

Midcounty Corridor Study: Montgomery County Department of Transportation Briefing

-  Matthew Folden, Planner Coordinator, Area 1, matthew.folden@montgomeryplanning.org 301-495-4539
-  Mary Dolan, Chief, Functional Planning and Policy, mary.dolan@montgomeryplanning.org 301-495-4552

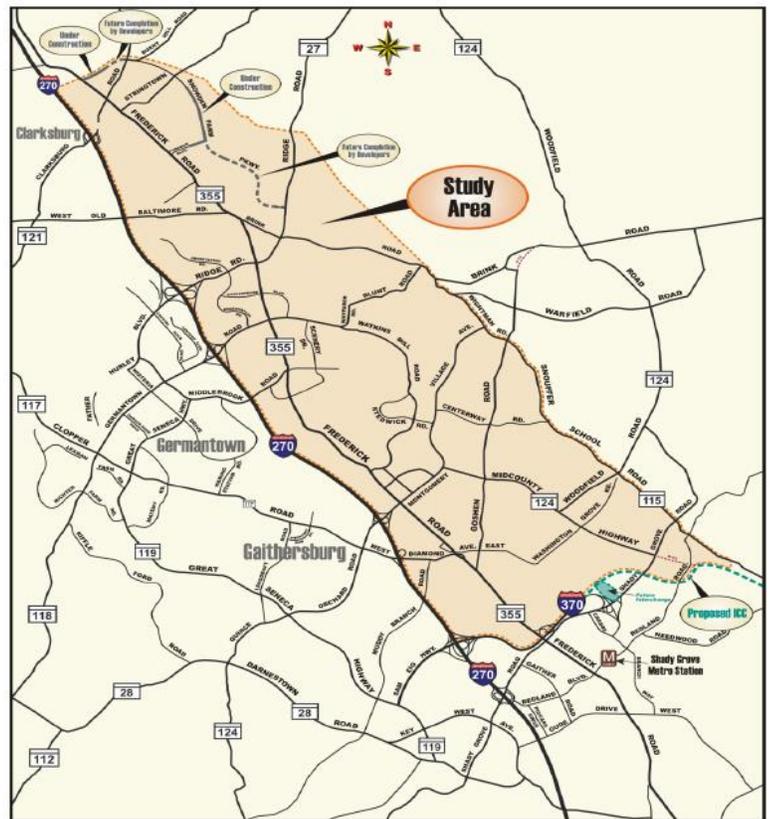
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Description

- MCDOT Briefing on the five potential “Build” alternatives evaluated for the Midcounty Corridor Study.
- Study Area: Bounded by I-270 to the west, I-370 and the Intercounty Connector (MD 200) to the south, Snouffer School Road and Wightman Road to the east, and Snowden Farm Parkway to the north.
- Applicant: Montgomery County Department of Transportation (MCDOT)

Summary

- **Staff Recommendation:** Staff recommends scheduling the following two Planning Board agenda items: 1) A tour of the Study Area, and 2) A consideration of the Board’s recommendation on a preferred alternative in early Fall 2013 following today’s MCDOT briefing.
- The Study Area is within Planning Areas 2 and 3 and transects the Gaithersburg Vicinity, Clarksburg, and Germantown master plan areas.
- The proposed alignments included in this study are intended to relieve traffic congestion, improve safety and efficiency, and improve accessibility.
- MCDOT believes the “No-Build” alternative is not a viable option because it does not meet objectives set forth in the project’s need statement.



Background

The Midcounty Highway (M-83) was first listed in Montgomery County's Master Plan of Highways in the 1960s and was planned to extend from Ridge Road (MD 27) in Clarksburg to Redland Road in Derwood as an 8.7-mile, controlled access, four to six-lane major highway. Over the years, a three mile segment of Midcounty Highway was constructed, between Shady Grove Road and Montgomery Village Avenue, while a majority of the remaining master planned right-of-way has been dedicated/ reserved for dedication by developers through the development review process.

Planning and design of the project was not actively pursued between 1992 and 2004 due to fiscal constraints, however, the current iteration of the Midcounty Highway Facility Planning Study was reinitiated in 2004 to evaluate construction of the master plan alignment between Montgomery Village Avenue and Ridge Road. MCDOT presented a *Purpose and Need Statement* to the public in November 2004, which was and accepted by the environmental agencies, including the Army Corps of Engineers, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and the Maryland Department of Environment, in January 2007. That study analyzed eleven potential alternative alignments which were subsequently refined to the five "Build" alternatives and one "No-Build" alternative. These "Alternatives Retained for Detailed Study" (ARDS) were further detailed and anticipated impacts are documented in the May 2013 *Draft Environmental Effects Report*. Each of those alternatives is described in detail below:

Alternative 1 – No-Build Alternative

Not considered to be a viable solution by MCDOT because it would not meet the project's needs. Its purpose is to provide a baseline for comparing the five Build alternatives. Preliminary cost estimate: \$0

Alternative 2 – Transportation Systems Management/Travel Demand Management

Implement minor, low-cost intersection improvements within the existing right-of-way to improve the previously identified 16 Study Area intersections projected to have unacceptable congestion in the design year under the No-Build scenario.

Preliminary cost estimate: \$41 million

Alternative 4 Modified - Brink-Wightman-Snouffer School-Muncaster Mill

Widen the Brink-Wightman-Snouffer School-Muncaster Mill corridor to a four to six-lane divided highway. A sidewalk, 10-foot wide shared use path, and two 5.5-foot on-street bicycle lanes would be provided. This alternative would include more than 125 access points (13 signalized intersections, 25 unsignalized intersections, and 90 driveways).

Preliminary cost estimate: \$251 million

Alternative 5 –MD 355 with Service Roads

Improve MD 355 to a six-lane highway, with service roads at select locations. The service roads would reduce the number of driveways from 62 to 17, thereby reducing the potential

for accidents and increasing efficiency of the roadway. Three commercial properties would be displaced as a result of this alternative, however, those displacements would be the result of the proposed MD 355 widening, not the proposed service drives.

Preliminary cost estimate: \$120 million

Alternative 8 – Master Plan Alignment Truncated at Watkins Mill Road

Provide a new four-lane divided highway with access controls, following the M-83 Master Plan alignment from Snowden Farm Parkway to Watkins Mill Road, where the new highway would tie into Watkins Mill Road. This alternative would leave a gap in Midcounty Highway between Watkins Mill Road and Montgomery Village Avenue to avoid impacts to the Whetstone Run stream valley. Three Northern Terminus Options are proposed at the north end of the alignment: Option A would follow the Master Plan alignment, Option D would traverse the Agricultural Reserve (but would avoid sensitive resources in North Germantown Greenway Stream Valley Park), and Option B would incorporate existing Brink Road and Ridge Road. MCDOT staff believes that Option B is undesirable in terms of traffic operations and safety. The portion of Alternative 8B that follows the Master Plan alignment has been reserved for M-83 through the subdivision review process.

Option A Preliminary cost estimate: \$274 million

Option B Preliminary cost estimate: \$255 million

Option D Preliminary cost estimate: \$267 million

Alternative 9 – Master Plan Alignment

Provide a new four-lane divided highway with access controls, following the M-83 Master Plan alignment, for a distance of 5.7 miles. Connecting to the existing Midcounty Highway to the south and Snowden Farm Parkway to the north, Alternative 9 would complete a 12.2-mile highway between Gaithersburg and Clarksburg. This alternative includes the same three Northern Terminus Options described for Alternative 8.

Option A Preliminary cost estimate: \$357 million

Option B Preliminary cost estimate: \$338 million

Option D Preliminary cost estimate: \$350 million

Purpose and Need for the Midcounty Corridor Project

The purpose and need statement for this project is based on the following seven considerations:

- Reduce existing and future congestion: Sixty-five intersections were evaluated within the Study Area. Sixteen of those intersections would result in unacceptable congestion by the design year 2030, including eight intersections along MD 355.
- Improve vehicular safety: Nearly all arterials comprising the Build alternatives currently experience higher than average accident rates.
- Enhance the efficiency of the roadway network and improve connections between economic centers: MD 355 currently has more than 90 driveways, entrances, and intersections along MD 355 between MD 27 and MD 124. Travel time along MD 355 is projected to increase by 35% in 2030, compared to existing conditions, and the mixing of regional and local traffic is expected to lead to increased accidents.
- Accommodate planned land use and future growth: The MD 355/I-270 Technology Corridor accounts for 60% of the County's jobs, 73% of its industrial acreage, 81% of its office space, and 56% of its retail sales. In addition, it has the capacity to accommodate 72% of the County's remaining residential development and 83% of its future job growth. The County and State have increased financial resources devoted to attracting bioscience business to the corridor, and the success of those efforts depends on increased highway capacity and mobility.
- Provide bicycle and pedestrian connections: The region lacks adequate north-south bicycle facilities necessary to provide safe, efficient connections
- Enhance homeland security: A new or improved north-south regional highway would improve emergency response and incident management.
- Improve the quality of life: Reducing commuting times and improving mobility and traffic safety would enhance quality of life.

Schedule

- August 7, 2013
Army Corps of Engineers/ Maryland Department of Environment: Public Hearing
- August 21, 2013
Army Corps of Engineers/ Maryland Department of Environment: Comment Period closed
- September 26, 2013 (tentative)
Planning Board tour of the study area
- October 3, 2013 (tentative)
Planning Board recommendation on preferred alternative alignment. Following this meeting, staff recommends that the Board direct staff to transmit comments to MCDOT and the Montgomery County Council.

