

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the Montgomery County Planning Department staff recommendations on a Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA) for the Purple Line, a proposed transitway connecting Bethesda to New Carrollton in Montgomery and Prince George's Counties. The report also describes the relevant findings of the Purple Line Alternatives Analysis / Draft Environmental Impact Statement (AA/DEIS), completed by the Maryland Transit Administration (MTA) in September 2008. The staff recommendations are for the portions of the Purple Line within Montgomery County.

Staff finds that the Purple Line is an infrastructure investment needed to fulfill the objectives of the Montgomery County General Plan. Staff recommends that the study proceed to the next phase of Preliminary Engineering/Final Environmental Impact Statement (PE/FEIS) using the guidance in the report and summarized below.

Staff recommends that the Purple Line be implemented as a Light Rail Transit (LRT) mode, based primarily on the need to provide East-West transit capacity higher than that which can reliably be expected from a Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system. The mode selection process also recognizes that Prince George's County officials have also expressed a preference for LRT.

Staff recommends that the LPA conform generally to the AA/DEIS Medium Investment LRT Alternative, based primarily on the design features of the alternative and the fact that it is the most cost effective of the LRT alternatives studied. Staff recommends that the LPA include two modifications to the Medium Investment LRT Alternative:

- Inclusion of the Capital Crescent/Georgetown Branch Trail through the Air Rights Tunnel under Wisconsin Avenue in Bethesda. This connection is integral to the regional trail system and should be incorporated into the LRT facility design and constructed concurrent with the transit facility. A separate funding source should be pursued to retain the LRT cost-effectiveness.
- Elimination of the Dale Drive station, based on the staff finding that the increased travel time and community impacts associated with a station at this location are not warranted by the travel demand generated from the surrounding low-density single-family residential neighborhood.

The portion of the Purple Line between Bethesda and Silver Spring has been in the County's master plan since 1986 and has been the subject of several prior studies by state and county agencies. The portion east of Silver Spring has not been the subject of prior detailed study, and further investigation is needed to assess the best way to minimize or mitigate several potential impacts in the communities along the Medium Investment LRT Alternative, particularly between the Silver Spring Transit Center and Sligo Creek Parkway. In these areas, the AA/DEIS provides sufficient information to select an alternative, and staff recommends the surface alignment in the AA/DEIS. However, more refined travel demand forecasts, preliminary engineering, and operational analysis are needed to assess site specific concerns along Bonifant Street and Wayne Avenue, ranging from the preliminary cost effectiveness of a tunnel option to the removal of on-street parking in certain areas.

The staff recommends the development of further design studies and mitigation strategies to address concerns identified in the AA/DEIS, most notably the mitigation of community impacts associated with master planned changes to the Capital Crescent/Georgetown Branch Interim Trail. The 1986 Georgetown Branch Master Plan envisioned a transitway and trail in the Georgetown Branch right-of-way and the trail subsequently constructed was designated an Interim Trail with the recognition that the master plan vision included trail reconstruction. Nevertheless, the construction of the Medium Investment LRT Alternative will change the character of the trail and the ultimate trail design must be carefully considered to balance transportation, recreation, and community compatibility objectives.

The staff recommends additional local government agency actions to continue Purple Line station area plans, establish procedures to identify and fulfill local agency funding requirements, and reserve rights-of-way through the development approval process.