

Greater Colesville Citizens Association

PO Box 4087
Colesville, MD 20914
September 27, 2023

Montgomery County Council
Attn: President Evan Glass
100 Maryland Ave
Rockville, MD 20850

Re: Testimony on Fairland Briggs Chaney Master Plan

Dear Council President Glass:

The Greater Colesville Citizens Association (GCCA) supports the recommendations in the Planning Board draft with modifications, as noted below.

The plan jumps between master plan boundaries and study area boundaries in section 2D (pages 13-33), which is in effect comparing apples and oranges. Data needs to be provided for both areas since the conclusions will be substantially different. The Master Plan should not try to exist in isolation to the study area. Zoning and services within the overall study area must be considered when making recommendations, especially relative to housing, grocery stores, employment, and transportation. The Burtonsville and Life Science Centers (including Viva White Oak and on-going development) must be considered.

GCCA doesn't believe that many of the property owners will want to change the activities they are currently performing on their properties, especially religious institutions, senior housing facilities and government facilities. On one hand, the plan encourages more senior housing (page 45, para 3) but on the other hand proposes the elimination of three existing senior housing developments (via rezoning). We can foresee that the nature of some businesses will evolve over time (but not close) and ask that the master plan not preclude that evolution. This is especially true for auto dealers as the number of Electric Vehicles increases. Detailed comments are included in Attachment 1.

The county must fund and implement good public transportation, especially BRT/Flash in order to achieve the plan visions of equitable, economically healthy, environmental resilience and complete communities. To achieve these visions, good public transportation is a must since many existing residents are low income and have at most one car. This master plan and other existing current plans/planning efforts are striving to provide such a service but are falling short, largely because they fail to look at the big picture and consider how the different components need to work together. Our proposed solution as to how to integrate the various BRT components is illustrated in the two figures below for Eastern Montgomery County. In the top diagram, new BRT stations and BRT routing proposed by the draft plan on US29 should be placed and instead use Briggs Chaney Rd and Old Columbia Pike. Attachment 2 contains data that shows what the result will be without integration. The key is to provide as many one-seat rides as possible in this area between locations where a large percentage of people live, work, and visit.

Attachment 1 – Detailed Comments

1. **Page 17, 2.D.4.** The text indicates that the area grew rapidly in the 1980s and 1990's. That is true for the 1980s but the area was placed in moratorium before the decade was out. If memory is correct, it was 1986/7. A Growth Policy Report we found shows no remaining growth capacity in 1989. Traffic congestion has been a major concern for Eastern Montgomery County residents, especially in the 1980-2010 period. The Trip Reduction amendment to the 1981 master plan was approved at the end of the 1980s. The major topic for the 1997 Master Plan was the type and location of new development in order to avoid increasing congestion further. **This draft plan fails to address this concern.** The traffic congestion occurred in part because the county failed to implement the transit serviceability envisioned in the 1981 Master Plan. The implement of BRT within the last few years is finally a start toward providing the needed transit service.
2. **MCPS Boundaries.** When looking at the Maps 7-9 on page 26, one can observe that many MCPS school service areas are not local. We note that the Pedestrian Master Plan is striving to increase the percentage of students who walk or bike to school. To achieve that goal and reduce the amount of time (and cost) spent traveling to school, the school boundaries need to be redrawn. MCPS had conducted a study before the pandemic that showed the need to redraw boundaries and now is the time to undertake that detailed investigation – for the entire consortium.
3. **Page 35 and 43-45, Affordable Housing.** The statement in the plan states that there were discriminatory housing polices in the area, which is flat wrong. The Eastern Montgomery County has an over concentration of low-income housing, most of which is market rate. The draft plan states that the area needs more regulated affordable housing. We view that regulated and market rate affordable housing provide the same benefit to the public and therefore the plan should not distinguish between them. The over concentration of affordable housing has led to a number of social ills, including higher crime, poor investment in schools and other public infrastructure, and dumping undesirable facilities, chief of which was the WSSC composting facility, which economically depressed the area for decades. Other than MPDUs, more affordable housing should be discouraged.
4. **Page 43, para 3 and pages 71-107– Activity Centers.** The draft plan designation of Activity Centers is not in keeping with Thrive in that some of them are too small to create a complete community and as such need to be adjusted. Thrive defines four levels of activity centers: Large, Medium, Smaller and Village/Neighborhood. Many areas within the county that have retail and/or commercial were not designated as an activity center in Thrive. This master plan is striving to define all commercial areas as activity centers. Within Thrive, White Oak, Burtonsville, and Olney are examples of medium centers while Aspen Hill, Hillandale, and Montgomery Village are examples of small centers. Ashton, Colesville, and Cloverly are nearby examples of Neighborhood Centers.

The draft master plan applies those terms to the following areas:

Old Columbia and Briggs Chaney (proposed as a neighborhood center, page 73). This area consists of one small shopping center which is much smaller than the three neighborhood examples above and should not be labeled as an activity center. Rather, it should be part of the Briggs Chaney Activity Center.

Old Columbia Pike and Fairland (proposed as neighborhood center, page 77). This is smaller than even the Old Columbia and Briggs Chaney area that consists of two gas stations, and several small

businesses. Therefore, it should not be labeled as an activity center. Prior studies have concluded that it does not justify a BRT station.

Columbia Pike/Musgrove (proposed as a neighborhood center, page 81). This primarily consists of the two Verizon properties. If actually redeveloped, it might be classified as a neighborhood center, like Colesville and Burtonsville. Rather, this area should be combined with the Old Columbia Pike/E. Randolph Center.

Old Columbia/US29 and East Randolph Rd (proposed as a medium center, page 86). This area consists of one gas station, a handful of very small retail stores, Adventist HQ and a planned mixed use development. This is similar in size to Neighborhood centers and thus should be assigned as a Neighborhood Center. It is not reasonable to assume the redevelopment of the Adventist HQ, four churches or senior housing facility. (Note that the proposed boundaries are not consistent between diagrams.) If combined with the Verizon area, this probably justifies a medium designation, especially since it would have three BRT stations. The southern residential district should be included in this activity center (page 106). In order to provide complete communities to density developed areas, they need to be part of the activity center.

Briggs Chaney North (proposed as a medium, page 95) and Briggs Chaney South (proposed as medium, page 101). These two areas and the proposed Old Columbia and Briggs Chaney Rd center should be combined into a single center since they are adjacent to each other. The northern residential district should also be included in this activity center (page 106). Collectively it could be classified as a medium, like White Oak or Olney. It would also have four BRT stations.

5. **Page 43, para 7.** Drive-throughs for commercial businesses should not be discouraged since we need to encourage businesses to locate in eastern county and they are what the public demands. Allowing them will also reduce the need for parking, an environmental benefit.
6. **Page 46 Map 1 and page 87 - Recommendation 3.C.2.** Downtown street types would apply to downtown areas with high-rises on both sides of the road, such as downtown Bethesda, Wheaton, Downtown Silver Spring . Old Columbia Pike from E. Randolph Rd to Tech Rd should never be considered a downtown street; rather it is an area connector. Town Center street types would apply only to the Briggs Chaney activity center.
7. **Page 47, para 4.** GCCA agrees with removing the proposal for additional grade-separated interchanges. Industrial Parkway has always been a part of the Tech Rd Interchange and therefore should not be built. The existing interchanges must be retained. The state doesn't have the funds needed to build these interchanges and keeping them in the plan just delays approval of development plans. If an interchange were to be built, it is needed within the next three years to support Viva White Oak.
8. **Page 47. Para 6 and 8.** The lane width in existing at-grade intersections needs to be retained for safety reasons. Also, the existing number of lanes, including left-turn lanes, must be maintained for safety reasons and to avoid increasing congestion.
9. **Page 48, para 10.** GCCA questions whether it is possible to eliminate driveways on the more major roads, since there is no alternate location for them, except in the event that small properties are assembled into a larger one.
10. **Page 49, Table 5.** GCCA strongly opposes reducing the speed limit on East Randolph Rd, Old Columbia Pike to 25 mph. These are main through streets and reducing the speed limit, if followed

will just increase congestion. The lower the speed limit, the lower the capacity and thus the sooner congestion will occur. There is already too much congestion in the area.

11. **Page 61. Item 5.** We question the need for another elementary school. MCPS has been modernizing buildings and at the same time expanding them. Also, a new Elementary School is slated for Viva White Oak.
12. **Page 116. School Capacity.** The plan indicates that high school and middle school capacity should be adequate but an additional elementary school might be needed. That assertion is not correct when one considers other planned development outside the master plan area but within the study area that will feed into these same schools. It also ignores the recommendation in the White Oak Science Gateway Master Plan to add an elementary school in Viva White Oak.

Appendix 2, BRT

Improvements are needed primarily within the activity centers for walkers and bikers. People who will use them will primarily access public transportation to travel between centers.

Public transit consists of local bus (i.e., Ride On and MetroBus) and Flash (BRT). The primary purpose of local bus is to collect people from where they live, work, shop or play and get them to Flash stations. There is not sufficient housing, retail, or commercial use to justify the proposed provision of Flash along Roby Rd and Greencastle. We agree that transit service improvements are needed on these roads but it needs to be local bus.

The Flash network needs to be considered in a much larger geographic area than just this Master Plan. It must consider the development slated for the White Oak Science Gateway Master Plan and service to Burtonsville and travel to Howard County. Some people residing in the two residential areas in this Fairland Master Plan will want to access retail in the Briggs Chaney Shopping Center and businesses (Auto dealers, Verizon, and Adventist HQ). More than that they will want to access the Life Science and White Oak centers. This includes large employers in Viva White Oak, White Oak Medical Center, Montgomery College, FDA, two large shopping centers and a large number of office buildings. Some people within the White Oak Center and LifeSci Center (Viva is projected to add 5000 housing units) will want to access retail facilities, auto dealers, gov't center, Paint Branch High School and recreation center in Briggs Chaney area. The master planned BRT service does a poor job providing the needed connectivity and thus must be modified.

The proposed Flash configuration integrates four BRT corridors. (The US29 corridor is actually two: Blue from Burtonsville and Orange from Briggs Chaney.) The four corridors are US29 Blue and Orange, Randolph Road and New Hampshire Ave. The proposed configuration is illustrated in Figure 1 and consists of the following:

- The Blue Line from Burtonsville is unchanged within Montgomery County but is extended to Howard County. DOT indicates an extension to Maple Lawn is less than two years away. The provision of a dedicated lane along US29 is needed to provide truly rapid service.
- Orange Line from Briggs Chaney should use Old Columbia Pike to the Tech Road Station for two reasons. The first reason is to provide good transit to the two activity centers (see above). It will pick up four additional stations: Shopping Center/Auto Park, Old Columbia Rd/Briggs Chaney Rd (shopping, housing, and Paint Branch HS), Verizon (if used or redeveloped – it looks empty now), and Adventist HQ/new mixed-use development. The second reason is to stop at the US29 Tech

Rd BRT station (to support transfers to/from Blue Line) and then be able to turn east on Tech Rd. If US29 continues to be used, the BRT vehicle will not be able to undertake both actions.

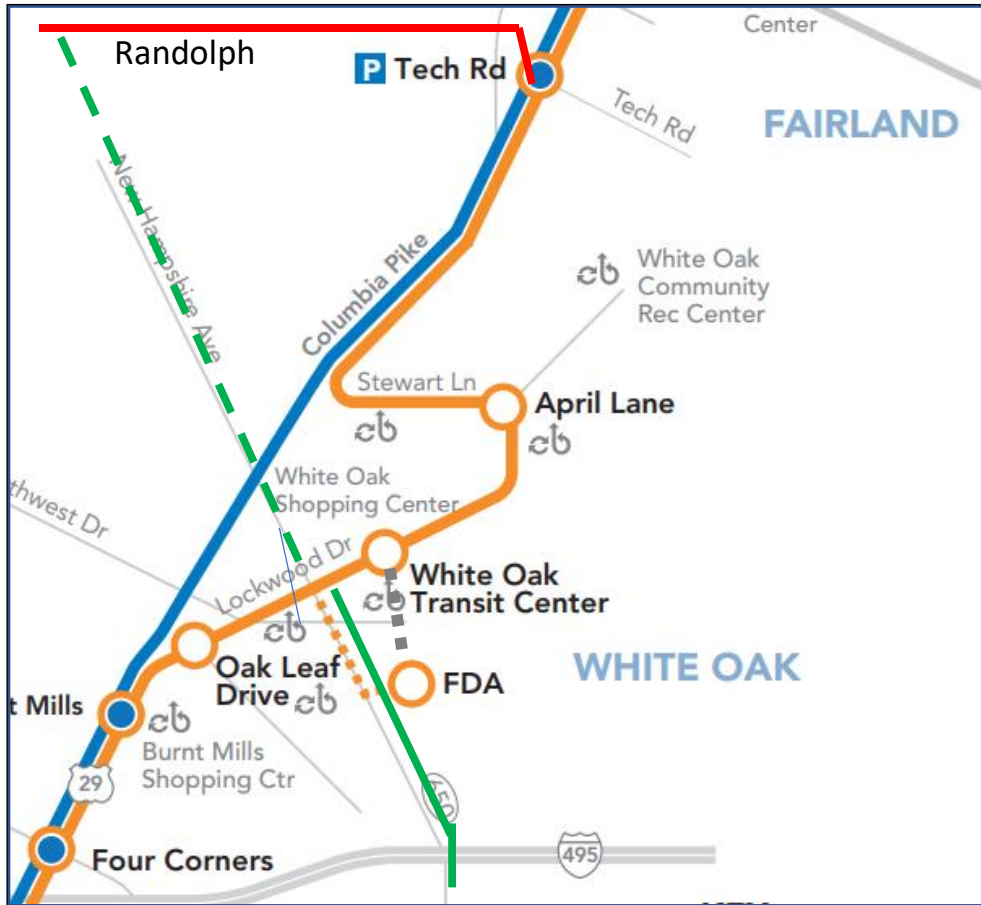
- Orange Line is then routed through Life Science Activity Center rather than Stewart Ln. It picks up new stations at Montgomery College (New Apartment development, hotel/restaurants, businesses), WOMC (Businesses, shopping center, Riderwood), and Viva White Oak (12M sq ft of development).
- Orange Line crosses Paint Branch from Viva to WO Rec Ctr (new station) and picks up existing stations in the White Oak Activity Center. The connection to FDA will go directly from the White Oak Station. When the White Oak Shopping Center redevelops (e.g., Sears), the BRT station will be moved from Lockwood into that center and BRT routing will be changed to use the frontage road along US29 (these will not affect other stations.)
- Randolph Rd Corridor (red) will follow the above orange routing and connect with the New Hampshire Ave (Green) Corridor at the FDA station, effectively becoming a single red line.

The three diagrams and tables following show BRT routes under three scenarios: existing Transit Master Plan; that Plan as modified by the White Oak Science Gateway Master Plan; and the recommended plan. The recommended plan is in keeping with the vision of those master plans but the details are changed. The attachment shows where BRT connectivity would exist and the number of different BRT vehicles (i.e., seats) that would need to be used between location pairs. The goal is to keep the number of seats as low as possible. The charts show connectivity between each of the 17 origination/destination pairs. The destinations include the 13 identified stations within the four activity centers (Life Sci, White Oak, Fairland, Briggs Chaney) and the five roads outside those centers (US29 North, US29 southwest, New Hampshire southeast, E. Randolph and Cherry Hill). New Hampshire Ave north of White Oak would have good local bus rather than BRT to Colesville and the BRT station there.

The following table tabulates the number of routes (seats) required – not available, one, two or three.

	MP	MP+VIVA	Recommended
One	21	22	117
Two	13	19	19
Three	2	3	0
None	117	109	17
Total	153	153	153

Master Plan Configuration (with US29 As Built)



Blue: US29 Orange: Briggs Chaney Green: New Hampshire south (Hillandale) Red: E Randolph Rd west.

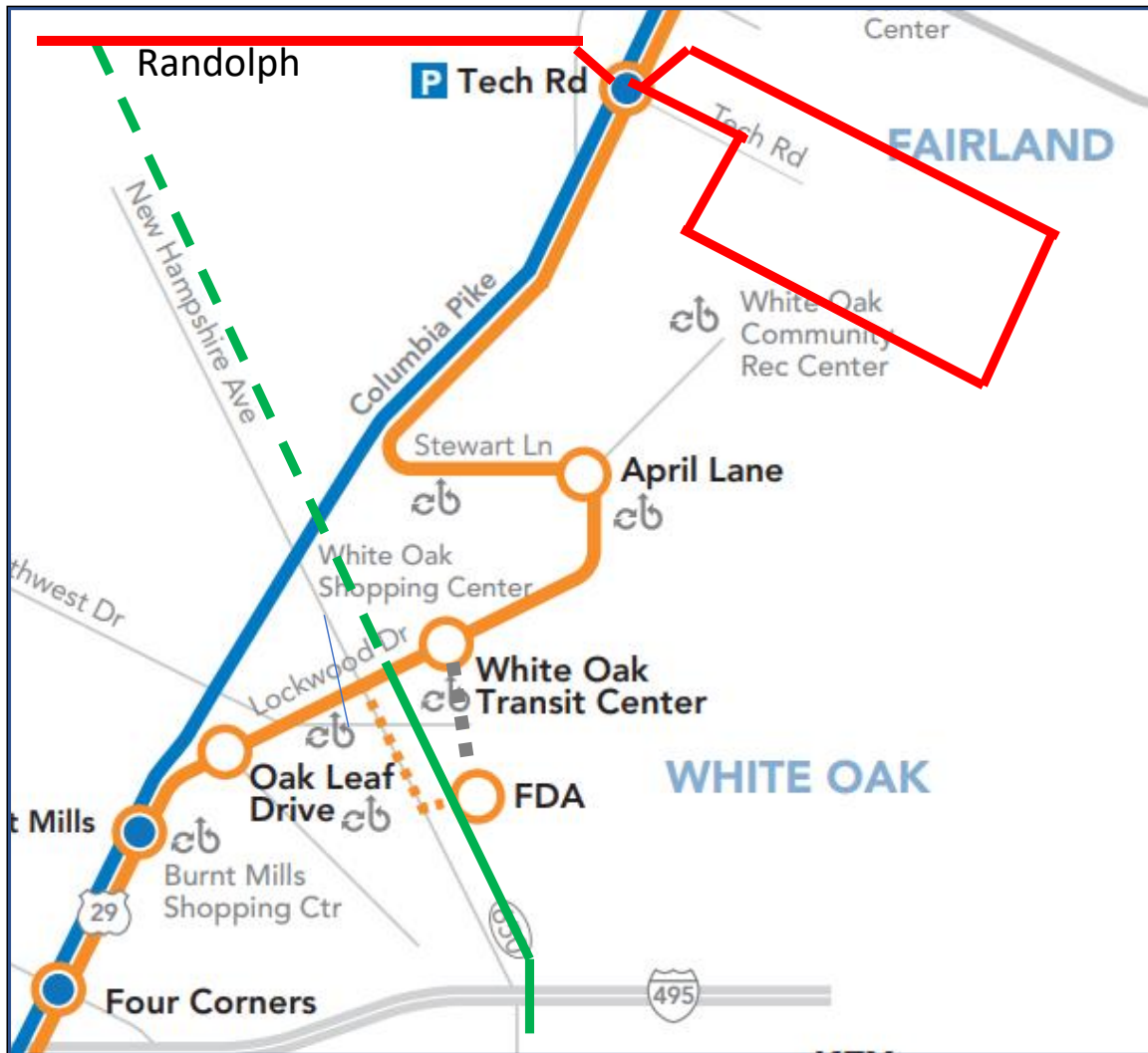
The revised BRT routing assumes Viva White Oak will be built, which looks very likely. Rather than replace the bridge across the Paint Branch on Old Columbia, a new crossing would be provided between Viva and Recreation Center. The county needs to provide funding to study this crossing and study BRT on Randolph Rd and as shown above.

Master Plan Configuration Connectivity Matrix (From/To)

		Tech Rd Station	Viva	MC	WOMC	Stewart Ln	WO Shop ctr	FDA	WO Rec Ctr	E County Rec	Auto Pk	HS	Verizon	Adv HQ	North	SE	SW	West	East	
Life Sci Ctr	Tech Rd Station																			
Life Sci Ctr	Viva	Yellow																		
Life Sci Ctr	M College	Yellow	Yellow																	
Life Sci Ctr	WOMC	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow																
WO Ctr	Stewart Ln	Oran			Yellow															
WO Ctr	WO Shop Ctr	Oran				Oran														
WO Ctr	FDA	Oran				Oran	Oran													
WO Ctr	WO Rec Ctr	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow												
Briggs Ctr	Rec/Castle	Oran				Oran	Oran	Oran	Yellow											
Briggs Ctr	Shop ctr/Auto Pk	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow										
Briggs Ctr	Old Columbia/HS	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow									
Briggs Ctr	Verizon	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow								
Briggs Ctr	Adv HQ/	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow							
North	Burtonsville/Maple Lawn	Blue				Blue	Blue & Oran	Blue & Oran		Blue & Oran				Yellow						
SE	Hillandale/DC/Langlely/Purple	Green & Oran				Green & Oran	Green	Green		Green & Oran				Yellow	Red & Green & Oran					
SW	Four Corners/SS	Blue				Oran	Oran	Oran		Oran				Yellow	Blue	Green & Blue				
West	Colesville/Glenmont	Red				Red & Oran*	Red & Oran*	Red & Oran*		Red & Oran*				Yellow	Red & Blue	Red & Oran & Green*	Red & Blue			
East	PG County	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow

Yellow: No BRT Connection
 Clear: One BRT Vehicle Ride
 Blue: Two BRT Vehicle Ride
 Red: Three BRT Vehicle Ride

Master Plan Configuration Plus Viva White Oak



Blue: US29 Orange: Briggs Chaney Green: New Hampshire south (Hillandale) Red: E Randolph Rd west & Viva

Recommended Configuration

