asking both employers and employees about what they need to get to work. Dr. Giles works directly with employers and employees, and the member thinks this connection would be beneficial.

C: A member commented that he thinks the project will be at 2040 numbers far earlier than predicted, and the project will therefore need additional vehicles much sooner than anticipated.

R: Michael commented that the more realistic feedback that the team receives from the public, the more the team will be able to plan services effectively.

b. Public Involvement Plan (PIP)

Michael reviewed the draft Public Involvement Plan. The overarching goal of the public involvement plan is to educate the public and engage stakeholders to collect meaningful feedback. The project team will engage the public regularly using a variety of tactics. This phase will span from March-October.

The team will send out monthly newsletters and is refining the listserv for this purpose. The team will also send out special mailings.

C: A member commented that civic groups should be listed in the presentation slide.

R: Michael affirmed that it should be listed there, and the team will update the slide.

The project team will conduct in-person outreach including tabling and other in-person meetings. The team will sign up for as many community events as possible.

C: A member pointed out that Springbrook High School should be listed in the outreach plan, as well as other umbrella groups that are on both sides of US 29, rather than only those groups that are directly on the corridor. Feeder communities include New Hampshire and Randolph Road. The member commented that these are all feeder communities of the corridor, including communities that are two miles west and east of the corridor, rather than communities that are only 100 feet off the corridor. The member would like to see the project team branch out with their outreach efforts.

R: Michael affirmed that the project team is interested in engaging these communities, and that the list of groups in the PowerPoint is not exhaustive.

C: A member commented that the Planning Board has a tool that the team can use to show civic associations by area.

R: Michael affirmed that we will follow up with this and will provide opportunities for these groups in these areas.

Q: A member asked if the team plans to reach out to other community service organizations including rotary clubs, Knights of Columbus, and Lions' Clubs.

R: Michael noted that these are recognized in the full plan, including other advocacy groups.

The outreach team will conduct pop-up events, which include distributed material and targeted surveys, with giveaways and incentives for participation. The project team hosted three open houses in March, which were held at key locations along corridor. The open houses covered program details, the definition of BRT, what the project corridor looks like, a trade-off activity, station design, and the Public Involvement Plan in a general way. The open houses had a total of 190 attendees and the team received 90 comment cards, which will be integrated into the project design as appropriate. A virtual open house is available online for anyone who was unable to attend the open house in person.

Michael reviewed the tradeoff activity results from the US 29 open houses in March. In general, residents prefer a faster transit trip. They prefer the bus to come more often as opposed to a shorter walk to bus stops as well as a more direct trip with less transfers. However, answers were split between preferring peak hour services versus off-peak services, indicating a strong demand throughout the day.

C: A member commented that it appears that residents would like to use the service both to commute to work and to travel other places at other times of day.

Michael showed the results from the Word Cloud activity from the US 29 open houses. The general takeaway is that people often want to share their perspective and concerns more than they would like

to answer the question at hand. However, it is apparent that residents celebrate the diversity in Montgomery County and that sustainability is important. In addition, residents acknowledge that there is an aging population that will need transit service in the future. In addition, some residents expressed concern about expense and quality of the project.

Michael reviewed the upcoming events. Later in the summer, the project team will conduct a survey, analyze the feedback, share it with the CAC, and incorporate it into the project design.

5. Next Steps

Michael reviewed next steps. The CAC Meeting #11 will be held the weeks of May 15th and 22nd, 2017. Michael explained that he will send out an assignment to CAC members to look at station locations.

6. Questions

C: A member commented that the question he gets most is “What is BRT?”. Most people have no idea what that means. He feels that online resources and presentations don’t have enough graphics that allow the public to identify what the project is about. He feels that the graphics on the Get On Board website are not realistic enough. He feels that if the team would like to connect with diverse populations, it is important to use more graphics.

R: Michael responded that this also came up in the open houses. However, the team will make sure to provide this during the preliminary design phase, particularly with station siting and architecture.

C: The member commented that the project is being fast-tracked, so it is important to start helping the community visualize the project sooner rather than later. The member believes that seeing what a BRT vehicle looks like would be helpful.

R: Chris recognizes the need to make sure that we are speaking to the public in an accessible way, rather than just speaking to the people who have been with the project for a long time. Michael recognizes the need to visualize BRT to the public, especially since it will not involve some visible elements such as land takes or separate lanes.

C: One member commented that he explains to people that the BRT system is similar to Metrorail, but has rubber tires rather than steel wheels. People often automatically assume that the BRT will be similar to a local bus, and he sees a need to change that mindset.

R: Michael agrees that because BRT will largely operate in mixed traffic, it is necessary to sell its other features.

C: The member believes in the importance of developing an elevator speech to explain to the public what BRT means in a quick way. He believes it would be effective to talk about the difference between BRT and a local bus.

C: A member comments that BRT should be pitched from a holistic standpoint.

Q: A member asked if the surveys will ask about the affordability of fares.

R: Michael answered that the current plan is to charge the same fare as the regular Ride On service, so the fare question is not relevant to the project. But it is a good idea to get a sense of the current journey that people take and how much they currently pay for their entire trip. MetroExtra service has a higher fare than what this project plans on using.

C: A member commented that consumers do not have a lot of say in fare setting, and he is concerned about affordability. This is an important piece of the promotion of the BRT.

C: Another member commented that it would be helpful to have a simple one-page sheet with graphics to explain the project. It should cover major topic areas.

R: Michael responded that they currently do have a one-page sheet, and the team would love to receive feedback on it. The whole "Get on Board BRT" program's purpose is to promote the BRT as a concept, rather than promoting an individual corridor. That program began in November, and the project is now getting into the details of this corridor. Darcy Buckley from MCDOT also commented that they have other brochures in color, FastFact sheets, and a project page. Darcy will email these to the CAC members to get feedback.

C: The member would like the outreach one-pager to describe the project from a user standpoint, rather than an implementation standpoint.

C: A member commented on the demographics of the CAC membership, and how these do not reflect the ridership. How is it possible to get this demographic in and collect their thoughts and feedback?

R: Michael responded that during this public outreach phase, the project team will provide information at pop up events, use census data to identify underrepresented and underserved populations, and target events based on geospatial analysis, all with the purpose of meeting people where they are at, rather than asking them to come to us. It will be possible to provide language interpretation when needed.

Q: A member asked if the team uses the services of the outreach coordinators for the County for immigrant and minority populations. The member recommended using focus group meetings rather than pop up events, especially since several languages may need to be interpreted. These populations are the current riders, and it is important to get their input.

C: A member suggested doing outreach through the community and thought the project team could contact the County's faith-based coordinator, as well as local community organizations.

R: Michael responded that working with community based organizations is a good way to conduct outreach to these populations. Foursquare ITP has previously created a plan for Metro that incorporated promotion in ethnic newspapers and in languages other than English. The purpose of this approach is to reach as many people as possible.

Q: A member asked if the team will conduct outreach to schools.

R: Michael answered that yes, in the past, the team has used take-home strategies included with report cards and backpacks to do outreach to schools.

C: A member commented that the civic association members would like an attention-grabbing informational handout that is not too lengthy. It could, for example, include four slides to post, email, or disseminate. It should be short and succinct while explaining the project.

C: A member requested that information that is disseminated should consider communities that don't have a feeder bus and are not within walking distance to the BRT, but who may still see the project.

C: A guest commented that he rode the Z6 recently and noted that the shortcomings of local buses include lengthy wait times while wheelchairs or bikes load; more than a dozen people getting on the bus at a time; and hitting red lights. An informative handout could highlight the differences between a local bus and BRT.

R: Michael affirmed that these features will make the service better and improve on-time performance.

C: A guest mentioned that she was not allowed to substitute for another member during this meeting, and would like to meet with presenters separately after the meeting to review her questions.

R: Presenters expressed their willingness to do so, and did meet with her after the meeting formally adjourned.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at approximately 8:15pm.