



East County Citizens Advisory Board

January 8, 2021

The Honorable Marc Elrich
County Executive
Executive Office Building
101 Monroe Street, 2nd Floor
Rockville, Maryland 20850

Dear Mr. Elrich,

On behalf of the East County Citizens Advisory Board (ECCAB), I would like to thank you for your persistent leadership and support of Bus Rapid Transit in Montgomery County, in particular the US 29 Flash project, which started operation last month.

That being said, running BRT in mixed traffic is not a viable long-term solution to solving the pressing challenges of climate change, congestion, high cost of living, and social/racial equity. Therefore, the ECCAB requests that you urgently take bold steps to fully achieve your vision to provide BRT with **dedicated lanes** that provide commuters with a faster, safer, more reliable, and less expensive alternative to driving.

Although this long-anticipated BRT service on US 29 will be valuable lifeline for the 120,000 residents that reside within a half mile of the US 29 Flash stations—half of whom live in car-free or car-lite households¹—it is a well-known fact that the BRT vehicles are susceptible to congestion-related delays due to the lack of a dedicated transit lanes south of Tech Road. This limitation negates most, if not all, of the intended benefits of a rapid transit system. In an effort to address this shortcoming of the existing BRT service, MCDOT initiated the US 29 Mobility & Reliability Study to evaluate options for enhancing transit service along the corridor.

On October 14, ECCAB members held a committee meeting to review and discuss the findings of this study. MCDOT Project Manager Corey Pitts provided an overview of the project to the board. Afterwards, two members of the East County community, Sebastian Smoot and Dan Wilhelm, gave brief presentations highlighting their concerns about MCDOT's assumptions, approach, and conclusions (see attachment).

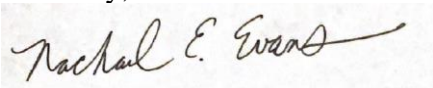
¹ "Car-lite" refers to households with access to only one car per family. Source of data: "Montgomery County US-29 BRT TIGER Discretionary Grant Application". MCDOT, 2016. page 6. "Twelve percent of households on the corridor do not have access to a car, and an additional 38 percent of households on the corridor only have access to one car." Available at https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/brt/Resources/Files/narrative_US29_TIGER_final.pdf

The ECCAB members agreed with many of Mr. Smoot's and Wilhelm's claims that the MCDOT study had several shortcomings that may have skewed the findings, using overly optimistic assumptions for the managed lane alternative and pessimistic assumptions for the median bus lane alternative. While we would like this study to be completed in an expeditious manner and see transit improvements implemented as soon as possible, we cannot support the study as it currently stands until our concerns are addressed. Therefore, our Board believes that the finalization of recommendations in the MCDOT Study should be placed on a brief hold. Moving forward, we recommend that the MCDOT study team coordinate with members of the community and Planning Department staff to address the areas of concern and determine if a better solution exists to enhancing BRT service in the corridor.

Furthermore, **we respectfully request your direct involvement** in some of these conversations, as your profound knowledge of BRT, innovative approach to problem-solving, and steadfast commitment to social/racial equity will prove extremely valuable in these discussions. East County needs your leadership to advocate for continued transit investment in our communities, especially our low-income, car-free, and car-lite neighborhoods.

We thank you again for your thoughtful consideration of the Board's comments regarding the US 29 Mobility & Reliability Study and appreciate your continued support.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Rachael E. Evans", written in dark ink on a light-colored background.

Rachael Evans
Chair, East County Citizens Advisory Board

cc:

Tom Hucker, Montgomery County Council President
Jewru Bandeh, Director, East County Regional Office
Christopher Conklin, Director MCDOT