



Martin O'Malley, Governor
Anthony Brown, Lt. Governor

State Highway Administration
Driven to Excel

John D. Porcari, Secretary
Neil J. Pedersen, Administrator

Maryland Department of Transportation

May 11, 2009

The Honorable Roger Berliner
Vice President, Montgomery County Council
6th Floor
100 Maryland Avenue
Rockville MD 20850

Dear Vice President Berliner:

Thank you for your letter regarding the State Highway Administration's (SHA) design proposals for intersection improvements connected with the expansion of the National Naval Medical Center (NNMC) in Bethesda. In particular, your letter urges SHA to reevaluate the plans in order to take a systematic approach to traffic congestion. It is my pleasure to respond to your concerns.

You are correct that SHA's current plans for the four intersections near NNMC have been developed to address the immediate projected increases in traffic from the expanded facility, which is expected to open in 2011. The improvements in the NNMC area are a small, but significant part of the total transportation effort that the Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) has supported in Montgomery County in the past and will, in the future, based on available resources.

In looking at multi-modal solutions related to Base Realignment And Closure (BRAC), MDOT is working with the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC), the Montgomery County Department of Transportation, the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA), the United States Navy, and the National Institutes of Health. At MDOT's request, WMATA is conducting a feasibility study of NNMC Metro Station access issues. The MDOT is also participating in WMATA's regional BRAC bus study. The MDOT staff has also met with M-NCPPC staff regarding both BRAC and the White Flint Sector Plan. Your suggestion about new Metro stations in the White Flint area would require considerable analysis; MDOT will discuss this suggestion further with both M-NCPPC and WMATA. To improve on the interagency/multi-modal planning that is underway, MDOT will establish an informal agency workgroup. For more information about multi-modal planning issues or MDOT agency coordination, please contact Mr. Andrew J. Scott, Special Assistant to the Secretary for Economic Development at MDOT. Mr. Scott can be reached at 410-865-1095 or via email at ascott@mdot.state.md.us.

My telephone number/toll-free number is 410-545-0400 or 1-800-206-0770

Maryland Relay Service for Impaired Hearing or Speech: 1.800.735.2258 Statewide Toll Free

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Your letter also suggests improved pedestrian and bicycle facilities, such as accessible crossings, sidewalks, on-road bicycle lanes, and shared-use paths. To the extent possible, the proposed improvements incorporate all of those accommodations. The SHA is committed to make every effort to accommodate all travelers, including pedestrians, cyclists, transit users, and drivers of passenger and commercial vehicles. The reconstruction of all four of the intersections will include the installation of both Accessible Pedestrian Signals (APS) and Countdown Pedestrian Signals (CPS), as well as the reconstruction of pedestrian ramps to ensure that they comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The APS devices emit a periodic clicking sound that helps visually impaired individuals to locate and navigate crosswalks. The CPS devices display the remaining seconds that a pedestrian has in which to finish crossing the road. All existing sidewalks will be maintained, and all that are currently less than five feet wide will be widened to at least five feet.

The right-turn channelization island on the southeast corner of MD 355 (Rockville Pike) and Cedar Lane does not comply with our current standards. The existing configuration does not align the crosswalk to the island as it does on the southwest corner, whereby pedestrians have a refuge area in which to change between the signal-controlled crossing and the free-flow crossing. The current design proposes to remove the right-turn channelization island on the southeast corner and convert this pedestrian movement into a fully signal-controlled crossing. While it is anticipated that right turns on red will be permitted, we are in the process of reviewing the turning radii at each intersection to see if they can be reduced. This could simultaneously reduce the crossing distance as well as the speeds of motorists who are performing right turns.

Our statewide standard defines the pedestrian crossing speed as three and one-half feet per second, which was recently reduced from four feet per second. This speed, which is factored into our calculations for signal timing, allots the time necessary for a pedestrian to cross the intersection. All impacted signals will be required to abide by this standard. A six-foot-wide, monolithic, concrete median is also being constructed, which will provide a refuge for pedestrians who are unable to complete the crossing.

Accommodations for cyclists are also included in the proposed improvements. The existing bike path that runs along the west side of MD 355 on the National Institutes of Health (NIH) property will be maintained. Where the existing path is eight feet or less in width, it will be widened to 10 feet. An existing path runs along the north side of Cedar Lane. All of the widening in this area is on the south side of Cedar Lane; thus, that path will not be impacted.

As for on-road bicycle lanes, the cost and right-of-way impacts of the proposed improvements, without wider outside lanes, are already considerable. The SHA did investigate what the impacts would be, if we widened the roadway to accommodate the additional BRAC-related traffic and cyclists. Given the purpose and need of these projects, to mitigate BRAC traffic and not to address long-term corridor issues, we concluded that the impacts would be too costly. The SHA does, however, recognize the need to accommodate cyclists, as much as feasibly possible, within the constraints we have. The Bicycle Level of Comfort (BLOC) rating is being improved for all roadways being improved under these projects. Given the extremely constrained right-of-way, this is being accomplished primarily through reductions in travel lane widths. Given the low-posted speed limit and low percentage of truck traffic, we are adopting a 10-foot minimum lane width within our limits of work. This minimum will allow a wider outside lane for limited bicycle accommodations. This lane reduction will only occur within the limits of work for each intersection.

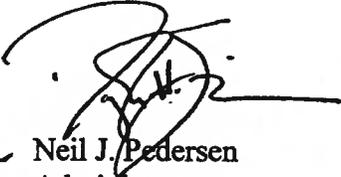
The SHA is aware of Montgomery County's Master Plan and the desire for a multiuse path between MD 355 and MD 187 (Old Georgetown Road) and improvements and additional connectivity of the Trolley Trail. Our policy is to construct Master Plan amenities, such as multiuse paths, if we are able to obtain right-of-way from willing property owners. Widening and/or constructing portions of the Trolley Trail would require right-of-way from NIH and others. The NIH has expressed to us that it does not support these intersection improvements or any impacts to their property. The SHA is hereby requesting your assistance in garnering support, from NIH and other property owners that would be impacted by the trail, for more comprehensive improvements for the bicycle community. If NIH and other property owners support the trail and the additional right-of-way impacts, SHA will commit to their construction, budget allowing. However, cost estimates for these improvements exceed available funding.

The SHA intersection-improvement plans only address short-term congestion that is expected in 2011. We agree that a long-term, systematic approach, involving all stakeholders to reduce single-occupancy vehicles, is needed. Additional time and funding from all stakeholders will be required for that effort. In order to mitigate for BRAC-related traffic now, these short-term intersection improvements must move forward.

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Thank you again for your letter. If we may be of further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me or Ms. Barbara L. Solberg, Assistant Chief, Highway Design Division, SHA at 410-545-8830, toll-free 888-228-5003 or via email at bsolberg@sha.state.md.us.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Neil J. Pedersen", with a horizontal line extending to the right.

Neil J. Pedersen
Administrator

cc: Mr. Darrell B. Mobley, District Engineer, SHA
Ms. Barbara L. Solberg, Assistant Chief, Highway Design Division, SHA

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bcc: Mr. Gerald Cichy, BRAC Coordinator, Maryland Transit Administration (MTA) ✓
Mr. Bruce Gartner, Director of Policy and Governmental Affairs, MDOT, (electronic copy)
Mr. Martin L. Harris, State Legislative Officer, MDOT (electronic copy)
Ms. Colleen Johnson, Legislative Coordinator, Office of Policy and Governmental Affairs, MDOT (electronic copy)
Mr. Sean Massey, BRAC Coordinator, MDOT
Mr. Kirk G. McClelland, Director, Office of Highway Development, SHA
Ms. Caitlin Hughes Rayman, Assistant Secretary for Transportation Policy, MDOT (electronic copy)
Mr. Gregory Slater, Director of Planning & Preliminary Engineering, SHA
Mr. Paul Wiedefeld, Administrator, MTA
Dr. Richard Y. Woo, Ph.D., Director of Policy and Research, SHA