

MD 355 North Corridor Advisory Committee Meeting #14

April 20, 2021

6:30pm – 8:00pm

Held Virtually via Zoom

CAC members in attendance:

CAC members (marked with an “x” if Present)			
Carol Berger		Era Pandya	
Paula Bienefeld		David Rosenbaum	
Dennis Cain		Margaret Schoap	
Jerry Callstein	X	Peter Shaw	X
Steven Cohn	X	Gail Sherman	
Nallathamby Devasahayam		Goke Taiwo	
Cherian Eapen		Helen Triolo	
Peter Henry		Gary Unterberg	X
Kathie Hulley		Ronald Welke	
John Lin		Andrew Williamson	
Richard Lindstrom	X	Paul Yanoshik	
James Martin		Joel Yesley	
Mark Pace	X		

Stakeholders and members of the public in attendance:

David Anspacher (M-NCPPC)
Pete Fosselman
MiYo Park (City of Gaithersburg)

Staff in attendance:

MCDOT staff	Consultant team members
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Corey Pitts, MCDOT Division of Transportation Engineering, Planning Section Manager Joana Conklin, MCDOT BRT Program Director Darcy Buckley, MCDOT Denny Finnerin, MCDOT Consultant Project Manager 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mike Chamberland, Stantec Lori Adgate, Stantec Randy Knapick, IBI Group Nick Hart, IBI Group Andrew Pease, IBI Group

Meeting Introduction, Zoom Instructions & Protocol, Attendee Introductions, and Agenda Overview

Corey Pitts welcomed all attendees and introduced the meeting by covering the following items:

- The meeting format (via Zoom)
- Instructions for using Zoom

- Meeting protocols for Zoom use
- Introductions of the MCDOT team

Denny Finnerin continued the meeting overview by introducing the consultant team members in attendance, as well as providing an overview of the agenda and a summary of the meeting objectives.

MD 355 Bus Rapid Transit Project Refresher

Denny Finnerin provided a refresher about the MD 355 BRT project by covering the following items:

- Project purpose
- Overview of MCDOT's FLASH BRT Program
- MD 355 corridor overview
- Project design segments
- Overview of Alternative B Modified, which was the selected outcome as a result of Phase 2 Planning efforts
- Project update regarding progress made, current schedule, and key milestones

MD 355 Project Update & Schedule

Denny Finnerin provided an update about the project status and its schedule by covering the following items:

- Current status of the project
- Progress made and work still to come
- Project timeline
- Key milestones

Presentation & Focused Discussion

Randy Knapick facilitated the detailed presentation, which covered the following topics:

- BRT service planning refinement
- Overview of the alignment shared by the planned 355 BRT and Veirs Mill Road BRT
- The initial Phase 2 service plan, which includes four route patterns (Clarksburg to Montgomery College-Rockville, Germantown to Montgomery College-Rockville, Lakeforest Transit Center to Grosvenor Metro, and Montgomery College-Rockville to Bethesda)
- A summary of proposed revisions to the service plan, with four altered route patterns (Clarksburg to Shady Grove, Milestone to Shady Grove, Lakeforest Transit Center to Grosvenor/White Flint Metro, and Montgomery College-Rockville to Bethesda)
- BRT runningway refinement
- A detailed summary of Segment 3 (Dodge Street to College Parkway)
- A detailed summary of Segment 5 (Montgomery Village Avenue to Summit Avenue)
- A description of corridor-wide preliminary engineering refinements, including next steps related to design and analysis
- A detailed summary of plans and considerations for BRT at Shady Grove Metro

- A detailed summary of plans and considerations for BRT at Montgomery College-Rockville
- A detailed summary of plans and considerations for BRT at Lakeforest Mall

Discussion/Questions

Q #1:

Margaret Schoap: Stated that she is from Germantown and wanted to discuss issues in that area. Indicated that Randy stated the highest ridership is to Shady Grove and that most riders come from the north. Margaret is concerned with how Germantown and Clarksburg areas will be served considering the preliminary design is focused on Segments 2 through 6. Margaret is concerned that Segment 7 is undetermined and will be prioritized last. These corridors on MD 355 are open in this area. She stated that these communities are the fastest growing in the county. Margaret wants to confirm that these areas will be addressed and incorporated into the project.

R #1:

Corey Pitts: Responded by stating that preliminary design is focused on the dedicated guideway in Segments 2 through 6 since they are the most complicated to engineer. Corey states that Germantown and Clarksburg are still being addressed, but heavy engineering lift is right now in the south where more difficult segments exist. Corey explains that Segment 7, which includes Germantown and Clarksburg, will be mixed traffic and will be phased in with the rest of the project.

Denny Finnerin: Stated that southern segments are more difficult to construct and that lighter work in the north is less time constrained. Denny explained that the project could be opened all at once because the construction timeframe will be coordinated.

Q #2:

Margaret Schoap: Stated that when the project started, everything was going to have curbed BRT lanes. Margaret asks if there are still any dedicated lanes included in MD 355.

R #2:

Denny Finnerin: Responded by explaining that Segments 2 through 4 and 6 will have curbed lanes, and that Segment 5 will be mixed traffic based on feedback from the City of Gaithersburg. Denny stated that in the Old Town Gaithersburg area, there are older buildings close to roadway and the city has concerns about roadway widening.

Q #3:

Richard Lindstrom: Asked about the fact that at Lakeforest, why isn't Russell Avenue the obvious route?

R #3:

Randy Knapick: Responded by stating that Russell Avenue is becoming the preferred route, however there are current concerns about connecting with the existing transit center. Randy explains that the project team is looking at aligning on Russell Avenue in coordination with relocating the transit center to the west of the mall.

Q #4:

Steven Cohn: Asked what are the future plans for Lakeforest Mall property and its potential location for Lakeforest Town Center?

R #4:

Corey Pitts: Responded by stating that the County is coordinating with the City of Gaithersburg to learn more about this. Corey explained that the City is currently in a visioning process for what the mall could be and that there are currently no proposals for this property; however, the existing vision is for a mixed-use site with a mix of residential and commercial, making it more walkable and transit-oriented. Corey states that the project team wants to ensure the project is well-positioned to respond to whatever comes in.

Q #5:

Jerry Callstein: Asked what will be done to protect riders from weather for long-walk areas like Lot 13 at Montgomery College Rockville Campus and the proposed Shady Grove location?

R #5:

Randy Knapick: Responded by explaining that Transit Centers will have covered platforms and that covered walkways are also possible, or at the very least walkways with enhanced lighting. Randy also explained that walks from Lot 13 would be similar to current walks from parking lots. Randy stated that the project team is also looking at how convenient and safe we can make bike paths, etc., from the proposed Lot 13 transit center to on-campus destinations, as well as First/Last mile connections.

Discussion:

Mark Pace: Continued this discussion by stating that he thinks Lot 13 at Montgomery College would be the best option for a transit center there. Mark thinks that some students might argue against this, since the loop bus stop is closer to buildings. But, Mark states that with the number of routes going through there, coming onto campus will slow overall travel times, and using Lot 13 could be a lot quicker. However, Mark noted that Lot 13 is owned by the school district, and there are various complications with that location related to the protected viewshed, etc. Mark stated that if things can be worked out, though, this is the location that serves the system the best.

Randy Knapick: Thanked attendees for the comments, and recognized the fact that the bus loop is also a layover location where drivers take breaks as necessary. Randy explained that added service may pressure loop location too much, and we need to come up with creative alternatives providing safe, convenient, and attractive service.

Mark Pace: Explained that Lot 13 could accommodate greater amounts of service in the future, if we're looking at future expansion of service. Mark stated that the college used to have many students going back and forth between Lot 13 and campus. Mark explained that lately, Lot 13 has been used by construction workers, who are now finished with their work. Mark states that use of lot is going down to less than 25% capacity.

Q #6:

Steven Cohn: Asked if the presentation covered route preferences from Germantown to Clarksburg?

R #6:

Denny Finnerin: Responded by explaining that Alternative B Modified includes route that goes along Snowden Farm Pkwy, which is the easternmost route. Denny explained that this alignment was selected because it matches where development has occurred to this point. Denny also stated that Observation Drive is avoided because it is still under construction and won't be complete any time soon, MD 355 in the north is seen as more rural and not as suitable for service, and that Snowden Farm Pkwy is perceived to meet more needs of Upcounty area.

Conclusion

Denny Finnerin concluded the meeting by explaining the next steps in the process, including upcoming CAC meetings in the fall, as well as by providing the url for the MD 355 Project Website and contact information for herself and Corey.