This segment is a work in progress with road, pedestrian, and bike improvements pending. NSA/Bethesda and NIH are both major County employment centers. BRT should become a contiguous, interactive feature within those employers' transit paradigm and physical build out.

Bus service through this intersection (Ride On 30, 34, 46; Metrobus, J-2, J-3) provides good service to neighborhoods around this intersection, providing direct short-haul service to employment locations and Metro that should be maintained/strengthened in any BRT implementation.

Construction projects associated with BRAC reconstruction of the Pike to the south, east, and west of the intersection will (or have) much improved bike and pedestrian access to NIH, NSA-B (Walter Reed), and the Medical Center Metro station.

Bethesda Trolley Trail is a good alternative to cycling on MD 355 to access Woodmont Triangle from the north.

Tunnel running under Rockville Pike from Grosvenor apartments to Grosvenor Metro stop. It's a great connection to the Metro stop in an area where it's very difficult to cross Rockville Pike. Also makes it easier to reach the Strathmore Arts Center on the other side of the Metro.

Pull-over lanes for buses are good; allow for other traffic to keep moving.

Tunnel under MD 355 provides good connectivity between East and West sides of Rockville Pike and shows pedestrian prioritization. It is well-used so I feel safe using it to cross from Viers Metro to the southbound bus stops.

Wide sidewalks, tunnel under MD 355 for safety in crossing, some bike access although some improvements can be made, close to many apartments/condos and shopping.

Tunnel and wide pedestrian crossing, tight curb to slow turning vehicles, wide and wide sidewalks, tunnel under MD 355 for safety in crossing, some bike access although some improvements can be made, close to many apartments/condos and shopping.

Rockville Town Center has a variety of uses, especially the public library, that appeal to individuals of all ages and families; both reasonable transit access and garaged parking.

New pedestrian-activated flashing light to cross Wisconsin Ave to bus stop allows pedestrians to cross safely without adding a traffic light, which otherwise would add to traffic backup.

New bike lane on Woodglen Drive; lots of complaints and people still getting used to it. But it has narrowed the road and slowed the traffic down, making it safer for pedestrians.

Easy transfer to Viers Mill BRT line, bridge over MD 355 for safe crossing, many government buildings, shopping and residences.

New pedestrian-activated flashing light to cross Wisconsin Ave to bus stop allows pedestrians to cross safely without adding a traffic light, which otherwise would add to traffic backup.

Tunnel under Metro stop in front of the Montrose Crossing shopping center has been widened to serve as part of the Bethesda Trolley Trail, providing a wider sidewalk buffered from the street.

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MD 355 South: Mapped “Opportunities” from CAC Kickoff Meeting Homework Exercise

The Southbound traffic light should be coordinated with Sensor detection of traffic waiting to exit I 270 to eliminate crashes with traffic trying to exit the road onto MD 355.

Create an underground passage to the east side of Wisconsin Ave.

Traffic in this area at any time of day is unbearable. Employees at these 2 major employers need more transportation options to entice them to leave their cars at home.

Construction of the underground Crossing from the West side of the Street to the East Side will reduce the chance of Pedestrian Accidents.

Rockville Metro stop is a long walk for residents along Grosvenor Lane. They are cut off from the Medical Center stop by the Beltsway. A BRT stop at Grosvenor Lane could benefit them. A new townhouse development in that area is going to increase congestion unless people have convenient public transportation options.

An improved bicycle connection to Beach Drive is needed.

It's very difficult to cross Rockville Pike anywhere in the White Flint area. The area will not feel walkable and pedestrian safe until the Pike becomes more like a street and less like a highway.

Ride On buses deviate from their routes along Rockville Pike to turn onto Halpine Road, Chapman Avenue, and enter Twinbrook station’s bus area, only to return to Rockville Pike to continue their routes. This adds a large amount of time (often 10+ minutes), so it will not be feasible for any BRT route to run this way. We must come up with a new way of allowing for connectivity between Twinbrook station and the activity centers/potential BRT station along Rockville Pike. Installing a covered, lighted walkway from the Twinbrook station west entrance north along the Metro/MARC right-of-way, and then west along the south side of the parking structure, across Chapman Avenue, and along the south side of Halpine Road (possibly taking the space of the handful of on-street parking spaces on the south side of Halpine Road) would provide a high-visibility, seamless connection between Metrorail, Metrobus, other Ride On routes, and the BRT.

There is an opportunity to improve pedestrian conditions in many areas. Walking is particularly uncomfortable on the west side of MD 355 between Montrose Parkway and Halpine Road - particularly because of the large numbers of curb cuts and an overall design that does not seem to focus driver attention on pedestrians.

This area is nearly 100% residential and many who live between Grosvenor and NIH drive because there is no dependable alternative. BRT in that area could serve a valuable purpose at rush hours to connect commuters with NIH campus and Metro.

It's very difficult to cross Rockville Pike anywhere in the White Flint area. The area will not feel walkable and pedestrian safe until the Pike becomes more like a street and less like a highway.

Pancake House Courtyard is a great pedestrian opportunity off of MD 355, why not funnel pedestrian traffic right to it by creating a crosswalk across MD 355 at the Courtyard entrance?

Provide more extensive and more frequent feeder bus service from cul-de-sacs to Bethesda Metro to access the Red Line. Similar opportunities exist at NIH/Medical Center, Rockville, and other Metro stations. Feeder buses are needed.

Bank buildings are abundant and life-less at night, dull to look at during the day, create no foot traffic, and offer no interesting storefronts.

The area between the Rockville Metro stop, including its parking lot, and the Rockville Town Center area should be filled in with development. If the City widens MD 355 there, it would be a terrible use of valuable land.

Halpine Rd. has limited access from east of Twinbrook station when Metro is closed. Templeton Pl. has no access for residents of Twinbrook and no parking spaces available. No bike lanes.

This intersection is especially dangerous, due to high-volume traffic. Vehicles on Halpine Road do not have protected left-turn phases, and often have to wait multiple cycles for the opportunity to turn left onto Rockville Pike. Thus, they are often in a hurry and are not watching for crossing pedestrians, who also do not have a protected signal phase or even a leading pedestrian interval. Splitting the light cycles so each direction of Halpine traffic has its own phase, or, in the case of a BRT station in the median, splitting each pedestrian crossing into separate signal phases would be improvements.

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**Strengths**

This is an opportunity to fulfill MWCOG’s Transportation Planning Board’s directive to “Think Regionally and Act Locally.” Their findings show the biggest bang for the buck and greatest necessity is to bring existing transit infrastructure to best function and promote regional connectivity. MD 355 BRT should not undermine Metro but fill its gaps to support regional objectives.

The local business community has articulated the need for BRT up and down I 270 and around I 495, including across to Virginia. In addition to more realistically serving interstate and regional commuters during peak commuting hours, implementation of BRT on these highways would free up space for better Baltimore, interstate, eastern seaboard trade/delivery access.

Sidewalk coverage along both sides of the street.

Walk lights and crosswalks seem to be located appropriately for the most part. Timing is great.

The County Ride On system is large and robust, feeding riders to metro stops now and could do the same effectively for BRT stations. However, the frequency of buses on Route 34 which I do use hampers building consistent ridership. I can walk to either the Bethesda or Friendship Heights metro in 15 minutes. If I’ve missed a 34 bus, I can generally walk to the station faster than waiting for another bus except perhaps during peak periods, when I debate what to do. Others raised this during the discussion at the kick-off meeting. To create a culture of bus users in our suburban environment, the buses must run with greater frequency. I know that is the goal of BRT vehicles but the feeders need to do so as well.

In general, the Metro stops work well and I find the Medical Center stop especially functional. While there are frustrating times when the WMATA escalators or elevators don’t work, coming from my neighborhood the pedestrian flow into and out of the stations is good, as is the kiss and ride drop-off/pick-up areas, and the bus stops at these stations. (Pedestrian flow across Wisconsin Avenue into Walter Reed could be improved, but that improvement is already planned.)

The 1,200 homes in my East Bethesda community are within walking distance to the Bethesda and/or Medical Center stops along the Red Line. Using Metro for commuting is the most obvious way these stops play a significant positive role in my community. Red Line stops are also a great benefit to the teenagers in our community, many of whom attend B-CC HS, and get tremendous independence and opportunity from access to the Red Line. (For example, the rowing team uses Metro to reach Thompson’s Boat House.)

I find it a pleasure to walk from East Bethesda into Downtown Bethesda - the sidewalks are fine, the crosswalks on MD 355 are plentiful enough, the cut-throughs for pedestrians are visually interesting and removed from traffic (such as the mosaics along the pathway between Wisconsin and Woodmont Avenues next to the Original Pancake House, or the paths along the fountain in front of the Chevy Chase Trust building at the corner of East-West Highway and Wisconsin Avenue). A walk might take me to the grocery store, the library, Strosnider’s hardware store, CVS, a stop for coffee and to check my email, and then to meet my son at B-CC High School for a walk over to his music lesson at Bach 2 Rock.

While I sometimes denigrate “The Pike” -- mostly because it is not so visually attractive with its endless stretch of commercial signs and power lines -- nevertheless the stretch from Tuckerman Lane north to Shady Grove Road is unmatched for the great diversity and affordability of stores and services found along it (as well as on the smaller roads that run perpendicular and parallel to it one block in). Thus, I go there a lot even though it’s not so pretty. Even the town ‘dump’ (aka the Shady Grove Transfer Station) is a gem: it looks like a tidy office park and could not be easier to use; I often took my kids to the recycling center there as a fun and educational outing.

Shopping centers along Rockville Pike have their nearest bus stop located away from the primary vehicle access points. For example, in front of Federal Plaza the bus stop is located in the middle of the property, whereas the two primary vehicle entrances from Rockville Pike are located on the north and south ends of the property. Not only does this reduce conflicts between pedestrians and vehicles attempting to enter the property, but it also presents the opportunity for “branding” of pedestrian-specific access points to each major activity center (e.g., putting up an entrance archway with the property name, etc.). This would benefit both the property and the BRT system, by drawing attention to the property’s location as well as to the fact that there is easy access to the property via BRT.
Opportunity
Crossing MD355 as a pedestrian is unfriendly at best and dangerous by design at worst.

Sidewalks should be wider to allow for pedestrians to feel safe. Sidewalks could be set back with a grass verge between sidewalk and street. Also, wider sidewalks would allow pedestrians to pass easily, especially if pulling carts.

If the traffic lights could be synchronized at a speed slightly below the speed limit at non-peak times in one direction and have signs indicating the direction like Los Angeles, California traffic flow would be improved. On Old Georgetown Road the traffic lights could be synchronized in the other direction. This will speed up the Ride On buses and all other traffic on both routes.

All intersections on MD 355, Rockville Pike should have traffic detection sensors for all traffic movements (for example 3 Northbound, 3 Southbound 1 for Left Turn Northbound and 1 for Left turn Southbound. On the cross streets there would be 2 or 3 Eastbound and Westbound. There would be one or two for all left turn lanes East and Westbound.) This would permit computer control of each intersection so there is no time wasted in changing the direction of traffic or pedestrians when no one or vehicles are trying to use the traffic lights.

Planning for BRT stations needs to proactively take into account the safety of getting to them. How users will cross multiple lanes of dense traffic needs careful thought. Metro stations have had to be retrofitted with underground tunnels and new entrances to allow access from one side of MD 355 to the other. BRT stations also need wide enough sidewalks or buffers leading to stations to ensure riders are not splashed by passing cars. To create a bus culture, potential barriers must be identified and considered in the planning process. Will our planning studies provide information about such needs in the route design?

Some of the traffic congestion in Montgomery County is pass-through traffic. Are there ways to address this by integrating regional services/express bus with BRT service and Metro?

The issue of ROW needs to be examined. How much ROW is actually available along the corridor? The Master Plan as approved was supposed to eliminate any identification of cross sections and ROW needs/constraints. However, it is already being discussed in development plans for Bethesda. See discussion of the issue at http://robert-dyer.blogspot.com/2015/03/brt-right-of-way-concerns-delay-8008.html

The developer and attorney are both members of the MD 355 South CAC.

Recent business community comments (e.g. by Marriott’s CEO) indicate that for businesses to locate in Montgomery County, good Metro access is needed to attract employees throughout the region. This means that Metro integration should be a BRT planning focus, keeping in mind that employees from DC, VA, and eastern Montgomery County travelling to locations along MD 355 and the CCT will be counter-peak commuting.

Much of the traffic inside the Beltway is to/from I-270. Reducing congestion on this segment needs to be integrated with implementation of better express bus service using I-270’s express lanes.

A demonstration project is preferable to a permanent BRT. Given the bigger problem of a lack of sufficient bus access to the Metro Red Line, it is not clear that a BRT on top of the Metro Red Line from Rockville to Bethesda will be helpful. Without any reliable data on this, a demonstration project would be helpful to determine the need.

Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School and Richard Montgomery High School are adjacent to the corridor and represent a large demographic who could develop a strong custom of and positive association with using public transit. Encouraging teens to take public transit not only creates a custom, it also reduces the amount of teen driving, which is the riskiest category of driver. But are we fully encouraging that? For example:

• Why is the Kids Ride Free program limited to certain days and hours?
• Why can Youth Cruiser SmarTrip Cards only be purchased at the TRIPS Commuter Stores?
• Why not enable:
  • online purchasing of the Youth Cruiser (with eligibility based on MCPS student ID, and an alternative for non-MCPS students), and
  • a mobile app that allows teens to use their smartphones in lieu of SmarTrip Cards to ride the vehicles and to know when the transit vehicles are approaching?
• Why even charge kids at all? Better to keep these inexperienced drivers out of their cars and encourage a custom of bus use from the start.

Starting at the Chevy Chase Trust building (at the corner of East-West Highway and MD 355) and walking north along MD 355, my banking options are unprecedented! Sun Trust, Bank of Georgetown, United Bank, CitiBank, Wells Fargo, Beal Bank... But who walks into banks anymore? I do all my banking online or via ATMs, and bank buildings are boring. They’re lifeless at night, dull to look at in the day, create no foot traffic, and offer no interesting storefronts – so why aren’t they all located facing the alleys and dumpsters and let the fun stores face the street? Frankley, the Pumphrey Funeral Home is a far friendlier visual asset to the streetscape on this stretch of MD 355 as compared to all these banks. The Golden House restaurant, even with its tacky lemon yellow roof, is far more fun to walk by at any time of day or evening, than these dull banks.

Sidewalks along Rockville Pike are very narrow, adjacent to the busy road, and cross countless driveways/shopping plaza entrances. Need to widen sidewalks, install buffers between pedestrians and vehicles (preferably with trees), and provide better visibility for pedestrians crossing various driveways/entrances (painted crosswalks, “Turning Vehicles Yield to Pedestrians” signs, etc.)

Dedicated lanes can contribute to a brand image of a more urban, vital corridor and signal a commitment to alternatives to driving that may send an important message about how people can expect to be able to use the corridor differently in the future. (This particularly applies in areas that are dominated by strip malls, e.g. north of Montrose Parkway.)