





Thrive Montgomery 2050 Worksession No. 4: Transportation and communication networks: connecting people, places and ideas

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Introduction

The main topic of discussion for today's worksession and approval by the Planning Board is the draft of the revised transportation chapter now called Theme #3: Transportation and communication networks: connecting people, places and ideas (ATTACHMENT 1). It lays out the issues and existing conditions related to transportation and connectivity, and the goals and policies Thrive Montgomery 2050 proposes to address these issues. It also addresses the ways in which these policies will further the key objectives of Thrive Montgomery 2050, and a set of potential measures to monitor the progress towards achieving the transportation and connectivity goals of the Plan.

Staff will also present a summary of major themes of the public hearing testimony related to transportation, and the Transportation Analysis Report that analyzes the impacts of Thrive Montgomery policies and trends related to the economy, climate change, demographics, technology, and lifestyle choices on the future transportation network in the county.

In order to let the Planning Board and the public know what will be discussed at each worksession, staff publishes an outline of the revised chapter/theme two weeks in advance. Therefore, today's packet includes an outline of the main topic of discussion for the January 28 worksession— Compact growth: corridor-focused development.

Major themes of public testimony related to transportation

Major themes that emerged from the transportation-related comments included public transit, walking and bicycling, planning for people instead of cars, reduction in parking, and inequities in the transportation network.

Public transit

The topic of public transit received the highest number of transportation-related comments. People who supported the idea of more transit described it as the only viable alternative to private auto travel. The benefits cited included avoiding increased traffic congestion; less imperviousness from wider roads; decreased greenhouse gas emissions; and increased road safety for pedestrians, bicyclists and people with disabilities. Better transit was also recognized as a critical need for older adults who prefer not to drive. Many people supported improving transit to provide better access to lower-income neighborhoods whose residents rely more heavily on public transit for access to jobs, education and other services and amenities.

However, there were also comments about whether public transit can be the predominant mode of travel given the recent decline in ridership due to the Coronavirus pandemic as well as gaps in the geographic reach and frequency of transit service. Some commenters did not think transit was feasible in the more suburban and rural parts of the county. Some thought that private car was a safer and more convenient way to travel than walking and transit for older adults as it gave them more independence.

Walking and bicycling

Nearly all comments supported the draft Plan's focus on improving walking and bicycling. They cited the environment, health, accessibility, and social interaction as major benefits of walking and bicycling. While many comments supported walking and bicycling primarily as access to parks and trails, others also stressed them as critical to achieving the goals of directing future growth to transit station areas and creating complete communities. Some commenters mentioned that support for walking and bicycling was essential not only in more urban areas but equally important in less urban areas where safe walking and bicycling paths could allow residents to commute without a vehicle to the grocery store, coffee shops or local restaurants, which could be a boost for small businesses within the community.

Many commenters expressed support for walking and bicycling as a public health issue and, perhaps more importantly, as a climate change issue. They cited reduced automobile exhaust to help achieve the goal of eradicating greenhouse gas emissions.

Other commenters raised concern about the Plan's emphasis on walking and bicycling. They thought prioritizing walking and bicycling over all other modes meant restricting automobile use throughout the county, even in places where there was no transit or places to walk to. For them, the emphasis on walking and bicycling was unrealistic due to the county's land use patterns, demographics and the varying needs of a diverse population. They suggested the county continue to improve all transportation options so people can choose the mode that works best for them in different situations.

Start planning for people instead of cars

There were numerous comments regarding the theme of "Start planning for people instead of planning for cars" on page 42 of the Public Hearing Draft Plan.

Those who fully supported this theme cited the many benefits of walking, bicycling and transit over private vehicle use including increased safety for all road users. For them, moving away from auto travel is critical to fight climate change and eliminate greenhouse gas emissions. For some, planning for people meant planning for cars as well as planning for walking, bicycling and transit.

Many others took issue with this theme as they believed it meant the draft Plan was proposing to ban cars, and that all travel would be by transit, negatively impacting most county residents and workers ability to drive. In their view, it was just not practical or feasible for several reasons to think that people would give up their cars or the businesses could be sustained with transit alone.

Reduction in parking

Related to comments about “Start planning for people instead of planning for cars” were concerns about the Plan’s recommendations such as *Goal 4.3: Have fewer parking spaces and manage the spaces that remain effectively*, and its related policies that discourage auto travel by reducing parking, especially in transit centers and urban areas. While there were many who supported discouraging, even restricting, parking in more built-up areas to make auto travel less attractive, there were others who were concerned about the loss of parking. They thought it could make it difficult for people to go to work or other destinations, hurt small businesses, increase traffic congestion, and compel people to travel farther to places where parking would be easily available.

Inequities in the transportation network

Many commenters raised transportation-related equity issues, but their opinions vary about which mode of transportation could more negatively impact various user groups. For some, deprioritizing travel by private vehicle exacerbated exclusion by making access to jobs, medical facilities and other amenities harder for low-income residents, seniors, people with disabilities and people in suburban and rural areas where transit is not available and walking and biking are not safe or practical. For them, the emphasis on walking, bicycling and transit favors urban areas such as transit oriented mixed-use centers. In their view, these urban centers will continue to be too expensive for low-income groups, and therefore a greater investment in the non-auto infrastructure meant less attention for outer areas where most of the low-income populations live.

Others believed that prioritizing walking, bicycling and transit over cars will help provide greater accessibility to essential services and thus positively benefit these groups, especially those who do not own cars, cannot drive or prefer not to drive. For them, the current transit infrastructure doesn’t work for many low-income groups because it is not designed to serve their needs—not available near their homes, not frequent enough to be reliable, and far from job locations.

Attachments

ATTACHMENT 1 is the draft of **Theme #3: *Transportation and communication networks: connecting people, places and ideas***

ATTACHMENT 2 is the Transportation Analysis Report

ATTACHMENT 3 is an outline of **Theme #1: Compact growth: corridor-focused development**. The full draft of **Compact growth: corridor-focused development** will be discussed with the Planning Board on January 28, 2021.

ATTACHMENT 4 is an updated summary table of all testimony received by December 10, 2020. The table also includes staff responses to the comments that pertain to the topics being addressed during this worksession. As we proceed through subsequent worksessions, staff will add its responses to the public comments pertaining to the topic area of each worksession.

The transcript of the November 19, 2020 public hearing can be accessed [here](#).

All written testimonies submitted by December 10, 2020 can be accessed here: [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#), [Part 3](#), [Part 4](#)