

# State Designated TOD Narrative

## Friendship Heights

The downtown area of Friendship Heights is one of four Central Business Districts (CBDs) in Montgomery County, Maryland and includes the Friendship Heights Red Line station that serves both Montgomery County and the District of Columbia. Wisconsin Avenue (MD 355) runs north-south through the downtown area from Bethesda. The MD 355 Bus Rapid Transit (BRT/Flash) from Clarksburg to Friendship Heights is in the design phase between Clarksburg and Bethesda, with a master planned continuation to Friendship Heights Metro Station with potential extensions into the District of Columbia. High frequency buses connect Friendship Heights to Georgetown and DC's downtown core, while medium frequency buses link Friendship Heights, Bethesda, and the American University campus.

Friendship Heights has some larger commercial and residential urban developments that contribute to the success of the downtown on both the Maryland and District lines. Mazza Gallery is in Washington, DC and is currently being re-envisioned as a mixed-use development. The site of the former GEICO Headquarters was recently sold and is planned for a mixed-use residential neighborhood. A considerable amount of medical office and retail services exist to support the existing residences in the boundary area and adjacent communities, as well as the region beyond.

The boundaries for this TOD designation area generally align with the [Friendship Heights Sector Plan](#) currently being updated with an anticipated approval in 2027. This master plan is considering increased heights, densities and a more comprehensive mix of uses. The geographic areas are generally bounded by the Town of Somerset to the north, Western Avenue at the DC line to the south, Willard Avenue to the west and Belmont Avenue to the east. All of the boundary area is within a five-to-ten-minute walkshed from the Metro Station.

### **Friendship Heights – Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) Justification**

**Project Area:** Friendship Heights, Montgomery County, Maryland

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

**Transit Assets:** Metrorail Red Line, Planned BRT/Flash Terminus, Local/Regional Bus Network

**TOD Type:** Mixed-Use, Multimodal, Cross-Jurisdictional Urban Center

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

- Friendship Heights is a major transit node anchored by the Friendship Heights Metrorail Station (Red Line), serving both Montgomery County and the District of Columbia.
- The MD 355 BRT/Flash corridor (Clarksburg to Friendship Heights) is in design and will terminate at the Friendship Heights Metro Station, creating a high-frequency bus-rail transfer point.
- Wisconsin Avenue (MD 355) provides a continuous north-south multimodal corridor linking Friendship Heights to Bethesda, the National Institutes of Health and Walter Reed National Military Medical Center, American University, and downtown Washington, D.C.

- All TOD parcels fall within a five-to-ten-minute walkshed of the Metro station and future BRT terminus.

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

- The TOD boundary generally aligns with the Friendship Heights Master Plan. The plan is currently undergoing a comprehensive update with anticipated approval in 2027.
- The plan is evaluating:
  - Increased building heights and densities
  - Expanded mixed-use development
  - Improved multimodal access and public realm enhancements
  - Providing public parking options to reduce the reliance on and abundance of private parking, with the intent of better supporting a denser urban environment
- The district is identified as a priority area for reinvestment and redevelopment on both sides of the Maryland–D.C. line.
- The district is designated a Regional Activity Center by the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (MWCOG)

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

- Friendship Heights contains significant commercial and residential development that supports a compact, walkable urban environment.
- Key redevelopment opportunities in an around the Friendship Heights downtown area include:
  - The former GEICO Headquarters site in Maryland, recently sold and planned for a mixed-use residential neighborhood
  - The Mazza Gallery site in D.C., undergoing re-envisioning as a major mixed-use project
- The district includes substantial medical office, retail services, and neighborhood-serving commercial uses that support both local residents and the greater region.
- The area’s land use mix and redevelopment pipeline strongly align with TOD principles.

## **4. Multimodal and Active Transportation Connectivity**

- Friendship Heights benefits from a highly walkable street grid and direct access to Wisconsin Avenue’s multimodal corridor.
- Planned improvements under the Master Plan update include enhanced pedestrian and bicycle facilities, improved crossings, and stronger connections to adjacent neighborhoods.
- The district’s compact form and transit proximity support reduced vehicle miles traveled (VMT) and increased transit ridership.

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

- Friendship Heights serves a significant residential population and provides access to employment, retail, and medical services for surrounding communities.
- TOD investment supports:
  - Improved multimodal access for residents and workers
  - Expanded housing opportunities near high-capacity transit
  - Safer pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure
  - Strengthened access to jobs, services, and regional amenities
- The cross-jurisdictional nature of the district aligns with federal and state goals for equitable, coordinated regional mobility.

## **6. Economic Development Potential**

- Friendship Heights has significant redevelopment capacity, including large underutilized parcels and aging commercial properties.
- TOD investment will:
  - Catalyze mixed-use redevelopment on key sites
  - Support small business vitality and neighborhood-serving retail
  - Increase the commercial and residential tax base
  - Leverage major private-sector redevelopment already underway
- The district's location at the Maryland–D.C. border enhances its regional economic significance.

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

- Montgomery County and M-NCPPC have extensive experience implementing TOD-focused planning and infrastructure projects.
- The district benefits from:
  - An active Master Plan update with clear TOD objectives
  - A planned BRT terminus at the Metro station
  - Zoning and regulatory frameworks supportive of mixed-use redevelopment
  - Strong coordination with MDOT, WMATA, and the District of Columbia
- These factors demonstrate a high level of readiness for TOD-related funding and implementation.
- The district benefits from a strong business partnership organization, The Friendship Heights Alliance, that is promoting the development of a vision for the area and renewed investment and redevelopment.

## **Summary**

Friendship Heights 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 redevelopment, and deliver long-term benefits to residents and businesses on both sides of the Maryland–D.C. line.

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