



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

MCPB
ITEM #9
October 14, 2010

MEMORANDUM

DATE: October 6, 2010
TO: Montgomery County Planning Board
VIA: Dan Hardy, Chief – Move Division *DKH*
FROM: Tom Autrey (301-495-4533), Supervisor, Move Division *TA*
SUBJECT: Transitway Planning Update – Roundtable Discussion

Purpose of Update on Transitway Planning Activities

Staff expects constructive public dialogue during the next two to three months focusing on the relationship between transitway planning and Sector Plans. The Maryland Transit Administration (MTA) is expected to release its latest environmental document (i.e., the Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement or SDEIS) related to the **Corridor Cities Transitway (CCT)** later this month. A Public Hearing on the SDEIS is tentatively scheduled to be held in mid November. Work at the State and County level also continues on planning related to the **Purple Line**. In addition, the County Department of Transportation has underway a **Countywide Bus Rapid Transit Study**. All of these transitway planning efforts are integrated with our master planning work program and it is for that reason staff has prepared the following brief summary for the Planning Board. The Roundtable agenda item will consist of a short presentation and follow-up question and answer session as a means of updating the Planning Board.

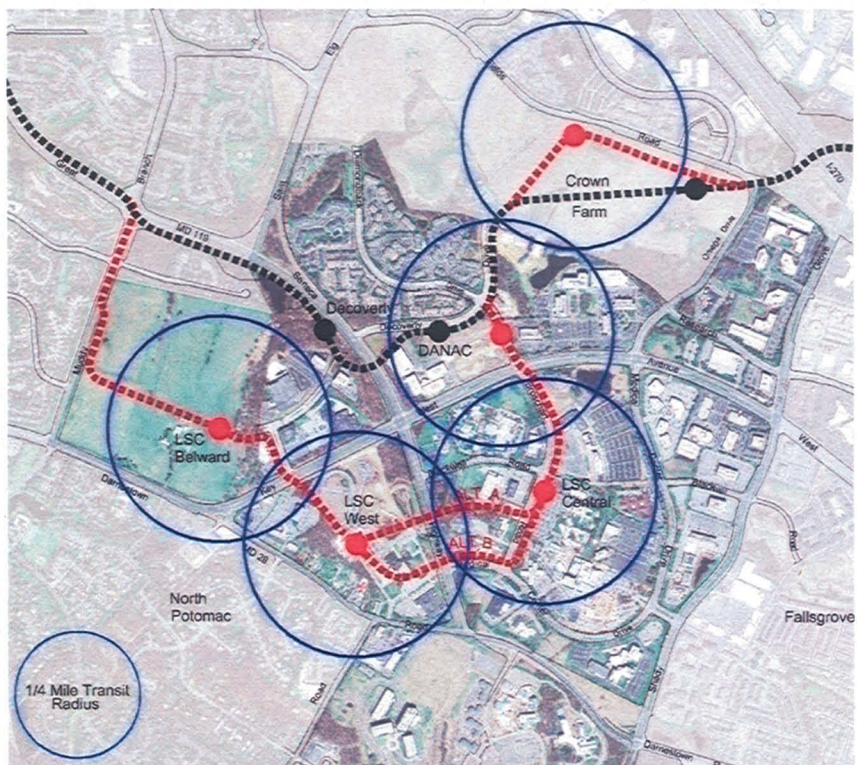
Action Requested

No formal Planning Board action is recommended. However, the Planning Board may want to discuss the merits of scheduling a short follow-up agenda item shortly after the release of the SDEIS. The purpose of the follow-up item would be to review a brief staff summary of the SDEIS and determine at that time whether staff or the Chair should submit testimony during the formal comment period on the SDEIS.

Corridor Cities Transitway

As noted, the MTA is expected to release a SDEIS later this month. The purpose of the SDEIS is to examine in more detail the potential impacts of the proposed alternative alignment for the CCT - i.e., alignments included in the recently adopted Great Seneca Science Corridor Plan. The alignments are shown below in Exhibit 1.

Exhibit 1 - New CCT Alignment (in red) – Great Seneca Science Corridor Plan¹



The MTA released an initial analysis of the new CCT alignment in November 2009 during the development of the Great Seneca Science Corridor Plan. The purpose of the study was to determine the viability of the proposed alternative alignments in order to inform decision making on the Master Plan and the eventual selection of a Locally Preferred Alternative for the CCT.² The analysis indicated the new alignments would result in overall higher ridership and improved cost – effectiveness using guidelines established (and used) by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA).

The soon to be released SDEIS is needed in order to bring the evaluation of the impact of the Great Seneca Science Corridor Plan alignment up to the same level of detail as the evaluation of the previous alignment – and before a Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA) is formally selected by the Governor and a FTA ‘New Starts’ application is filed by the MTA. The Planning Board, County Council and County Executive have formally indicated their support for the new alignment through the recommendation and adoption of the Great Seneca Science Corridor

¹ The Great Seneca Science Corridor Plan was previously known as the Gaithersburg West Master Plan. Exhibit 1 depicts the CCT alignments in or in the immediate vicinity of the Plan area. Crown Farm is in the City of Gaithersburg. The SDEIS will also include an analysis of a proposed alternative alignment north of this area on the west side of Great Seneca Highway to serve the Kentlands community – also within the City of Gaithersburg.

² The MTA report can be found at:

http://www.i270multimodalstudy.com/images/stories/documents/Final_CCT_Alternative_Alignments11-05-09-last.pdf

Master Plan. The County Council and County Executive have also gone on record as supporting Light Rail as the mode (instead of Bus Rapid Transit – the recommendation of the Planning Board in November 2009)³.

The SDEIS that will be made available later this month by the MTA uses the Round 7.2a land use forecast that has been adopted by the Council of Governments and has assumed no major (widening, direct access ramps, etc.) improvements on I-270. Early guidance provided by the MTA indicates that there is no significant change in the ridership or cost effectiveness rating as a result of these changes in the model inputs and assumptions.

With respect to I-270 itself, the State Highway Administration (SHA) and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) have agreed that full implementation by 2030 of the highway improvements envisioned in the Alternatives Analysis / Environmental Assessment released in May 2009 is not feasible and that the SHA, working with communities and stakeholder agencies, will work toward a highway LPA that could be a combination of highway alternatives with modifications. SHA will be completing an “Independent Utility Study” in the near future that will inform this process. The Independent Utility Study is expected to confirm that both the CCT and I-270 elements of the planning study have independent utility and can now be separated from a procedural perspective. Essentially, the selection of a LPA for the transit (CCT) and highway components (I-270) will proceed on separate but coordinated paths.

The MTA staff is available to meet with interested community groups to discuss specific issues related to the CCT study effort. The Planning Department staff continues to coordinate with the MTA and other interested parties on development applications along the corridor as well as updating the web site, GIS layer, and other outreach activities.

Staff expects the environmental document prepared by the MTA to be consistent with the Great Seneca Science Corridor Plan and the County Council and County Executive LPA testimony. Therefore, there is no need for action by the Planning Board at this time. The Planning Board may want to discuss the merits of scheduling a follow-up (short) agenda item shortly after the release of the SDEIS. The purpose of the follow-up item would be to review a brief staff summary of the SDEIS and determine at that time if there was a basis or need for submitting testimony during the formal comment period on the SDEIS. Absent any significant new findings in the SDEIS, the Planning Board may want to consider submitting a statement in support of the overall vision of not only the Great Seneca Science Corridor Plan but also the CCT as a key underlying element of other numerous County master plans – as well as plans adopted by the cities of Gaithersburg and Rockville. If there are new findings or issues, the staff would recommend that the Planning Board consider those issues at that time and transmit any recommendations as it deemed appropriate. Estimated CCT milestone dates include the following:

- Mid to Late October 2010 – SDEIS Released for Comment by MTA
- Mid - November 2010 – Public Hearing on SDEIS
- Winter 2010 – 2011 – Selection of LPA by Governor

³ Letter of November 30, 2009 from County Executive Ike Leggett and County Council President Phil Andrews to Maryland Secretary of Transportation Beverly Swaim-Staley.

- Summer 2011 – Submittal of FTA New Starts Application
- Late 2011 to Mid 2013 – Preliminary Engineering and Final Environmental Impact Statement
- Mid 2013 – Request Entry into Final Design
- Late 2013 to Mid 2015 – Final Design
- Mid 2015 to Late 2015 – Start Construction

Purple Line

The Purple Line Functional Plan was adopted by the full Commission on September 8, 2010. It is anticipated that the final document will be published by the end of this month.

There is one Purple Line related Master Plan – the Takoma Langley Crossroads Plan – that has been forwarded to County Council as a Planning Board Draft. Purple Line station area plans currently underway include the Chevy Chase Lake Sector Plan and the Long Branch Sector Plan. The MTA Purple Line project team is actively involved in both the outreach and technical aspects of these planning efforts.

The next major step in the Purple Line planning process at the state level is the submittal of the request to enter the Preliminary Engineering / Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) phase and the submittal of an application to enter FTA’s New Starts process. It is expected that this will occur by the end of this year or early 2011.

The MTA has recently established standing working groups in both counties to facilitate a more detailed examination of key issues as the project design advances into preliminary engineering. Members of the working group include representation from our master plan teams and Department of Parks, County Department of Transportation, County Fire and Rescue, and other agency stakeholders. The working group meets monthly and to date has examined issues related to the Capital Crescent and Silver Spring Green Trails, access issues at Rosemary Hills Elementary School and Silver Spring International Middle School, and the station area design concepts for the Bethesda South entrance, Connecticut Avenue, and Silver Spring Transit Center, among other locations.

In addition, the County Department of Transportation is funding the design of the Bethesda South entrance and the initial concept under development for this important end of line station was recently presented to County Council. It is anticipated that this project will come before the Planning Board as a Mandatory Referral within the next 6-12 months.

The staff continues to work with the MTA and the respective County Departments to ensure that the many elements of the Purple Line project planning are coordinated with our master planning, development review and outreach efforts.

The latest estimate of key dates for the Purple Line project planning includes the following:

- Winter 2010 – 2011 – Submittal of New Starts Application and Request to enter Preliminary Engineering / Final Environmental Impact Phase

- Spring 2012 – Complete Preliminary Engineering & Final Environmental Impact Statement
- Fall 2012 – Begin Final Design
- Fall 2013 – Complete Final Design
- Early 2014 – Begin Construction
- Late 2017 – Complete Construction

Consolidated Transportation Program

The Maryland Department of Transportation recently released its Draft FY 2011 – FY 2016 Consolidated Transportation Program (CTP). The draft CTP includes a total of \$227 million over the period for the Purple Line – a level of funding that is expected to cover preliminary engineering and right of way acquisition. The CTP includes a total of \$43 million for the CCT – funds that will be used for preliminary engineering and other planning activities.

Countywide Bus Rapid Transit Study

The County Department of Transportation has begun work on a Countywide Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) study. The objective of this study is to determine whether a system of BRT routes is feasible as a premium transit option for the County. The concept of a network of priority transit corridors has been proposed both regionally and locally. From a regional perspective, WMATA has identified a Priority Corridor Bus Network where enhancements are being introduced to improve travel time and passenger amenities. A recent successful TIGER⁴ grant application for the region included funds for the implementation of improvements to bus service in the Veirs Mill Road corridor and between Bethesda and College Park in Prince George’s County. Additional funds for the construction of the Takoma / Langley Transit Center were also included in the grant application. Locally, the County’s study has built upon the initial proposal developed by Councilmember Elrich. Councilmember Elrich is tentatively scheduled to brief the Planning Board on the overall concept on November 4, 2010.

The current study is underway and the consultant is in the process of evaluating specific corridors. This study will be used to inform master plan development and implementation efforts, particularly in areas where the results are available and applicable, including:

- The establishment of the Rockville Pike right-of-way in White Flint (a specific element of the approved and adopted Sector Plan),
- The consideration of BRT treatments along Connecticut Avenue, which may include portions of the Chevy Chase Lake Sector Plan, and
- The consideration of options along US 29 and New Hampshire Avenue in the vicinity of the East County Science Center plan.

We anticipate that the study will include public outreach on preliminary findings in the next two to three months and be completed by spring 2011.

⁴ “TIGER” is an acronym for Transportation Investments Generating Economic Recovery.

Summary

There are three primary planning efforts underway that are being used to inform our master planning and development review activities. The most immediate milestones include the upcoming release of the CCT SDEIS this month by the MTA and the publication of the Final Purple Line Functional Plan document. Following months will include updates on the Countywide BRT Study and various aspects of the Purple Line as the MTA gets closer to entering preliminary engineering. Outreach efforts will continue by the stakeholder agencies and Planning Department on all fronts.