

## **Item 12 - Correspondence**

**From:** [Sharon Canavan](#)  
**To:** [MCP-Chair](#)  
**Subject:** NFCCA testimony for November 10  
**Date:** Monday, November 7, 2022 10:42:38 AM  
**Attachments:** [BRT 2.0-NFCCA letter FINAL to Planning Board.docx](#)

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Please find attached testimony from the Northwood Four Corners Civic Association (NFCCA) regarding our position on recommendations on the US 29 Reliability and Mobility Study.

## NORTHWOOD-FOUR CORNERS CIVIC ASSOCIATION



November 7, 2022

RE: Montgomery County Planning Board Hearing on November 10, 2022

Dear Acting Chairman Zyontz:

The ~1,600 households represented by the Northwood-Four Corners Civic Association (NFCCA) would like to take this opportunity to express our views regarding the alternatives to the Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) plan that are mapped out in the 2022 draft U.S. 29 Mobility and Reliability Study (the 2022 study). The project findings in the latest iteration of this study evaluated three alternatives: No Build, Managed Lane (Bus/HOV), and Dedicated Median Bus Lane.

To set the scene, Four Corners, which is located at the intersection of Route 193/University Boulevard and US 29/Colesville Road, presents complex traffic and pedestrian safety challenges. The Four Corners intersection is a high traffic volume east/west and north/south junction. Montgomery Blair high school with its 3,220 students sits on one quadrant and residential neighborhoods with commercial establishments located on the street frontage occupy the other three quadrants. The NFCCA community lies in the northwest quadrant (North Four Corners). To add to the intersection's complexity, a church, stores, and fast-food restaurants are situated in an island that bisects Route 193/University Boulevard at this intersection. Two nearby beltway interchanges create significant additional traffic volume as well.

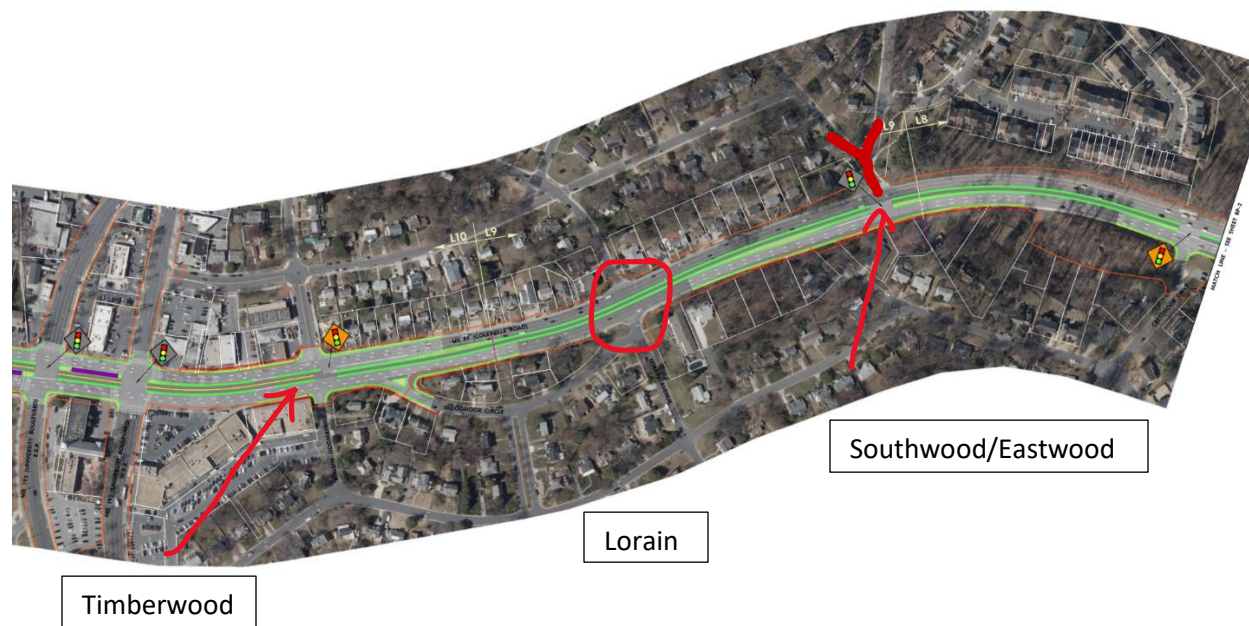
A number of years ago, the Four Corners intersection was altered to prohibit left turns going east or west by drivers traveling south or north on US 29. To accommodate this traffic flow change, so-called "jug handles" were incorporated into the intersection, requiring north or south bound drivers to turn right, move quickly across multiple lanes to proceed to a two-lane wide U-turn, and then make their way either east or west. Turns at these jug handles are inconvenient for nearby residents, tricky to negotiate, and add considerable wait time at two additional traffic lights. Frustrated drivers cut through nearby residential neighborhoods to avoid the Four Corners intersection—often at high speeds and ignoring stop signs or speed bumps.

The NFCCA area would receive minimal benefit from making further transit changes to US 29, so No Build, which is both cheaper and no impact, would not raise objections. Among the other alternatives, NFCCA believes the Managed Lane alternative is a much better option than installing a Dedicated Median Bus Lane.

According to the 2022 study, bus drive time would be cut in half by a Managed Lane over the No Build option and is marginally faster than bus drive time under the Dedicated Median Bus Lane alternative. Plus, the Managed Lane alternative benefits HOV car riders and all buses, not just the FLASH bus, which would be the only transit permitted in the Dedicated Median Bus Lane. A Managed Lane has distinct advantages—it is cheaper than the Dedicated Median Bus Lane, speedier than No Build for cars and busses, and markedly faster for cars (particularly for HOV carpoolers) than the Dedicated Median Bus Lane alternative.

Planning Board staff recommend advancing the Dedicated Median Bus Lanes alternative described in the 2022 study. Adoption of this alternative will significantly add to the inconvenience and time it takes nearby residents and other drivers to negotiate the Four Corners intersection. Also these changes will have a significant impact on the community by further increasing cut-through traffic as drivers try to avoid the resulting backups at the Four Corners intersection.

Another downside of the Dedicated Median Bus Lane alternative is it reduces North Four Corners residents' available entry/exit points on US 29. A Dedicated Median Bus Lane would block off Lorain Avenue—eliminating turns there for North Four Corners drivers. South-bound Woodmoor residents would be able to turn into their neighborhood at a proposed traffic light at Timberwood Avenue, but north-bound drivers would be blocked from turning left there into North Four Corners (see illustration below).



Allowing a north-bound left turn at Timberwood Avenue could retain a north-bound entry point into North Four Corners to make up for losing access via Lorain Avenue. This change, however, may increase the neighborhood's cut through traffic if northbound drivers who want to go west on University Boulevard turn at Timberwood Avenue instead of the more time-consuming jug handle at the Four Corners intersection. This could be managed through "Local Traffic Only" signage or prohibiting left turns from Timberwood Avenue onto both Sutherland and Lorain Avenues.

The Dedicated Median Bus Lane alternative, if adopted, would significantly impact the NFCCA neighborhood. Southwood Avenue would be the only northbound access point from US 29 into North Four Corners; this would create considerable neighborhood traffic congestion at this intersection. This is a complicated intersection—*immediately* after the traffic light cars either continue up Southwood Avenue to go into the eastern portion of the neighborhood or turn right on Eastwood Avenue to go into the northwestern part of the neighborhood (see illustration above). Outbound neighborhood traffic already backs up significantly on both Southwood and Eastwood Avenues at that traffic light.

With only one entrance into North Four Corners from US 29, in order to give our neighborhood adequate access both the turn lane and traffic signal time on US 29 would need to be lengthened to accommodate additional waiting traffic. It is unclear if the 2022 Study factored into its evaluation of the Dedicated Median Bus Lane alternative (both as to cost and traffic mobility) the necessity to lengthen both the cycle time for this traffic light and the length of the US 29 turn lane.

The first draft of the US 29 Mobility and Reliability Study (the 2021 study), which was presented to the Planning Board in the fall of 2021, recommended adoption of the Managed Lane approach. The 2021 study considered a number of factors. Not only does a Managed Lane move cars faster up and down US 29 according to that analysis but it was also significantly less costly than a Median Bus Lane.<sup>1</sup> The cost estimates in the 2022 study have risen considerably over the estimates from the 2021 study.<sup>2</sup> We believe adoption of Managed Bus Lanes was the correct recommendation then and the analysis presented in the 2022 study does not change that; a Dedicated Median Bus Lane does not achieve a better result.

In 2020, in seeking to avoid delays to reanalyze the Dedicated Median Bus Lane alternative, the Planning Board endorsed the Managed Lanes alternative “as an interim phase in the build out of the master-planned vision of dedicated bus lanes on the entire corridor between Burtonsville and the Silver Spring Transit Center.”<sup>3</sup>

In endorsing the Dedicated Median Bus Lane alternative now, Planning Board staff argue that “When one alternative (Managed Lanes) improves both auto and transit travel times, and a second alternative (Median Bus Lanes) only improves transit travel times, it is the second alternative that is going to best incentivize people to make the

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<sup>1</sup> The first US 29 study estimated the cost of a Managed Lane at \$40-50 million and the cost estimate for a Dedicated Median Bus Lane at \$100-110 million. A recording of the public meeting describing the first US 29 study along with the slide presentation and the full study can be found under the project documents tab at <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/dot-dte/projects/US29Study/index.html> .

<sup>2</sup> In the middle portion from Tech Road to Sligo Creek Parkway, the alternatives project the cost to harden the shoulder and repurpose lanes to create either a Bus/HOV or Bus-only lane and potentially add a station at Franklin Avenue at \$105 million for Managed (Bus/HOV) or \$125 million for a Median Bus Lane.

<sup>3</sup> Montgomery County Planning, US 29 Mobility and Reliability Study, Part 2 Alternatives Selection at page 6. See [US-29-BRT-Alternatives-Staff-Report-2022-11-02\\_Final\\_Rev.pdf \(montgomeryplanningboard.org\)](#).

switch from driving to taking transit.”<sup>4</sup> By making a \$125 million (estimate) investment in Dedicated Median Bus Lanes, the county will do nothing to relieve traffic time for autos, including carpoolers. This seems like a big bet on an unproven construct. The idea that large numbers of suburban residents will abandon their cars in favor of public transportation is simply unproven. A better choice would be to adopt the Managed Bus Lanes alternative, measure over time how this improves adoption of public transit usage, and determine in the future if a further investment in a Dedicated Median Bus Lane is warranted.

Furthermore, the Montgomery County Planning agency is initiating its public engagement process for the University Boulevard Corridor (UBC) Plan. This planning effort will focus on a three-mile section of Route 193/University Boulevard (illustration below.) The planning agency will be evaluating traffic safety, regional connectivity, environmental sustainability, and economic development along this three-mile stretch. Potential opportunities for higher density housing infill development, bikeways, and a future bus rapid transit (BRT) route will also be evaluated.



The 2022 study presents alternatives for repositioning the FLASH bus station at Four Corners. NFCCA believes that before major investments are made to move the stations, this should be holistically evaluated as part of the University Boulevard Corridor (UBC) Plan.

In closing, if the choice is made to further develop the US 29 Corridor (instead of No Build) NFCCA urges the Planning agency and the Montgomery County Council to adopt the Managed Lane alternative. The Managed Lane alternative will not dramatically impact traffic flow in the Four Corners area, but the Dedicated Median Bus Lane alternative will as NFCCA has described here at length.

Over the years transportation decisions in the Four Corners area have always prioritized moving traffic quickly through this section over the needs and convenience of residents of this area (e.g. eliminating left turns and incorporating jug handles, Dennis Avenue as cut through to US 29, etc.). NFCCA believes that a decision to adopt the Dedicated Median Bus Lane alternative would once again illustrate this lack of concern.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid. at page 14.

By ignoring the safety of and access to nearby communities, a decision in favor of Dedicated Median Bus Lanes would sacrifice the quality of life for Four Corners residents who must live with the inconvenience and cut through traffic resulting from the many years of transportation decisions favoring moving the maximum volume of traffic through Four Corners.

NFCCA opposes the Dedicated Median Bus Lane alternative because it is costlier, does not improve drive time conditions on US 29, and more specifically, would limit neighborhood access for Four Corners residents, increase traffic backups on Southwood and Eastwood Avenues, increase cut-through traffic, and add two additional traffic signals along this half-mile stretch of US 29.

Thank you for your consideration of NFCCA's views.

Submitted by:

Sharon Canavan  
NFCCA Secretary  
10213 Edgewood Avenue  
Silver Spring, MD 20901

**From:** [djwilhelm@verizon.net](mailto:djwilhelm@verizon.net)  
**To:** [MCP-Chair](#)  
**Cc:** [Anspacher, David](#)  
**Subject:** US 29 Reliability Study, November 10, item 10  
**Date:** Wednesday, November 9, 2022 8:44:27 AM

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**Greater Colesville Citizens Association  
PO Box 4087  
Colesville, MD 20914  
November 8, 2022**

Montgomery County Planning Board  
Attn: Jeff Zyontz, Chair  
2425 Reddie Drive  
Wheaton, MD 20902

Re:

Dear Chairman Zyontz:

The Greater Colesville Citizens Association (GCCA) has been actively involved with BRT for more than a decade and wishes to provide comments related to the staff report dealing with improving reliability on the US29 BRT. Our comments are organized in the same order as those which staff provided in Section 1 of their report:

1. GCCA agrees with staff that the Median Bus Lane alternative should be advanced because it provides more dedicated lanes than the Manage Lane/HOV Alternative. The DOT study indicates that travel time is longer with the Median Bus Lane Alternative, but that study is based upon pre-pandemic conditions and concludes that many people would switch to carpools. We don't believe that there will be many additional carpools in a post-pandemic environment since many more people are working from home, at least part of the work week. Also, once the full BRT service is implemented and integrated with local bus, we think people would prefer transit service over carpooling. Thus, we don't believe there will be a travel savings for general purpose traffic for the Managed Lane/ HOV Alternative compared with the Median Alternative.

2 and 5. GCCA can support the staff recommendation to defer any decision on US29 and Greencastle Rd until the Fairland/Briggs Chaney Master Plan is approved by the Council. Nevertheless, we think improvements are needed there but also think those improvements should be addressed as a separate effort, not as part of the Flash improvements.

3. Contrary to the staff recommendation, GCCA does not support a BRT station at Franklin Ave because the ridership does not justify one. The surrounding area is all single-family housing. Good public transit needs to be provided along that section of US29 but good local bus service should be used. Adding a BRT station will just slow that service.

4. GCCA opposes a second ramp lane from southbound US29 to westbound I-495 as does staff. At peak times, both I-495 and US29 operate in a stop-and-go manner, and adding another lane will not provide any improvement in traffic operation since it will just add more space for stop- and-go traffic. There will be no benefit to adding such a lane and adding it will

be a waste of limited funds.

6. GCCA agrees with staff to not make intersection improvements to the four intersections if the Manage Lane Alternative is selected. GCCA also does not support adding a third southbound lane on the bridge over MD650 for the reasons reached in 1997. The volume of vehicles exiting onto southbound US29 is around 30% of the total US29 volume and adding another lane will not allow safe merging of traffic.

7. GCCA takes no position about adding the sidewalk on Sligo Creek Parkway.

8. GCCA agrees with staff about a sidewalk relocation in Burnt Mills.

Sincerely,

Daniel L. Wilhelm, President