



MONTGOMERY COUNTY PLANNING DEPARTMENT
THE MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION

MCPB 03/27/08
Item #10

March 20, 2008

MEMORANDUM

TO: Montgomery County Planning Board

VIA: Gwen Wright, Chief – Countywide Planning Division *GW*
Glen Kreger, Acting Chief - Community Based Planning Division *GK*
Dan Hardy – Acting Chief – Transportation Planning *DH*

FROM: Tom Autrey (301-495-4533), Supervisor, Transportation Planning *TA*

SUBJECT: Project Planning Overview – Purple Line, Corridor Cities
Transitway (CCT), and MARC

**STAFF
RECOMMENDATION:** None. This is a discussion item only. The staff has invited representatives of the Maryland Transit Administration (MTA) to present a brief overview and update of project planning and coordination efforts related to the Purple Line Alternatives Analysis / Draft Environmental Impact Statement (AA/DEIS), CCT Environmental Assessment (EA), and the MARC Growth and Investment Plan that was published in September 2007.

OVERVIEW

The MTA is nearing two important milestones with respect to Purple Line and Corridor Cities Transitway (CCT) project planning. The CCT EA is scheduled to be available this spring and the Purple Line AA/DEIS is scheduled to be available in late summer. Once the documents are available and the local review is complete, the state will be considering which alternative (referred to as the “Locally Preferred Alternative” - or LPA - under the current federal alternatives analysis process) for each project to advance into preliminary engineering. The Planning Board will have an opportunity to forward a recommendation on the preferred alternative in advance of the state decision on each project. The state is expected to be faced with making a decision on not only the CCT and Purple Line but also Baltimore’s Red Line project planning effort at the same time (i.e., later this calendar year).¹ All three projects are using 2030 as the planning horizon year.

¹ Further background on the Purple Line AA/DEIS can be found at:
<http://www.purplelinemd.com/pages/overview.html>. The Planning Board web site also has summary information on both the CCT and Purple Line. The link for that information is:
<http://mcparkandplanning.org/Transportation/projects/list.shtm>.

In addition to the CCT and Purple Line on-going studies, the MTA released the MARC Growth and Investment Plan in September 2007.² This plan identifies phased capital and operating enhancements through 2035. The enhancements include system preservation elements like locomotive and car refurbishment, additional train storage area at Union Station, and other items as well as additional track and improved service frequencies and expanded service.

As might be expected, there are various issues related to the selection of a preferred alternative, project phasing, coordination with our master planning efforts, and funding that will continue to be addressed between now and implementation. The staff believes it would be beneficial to engage the MTA on these issues given the upcoming important project milestones, realizing that the dialogue is on-going and that some of the questions at this point may not have definitive answers. A brief summary of the issues we will explore with the MTA during this session is presented below.

As of this writing, we expect the MTA staff representation for this agenda item to include:

- Diane Ratcliff, Director of Planning
- Rick Kiegel, Project Manager for the CCT EA
- Mike Madden, Project Manager for the Purple Line DEIS

The MTA team will have a brief presentation in advance of the planned discussion segment of this agenda item.

MODE, ALIGNMENT, AND DESIGN OPTIONS

In the case of both the Purple Line AA/DEIS and the CCT EA there is a decision to be made with respect to Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) or Light Rail Transit (LRT).³ In the case of the Purple Line, there are also alignment alternatives and design options under consideration. On the CCT, staff has explored some alignment modifications as part of the master plan development process for both Germantown and Gaithersburg West plans.

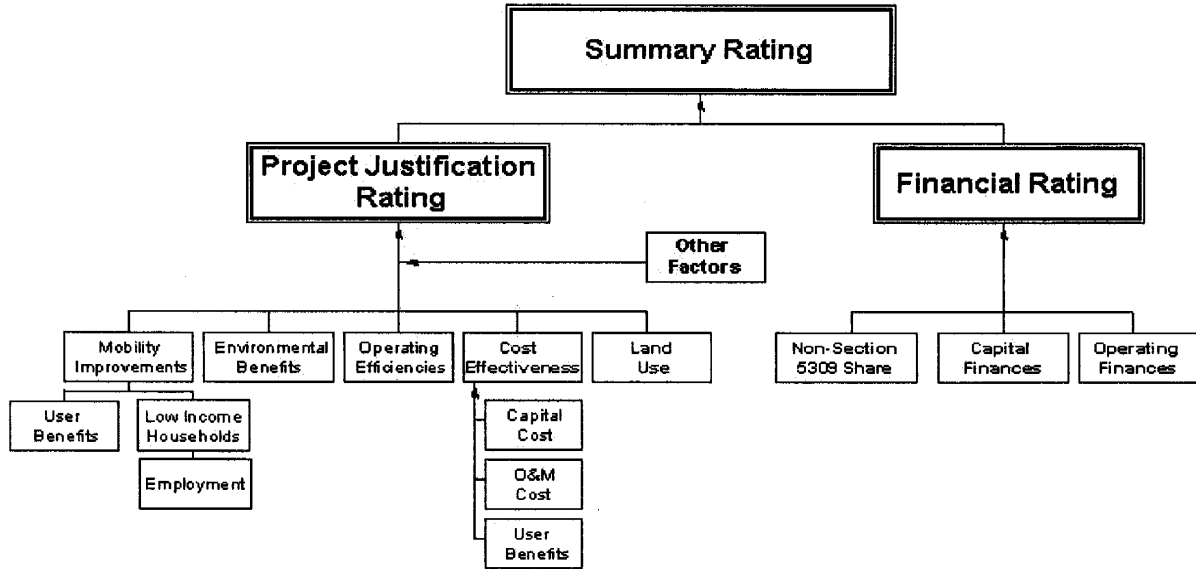
During the development of a locally preferred alternative, a wide range of environmental and fiscal measures of effectiveness are considered, as shown in Exhibit 1; an excerpt from the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) guidance FY 2009 New Starts and Small Starts Evaluation and Rating Process.⁴

² The link for the MARC Growth and Investment Plan is:
<http://www.mtmaryland.com/projects/marc%20plan%20full.pdf>

³ Two recent articles on the many factors to be taken into consideration when deciding between BRT or LRT can be found at:
http://onlinepubs.trb.org/onlinepubs/circulars/ec058/05_LIGHT%20RAIL%20AND%20OTHER%20MODES.pdf (entire document) and <http://www.vtpi.org/tranben.pdf> (pages 71-74).

⁴ This document and companion resources can be found at:
http://www.fta.dot.gov/planning/newstarts/planning_environment_2620.html

The FTA New Starts Evaluation and Rating Framework



Minimum Project Development Requirements:

Metropolitan Planning and Programming Requirements	Project Management Technical Capability	NEPA Approvals	Other Considerations
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Examples of recurring questions about this aspect of both projects include:

- How do we determine how alternative modes and alignments might compare with competing localities – both in Maryland and nationally – in advance of selecting an alternative?
- How could the mode and/or alignment potentially impact the phasing of the implementation?
- Given the Federal Transit Administration’s (FTA) reservations about the Dulles Rail Extension and higher overall capital costs for rail, are rail projects in trouble generally at the federal and/or state level?
- How important is it for project approval or endorsement at the federal and state level to have general consensus on an alignment and/or design option at the local level – e.g., within the community at the neighborhood level?

PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

The MTA has indicated in the past that the initial phase of the CCT might logically consist of the segment between Shady Grove and Metropolitan Grove, particularly if LRT is the selected mode. There is no suggested phasing for the Purple Line at this point in the process. The MARC Growth and Investment Plan, however, is specific with respect to the estimated phasing of the proposed improvements. Phasing is important for a number of reasons and is, of course, related to funding availability and need, among other things. The County, and perhaps the full Commission, will have an opportunity to guide phasing recommendations and will need to consider:

- What determines the phasing once the alternative is selected?
- What factors are used to determine phasing when there are multiple projects and multiple jurisdictions?
- How “set” are alignment, design, and phasing decisions once the project enters the FTA pipeline?

MASTER PLANNING COORDINATION

We currently have master planning efforts underway for Germantown, Gaithersburg West, White Flint, and the Takoma/Langley Crossroads. Each of the plans is in different stages of analysis. In some cases, there are evolving plans (also in different stages of plan development) for specific new projects near or adjacent to the existing MARC or CCT alignment, or one of the proposed Purple Line alignments. Crown Farm, the Johns Hopkins University Plan for Belward Farms, the Kentlands, and the BRAC impacts upon the National Naval Medical Center fall into this latter category. The challenge for us is to support the best transit-oriented development possible without introducing undue delays into the transit alternatives analysis and selection process. We have asked MTA staff:

- What can local governments do to help you move toward implementation on these important transit projects?

- How and when will the MTA incorporate updated jobs and housing forecasts, as well possible alignment changes, for CCT, Purple Line, and MARC project planning?
- Our planning in White Flint may result in a recommendation for a new MARC station. How does the MTA factor that into its MARC facility planning and project programming?
- What are the next steps for the MARC Investment Plan?

FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

These projects are expensive and funding resources are limited. Competition for funding at all levels is intense as there are legitimate competing needs of significant magnitude throughout all levels of government. Plans without identifiable funding, however, simply serve to undermine the credibility of the overall process. Recently, there has been significant progress on identifying additional funding for design elements of the CCT and Purple Line and there is a proposal in place at the County level to move ahead with the funding of a southern entrance to the Bethesda Metrorail south entrance – an important component of the Purple Line project. Nevertheless, key questions remain:

- What is the specific method that the FTA uses in rating the financial plan of New Start applications? What do you see as our greatest exposure in this regard?
- What have you found in your inquiries into the potential for public private partnership to help defray the costs of these projects?
- What follow-up is anticipated on the Maryland Transit Funding Study Steering Committee report that was completed in January 2007?
- Are there any particular avenues for new funding streams that you view as holding promise?

SUMMARY

The questions above are intended to provide a framework for 60-90 minutes of discussion with the MTA staff. The staff would expect follow-up sessions on these topics, possibly again as a stand-alone agenda item but certainly as each transit project and master plan comes before the Planning Board. We do not expect the MTA staff to necessarily have definitive answers to all of these or similar questions that may come up in this session but we know they share our view that it is useful to begin the dialogue now in advance of the studies being available for review and the need for specific recommendations that are supportive of, and consistent with, our master planning efforts.