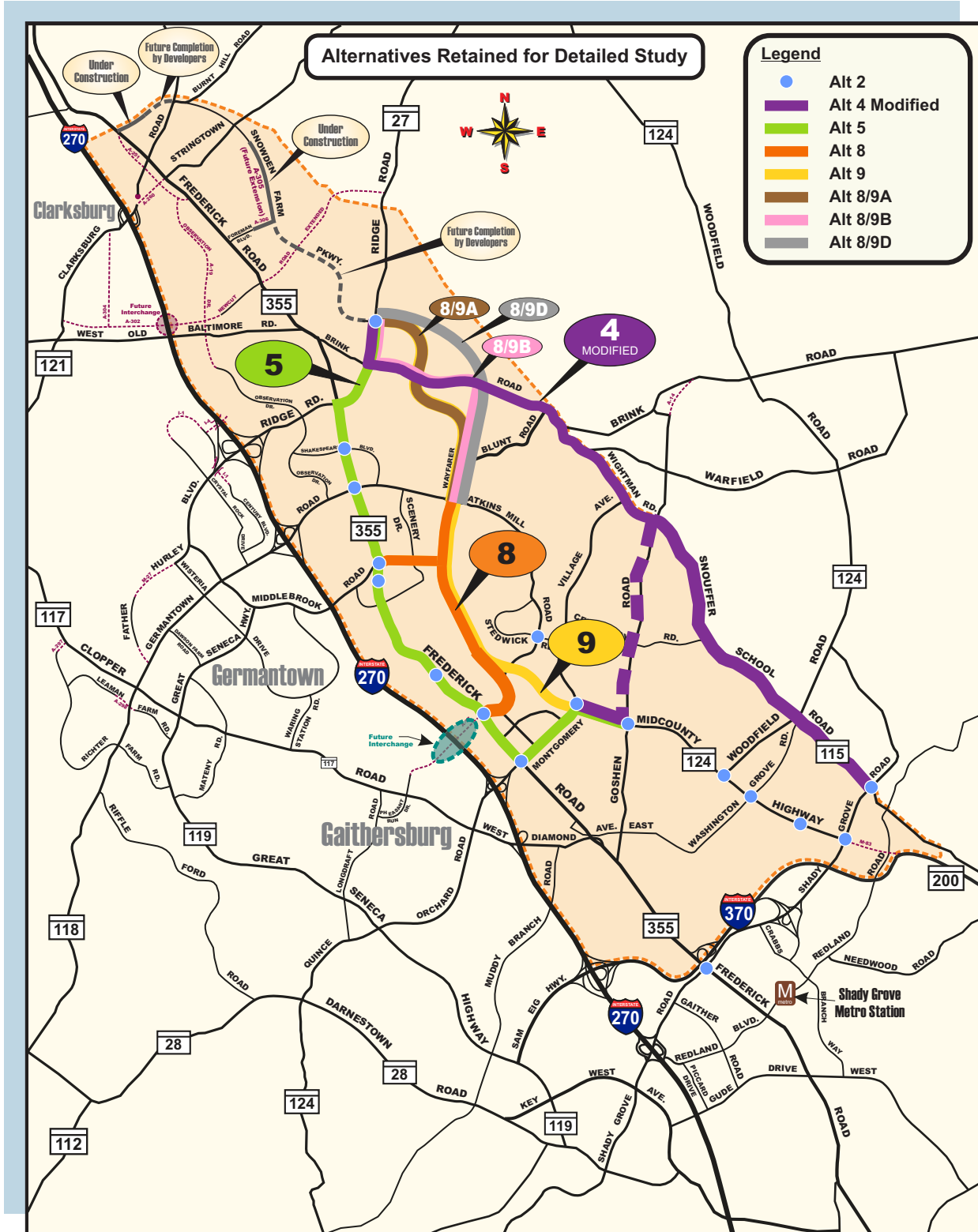


# SECTION I

## INTRODUCTION







## I. INTRODUCTION

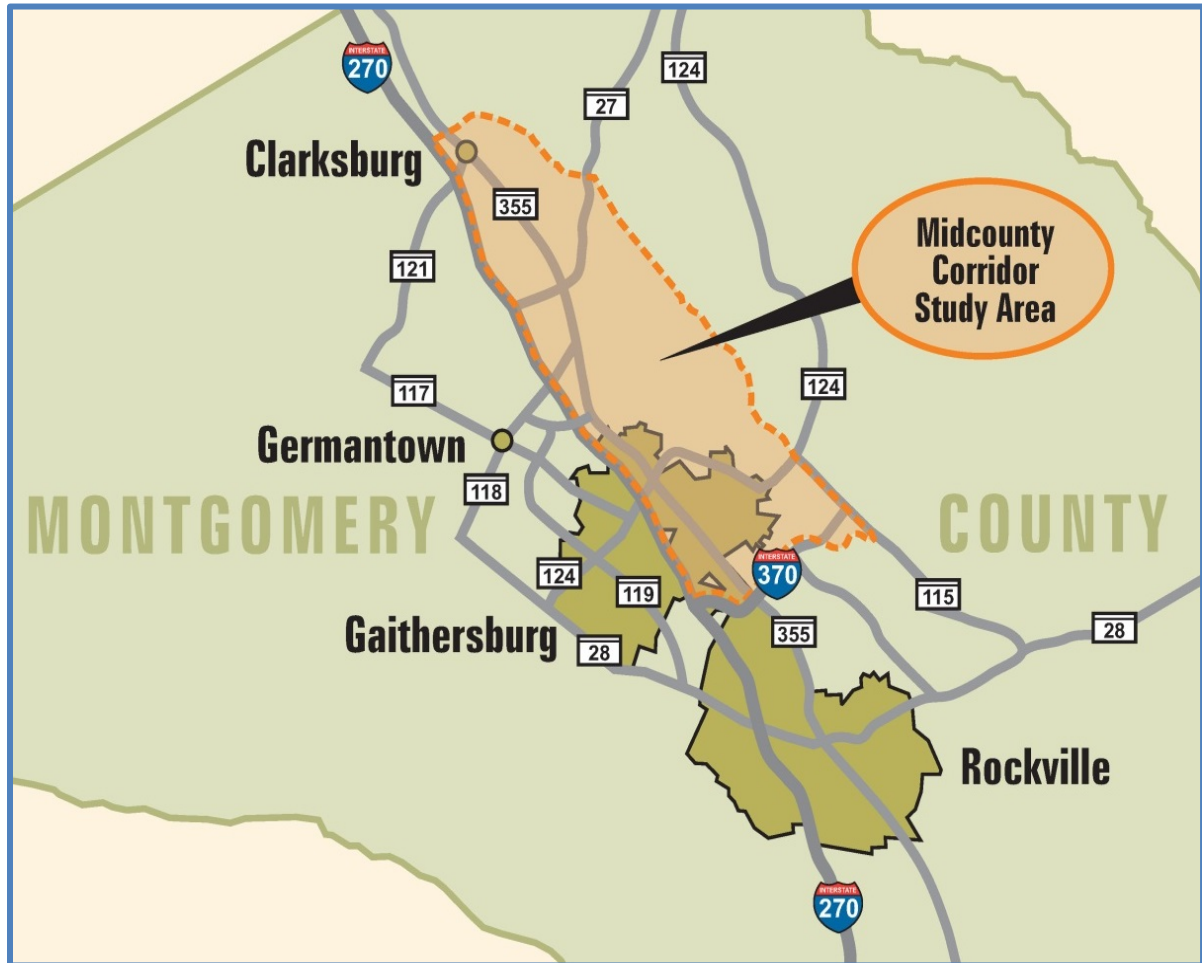
Since the 1960s, Midcounty Highway (M-83) has been an element of the transportation master plan for Montgomery County. It is proposed as an 8.7-mile controlled access, four to six-lane major highway from Ridge Road (MD 27) in Clarksburg to Redland Road in Derwood. In the 1980s, the Maryland State Highway Administration (SHA) conducted the *Maryland Route 355 Corridor Study*. This study concluded that improvements to MD 355 and a completed Midcounty Highway (M-83) would both be required in the next 10-15 years to provide access for existing and planned development east of I-270 in Germantown.

In 1986, MCDOT initiated the *Germantown-Montgomery Village Connector Study* that included preliminary engineering for the northern extension of Midcounty Highway from Montgomery Village Avenue (MD 124) to Ridge Road (MD 27) along the Master Plan alignment. The study was put on hold in 1992 due to fiscal constraints. As communities developed along the route, right-of-way was reserved for the Master Plan alignment through the County's planning process.

By 2000, SHA reconstructed the portion of MD 355 from Montgomery Village Avenue to Middlebrook Road to six lanes and the portion from Middlebrook Road to Ridge Road (MD 27) to four lanes.

In 2004, the Montgomery County Department of Transportation (MCDOT) initiated the Midcounty Corridor Study (MCS) to extend the Master Plan alignment of existing Midcounty Highway from Montgomery Village Avenue to Snowden Farm Parkway at Ridge Road. As it became clear that the potential impact to wetlands and streams may warrant a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) Individual Permit, which requires compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the study was expanded to include an analysis of eleven alternatives. **Figure I-1** depicts the study area for the project.

This project has been utilizing *Maryland's Streamlined Environmental and Regulatory Process* (the *Streamlined Process*, January 15, 2000) which was developed for projects that require NEPA documentation and Clean Water Act permits. The *Streamlined Process* is a collaborative process between the applicant and the environmental agencies whose permits and approvals are required to construct the project. The input from the environmental agencies is critical in the development of the project, providing predictability on key decisions in the process and allowing the MCDOT to develop an environmentally sustainable and permit-able project. Obtaining permits before final design ensures a sound investment of tax payer dollars. Additionally, throughout the study extensive public outreach has been conducted through newsletters, public meetings and hearings to help inform the public of the project status, to solicit feedback, collect suggestions, and address concerns.



**Figure I-1: Midcounty Corridor Study Area**

The USACE, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) have been invited to concur at three major milestones: (1) Purpose and Need (concurred upon January 2007), (2) Alternatives Retained for Detailed Study (ARDS, concurred upon February 2011), and (3) Preferred Alternative/Conceptual Mitigation. This *Preferred Alternative/Conceptual Mitigation* package (PA/CM) provides the basis for the MCDOT's recommendations concerning the third milestone.

MCDOT released a *Draft Environmental Effects Report (EER)* May 2013 for public and agency review. The *Draft EER* was made available on the project website at: [www.montgomerycountymd.gov/midcountycorridorstudy](http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/midcountycorridorstudy). Additionally, hard copies of the document were available at multiple public libraries and county offices. The *Draft EER* evaluated five build alternatives and the No-Build Alternative for their ability to address the



project purpose and need and potential social, economic, and environmental effects of each alternative. The alternatives included in this evaluation are summarized below:

- **Alternative 1 – No-Build:** Provides a baseline that assumes all the programmed transportation improvements within the study area would be completed by horizon year 2030 except for the proposed extension of Midcounty Highway.
- **Alternative 2 – TSM/TDM:** Proposes low cost improvements at 16 intersections that would fail the County’s congestion standard by 2030, based on projected traffic volumes under the No-Build scenario.
- **Alternative 4 Modified – Brink-Wightman-Goshen-Snouffer School-Muncaster Mill:** Proposes improvements along existing Brink, Wightman, Goshen, Snouffer School, and Muncaster Mill Roads to increase capacity and throughput.
- **Alternative 5 – MD 355 with Service Roads:** Proposes upgrades and access consolidation along MD 355 to accommodate the additional traffic that would be attracted to the study area.
- **Alternative 8 – Master Plan Alignment Truncated at Watkins Mill Road:** Proposes a new four-lane, divided, highway with partial control of access along the Master Plan alignment.
- **Alternative 9 – Master Plan Alignment:** Proposes a new four-lane, divided, highway with partial control of access along the Master Plan alignment.

For Alternative 8 and Alternative 9, three options (A, B and D) were evaluated for the northern terminus of the alignments as follows:

- **Option A:** Follows the master plan alignment and extends northwesterly through the park to Brink Road. The alignment would then continue across Brink Road on new alignment to Snowden Farm Parkway at Ridge Road.
- **Option B:** Provides a more direct crossing of the North Germantown Greenway Stream Valley Park and extends straight across the park to Brink Road. The alignment would then follow Brink Road and Ridge Road to Snowden Farm Parkway.
- **Option D:** Provides a more direct crossing of the North Germantown Greenway Stream Valley Park and extends straight across the park to Brink Road. The alignment would then continue across Brink Road on new alignment to Snowden Farm Parkway at Ridge Road.

Following publication of the *Draft EER*, a Joint Public Hearing was held by USACE and MDE August 7, 2013. On November 21, 2013, the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission’s (M-NCPPC) Montgomery County Planning Board conducted a public hearing regarding the proposed alternatives. At the meeting the Montgomery County



Planning Board, with a vote of three to two, supported the Master Plan Alignment 9A as the Preferred Alignment.

The content of the *Draft EER*, feedback from the public and the recommendation of the Montgomery County Planning Board were considered in the development of the *PA/CM* that follows. The culmination of these efforts will provide supporting documentation for the USACE permit decision on the Preferred Alternative outlined in this report.

This *PA/CM* presents the rationale for MCDOT's recommendation of a Preferred Alternative – Alternative 9A and identifies the conceptual mitigation strategies to offset unavoidable environmental impacts that may result from the construction of the Preferred Alternative. Upon concurrence of the Preferred Alternative, the study process will conclude with a *Final EER* to document the following:

- the rationale for agency concurrence of the Preferred Alternative,
- the final impacts and detailed mitigation for the Preferred Alternative,
- responses to the comments received on the *PA/CM*, and
- environmental practices that will be employed in the design and construction of the project.

MCDOT will submit the *Final EER* along with final wetland and stream mitigation plans to the permit agencies and request the issuance of wetland and waterway permits by USACE and MDE.

The *PA/CM* is organized as follows to provide the supporting information necessary to recommend a Preferred Alternative:

- ***Section I:*** Introduction of the project history and summary of tasks taken for the evaluation.
- ***Section II:*** Summary of the Purpose and Need concurred by the agencies at initial milestone, the criteria by which all proposed alternatives was evaluated.
- ***Section III:*** Detailed descriptions of the ARDS which were evaluated against the project Purpose and Need and assessed for environmental impacts. Modifications to reduce impacts (refined design) completed since *Draft EER* are summarized.
- ***Section IV:*** Detailed discussion of each of the alternatives' ability to address the transportation measures of effectiveness: ie., meet the project purpose and needs.
- ***Section V:*** Summary of additional analyses conducted since the completion of the *Draft EER* which were used in the analysis of determining the preferred alternative.
- ***Section VI:*** Summary of the comments received from the stakeholder/regulatory agencies, general public and County Planning Agency which were addressed in the document.





- **Section VII:** Detailed discussion of the rationale for selection of preferred alternative and details of the environmental impacts anticipated from the preferred alternative.
- **Section VIII:** Summary of potentially available conceptual mitigation options for compensating for environmental impacts of the preferred alternative.