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MONTGOMERY COUNTY PLANNING BOARD
THE MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION

OFFICE OF THE CHAIRMAN

July 8, 2009

Councilmember Nancy Floreen
Chair – Transportation, Infrastructure, Energy and Environment Committee
Montgomery County Council
100 Maryland Avenue
Rockville, Maryland 20850

Dear Ms. Floreen:

The Montgomery County Planning Board at its meeting Monday evening, July 6, voted to recommend that the Council endorse Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) as the Locally Preferred Alternative for the Corridor Cities Transitway (CCT). The consensus of the Board was that the flexibility of BRT offers advantages from phasing, operational and cost standpoints – making it the logical choice based on information available at this time. The Maryland Transit Administration (MTA) is currently examining the feasibility of both Light Rail Transit (LRT) and BRT on the Planning Board's preferred alternative alignment to serve the Life Sciences Center within the Gaithersburg West Master Plan area. The Board recognizes that the question of the preferred mode for the CCT would be revisited if the MTA analysis this fall indicates that the cost-effectiveness of LRT would improve to the point where it would be competitive for federal funding. However, there is no basis to suggest that the MTA results of the Life Sciences Center alignment will show a different relationship between the performance of LRT and BRT modes. We expect that the BRT advantages summarized above will be confirmed by the subsequent MTA analysis.

With respect to alignment, the Planning Board supports the alternate alignment through the Life Sciences Center that is included in the current Public Hearing Draft of the Gaithersburg West Master Plan. We believe it is important – absent any analysis to the contrary – that this alignment with a dedicated transitway be included as the preferred approach to accommodating the planned growth in this area. The Board is not opposed to a secondary, or limited express, bus service along the current Master Plan alignment but that alignment should be clearly identified at this time as supplemental and not the preferred alignment.

The Board also recommends that the Council endorse a modified Alternative 7 as the locally preferred highway alternative. This recommendation should be viewed as a qualified recommendation. Some Board members are reluctant to endorse any widening of I-270. The Board, however, feels the combination of (1) moving forward with the CCT and (2) introducing value pricing or variable tolling on I-270 are key elements of moving us away from dependence on additional roadway capacity and that the trade-offs in play (including the potential for

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significantly worsening congestion) warrant moving ahead with a "build alternative." The Board, the Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) Project team, and our staff all agree, however, that additional information is needed in order to make the case for this highway alternative. There is also a need to continue work on mitigation of impacts – which in some cases are significant.

A summary of all of the Planning Board recommendations related to the I-270 / U.S. 15 Corridor Cities Transitway Alternatives Analysis/Environmental Assessment is enclosed. We want to take this opportunity to thank the MDOT Project Team and the Montgomery County Department of Transportation for their responsiveness and assistance throughout this process. It is a critically important project and we look forward to seeing it advance in a manner consistent with our goals for providing enhanced mobility throughout the County.

Our staff will be present at the Committee's deliberations on July 13 to answer any questions you or other Committee members may have. Should you have any questions in advance, please do not hesitate to contact Dan Hardy (301-495-4530) or Tom Autrey (301-495-4533) of our Transportation Planning Division.

Sincerely,

Royce Hanson
Chairman

Enclosure

Planning Board Recommendations on I-270 / U.S. 15 / Corridor Cities Transitway (CCT) Alternative Analysis / Environmental Assessment
Adopted July 6, 2009

Transit Mode

1. Select Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) for the CCT.

CCT Alignment

2. Select the Master Plan alignment with adjacent hiker biker trail with the following modifications:

   a. Replace the existing master plan alignment with the alignment through the Life Sciences Center that is included in the pending Planning Board Draft of the Gaithersburg West Master Plan.
   b. Replace the conceptual alignment through Crown Farm with the alignment along Fields Road that is consistent with the Crown Farm Project Plan approved by the City of Gaithersburg.
   c. Include only one station on Crown Farm and drop from further consideration the stations at School Drive and Middlebrook Road.
   d. Defer to the City of Gaithersburg on any recommendation to the proposed relocation of the alignment to the west side of Great Seneca Highway to better serve the Kentlands.
   e. Locate the Operations and Maintenance facility at Metropolitan Grove Site 6.

Highway Alternative

3. Based upon the information currently available, select "Modified" Alternative 7 – Two Express Toll Lanes (ETL) in each direction but:

   a. Limit the number of through lanes (i.e. General Purpose and Managed Lanes) at the Frederick County line to no more than six.
   b. Incorporate preferential treatments for High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) and transit into the design (i.e., High Occupancy Toll or HOT lanes instead of Express Toll Lanes).
   c. Consider a reversible lane system between MD 121 and the Monocacy Battlefield as a means to minimize costs and resource impacts.

Further Analysis

4. Provide additional detail on on-going mitigation efforts throughout the next phases of the project planning for both the highway and transit components.

5. Provide additional detail on the financial profile of the project. Additional and updated information is needed on assumptions related to toll rates, the estimated revenue to be generated, the extent to which the highway component of the project is expected to help

defray capital and operating costs, and the extent the project may be expected to fund transit improvements.

6. Examine the potential for providing more frequent access to the managed lanes through the use of more open area or slip ramps where appropriate. The feasibility of providing direct access ramps from HOT lanes to the Life Science Area needs to be examined.

7. Consider closing the MD 109 interchange.

8. Additional information or data is needed in subsequent project planning in the following specific technical areas:

   a. Traffic Volumes and Level of Service (LOS) By Lane Type
   b. Intersection LOS in format similar to 2002 AA/DEIS
   c. Roadway Travel Time Data

9. During project development, the following resource impact minimization and mitigation efforts should be expedited:

   - Section 106 coordination to address master planned development on the Banks / Belward Farm historic site facilitating establishment of the CCT alignment to a planned community with five million square feet of commercial development potential.
   - Development of linear stormwater management techniques in sensitive areas such as Use IV subwatersheds, the Clarksburg Special Protection Area, and the stream/parkland crossings of Great Seneca Creek and Little Seneca Creek.
   - Continuing coordination between federal, state, and local environmental mitigation requirements with particular attention to noise attenuation, wildlife exclusion fencing, the introduction of non-native invasive species, and the protection of rare, threatened, and endangered species such as the comely shiner.
   - Developing a project delivery mechanism that provides continuing opportunities to minimize resource impacts, including the use of contractual financial incentives.
   - Identifying a conceptual Section 4(f) mitigation proposal to address parkland impacts such as potential impacts to Little Bennett Regional Park and Black Hill Regional Park.

Recommended Further Action by Montgomery County

10. Establish a working group to examine methods of accelerating the funding and implementation of the CCT and providing necessary funding for the operation, maintenance, rehabilitation, and expansion of our existing public transit services – including Metrorail, Metrobus, and Ride On – as well as the planned Purple Line.

11. Before I-270 improvements (other than new interchange access points) are designed for mandatory referral submission, the County Council should identify the priority of all major roadways and transit projects in the corridor through the County CIP and state CTP

process. Existing or potential projects of significance in the corridor include the following:

- I-270 north of I-370 (improvements resulting from this AA/EA)
- Extended managed lanes to be evaluated in the SHA West Side Mobility Study
- A countywide BRT network, for County study in FY 10
- Midcounty Highway Extended (M-83), currently under County study