

Request for Information

Implementation of Bus Rapid Transit on MD 355 from Bethesda to Clarksburg, Maryland

Synopsis

Montgomery County, acting through its Department of Transportation (MCDOT), is seeking input from firms who have experience with innovative project delivery, including private financial participation and novel design, construction, and operating strategies for bus rapid transit (BRT). The County has a planned Countywide network of BRT and is scheduled to advance several corridors over the next few years. The US 29 corridor is now under construction, with service scheduled to start in May 2020. One of the most significant corridors, MD 355, has just completed its planning phase. Design activities are scheduled for MD 586 (Veirs Mill Road), and facility planning is scheduled for two additional corridors, MD 650 (New Hampshire Avenue), and the North Bethesda Transitway within the six-year Capital Improvements Program (CIP). Planning and design for other corridors would occur beyond the current CIP. Additional capital improvements to the US 29 corridor are also in a planning phase.

Although the projects are advancing under the County's normal planning, design, and construction process, the County is eager to understand opportunities to accelerate this program and to incorporate novel or innovative project delivery, and design, construction, and operating concepts learned from experience in the United States and internationally. Responses to the Request for Information will be used to formulate the County's project delivery approach for BRT.

Instructions and Disclaimers

****This is a Request for Information (RFI) only and does not constitute a commitment, implied or otherwise, that Montgomery County will take procurement action in this matter. Further, Montgomery County will not be responsible for any cost incurred in furnishing this information. The RFI will serve to conduct research and identify firms capable of providing such services. No telephone calls requesting a solicitation will be accepted or acknowledged. There is no solicitation available at this time.**

****If the County determines that a submission(s) warrants further investigation, we may reach out to the firm(s) and potentially provide a stipend to cover costs for more detailed study.**

****Purpose of the RFI: The purpose of this RFI is to gather ideas and information as well as gauge interest from industry on the market availability of the services that are described below. While the focus of this RFI is on the MD 355 corridor, ideas may have merit for other BRT corridors in the county.**

****Instructions: Respondents with the capability of providing the required services, as described below, with the necessary resources to fulfill the requirements are invited to submit, on a voluntary basis, in writing, information that addresses the following items: capability statement and business size/delegation (e.g., large, small, small disadvantaged, etc.). The capability statement should contain sufficient**

information that demonstrates interest, ability, and any ideas to flesh out the requirements listed below. You may identify any key staff you feel would be necessary for your firm to advance your proposed idea(s).

** Please note it is not necessary to answer every question. Respondents are strongly encouraged to only respond to those questions that are within their experience.

**Montgomery County appreciates your assistance with this market research and emphasizes that this effort is for planning purposes only. Responses will not be treated as proposals but may be used to create any subsequent Requests for Proposals (RFP) or Requests for Qualifications (RFQ). Respondents should clearly mark any proprietary information submitted in response to this RFI. A shortlist will not be generated from responses to this RFI. Note: this is a request for information and no contracts will be awarded against this request for information.

An industry forum for this RFI will be scheduled in advance of the due date of this RFI. MCDOT will use feedback from this RFI to decide if and how to proceed, and to determine the terms and conditions under which it would implement and operate a BRT along MD 355 and potentially other corridors. **RFI responses are due by close of business on December 6, 2019. See “Responding to the RFI” section below for details.

**The considerations and questions included in this RFI cover a broad range of topics in an attempt to maximize MCDOT’s understanding of the existing and emerging technology of state-of-the-art BRT systems, and approaches to implementing, operating, maintaining, and financing the system. MCDOT appreciates any and all information that contributes to this understanding and does not necessarily expect all responses to this RFI to address each of the extensive considerations.

Background

The MD 355 BRT Planning Study evaluated detailed alternatives for providing enhanced transit service along MD 355 from Bethesda to Clarksburg in Montgomery County, Maryland. It is part of a larger countywide effort to establish a BRT network on major transportation corridors within Montgomery County.

Several studies have been completed that propose BRT as the most appropriate mode for improving transit in Montgomery County, along MD 355 and other corridors, including the *Strategic Transit Plan (1993)*, *MCDOT Countywide Bus Rapid Transit Study (2011)*, *Countywide Transit Corridors Functional Master Plan (2013)*, *City of Rockville Bus Rapid Transit Town Center Integration Study (2015)*, *Service Planning and Integration Report (2015)*, *City of Gaithersburg MD 355 Bus Rapid Transit Study (2015)*, *MD 355 Bus Rapid Transit Corridor Planning Study Conceptual Alternatives Report (2017)*, and most recently the *MD 355 Bus Rapid Transit Phase 2 Corridor Study Report (2019)*, which can be found on the project website at along with the supporting technical reports at: <https://www.ridetheflash.com/md355/> Information regarding other corridors including US 29 and MD 586 (Veirs Mill Road) is also available at: <https://www.ridetheflash.com/>

Study Area

The MD 355 BRT Corridor Study extends approximately 22 miles from Clarksburg to the Bethesda Metrorail Station in Montgomery County, Maryland, and crosses municipal boundaries such as the Cities of Rockville and Gaithersburg, and encompasses different Master and Sector Planned areas. Most communities within Montgomery County have a master plan that creates a comprehensive view of land use trends and future development. The Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC) creates new Master or Sector Plans for these communities every 15 to 20 years. Most of the plans for areas along the MD 355 corridor propose enhanced transit to accommodate high density mixed-use development and redevelopment opportunities.

MD 355 is a busy economic corridor that extends the entire length of Montgomery County, from urban mixed-use centers in the south, through a range of suburban communities of varying densities before entering an exurban environment in the northernmost reaches of the County. The roadway changes in character as it crosses the jurisdictions, spanning areas of high urban density that include features such as wide sidewalks and on street parking; to more rural areas containing wide shoulders and open drainage systems. It is generally a six-lane roadway between Bethesda and Germantown, with wider roadway sections that incorporate multiple turning lanes at many signalized intersections. North of Germantown, MD 355 narrows to a two-lane roadway and the character and land use changes to a low-density residential environment.

Montgomery County is the most populous county in Maryland with more than 1 million residents. Over 300,000 people live in the study area, which is home to over 280,000 jobs. Increases in both population and jobs within the study area are expected to outpace growth in the county overall, with areas of concentrated growth forecast to occur in the segment north of I-495 (Capital Beltway) through Rockville to Gaithersburg. BRT along MD 355 will accommodate this growth by providing an option for people to get around aside from driving a car. BRT can also support the growth of pedestrian-friendly places, reducing the need to drive.

Transit plays a major role in the Washington regional transportation system, and includes multiple bus operators, two commuter rail systems, and the regional Metrorail system. The MD 355 corridor is served by fixed route transit service from two primary providers, the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority's (WMATA) Metrorail and Metrobus and Montgomery County's Ride On. The MD 355 corridor has some of the highest ridership bus routes in the Ride On system. However, the on-time performance of Ride On and Metrobus routes (at 72 percent and 77 percent, respectively) suffers due to congestion. BRT priority treatments would significantly improve the speed and reliability of bus service along the corridor.

Traffic congestion is a major issue on MD 355, with slow peak period and peak direction travel speeds and multiple failing intersections and roadway segments and heavy congestion throughout the day. Future traffic projections show that the significant growth in population and employment along the MD 355

Corridor will further degrade traffic conditions. This congestion is a contributing factor affecting the reliability of existing transit service. BRT on MD 355 would increase the efficiency with which the roadway space is used, allowing more people to traverse the corridor in a reliable, affordable, and safe way.

Purpose and Need

The purpose of the MD 355 BRT Project is to provide a new transit service with greater travel speed and frequency along MD 355 between Bethesda and Clarksburg that will help:

- Enhance transit connectivity and multimodal integration along the corridor as part of a coordinated regional transit network;
- Improve the ability for buses to move along the corridor (bus mobility) with increased operational efficiency, on-time performance/reliability, and travel times;
- Address current and future bus ridership demands;
- Attract new riders and provide improved service options for existing riders as an alternative to congested automobile travel through the corridor;
- Support approved Master Planned residential and commercial growth along the corridor;
- Improve transit access to major employment and activity centers;
- Achieve Master Planned non-auto driver modal share;
- Provide a sustainable and cost-effective transit service; and
- Improve the safety of travel for all modes along the corridor.

Purpose of this RFI

The County is interested in identifying Respondents with knowledge in best practices, emerging technologies, and innovative opportunities for implementing a cost-effective enhanced transit service along MD 355 with greater travel speed and frequency while minimizing traffic and right-of-way needs. MCDOT would like to better understand the potential limitations associated with implementing and maintaining these types of systems. MCDOT would also like to explore methods of project procurement and financing.

- Respondents considering responding to this RFI should become familiar with the MD 355 BRT Corridor Planning Study Phase 2 Corridor Summary Report and supporting technical documents, which are available online at: <https://www.ridetheflash.com/md355/>
- The County seeks to have the BRT operate from the Bethesda Metrorail Station South Entrance, currently under construction at the intersection of Elm Street and MD 355, to Clarksburg. This transit service can be provided via a variety of guideway treatments in order to achieve the desired travel time and reliability benefits. The guideways can be mixed and matched along the corridor to provide the best solution within the existing constraints and needs of the area.

- Additional treatments such as Transit Signal Priority (TSP) and queue jumps should be considered where applicable.
- The BRT should meet or exceed the following elements as discussed in the Traffic and Ridership Forecasting Analysis Summaries, available online at: https://www.ridetheflash.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/E_DRAFT_355BRT_Ridership_and_Traffic_Summary.pdf
 - Ridership (2040): 30,000
 - BRT Travel Time (minutes) from Middlebrook Road to Tuckerman Lane (AM/PM): 60.1/58.1
 - Transit Mode Share: 9.0%
 - Number of miles of LOS E or F along the corridor (NB/SB): 3.0/8.4
 - Number of Intersections Operating at LOS E or F from Elm Street to Middlebrook Road (AM/PM): 20/24
 - Addresses concerns regarding non-recurring congestion as it relates to reliability
 - BRT Frequencies along the Corridor should meet or exceed the performance included in the the *MD 355 Bus Rapid Transit Phase 2 Corridor Study Report (2019)*, which can be found on the project website at: https://www.ridetheflash.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/DRAFT_355BRT_Corridor_Summary_Report.pdf
- Novel approaches to infrastructure design are encouraged. However, modifications to the roadway will require approval by the Maryland Department of Transportation State Highway Administration (MDOT SHA). If a novel design approach is recommended, the respondent shall provide a comparison to established standards and a strategy for MDOT SHA approval to the novel approach. Relevant standards include MDOT SHA and/or local agency standards, and American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) standards, including *AASHTO Policy on the Geometric Design of Highways and Streets (2011)*, *MDOT SHA Book of Standards for Highway and Incidental Structures (2017)*, *MCDOT Road Code (2008)*, and other applicable design criteria.
- BRT station locations should be generally based on the Station Screening Report and should provide near-level boarding, off-board fare collection, and real time information. The Station Screening Report is online at: https://www.ridetheflash.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/C_DRAFT_355BRT_Station-Screening-Report.pdf
- All infrastructure elements should consider bicycle and pedestrian amenities, including access to BRT stations, and not preclude area Master and Sector plans, particularly the *Montgomery County Bicycle Master Plan (2018)*.
- Respondents should consider existing and emerging technologies that have relevance to design, operation, or construction of BRT guideways, signal systems, stations, vehicles, etc. Respondents

should also explain their view of the state of the industry, anticipated future trends, and potential sustainability and green solutions.

Gauging Project Interest for Design, Construction, and Operations

Please note it is not necessary to answer every question. Respondents are strongly encouraged to respond to those questions that are within their experience.

1. Is your firm potentially interested in participating in the MD 355 BRT Project? If so, in what capacity?
2. Please describe your firm, its experience in relation to Public-Private Partnership (P3) and/or BRT, other transit projects, and/or transportation projects, and its potential interest in relation to the parts or the whole project (e.g., design/engineering firm, construction firm, operations and maintenance firm, lender, equity investor, etc.)
3. List and rank the factors that would most influence your firm's decision on whether to participate in the project.
4. Are there novel design solutions that you would propose that have not been considered in any of the other previous work that would allow the BRT to achieve similar or better performance? (Performance guidelines can be found at the top of page 5 of this RFI.)
5. In your opinion what are the indicators that would make this project successful?
6. What major risks do you foresee with the design and construction of the project? What measures would you suggest to the County to mitigate these risks? Are there any other key risks and potential mitigation strategies you would like to discuss at this stage that MCDOT should be aware of and take actions to mitigate in the procurement?
7. What technical and/or financial challenges do you foresee with the projects, if any?
8. Would this project be of higher interest to the private sector if additional corridors are included?
9. What major risks do you foresee with the lifecycle costs, if any?

Business Model

10. What procurement strategies and project delivery method(s) may help mitigate project risk, any potential and/or financial challenges and enable a successful project for all parties?
11. Based on your understanding of the MD 355 BRT Planning Study, do you believe a P3 project delivery model, such as a Design-Build-Finance-Operate-Maintain (DBFOM) or other P3 structure, offers significant opportunity for innovation in design and construction techniques, means and methods? What are the advantages and disadvantages for each given the scope of the project?
12. How would your recommended project delivery method support a more cost-efficient project delivered on schedule?
13. From your firm's perspective, what are the advantages of entering into an agreement in which operations and maintenance and lifecycle responsibility are placed with the private partner? What are the disadvantages?

14. Do you have any innovative ideas that would assist the County with possible private investment utilizing alternative delivery methods for this project?
15. Do you have experience leveraging Opportunity Zones and/or do you see this as a viable financing option for the MD 355 BRT Project?

Guidance for Future Solicitation

16. These projects may or may not be eligible for Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Small Starts or New Starts funding. In the event the project advances, it will be necessary for the County to develop a plan to comply with the FTA Capital Grants or other Federal grant processes. As such, please describe your experience with FTA and other Federal funding sources, and from the Small Starts and New Starts programs. In addition, please describe any lessons learned.
17. Other than the answers already provided, what information would you like to receive that might influence whether you choose to participate in a future bidding or how you may bid on any of the projects?
18. What are the most important qualifications that MCDOT should consider in identifying the optimal project developer?
19. What strategies may help mitigate any potential technical and/or financial challenges?
20. Are these projects supportable by the private financial and surety markets? What are the potential actions and/or policies that could be adopted by MCDOT to facilitate such support? In your experience what type of financing has been the most successful in supporting such projects?
21. MCDOT is interested in reducing any unnecessary expense associated with preparing or responding to solicitations. Based on your experience with previous solicitations, please provide specific examples of requirements or specifications that your firm believes can be implemented to reduce proposal costs, without adversely affecting MCDOT's ability to obtain required information and appropriately review, the solicitation?
22. What efficiencies, if any, would a P3 provide the project in terms of design, engineering, construction, and/or operation and maintenance, as compared to a traditional model where MCDOT would build and operate the system for thirty years?
23. In your opinion what is the optimal term of a concession arrangement? What term do you think should be considered for this project?
24. What basic proposal submittal requirements, evaluation criteria, and key contract terms should be provided in the procurement documents?
25. Please comment on any other pertinent issues that should be considered with regard to alternative project delivery and a P3 availability payment structure delivery model that may be suitable for the project.

Industry Forum and Capabilities Conversations

The MD 355 BRT Industry Forum will take place on **October 14, from 8:00 am to 5:00 pm EST**, at 100 Edison Park Drive, Gaithersburg, MD 20878 in the 1st Floor Conference Room. Access to the building requires a security screening; plan accordingly and bring a government-issued photo ID.

The morning session will consist of an introduction and presentation by MCDOT officials on the project concept and open question and answer session (8:00 am to 9:30 am). The morning session will also be webcast for those who cannot attend in person. A tour of the MD 355 project corridor (9:30 am to 12:30 pm) will follow the morning session. An independent lunch break will be held from 12:30 pm to 1:30 pm.

Following lunch (1:30 pm to 5:00 pm), MCDOT officials will hold previously scheduled 20 to 30-minute private breakout sessions with interested parties to discuss project concepts and questions that they have for the MCDOT team. These discussions do not constitute negotiations on behalf of MCDOT with any individual party, nor do they limit the parties that may respond to a future RFP in connection with this proposed project.

To RSVP, please contact Project Manager Corey Pitts (corey.pitts@montgomerycountymd.gov) no later than close of business on October 9. RSVPs are required for both in-person and remote attendees. If you would like to schedule a breakout session for your firm, please include that request in your RSVP. Breakout sessions will be scheduled on a first-come, first-served basis. Participation in this site visit is not required for individuals to respond to any future RFP, but information received during the site visit may be used to influence the development and scope of an RFP or RFQ.

Responding to the RFI

MCDOT is interested in receiving responses to the RFI from all interested parties with relevant, demonstrated experience in all or specific areas of expertise, including designing, implementing, operating, and maintaining BRT systems. Respondents are requested to limit their general qualifications to no more than 20 8.5" x 11" pages and responses to questions to no more than three 8.5" x 11" pages per question. Please submit responses via email to Project Manager Corey Pitts (corey.pitts@montgomerycountymd.gov) by COB on **December 6**.

Contact Information

Questions or comments regarding this RFI should be submitted no later than October 28, 2019 via email to: Project Manager Corey Pitts (corey.pitts@montgomerycountymd.gov)