



Worksession: Staff Draft Countywide Transit Corridors Functional Master Plan

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Description

The first *Master Plan of Highways* (MPOH) was approved and adopted in 1931, shortly after the creation of the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission in 1927. The last comprehensive update to the MPOH was approved and adopted in 1955. The MPOH has been updated periodically, focusing on specific projects, rustic roads, and geographic areas in conjunction with area master and sector plans. Area master plans were revised in the 1970s to include the Metrorail Red Line, but the MPOH map was not revised to include transitways until 1986. Transitways now in the MPOH include:

- Purple Line Transitway
- Corridor Cities Transitway
- North Bethesda Transitway
- Georgia Avenue Busway

The Countywide Transit Corridors Functional Master Plan amends the MPOH to provide a network of transit corridors to supplement these transitways. In this way, transportation options can be increased to serve the anticipated growth with a minimum of adverse effects on the quality of life for those who live, work, and patronize the businesses along our major roadways.

This staff report summarizes the recommendations of the Countywide Transit Corridors Functional Master Plan and the proposed schedule should the Planning Board approve the Staff Draft for advertisement as the Public Hearing Draft.

Summary

The staff recommends that the Planning Board approve the attached Staff Draft as the Public Hearing Draft and set a Public Hearing for May 2, 2013.

The Countywide Transit Corridors Functional Master Plan is intended to:

- enhance mobility and accessibility
- support economic development
- improve the environment
- provide an efficient transportation system

To achieve these goals, the Staff Draft of the Plan makes recommendations on the following topics:

Major topic

Corridors where dedicated lanes are needed to support BRT service on:

- *Activity Center Corridors* with moderate-speed, high-frequency, all-day transit service on corridors connecting multiple dense, mixed-use areas.
- *Express Corridors* with high-speed, moderate-frequency, peak-period service on access-controlled corridors connecting commuters at park-and-ride lots to employment centers.
- *Commuter Corridors* with moderate-speed, moderate frequency, limited-stop transit service during peak periods on corridors that connect residential areas of moderate density to employment centers.

Other topics:

- Transit station locations on the recommended corridors
- Phasing for implementation of the recommended transit network.
- Addition of a third track to the Brunswick Line to expand MARC service.
- Designation of Bicycle-Pedestrian Priority Areas (BPPAs) to ensure that adequate access is provided in the area around major proposed stations.

The recommendations for additional transit corridors are based on transportation modeling results for the 2040 forecast year using “no-build” option and “build” options for transit networks of different sizes and treatments measured against standard and modified ridership thresholds for different levels of corridor treatments and the likely impacts of a combination of treatments on the transit network as a whole.

Overview of Staff Findings and Recommendations

The Staff Draft recommends an approximately 79-mile BRT network of corridors with a mix of treatments. Some of the corridors have forecast ridership that is fairly independent of other corridors, whereas others depend more on the “network effect” of completing other corridors in the ultimate BRT network.

Corridors that can stand alone

These corridors generally have higher ridership and a higher level of treatment is recommended that would be achieved via expanding rights-of-way and/or lane repurposing.

- MD 355 South – very high ridership, connects multiple activity centers
- MD 355 North – very high ridership, extension of Metrorail, connects multiple activity centers
- US 29 – high ridership, extension of Metrorail

- Georgia Ave North – low ridership, extension of Metrorail
- North Bethesda Transitway – moderate ridership but could significantly increase with potential future connection to Tyson’s Corner, Metrorail spur

Corridors that function best as part of a network

These corridors generally have lower ridership and a lower level of treatment that would be achieved via more limited increases in rights-of-way and/or via lane-repurposing. They rely upon a network of BRT corridors to be effective.

- New Hampshire Ave
- Georgia Ave South
- Veirs Mill Rd
- Randolph Rd
- University Blvd

The Importance of Transit in the County’s Transportation Network

Our current level of roadway congestion is consistently one of the worst in the nation and is forecast to increase by 70% by the year 2040. The solution to this transportation challenge consists of many parts:

- Promoting mixed-use development where appropriate
- Promoting telework
- Improving roadway connectivity
- Providing more and better pedestrian and bicycle facilities
- Improving the quality, availability, and reliability of transit

Implementation of the recommended transit network is a critical part of addressing our future transportation needs. To address the large increase in forecast traffic congestion, we either have to widen roadways through existing neighborhoods or make the better use of the roadways that we have. We believe that the latter is the better course and that increasing the attractiveness and availability of high-quality transit is the better answer.

Master Plan Phasing

The recommended BRT network, in its extent and treatment, meets the Board’s goal of an aspirational network while still working within the constraints of a Functional Plan that is tailored to the land uses and zoning in current area master plans. This would be accomplished via a two-phase master plan approach:

Phase 1

Phase 1 recommendations reflect what is needed to serve planned land use and would become active upon the approval and adoption of this Plan. While all of these recommendations could be pursued independently, we strongly urge that the initial major capital investments in dedicated lanes be made on

the recommended corridors with the highest existing and/or forecast ridership and that are reasonably independent of other corridors.

Phase 2

Phase 2 includes recommendations for enhancements that would require an amendment to the General Plan or an area master plan in order to require the dedication of additional rights-of-way. These recommendations include enhancements in other jurisdictions, as well as where the enhancements would significantly affect the character of the area or need additional density to generate ridership to justify the additional right-of-way. While previous master plans have recommended that certain transportation facilities be considered “beyond the life of the master plan,” this Plan recommends a uniquely extensive program of specific future transit corridor treatment enhancements, providing a blueprint for the transit network and associated transit-oriented development to be expanded in tandem.

Transit Network Implementation

We find that MD355 is the best candidate for pursuing a high-quality BRT treatment to serve future planned growth and that US29 is the best candidate for implementing dedicated bus lanes in the near term. While other recommended Phase 1 improvements should be pursued for additional study so that right-of-way needs can be better defined, their programming for construction should proceed far more cautiously.

Early success on individual transit corridors is essential to justify the investments required to create and operate the recommended BRT network. Corridors with less independent ridership potential will require heavier operating subsidies until other portions of the network are built. While some lower ridership corridors may be easier to construct and be attractive to those who want to “get something done”, picking the low-hanging fruit may work against the long-term potential of BRT. Poor performance on the part of any early candidate may adversely affect the consideration of subsequent better candidates.

The County Executive has recently created a BRT Steering Committee to pursue the development of the network that is recommended in the Functional Plan. At the appropriate time, we will urge that the Board forward these comments on implementation to the committee for their consideration.

Questions

We have heard a number of questions in our discussions with the Board and in other public presentations that we would like to address to clarify our approach to evaluation of the corridors and recommendations for treatment.

Does the transportation modeling take into account additional residential development and employment that may be attracted by the introduction of a high-quality transit line?

No, the model uses forecast 2040 development to determine the potential ridership and assumes the construction of the transportation facilities in the Constrained Long Range Plan (CLRP). The modeling needs to be bounded since if it assumed a high level of development everywhere a transit line was

introduced, regardless of master plan recommendations, high-quality transit would always be warranted. In addition, BRT can provide various levels of service that would in turn serve various levels of development. The land use planning should be done first to determine the appropriate level of development so that a determination can be made of the transportation facilities needed to support that development.

On a general basis, we did consider a further build-out of planned density beyond 2040 in approved master and sector plans. On an area-specific basis, we also considered the impacts on potential BRT ridership from the higher level of development that is being considered as part of the Glenmont Sector Plan and the White Oak Science Gateway Master Plan. The latter exercise was intended to assist those plan updates, providing information on what transportation network could be used to support new density if included in the plans. This information was used to determine what Phase 2 enhancements to the recommended transit network could be included in a future master plan.

Does the modeled transportation network include the Corridor Cities Transitway (CCT)?

Yes, the CCT and the Purple Line are both part of the CLRP that was used as the baseline for the modeling.

Was the BRT ridership forecast based on an assumed growth of existing bus ridership?

No, the modeling was based on 2040 forecast population and employment densities and locations and the availability and relative attractiveness of transportation facilities to move between desired origins and destinations.

Would dedicated bus lanes be restricted to BRT buses only?

The service plan being developed by MCDOT will consider if and when other buses should use the recommended dedicated bus lanes. While the recommended rights-of-way were developed with a specific treatment in mind, the final decision on treatment for each segment of any particular will be made by the implementing agency during more detailed planning that will follow the adoption of the Functional Plan.

Did the modeling assume a redeployment of existing local buses to neighborhoods as BRT is implemented on the major roadways?

No, the modeling includes a reduction of local bus service on major roadways per our discussions with Ride-On and WMATA staff, but no redeployment was included in the modeling. A service plan is currently being developed by MCDOT to determine how BRT should be integrated into the countywide bus network and what changes to the local network would be needed. In addition to considering whether local buses will be allowed to use the dedicated lanes recommended by this Plan, in which case there would be fewer buses to redeploy, the overall cost of transit service - both BRT and local - will be considered as part of the service plan.

Schedule

Our current schedule is as follows:

- **late March 2013:** Advertise Public Hearing Draft
- **May 2, 2013:** Public Hearing
- **May-July 2013:** Worksessions
- **late July 2013:** Transmit Planning Board Draft to County Council