



Maryland Department of Transportation
The Secretary's Office

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August 10, 2012

The Honorable Chris Van Hollen
Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Suite 507
51 Monroe Street
Rockville MD 20850

Dear Congressman Van Hollen:

Thank you for your letter regarding the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) Intersection Improvement at MD 355 (Rockville Pike) and Cedar Lane. It is my pleasure to respond to you.

As you know, the project includes widening northbound MD 355 from Cedar Lane to north of Locust Hill Road. The intersection at MD 355 and Cedar Lane has operated at a failing condition, with a failing Level of Service (LOS F) during the PM peak hour for years. Travel time data collected in 2011, both before and after BRAC implementation, indicated travel times are and will remain excessive without the improvements.

The planned improvement has been separated into two construction contracts: Phases 1-3 and Phase 4. Phases 1-3 will widen southbound MD 355, northbound MD 355 south of the Cedar Lane intersection, Cedar Lane, and West Cedar Lane. Phase 4 will widen northbound MD 355 to extend the auxiliary lane to north of Locust Hill Road. Phase 4 is currently at the 30 percent design stage. It provides a relatively low-cost benefit compared to the other phases, and thus is the final phase. For the reasons stated below, SHA believes that phase 4 will provide tangible operational benefits for northbound traffic on MD 355 during the evening rush hour, and should remain under consideration pending further analysis. Meanwhile, SHA will continue to assess whether the operational benefits of Phase 4 are worth the cost of the project, and discuss the impacts to the community with those impacted the most.

Based on the Maryland State Highway Administration's (SHA) original traffic projections, the improvements associated with Phases 1-3 will likely reduce delays during the evening rush hour by 64 percent. Phase 4 improvements are projected to further reduce average delays during the evening rush hour by an additional 14 percent. Phase 4 will also provide additional merge distance for vehicles exiting the Walter Reed National Military Medical Center (WRNMMC), particularly if the signal at North Wood Road is deactivated during the evening rush hour. The current intersection operates in a failing mode during peak periods; that is, the number of vehicles queuing for the intersection exceeds the number that can pass the signal each cycle. Phase 1-3 improvements result in an intersection capacity that approximately equals the number of vehicles attempting to pass through. This situation is better, but results in intermittent failure for a variety of reasons (sun glare, rain). Phase 4 improvements are projected to bring the intersection into the lowest level of stable flow conditions. This represents acceptable traffic flow conditions to most drivers.

Traffic counts were conducted this year to compare SHA's traffic projections to actual post-BRAC traffic volumes. Based on these counts, SHA found that Phases 1-3 would achieve stable flow conditions during the evening rush hour, and Phase 4 would reduce delays by about eight percent, from 47.9 seconds per vehicle to 44.3 seconds per vehicle.

My telephone number is 410-865-1000
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7201 Corporate Center Drive, Hanover, Maryland 21076

SHA implemented a temporary signal to facilitate egress from WRNMMC, and a triple right-out movement, at the MD 355/North Wood Road intersection located approximately 650 feet south of the MD 355/Cedar Lane intersection to make the signal more efficient. The benefits of Phase 4 are related to the future operations at this intersection such that if the North Wood Road signal remains in place during the evening rush hour, the benefits of Phase 4 would be minimized. Be that as it may, this signal is currently causing significant backups along MD 355.

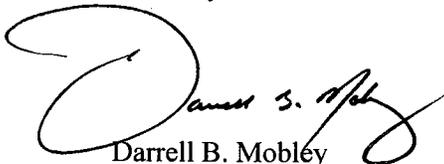
SHA's preferred alternative for this intersection is to construct a free right-turn lane for traffic exiting WRNMMC at North Wood Road, and deactivate the signal during the PM peak period. Deactivating the signal in the evening rush hour is projected to reduce delay for the heavy northbound through traffic by approximately 45 to 60 seconds per vehicle since there would no longer be a red light at North Wood Road. Traffic exiting WRNMMC would be able to turn into its own lane on northbound MD 355 and, theoretically, proceed without delay. However, if Phase 4 is not built, the new lane would end at Cedar Lane, and traffic heading north from WRNMMC would have to merge over one lane prior to the Cedar Lane intersection, reducing the efficiency of the intersection. Please note that determinations as to the signal's future operation during the evening rush hour will be contemplated by a Transportation Work Group consisting of the Montgomery County Department of Transportation, WRNMMC, National Institutes of Health, and SHA, and entail an extensive monitoring program.

In October 2011, SHA submitted to the Office of Economic Adjustment (OEA) the application for construction funds for the entire project, which bundled Phases 1-3 and Phase 4, and received pre-approval for use of OEA funds. SHA met with OEA on June 6, 2012 to discuss the possibility of unbundling Phase 4, which would allow for timely implementation of Phases 1-3 and the aforementioned analysis, design and community outreach related to Phase 4 to continue. SHA is currently awaiting guidance from OEA regarding the proposed project delivery approach. Meanwhile, SHA will continue to move forward with Phase 4 design and work through the NEPA process. To keep Phases 1-3 on schedule, SHA must receive NEPA approval and secure funding for the entire intersection.

Please know that SHA has been in close contact with the Locust Hill community throughout the design process. Another Public Outreach meeting was held on July 24, 2012 to provide project information and address community concerns. SHA will continue to closely coordinate the Phase 4 design with all stakeholders, including the Locust Hill Community.

Thank you, again, for your letter, and continued support of the Department's BRAC programming in the region. If you have any additional questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact Ms. Barbara L. Solberg, Chief, Highway Design Division, SHA at 410-545-8830, toll-free 1-888-228-5003 or via email at bsolberg@sha.state.md.us. Of course, you should feel free to contact me directly.

Sincerely,



Darrell B. Mobley
Acting Secretary

cc: Mr. Alex Wong, Office of Congressman Chris Van Hollen
Ms. Melinda B. Peters, Administrator, SHA
Ms. Barbara L. Solberg, Chief, Highway Design Division, SHA