



## 1. PURPOSE AND NEED

### 1.1 Study Area

A study area was developed that is bound by I-270 on the west, I-370 and the Intercounty Connector (MD 200) on the south, Snouffer School Road and Wightman Road on the east and Snowden Farm Parkway on the north. The study area is shown on **Figure 1-1**.

### 1.2 Project History

Since the 1960s, Midcounty Highway (M-83), a proposed 8.7-mile controlled access, four to six-lane major highway from Ridge Road (MD 27) in Clarksburg to Redland Road in Derwood, has been an element of the transportation master plan for Montgomery County. The County has completed a three-mile section of Midcounty Highway between Shady Grove Road and Montgomery Village Avenue.

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.

Accordingly, in 1986 MCDOT initiated the *Germantown-Montgomery Village Connector Study* (Montgomery County CIP #863116) that included preliminary engineering for the northern extension of Midcounty Highway from Montgomery Village Avenue to Ridge Road (MD 27) along the Master Plan alignment. Due to fiscal constraints, the *Germantown-Montgomery Village Connector Study* was put on hold in 1992; however, planned development and SHA improvements to MD 355 proceeded. As communities developed along the proposed Midcounty Highway north of Montgomery Village Avenue, portions of the Midcounty Highway Master Plan alignment were constructed and additional rights-of-way were dedicated. By 2000, the portion of MD 355 between Montgomery Village Avenue and Middlebrook Road was reconstructed as a six-lane highway, and the portion from Middlebrook Road to Ridge Road was reconstructed as a four-lane highway.

Begun in 2004, the *Midcounty Highway (M-83) Facility Planning Study* reinitiated the evaluation of the master plan alignment from Montgomery Village Avenue to Ridge Road (MD 27). Due to the potential magnitude of environmental impacts associated with the project, and the likelihood that the project would need federal permits, the *Midcounty Highway (M-83) Facility Planning Study* expanded to include the development of various alternatives to the Master Plan, in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). MCDOT invested additional resources for the evaluation of alternatives, and changed the project name to *Midcounty Corridor Study* (MCS) to reflect the expanded analysis. The US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) joined the effort as the lead federal agency for purposes of managing the NEPA process. USACE, the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) agreed to be "concurring parties." Concurrence from these parties has already been received in two project milestones: the *Purpose and Need (P&N)*, and the *Alternatives Retained for Detailed Study (ARDS)*. Concurrence will be sought in the third and final milestone, the *Preferred Alternative and Conceptual Mitigation (PACM)*, following the public hearing.

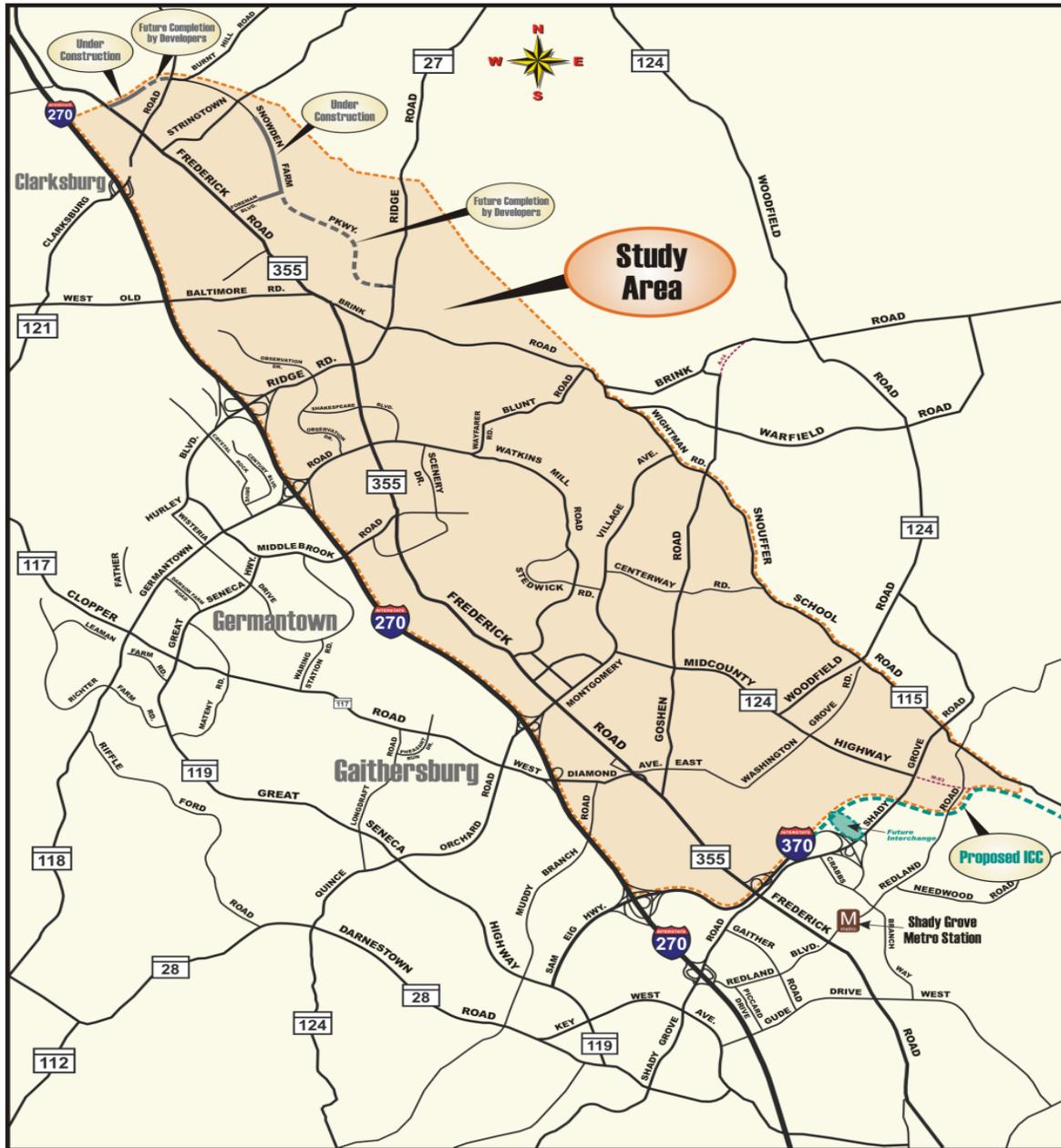


Figure 1-1: Midcounty Corridor Study Area

### 1.3 Purpose and Goals

The purpose of the Midcounty Corridor Study (MCS) is to develop transportation improvements in Montgomery County east of I-270 between Clarksburg and Gaithersburg that will:

- reduce projected congestion on roadway facilities between Clarksburg and Gaithersburg, east of I-270;
- provide a north-south corridor which improves the safety and efficiency of short and moderate length trips in the study area;

- improve vehicular, pedestrian and bicycle access to residential, commercial and employment destinations in Clarksburg and in the eastern areas of Gaithersburg and Germantown; and
- be implementable in an environmentally sensitive manner using measures to avoid, minimize, and mitigate impacts.

#### 1.4 Project Need

A draft Purpose and Need Statement was presented to the public in November 2004 and revised based on community input and agency comments. MCDOT received concurrence in the final Purpose and Need Statement from the three concurring agencies during January and April, 2007.

The need for this project is based on the following:

- Reduce existing and future congestion. Several intersections along MD 355 and other major roadways in the study area were approaching unacceptable levels of service or were failing in the peak hours in 2005. Almost every existing signalized intersection is projected to worsen over time and, in several cases, to deteriorate to LOS F by 2030. North-south travel times along the existing arterials are also projected to significantly increase over the planning horizon.
- Improve vehicular safety. Nearly all the existing highways comprising the build alternatives currently experience accident rates higher than the statewide average for similar facilities. Key factors contributing to the high accident rates are congestion at intersections, lack of access controls, and the high number of entrances, driveways, and intersections along the corridors.
- Enhance the efficiency of the roadway network and improve the connections between economic centers. Currently, localized north-south travel is provided by MD 355, which has little to no access control. In fact, between MD 27 and MD 124 there are more than 90 access points along MD 355 in a distance of 4.3 miles. Improved network efficiency and connections between economic and residential centers in the study area are needed to facilitate the movement of goods and people in the region.
- Accommodate planned land use and future growth. This region of the county is among the fastest growing for both employment and housing, with a sizable portion of the county's remaining residential and employment growth planned within the MD 355/I-270 corridor.
- Provide bicycle and pedestrian connections. The region lacks adequate north-south, off-street bicycle paths necessary to provide continuity and connections between existing and future bicycle facilities in the region.
- Enhance homeland security. Improved north-south access would enhance emergency response/evacuation and incident management by providing an efficient alternative to the existing congested north-south routes. Furthermore, diverting traffic from the existing routes would improve emergency response and incident management along those roadways.
- Improve the quality of life. Reducing commuting times and offering a safer alternative to the already congested local roads and arterials for vehicles, bicycles, and pedestrians would enhance the overall quality of life for potential users.



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