

# State Designated TOD Narrative

## Bethesda Downtown

Downtown Bethesda is one of four Central Business Districts (CBDs) in Montgomery County, Maryland and includes the Bethesda Red Line station and is the western terminus of the Purple Line. Major transit corridors through the downtown include East-West Highway (MD 410), Wisconsin Avenue (MD 355) and Old Georgetown Road (MD 187). The Medical Center Metro Station serving the National Institutes of Health and Walter Reed National Military Medical Center is located on the Red Line along Wisconsin Avenue and is an approximate five-minute walk northern boundary of the Bethesda downtown. The Capital Crescent Trail (CCT), a major bicycle and pedestrian trail that follows the Purple Line through the heart of the downtown westward toward Westbard and Georgetown. The MD 355 Bus Rapid Transit (BRT/Flash) from Clarksburg to Bethesda is in the design phase and has two stops in downtown Bethesda including one at Cordell Avenue and the other at the Bethesda Metro Station.

Transit-Oriented Development is the backbone of this area with mixed-use commercial and residential buildings reaching 300 feet in height and located on top of the transit stations. Multiple modes of transportation, including biking, walking, rolling and vehicles interact in a connected network of accessibility. Some of the highest population and employment densities in the county are found within this downtown area. Bethesda is an active area that brings to life many placemaking opportunities and is managed by the Bethesda Urban Partnership (BUP). In addition to Bethesda Row, a mixed-use attraction of shops and residential, the downtown hosts some major employers including Marriott Headquarters, Fox Studios, and the Geico Headquarters.

The boundaries for this TOD designation area align with the [2017](#) and recently [updated 2025 Bethesda Downtown Sector Plan Minor Master Plan Amendment](#) and generally are bounded by NIH to the north, Bradley Boulevard to the south, Arlington Road to the west and Montgomery Avenue to the east. All of the boundary area is within a five-to-ten-minute walkshed from the Metro and Purple Line Stations, as well as the future BRT stations.

### **Bethesda Downtown – Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) Justification**

**Project Area:** Bethesda Downtown, Montgomery County, Maryland

**Lead Agency:** Montgomery County Planning Department / M-NCPPC + MCDOT

**Transit Assets:** Metrorail Red Line, Purple Line (western terminus), BRT/Flash (in design), Local/Regional Bus Network

**TOD Type:** High-Intensity, Mixed-Use, Multimodal Urban Center

#### **1. Strategic Transit Access**

- Bethesda is a major regional transit hub anchored by the Bethesda Metrorail Station (Red Line) and the western terminus of the Purple Line.
- Major state highways: East-West Highway (MD 410), Wisconsin Avenue (MD 355), and Old Georgetown Road (MD 187): provide multimodal connectivity and support high transit ridership.
- The MD 355 BRT/Flash corridor (Clarksburg to Bethesda) is in design and includes two stations in Bethesda: Cordell Avenue and the Bethesda Metro Station.

- All TOD parcels fall within a five-to-ten-minute walkshed of heavy rail, light rail, and planned BRT stations.
- Additionally, the Medical Center Metro Station (Red Line) is located approximately a five-minute walk from the northern boundary of the downtown, expanding regional access.

## **2. Alignment With Adopted Plans**

- The TOD boundary aligns with the *2017 Bethesda Downtown Sector Plan* and the *2025 Bethesda Minor Master Plan Amendment*, which designate Bethesda as a high-intensity, transit-focused growth area.
- Adopted plans prioritize:
  - High-density mixed-use development
  - Vertical integration of residential and commercial uses
  - Pedestrian-oriented design and public realm improvements
  - Reduced auto dependence and enhanced multimodal access
- The district is a priority location for public-sector investment and infrastructure modernization.
- The district is designated a Regional Activity Center by the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (MWCOCG)

## **3. TOD-Supportive Land Use and Development Patterns**

- Bethesda Downtown contains some of the tallest buildings and highest densities in Montgomery County, with mixed-use towers reaching 300 feet and built directly above transit stations.
- Land use patterns include:
  - Office and corporate headquarters
  - Hospitality and retail
  - Institutional and cultural uses
  - High-density residential development
- Major employers include Marriott International Headquarters, Fox Studios, and GEICO Headquarters, contributing to a strong employment base and daytime population.
- The district's compact, mixed-use form supports high transit ridership and efficient infrastructure utilization.

## **4. Active Transportation Connectivity**

- The Capital Crescent Trail (CCT) runs through the heart of downtown, paralleling the Purple Line corridor and providing regional east-west bicycle and pedestrian access.
- The CCT connects Bethesda to Downtown Washington, DC, Downtown Silver, Spring, and other major activity centers, supporting non-motorized travel and reducing vehicle miles traveled (VMT).
- The Bethesda Trolley Trail provides north-south connections
- The downtown street grid supports biking, walking, rolling, and multimodal circulation in a connected, accessible network.
- Significant bicycle infrastructure investments on Woodmont Avenue, Cheltenham Drive and other areas of the downtown

## **5. Equity and Community Benefit**

- Bethesda serves a diverse workforce and provides access to major regional employment centers, including NIH and Walter Reed National Military Medical Center.
- TOD investment supports:
  - Improved multimodal access for workers across income levels
  - Expanded housing opportunities near high-capacity transit
  - Enhanced pedestrian and bicycle safety
  - Increased access to jobs, services, and cultural amenities
- The district's role as a regional employment hub aligns with state and federal equity and mobility goals.

## **6. Economic Development Potential**

- Bethesda is one of the county's strongest economic engines, with significant redevelopment capacity and ongoing investment.
- TOD investment will:
  - Catalyze infill development and adaptive reuse
  - Support small business vitality and placemaking initiatives
  - Strengthen the tax base
  - Leverage existing public infrastructure investments
- The public space is managed by the Bethesda Urban Partnership (BUP), which supports placemaking, maintenance, and programming.

## **7. Readiness and Implementation Capacity**

- Montgomery County and M-NCPPC have extensive experience implementing complex, multimodal planning initiatives.
- The district benefits from:
  - Adopted master plans with clear TOD policies
  - Active Purple Line construction
  - BRT corridor design underway
  - Zoning that supports high-density mixed-use development
  - Strong interagency coordination with MDOT, WMATA, and Montgomery County DOT
- These factors demonstrate a high level of readiness for TOD-related funding and implementation.

## **Summary**

Bethesda Downtown meets key state and federal TOD criteria, including multimodal access, supportive land use, equity benefits, economic development potential, and strong implementation readiness. Investment in this district will advance regional mobility, support sustainable growth, and deliver long-term benefits to residents, workers, and the broader metropolitan area.

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