

TECHNICAL UPDATE TO THE MASTER PLAN OF HIGHWAYS AND TRANSITWAYS – DRAFT SCOPE OF WORK

Introduction

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. The new street types are consistent with the [Complete Streets Design Guide](#) (CSDG), as reviewed and approved by the Planning Board in 2021. 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. Countywide Planning and Policy staff began work on the MPOHT technical update in July 2023 and the current anticipated schedule concludes with Commission adoption of the technical update, following Council approval, in November 2024.

Background

The MPOHT is a comprehensive summary of all significant existing and planned roadway and transitway infrastructure in Montgomery County. It provides a “road map” for making transportation investments in the county. While the plan is focused on highways and transitways, it includes provisions that impact all modes of transportation, including preserving rights-of-way to accommodate future transportation systems, identifying the number of lanes dedicated to general traffic, and designating the target speeds for individual roadways.

The first Master Plan of Highways was approved and adopted in 1931, shortly after the creation of the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission in 1927. A technical update to the MPOHT was last approved and adopted in 2018. Since then, it has been amended by several plans, including the *Silver Spring Downtown and Adjacent Communities Plan* (June 2022) and *Corridor Forward: The I-270 Transit Plan* (May 2022).

Transition from “Functional” to “Complete Streets” Classifications

Transitioning from the previous “functional” street classification system to the “complete streets” classification system has been a three-step process, and the MPOHT technical update will complete Phase 3:

- **Phase 1: Enactment of Bill 24-22 and Bill 34-22 (Complete).** With the enactment of Bill 24-22 on November 7, 2022, and Bill 34-22 on December 27, 2022, the County Council established interim designations of CSDG area types (e.g., Downtown, Town Center, etc.), as well as interim translations for CSDG street types (e.g., Downtown Boulevard, Downtown Street,

Town Center Boulevard, etc.) based on the designated CSDG area types and the previous street classifications.

- **Phase 2: Master Plan Area Types in the Pedestrian Master Plan (Ongoing).** To address some deficiencies in the Phase 1 designations, the Pedestrian Master Plan replaces the interim area type designations in the county code with permanent area type designations throughout the county. Changes to CSDG street types will occur in locations of the county where the area type is modified. The County Council is scheduled to approve the Pedestrian Master Plan this fall.
- **Phase 3: Master Plan Street Types in a Technical Update to the Master Plan of Highways and Transitways (Current Focus).** This plan update would reevaluate the classifications of all roads to fully ensure that each road is accurately and contextually classified.

Purpose

The technical update will accomplish the following:

1. Reevaluate the classifications of all existing MPOHT roads to ensure that each road is accurately and contextually classified based on the intended roadway function.
2. Identify target speeds for all MPOHT roads where no target speed is currently recommended and consider adjustments to target speeds on MPOHT roads where the recommended target speed differs from the target speed identified in the CSDG.
3. Introduce a new approach to street design along the suburban areas of the “Growth Corridors” identified in Thrive Montgomery 2050 that provides a framework for slower target speeds and more frequent protected crossings, among other things. This would entail modifications to the County Code and the CSDG and include the development of a rationale and design standards in these areas.
4. Reevaluate master planned transit station locations.
5. Integrate highway and transitway data into Montgomery Planning’s multimodal transportation Geographic Information Systems (GIS) network.

Outreach

Due to the technical nature of this countywide plan, the project team will focus engagement as follows:

- The team will work with a technical advisory group, including representatives of the Parks Department, the Montgomery County Department of Transportation (MCDOT), the Maryland State Highway Administration (SHA), and the Regional Services Center directors.
- Similar to other master plans, the existing MPOHT webpage will be modified to provide timely information on the technical update, including links to project deliverables, a project schedule, and a comment form for public input.

- Where draft recommendations would affect incorporated municipalities, elected officials and staff will be involved and given the opportunity to comment. Civic associations will receive notice of public meetings.
- Planning staff will hold a community virtual meeting to identify citizens' concerns with the proposed changes, during which an overview of the master plan work will be provided by Planning staff.

SCHEDULE AND WORK PLAN

The project is divided in ten tasks as follows:

Task 1 – Development of Scope of Work

Planning staff will develop a scope of work for the Technical Update detailing specific tasks to be undertaken and the project schedule. This draft scope will be presented to the Planning Board. After Planning Board discussion and comments, final edits will be made to the document to guide the work effort.

Completion: September 2023

Task 2 – Engagement

The MPOHT is a highly technical functional master plan that can have a wide range of impacts on development and redevelopment along county and state streets within the county. It is also usually not a topic that garners significant public interest until a street classification, or a right-of-way dedication is required by a property owner, typically during redevelopment, to meet the master planned right-of-way requirements. Planning staff will assemble a technical advisory group (TAG) to meet regularly to discuss the plan's status and provide input on the effort. The members of the TAG will include representatives from Montgomery Planning, Montgomery Parks, MCDOT, SHA and the Regional Services Centers. Municipalities, civic associations, advocacy groups and others will be engaged via public meetings, an e-letter and online materials.

Completion: November 2023 through March 2024

Task 3 – Development of Recommendations

Planning staff will conduct the tasks identified below, which will be used to develop the Working Draft Plan. Planning staff will then conduct outreach with a series of public meetings, and focused outreach with county agencies, commissions, and civic and business organizations to obtain feedback on draft recommendations.

Completion: September 2023 through February 2024

Review of Street Type Designations

Planning staff will reevaluate the classifications of all existing MPOHT roads to ensure that each road is accurately and contextually classified based on the roadway function. Staff will also consider adding new roads to include in the MPOHT. This will require reviewing individual master plans to assess the intent of a street's classification. From this review, an initial list of re-classification candidates will be developed. Countywide Planning and Policy staff will coordinate closely with the Planning Department's Downcounty, Midcounty and Upcounty planning divisions to refine this initial list.

Review of Target Speeds

Planning staff will establish target speed recommendations to all street segments in the MPOHT that currently do not have master planned target speeds. Staff will then conduct a detailed review of all street segments with previous master planned target speeds and assess whether any of these street segments should be re-assessed for a reduction in target speed based on guidance in the CSDG. Countywide Planning and Policy staff will coordinate closely with the Downcounty, Midcounty and Upcounty planning divisions to refine these recommendations.

Development of a New Approach to Street Design along Growth Corridors

Thrive Montgomery 2050 identifies Growth Corridors as shown by the black lines in Figure 1. These corridors are currently designated as Downtown Boulevards, Town Center Boulevards and (Suburban) Boulevards, but existing guidance for the (Suburban) Boulevard street type in the CSDG does not recommend adequate target speeds and protected crossing spacing along existing and planned transitways—features necessary to enhance pedestrian safety, improve pedestrian comfort, and shorten walking trips throughout the Growth Corridors. Growth Corridors such as Georgia Avenue, Veirs Mill Road, and University Boulevard account for roughly 34% of the county's crash fatalities and severe injuries but only 3% of the county's roadway miles, therefore more frequent protected crossings and lower target speeds are needed on these roads to achieve Vision Zero. This task will consider creating a new approach to designating (Suburban) Boulevards along these Growth Corridors.

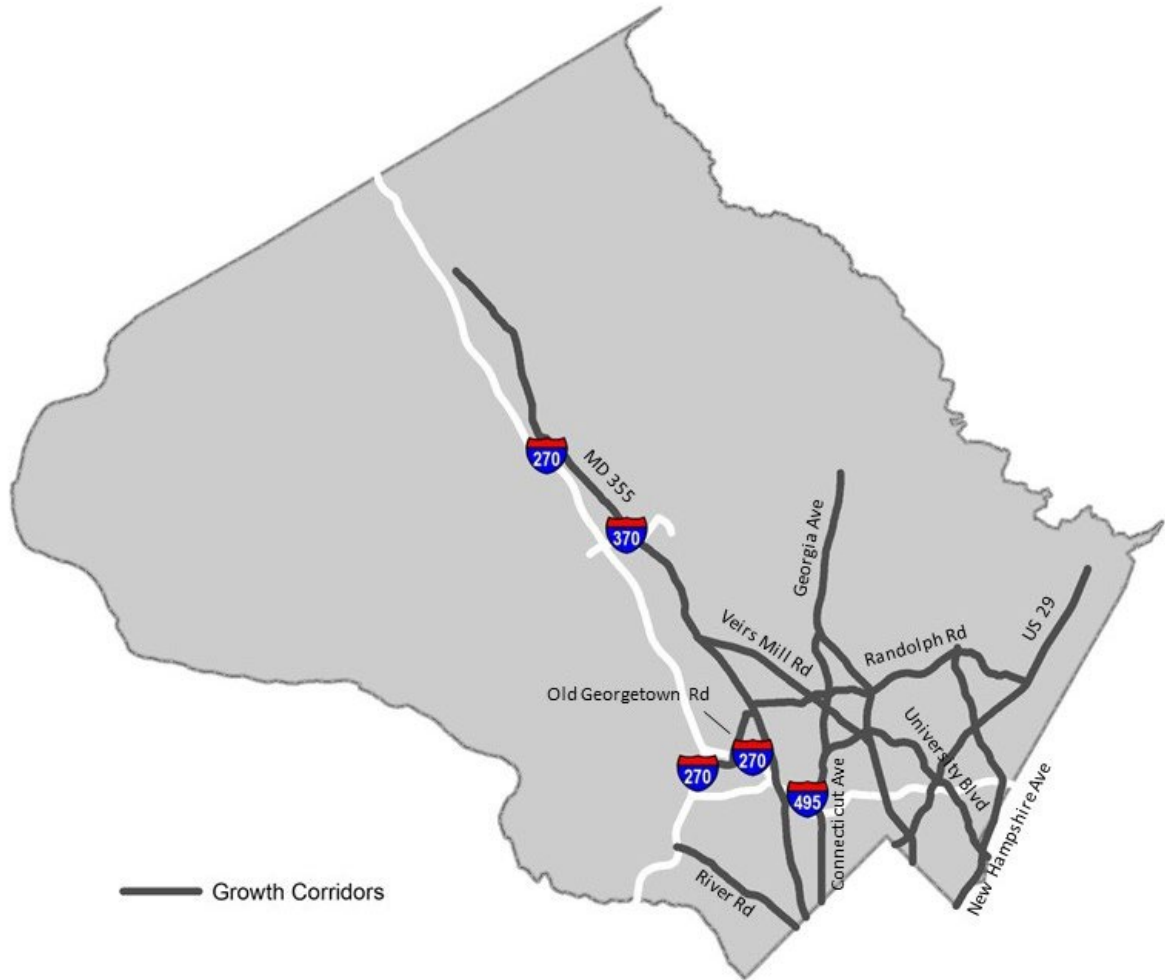


Figure 1: Thrive Montgomery 2050 Growth Corridors

Review of Transitways and Transit Stations

Planning staff will review master planned transit stations and recommend updates to station locations—including the addition and removal of several stations. The locations of bus rapid transit stations in corridors such as Veirs Mill Rd, US 29, and MD 355 have been refined through the Capital Project planning and design process, since they were originally master planned. Planning staff will also review master-planned transitways to determine whether changes are needed to reflect BRT (Bus Rapid Transit) projects that are under design by MCDOT. Additionally, staff will review future connections in approved master plans that may be beneficial to BRT service and consider formalizing them as transitways, with a more precise location and right-of-way width.

Countywide Planning and Policy staff will coordinate with MCDOT and the Planning Department’s Downcounty, Midcounty and Upcounty planning divisions to refine the recommendations.

Task 4 – Working Draft Master Plan

Staff will prepare the Working Draft of the master plan. The Planning Board will recognize the Working Draft (potentially with modifications) as the Public Hearing Draft and set the public hearing date.

Completion: March 2024

Task 5 – Planning Board Public Hearing

The Planning Board will hold a public hearing on the draft MPOHT.

Completion: April 2024

Task 6 – Planning Board Work Session and Plan Draft

Planning staff will hold work sessions with the Planning Board to address issues raised by the Planning Board and through public testimony. At the conclusion of this review and with the approval of the Planning Board, a Planning Board Draft of the MPOHT will be prepared. The Planning Board Draft will be submitted to the County Council and County Executive.

Completion: May 2024

Task 7 – County Council Review/Approval and Commission Adoption

The beginning of the County Council review of a master plan starts with a public hearing after a 60-day review period. After receiving testimony at the public hearing, the Council’s Transportation and Environment (T&E) Committee will hold work sessions and forward its recommended changes to the full Council, which will hold full Council work sessions and approve a revised plan. After approval of the MPOHT by the County Council, the document will be submitted to the Planning Board and then to the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission for adoption. After adoption by the Commission, a final Approved and Adopted Master Plan document will be prepared.

Completion: November 2024

Schedule

Figure 2 summarizes the schedule for the plan.

Attachment A

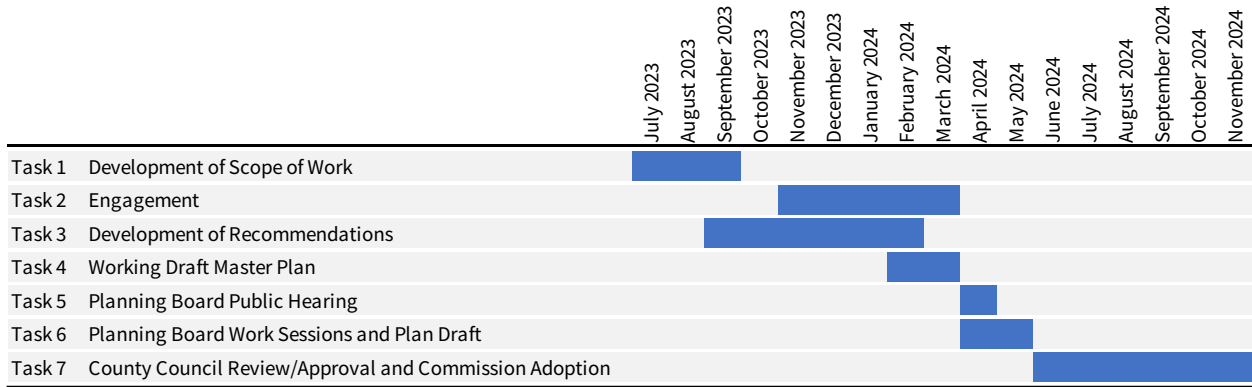


Figure 2: Project Schedule for MPOHT Technical Update by Task