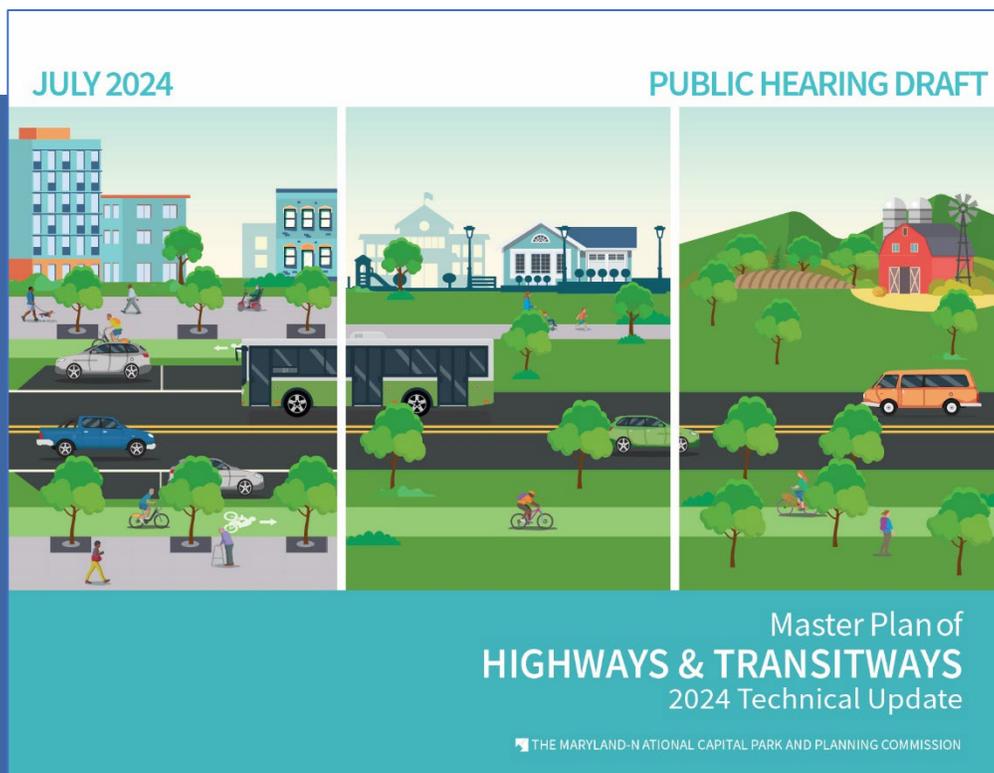
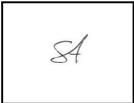


MASTER PLAN OF HIGHWAYS AND TRANSITWAYS 2024 TECHNICAL UPDATE – PUBLIC TESTIMONY UPDATE & ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS



Description

The Planning Board will receive a summary of public testimony on the Public Hearing Draft of the *Master Plan of Highways and Transitways – 2024 Technical Update*.



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Planning Division

Countywide Planning & Policy

Planning Board Information

MCPB
Item No. 7
October 3, 2024

MASTER PLAN OVERVIEW

A technical update to the *Master Plan of Highways and Transitways* (MPOHT) is necessitated by the County Council’s approval of two bills in 2022 (Bill 24-22 and 34-22) that revised the street types identified in Chapter 49 of the County Code, also known as the “Road Code,” to conform to the county’s Complete Streets Design Guide. While the updated county code provides an interim translation from the previous “functional” classification system to the new “complete streets” classification system, adjustments to these default translations are needed for various road segments in the county. Master plan recommendations are presented in the Public Hearing Draft of the MPOHT to modify street classifications, master planned target speeds, number of planned travel lanes, transitway removals and additions, transit station removals and additions, and the identification of a new Growth Corridor street type.

PUBLIC TESTIMONY

Planning Staff presented the Working Draft of *the Master Plan of Highways and Transitways – 2024 Technical Update* to the Planning Board on June 26, 2024. The Planning Board authorized Planning Staff to prepare the Public Hearing Draft and to hold a public hearing on September 12, 2024 in the second floor auditorium of the M-NCPPC Wheaton Headquarters building at 2425 Reedie Drive, Wheaton, MD. The public hearing was advertised in the Washington Times on August 5, 2024. The Public Hearing Draft and appendices are available online at: <https://montgomeryplanning.org/mpoht2024>

The public hearing record was kept open until Thursday, September 26, 2024, at 5 p.m. to allow community members to provide additional testimony to the Planning Board. **A key issue that has arisen is that most testimony, including from the County Executive and the Montgomery County Department of Transportation, has requested the removal of the unbuilt sections of Midcounty Highway Extended (also known as M-83), between Montgomery Village Avenue and Ridge Road, from the MPOHT.** Removing this section of Midcounty Highway Extended is beyond the scope of work (Attachment A) approved by the Planning Board on September 21, 2023, as this plan was originally intended to be a technical update to finalize the transition from the previous “functional” classification system to the new “complete streets” classification system as directed by the County Council.

MIDCOUNTY HIGHWAY OVERVIEW

Planning Staff is providing the Planning Board with some additional background and information related to the Midcounty Highway Extended in order to obtain additional direction.

Midcounty Highway was first added to the MPOHT in 1966/1967. The alignment has changed over the years, but the current alignment between Montgomery Village Avenue and Ridge Road was finalized in 2015 in the Midcounty Corridor Study Draft Preferred Alternative/Conceptual Mitigation Report as

Study Option 9A in Figure 1. Figure 2 shows this alignment as depicted in the MPOHT with current/existing and planned sections of Midcounty Highway delineated. A four-lane section from Shady Grove Road to Montgomery Village Avenue and a short two-lane section from Middlebrook Road to Grassy Knoll Terrace currently exist.

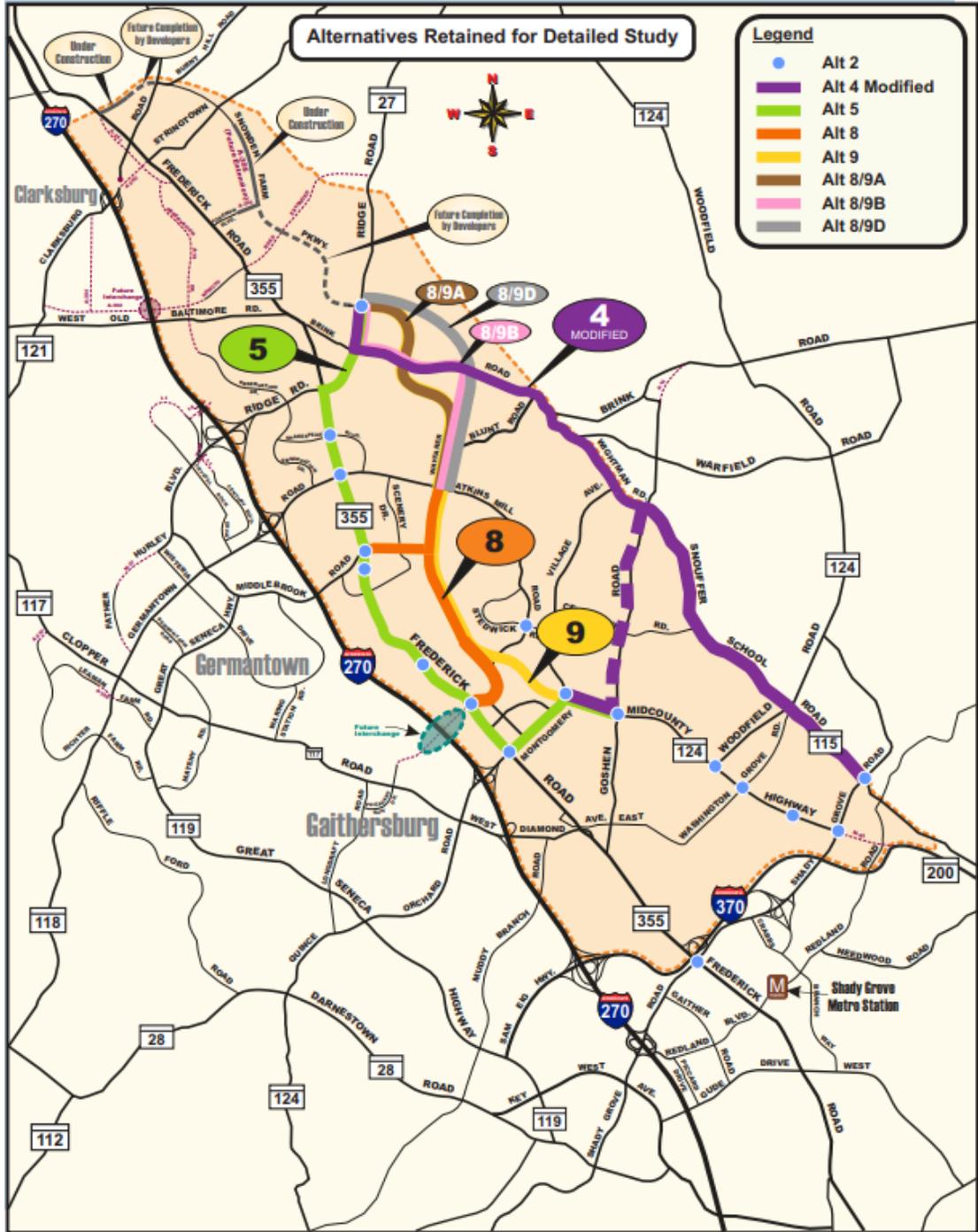


Figure 1: Preferred Alternative Selected in March 2015 Midcounty Corridor Study Draft Preferred Alternative/Conceptual Mitigation Report

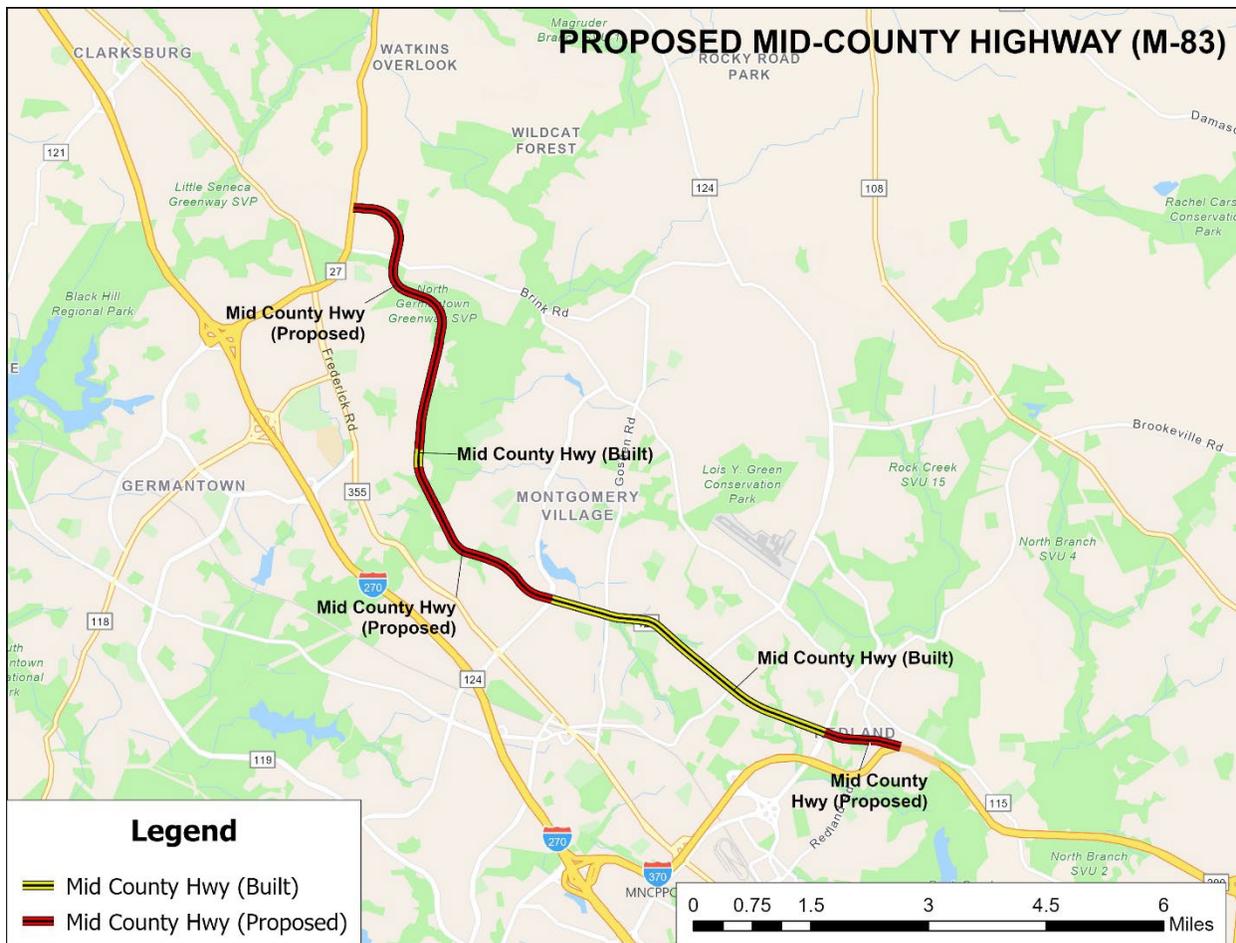


Figure 2: Midcounty Highway as Depicted in the Master Plan of Highways and Transitways

In 2013, the Montgomery County Department of Transportation (MCDOT) evaluated nine alignments for Midcounty Highway Extended, including several sub-alternatives and submitted these to the Planning Board for review. The Planning Board reviewed the alignments and supported Alternative 9A. In 2015, MCDOT completed the Draft Preferred Alternative/Conceptual Mitigation Report, where it also recommended Alternative 9A as the Preferred Alternative.

In 2017, MCDOT conducted a supplemental analysis to evaluate three options that included transit. It found that a transit-focused scenario, referred to as Scenario 1, performed well. This scenario includes bus rapid transit (BRT) along MD 355 and local intersection improvements (see Figure 3).

In 2017, the County Council approved Resolution 18-957 (see Attachment B). It states: “The Council directs the Montgomery County Planning Board not to assume additional road capacity from the northern extension of Midcounty Highway when calculating the land use - transportation balance in future master plans, including but not limited to the upcoming Gaithersburg East Master Plan and the Germantown Plan for Town Sector Zone. This step ensures that any new development allowed under these plans does not rely on the northern extension of Midcounty Highway, while retaining the right-of-way for this extension in these plans.”

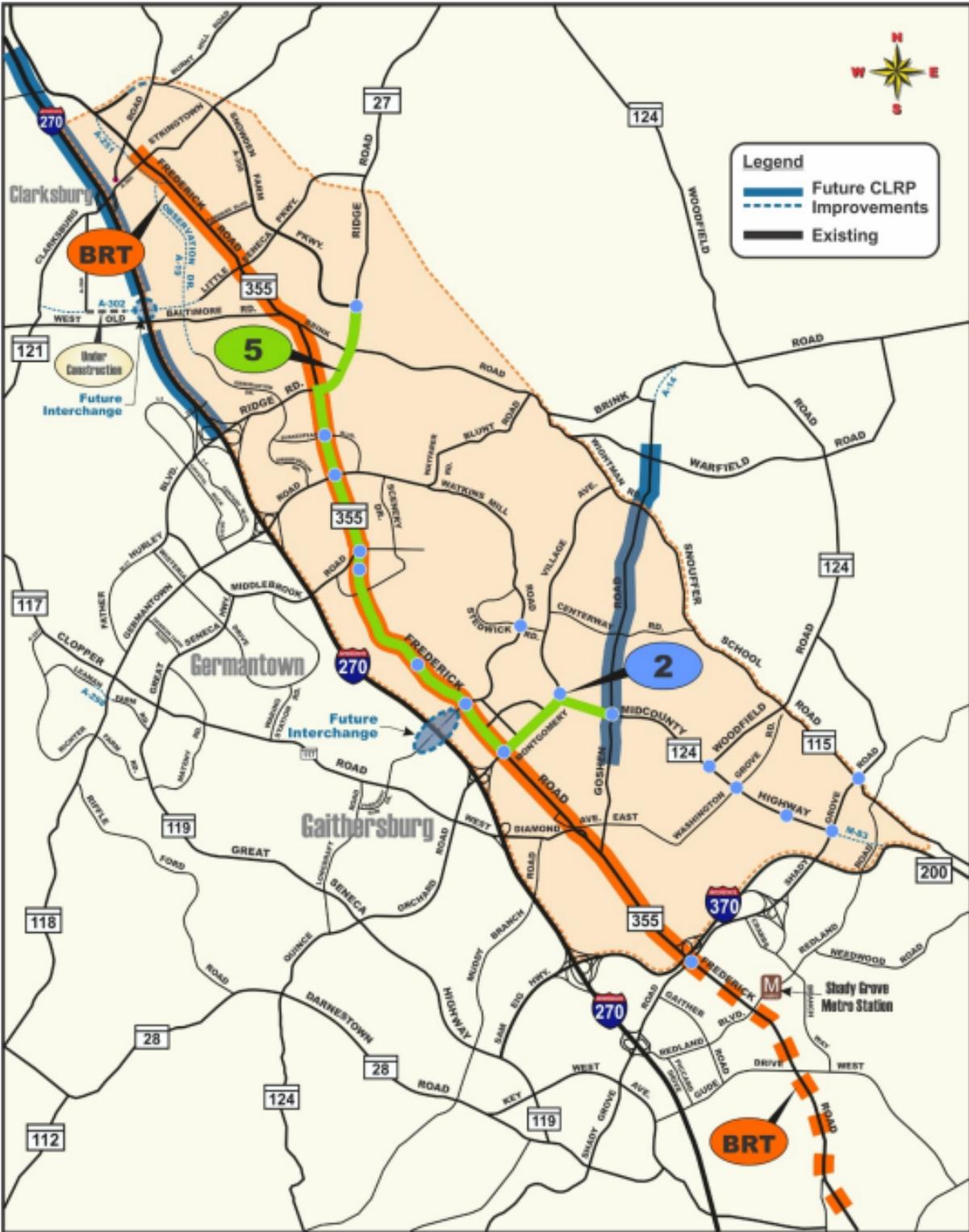


Figure 3: Scenario 1 (with no M-83) as evaluated in the 2017 Midcounty Corridor Study Supplemental Report

In 2018, the *Bicycle Master Plan* confirmed that a sidepath would parallel Midcounty Highway Extended if the project was to ever move forward.

Over the years, Montgomery County has preserved future right-of-way for Midcounty Highway Extended as part of the development approval process, which is shown in Figure 4 below. This map can be viewed in more detail on an online map at this link:

<https://montgomeryplanning.org/planning/transportation/highway-planning/highway-preservation/>

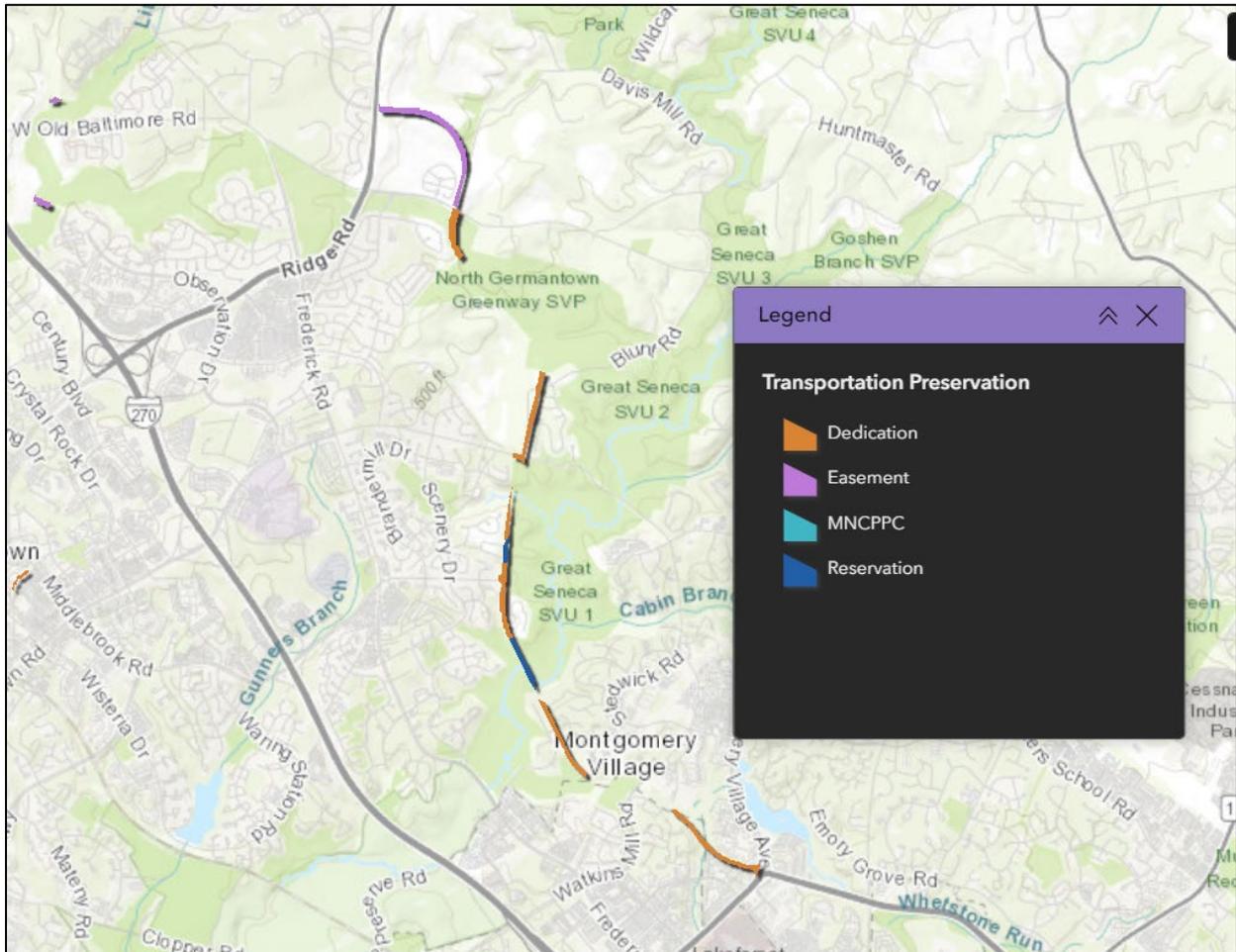


Figure 4: Roadway Reservations, Dedications, and Easements for Midcounty Highway (M-83)

RECOMMENDATIONS

There are at least three options that the Planning Board could take regarding the feedback received on Midcounty Highway Extended:

1. Do not remove or consider removing Midcounty Highway Extended from the MPOHT as it is beyond the original scope of the project and proceed with the current version.
2. Direct Planning Staff to modify the scope of the MPOHT to include consideration of Midcounty Highway Extended and to conduct additional public engagement and hold another public hearing.
3. Consider removing Midcounty Highway Extended from the MPOHT based on the Council's 2017 Resolution and the testimony already received without the need to hold another public hearing.

Planning Staff strongly recommend against Option #3. Removing Midcounty Highway from the master plan was not part of the approved scope of work, so affected communities may be unaware of this testimony. From a public engagement perspective, it is important that these communities have the opportunity to be informed about the proposal and to have the opportunity to provide public testimony.

Planning Staff support Option #2 and recommend that the Planning Board request additional public engagement and conduct a second public hearing on removing Midcounty Highway Extended from the MPOHT. If the Planning Board supports this approach, Planning Staff will:

- Conduct one in-person and one virtual public meeting regarding Midcounty Highway Extended prior to a public hearing to be scheduled for November 10, 2024. This will include online promotion through the MPOHT eletter and on social media.
- Update web page content with educational content and FAQs about Midcounty Highway Extended with an online feedback form.
- Provide a report and summary of the public meetings to the Planning Board along with recommended action.
- Work with the Montgomery County Department of Transportation, Maryland Department of Transportation, Montgomery Parks and other agencies to determine whether right-of-way dedications and easements need to be retained for other purposes.

Table 1: MPOHT Timeline (Original Schedule versus Modified Schedule)

Item	Current Schedule	Modified Schedule
Public Hearing #1	9/12/2024	9/12/2024
Public Comment Period #1 Ends	9/26/2024	9/26/2024
Planning Board Update	10/3/2024	10/3/2024
Public Engagement	n/a	10/07/2024-10/18/2024
Public Hearing #2	n/a	11/10/2024
Public Comment Period #2 Ends	n/a	11/24/2024
Work Session #1	10/17/2024	12/19/2024
Work Session #2	10/31/2024	01/09/2025
Transmit Planning Board Draft	November 2024	January 2024
Council Review	Fall 2024	Winter 2025
Council Approval	Winter 2025	Spring 2025

ATTACHMENTS

- Attachment A: Approved Scope of Work
- Attachment B: October 31, 2017 Montgomery County Council Resolution No. 18-957
“Transportation Solution for Northwest Montgomery County”