




2020 Montgomery County Transportation Priorities Letter Review – Briefing from MCDOT

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Completed: 11/26/19

Requested Board Action

Forward a list of comments to the Montgomery County Department of Transportation for consideration by the County Council and County Executive for inclusion in the 2020 Montgomery County Transportation Priorities Letter.

Background

The Montgomery County Department of Transportation (MCDOT) has prepared a draft letter for County Council and County Executive concurrence and execution. MCDOT is requesting comments from the Montgomery County Planning Board by December 20, 2019 to inform this process. The letter is expected by the Maryland Department of Transportation in April 2020. The draft letter is provided as Attachment A in this staff report. The letter has been formatted to address transportation priorities by mode, and the letter appears to be presented in priority order with Bus Rapid Transit and other transit needs discussed first, followed by pedestrian and bicycle needs, state highway (non-Interstate) needs, and finally Interstate needs.

Staff Evaluation/Recommendations

Planning staff is in general concurrence with the project priorities of the draft letter. It should be noted that most other Maryland Counties follow a different format providing priorities in numerical order. While the transportation needs of this County are more complex than most other Maryland counties, the lack of a priority ranking may make it difficult for MDOT to understand County priorities in the separate categories on a comparative basis, e.g., transit project #3 versus bike/ped project #1 or road project #1.

Staff Recommendations are as follows:

- Add a new Commuter Rail Expansion recommendation on page 3 as follows:

#4 Shady Grove Station (Planning). The Shady Grove Sector Plan calls for the integration of new MARC stations into the MARC Rail network. We request that MTA advance study of the station.

- Insert a new State Highways recommendation on page 4 as follows:
 - #3 16th Street (MD 390) Road Diet between Spring Street and MD 97 (Georgia Avenue)** – Implement a road diet on 16th Street between Spring Street and MD 97 to provide two through lanes in each direction (one lane reduction in each direction), consistent with the Greater Lyttonsville Sector Plan and the Forest Glen Montgomery Hills Sector Plan.
- Separate the State Highways recommendation for the MD 28 and MD 198 corridors (they are currently one MDOT project), as we anticipate that implementation will be conducted in phases as separate projects.
- Table 1 below shows the State Highway Recommendations with recommendation #3 added as described above (shown in bold). In addition, planning staff is recommending changes in the priority order of several projects compared to MCDOT’s ranking. The most significant changes are higher priorities from Planning for the MD 198 improvements and a lower priority from Planning for the US 29 Comprehensive Plan and the MD 97/ MD 28 interchange.

Table 1 State Highway Project Needs – Recommended Changes

State Highways Project Needs	MCDOT Rank	Planning Staff Rank
MD 97 (Georgia Avenue) Forest Glen/Montgomery Hills Improvements	1	1
MD 355 (Frederick Road) Improvements from MD 27 to Stringtown Road	2	2
16th Street (MD 390) Road Diet between Spring Street and MD 97 (Georgia Avenue)	-	3
Accelerated Traffic Signal Modernization	3	4↓
MD 117 (Clopper Road) Improvements	4	5↓
MD 198 Improvements - Burtonsville from Old Columbia Pike to US Route 29	7	6↑
MD 28 Improvements (Norbeck Road) from MD 97 (Georgia Avenue) to MD 200	7	7
US 29 Comprehensive Plan	6	8↓
MD 97 (Georgia Avenue) and MD 28 (Norbeck Road) Interchange	5	9↓

Note: Bold text denotes new recommended project. Arrows denote change in recommendation compared to MCDOT ranking.

- Provide a numerical ranking of all transportation priorities in one table to accompany this draft letter.

Attachments

- A. Draft 2020 Montgomery County Transportation Priorities Letter



DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION


Marc Elrich
County Executive

Christopher R. Conklin
Director

MEMORANDUM

November 18, 2019

TO: Casey Anderson, Chair
Montgomery County Planning Board

FROM: Christopher R. Conklin, Director 
Montgomery County Department of Transportation (MCDOT)

SUBJECT: 2020 Montgomery County Transportation Priorities Letter to the Maryland
Department of Transportation (MDOT)

On a periodic basis, Montgomery County expresses its priorities for State investment in transportation facilities and services. Montgomery County last prepared such a letter in 2017. Since that time, there have been many changes to the State transportation program and in Montgomery County's areas of emphasis.

MDOT is expecting to receive this letter by April 2020. In order to provide time for review and concurrence between the County Council and the County Executive, we request that the Planning Board review the letter and provide comments to MCDOT by Friday, December 20, 2019.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions at 240-777-7198 or christopher.conklin@montgomerycountymd.gov.

Office of the Director

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301-251-4850 TTY

Draft 11/18/2019

January __, 2020

Peter K. Rahn
Secretary, Maryland Department of Transportation
7201 Corporate Drive, P.O. Box 548
Hanover, MD 21076

Dear Secretary Rahn:

Montgomery County is a diverse community with many transportation needs. As always, we appreciate our cooperative relationship with the State of Maryland so that, together, we can meet the needs of our residents and businesses. MDOT has continued to make significant contributions to the transportation network in Montgomery County, including providing needed funding for WMATA, completing the interchange of Randolph Road and Georgia Avenue, initiating the I-270 Innovative Congestion Management project, beginning construction of the Watkins Mill interchange, partnering with the County for Vision Zero, and advancing construction of the Purple Line.

Notwithstanding these accomplishments, our County continues to need expanded investment in its transportation system. For the FY2021-2026 Consolidated Transportation Program (CTP), we have organized our priorities by emphasis area to aid in programming of future State resources toward the transportation needs in Montgomery County.

Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Implementation

Bus Rapid Transit is a key element of the County's Master Plan. FLASH on U.S. 29 – the first of its kind in Maryland - is advancing as a Federally and County-funded project, expected to open in 2020. Montgomery County will need MDOT assistance and cooperation to continue advancement our BRT system that is critical to expanding the economy of Maryland in Montgomery County.

The Corridor Cities Transitway (CCT), a long standing State project, needs to be restored as a project in the CTP. This project is a key ingredient to the success of the biotechnology industry in the Great Seneca Science Corridor and State engagement in its implementation is important to the economic strength of Maryland.

We thank the State for completing repairs to the shoulders on U.S. 29 and ask that the shoulder condition remain a high maintenance priority on this roadway. We request State participation in the implementation of strategies to manage congestion and improve transit travel time reliability between

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Tech Road and Silver Spring to be determined through the ongoing County-led US 29 Mobility and Reliability Study.

Building upon prior MDOT planning activities, the County has initiated design of BRT on Maryland 355 between Clarksburg and Bethesda and on Maryland 586 (Veirs Mill Road) between Rockville and Wheaton. These two projects will unlock the redevelopment potential of White Flint and will improve transit service to the thousands of daily transit riders who depend on services connecting Wheaton and Rockville. As both corridors are State Highways, MDOT's engagement during design and construction and financial participation in these projects will be important.

In the next few years, planning will be initiated for the Maryland 650 (New Hampshire Avenue) corridor and the North Bethesda Transitway. BRT on New Hampshire Avenue is a candidate State-led project as it is located in Montgomery and Prince George's County and connects into the District of Columbia. In addition, this corridor provides vital links to the Food and Drug Administration White Oak Headquarters, a key economic engine for the East County. The North Bethesda Transitway will also provide a substantial economic opportunity by linking the Rock Spring area to White Flint.

Locally Operated Transit Support

We thank MDOT for its capital and operating support of the Montgomery County Transit System including Ride On, Ride On Extra, the Flex and, starting in 2020, the Flash. Sustained financial support from MDOT is critical to providing quality transit service in Montgomery County. Furthermore, the County is moving toward deployment of electric buses as a regular component of its transit fleet. To enable this transition from traditional fuels, we request State technical and financial assistance with the installation of electric charging infrastructure at the three County transit depots.

Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) Investment

MDOT should be commended for providing major capital and operating support to WMATA. The County has identified that providing a northern headhouse at the White Flint Station and constructing a new passageway under MD97 (Georgia Avenue) at the Forest Glen Station are high priority improvements to WMATA Metrorail stations within the County. We ask for MDOT's advocacy to include these projects in the WMATA Capital Program. We also ask for State support of implementation of bus priority treatments as called for in the draft WMATA Bus Transformation Study Strategic Plan.

Commuter Rail Expansion

The MARC system operated by MTA is important for moving commuters to Rockville, Silver Spring and Washington, D.C. and the system could provide even greater benefit through enhancements to the service and increasing the system's accessibility. Priorities for MARC enhancements include:

1. ***Boyd's Station Expansion:*** (Design and Construction) Recently, the County acquired the property adjacent to the Station with the expectation of making facility improvements in partnership with MDOT/MTA.
2. ***Midday and Off-Peak Service:*** (Planning and Operating) MARC service provides an option for peak period, peak direction commuting. As travel patterns change and reverse commuting becomes more significant, providing more midday and off-peak trains will increase the value

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MARC service provides to Montgomery County and will increase the attractiveness of employment in Maryland for the growing population in the District of Columbia.

3. **White Flint Station** (Planning). The White Flint Sector Plan calls for construction of a new MARC Station and we request that MTA advance study of the station.

Pedestrian and Bicycle Safety and Facilities

Improving pedestrian and bicycle safety as highlighted in our Vision Zero Program, creating a safe and attractive walking environment in our key growth areas, and the implementation of Bikeshare as a permanent component of our transportation system are critical needs for State support.

1. **Pedestrian/Bicycle Safety Implementation on State Highways:** (Design and Construction) We request that the State increase funding to address sidewalk gaps, crosswalk conditions, trail crossings, and other issues in support of the County's Vision Zero Action Plan. Many of our highest-need locations are on State highways.
2. **Bicycle and Pedestrian Priority Areas (BiPPAs):** (Planning, Design and Construction) The County has identified over 30 BiPPA's and has prioritized five for early actions. To be effective, the County will need State cooperation and financial support to implement improvements to State infrastructure in these priority areas. A high priority activity within this program is to make improvements on access routes to the Purple Line and State funding for these improvements will help accelerate their construction.
3. **Bikeshare Program Support:** (Grants) Federal, State and private grants have been essential for Bikeshare in Montgomery County, a system that has now grown to 80 stations. Bikeshare contributes to achieving non-auto drive mode share (NADMS) goals in focus-areas within the County and provides an excellent complement to local and regional transit systems. State operating support for this system will help secure its long-term future.
4. **Intercounty Connector (ICC) Multiuse Trail:** (Planning). A multiuse trail was constructed concurrent with the ICC for much of its length. We request that the State begin planning for completion of the gaps between Layhill Road and Notley Road and between MD 650/New Hampshire Avenue and Briggs Chaney Road.

State Highways

The following projects represent our highest priorities for improvements to State Highways:

1. **MD 97 (Georgia Avenue) Forest Glen/Montgomery Hills Improvements:** (Design and Construction) We strongly encourage MDOT to advance the recommendations of its planning and NEPA study into design and construction. When completed, this project will improve a major gateway into the Silver Spring Central Business District and improve safety and accessibility within the Montgomery Hills and Forest Glen communities.
2. **MD 355 (Frederick Road) Improvements from MD 27 to Stringtown Road:** (Planning) Expanding MD 355 consistent with the Clarksburg Master Plan, may be the most cost-effective and least impactful way of improving access to and from this community. In addition to capacity, the improvements need to address pedestrian and bicycle connectivity, access to

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schools, and transit needs. We look forward to reviewing the results of the initial planning that MDOT is now advancing and to defining a project that addresses the needs on this corridor.

3. ***Accelerated Traffic Signal Modernization:*** (Design and Construction) The State traffic signal system contains many locations with structural impairment, inefficient incandescent fixtures, underperforming detection, and pedestrian crossing configurations that do not meet today's needs. MDOT/SHA and Montgomery County would benefit from acceleration of traffic signal modernization in the County, including deployment of additional adaptive traffic signal controls on key corridors within the County.
4. ***MD 117 (Clopper Road) Improvements:*** (Design and Construction) After construction of the Watkins Mill Interchange is completed, traffic patterns of MD 117 will change substantially. MDOT completed planning activities for improvements to MD 117 between the Seneca Creek State Park entrance and the I-270 southbound on-ramp. Montgomery County submitted a Chapter 30 funding application for this project in 2018 and 2019. With the opening of the Watkins Mill Interchange, implementation of these improvements will be important to accommodate the changes in Interstate access.
5. ***MD 97/Georgia Avenue and MD 28/Norbeck Road Interchange:*** (Design) The intersection of MD 97 and MD 28 is constrained and congested, particularly due to the proximity of the MD 200 Interchange just to the north and the intersection of MD 28 and MD 115 just to the west. Improvement to this location is important for facilitating access between Olney and Silver Spring and for the connection from Rockville to MD 200. We request that the State reinstate design of an interchange at this location.
6. ***U.S. 29 Comprehensive Plan:*** (Planning, Design and Construction) Traffic operations at several locations on U.S. 29 between Stewart Lane and MD 198 in Montgomery County result in recurring congestion and safety concerns. We request a comprehensive assessment of the signalized intersections on the U.S. 29 corridor, taking into consideration community preferences, approved land use plans, BRT operations, pedestrian and bicycle needs, traffic safety and throughput.
7. ***MD 28/198 Improvements (Norbeck Road and Spencerville Road):*** (Design and Construction) The State is still working on an alternatives analysis for the 11-mile MD 28/198 corridor between MD 97 (Georgia Avenue) and I-95 in Prince George's County. Montgomery County requests that the State complete the planning study and advance elements of this corridor into design and construction.

Burtonsville: Concepts for improvements between Old Columbia Pike and U.S. 29 through the Burtonsville business district have been identified. The County requests that the State select and refine a design concept for this portion of the corridor that is supportive of the *Burtonsville Crossroads Neighborhood Plan (2012)* goals. In Burtonsville, the project should also identify ways to reduce the width of Old Columbia Pike north of MD198 to better match reduced traffic demands and to reduce the barrier formed by this roadway.

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MD 97 to MD 200: At the west end of the corridor, we request that the State fill remaining gaps to complete the pedestrian and bicycle network along and across MD 28 between MD 97/Georgia Avenue and Wintergate Drive.

8. **MD 108/Laytonsville Bypass**: (Planning) The Town of Laytonsville has planned a bypass route for MD 108 around the west side of the town. This bypass, now partially constructed, will alleviate congestion at the intersection of MD 108 and Brink Road/Sundown Road, improving the character of the historic center of town.

Interstate Program

The County has been an active participant in the MDOT/SHA process for these projects. We agree with the need to improve the performance of these corridors, including expanded transit options, and we remain very concerned about the impacts of highway expansion, particularly where these are projected to be most acute. We are encouraged by the recent announcement of a coordinated approach between Maryland and Virginia to address the American Legion Bridge and to connect the proposed Capital Beltway modifications in Maryland to those planned by Virginia. Ideally, expanded facilities on the bridge will be implemented at the same time as the I-270 facilities approved in 2019 by the Board of Public Works as the first phase of the Traffic Relief Plan Public Private Partnership (P3). We also encourage MDOT to include the Dorsey Mill Road bridge in Germantown and a new interchange and Little Seneca Parkway in Clarksburg into the I-270 project, for which we believe reversible lanes will be most effective. In all cases, the modification of the Interstate system needs to consider the performance of the local road network, include expanded transit services, and include bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure on the crossings of the freeway facilities.

Montgomery County remains seriously concerned with the implementation of four additional toll lanes on I-495 between the east spur of I-270 and I-95 and requests that the State reconsider implementation of congestion management strategies like ramp metering and peak-period shoulder use, or other spot improvements that are respectful of our natural resources and communities on this facility. We believe MDOT should revisit its decision to eliminate the MD 200 alternative and other less environmentally-damaging alternatives between I-270 and I-95.

We thank you again for your continued partnership in meeting the needs of Maryland residents and businesses in Montgomery County. If you have questions about our priorities, please contact us.

Sincerely,

Marc Elrich
County Executive

Nancy Navarro
County Council President