



Rapid Transit Task Force Final Report: Presentation and Roundtable Discussion

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Description

This roundtable provides a forum for the County Executive’s Rapid Transit Task Force to present its report recommending a countywide rapid transit system to the Planning Board. The task force has been working since March 23, 2011 in the research, deliberation, and preparation of its report, which was released on May 22, 2012 and may be found here: <http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/Apps/cex/transit/reportfinal.asp>. The report will be presented to the County Council on June 12, 2012 and will be considered in the development of our recommendations for the Countywide Transit Corridors Functional Master Plan (Functional Plan).

The connection between the task force’s report and the Countywide Transit Corridors Functional Master Plan

The starting point for both the task force and the Functional Plan was the 150-mile network determined to be feasible in the Montgomery County Department of Transportation’s (MCDOT’s) 2011 Countywide Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) study. The task force makes many recommendations in the report that are intended to promote the development of a countywide rapid transit system, but not all are Master Plan issues that would need to be addressed in the Functional Plan.

The task force has categorized the need for various attributes of a BRT system; the full list may be found in Appendix A-1 of the report. The ones that would be addressed (either directly or indirectly) in the Functional Plan, with the task force’s priority ranking, are as follows. (Note that the task force uses the descriptor RTV (rapid transit vehicle) in their report rather than BRT.)

Grade AAA - absolutely essential attributes:

- To the maximum extent possible, having physically separated, dedicated RTV lanes throughout the entire system, so the system’s RTVs would not become comingled into mixed general traffic.

Grade “A” - essential attributes:

- RTVs must have multiple wide doors on both sides of the RTVs.
- Stations must have level platform boarding.
- Stations must be safe, wide, and weather-protected.
- Lanes with intersection improvements and coordination with other modes of transportation.

- Multi-modal integration (pedestrians, bicycles, Zipcars®, taxi service, Ride-On and Metrobus, shuttle buses and neighborhood circulators).

Grade “B” - highly desirable attributes:

- Stations are set back from the intersection.
- Stations have physically separated passing lanes for limited express and local service.
- RTV lanes in central verge of road (where appropriate).

Grade “C” - preferable attributes:

- Single stations serving both directions (where appropriate)
- Bicycle lanes in corridor (but NOT within the RTV dedicated lanes)

Overall, the Task Force Report builds upon the prior work of the County Department of Transportation’s feasibility study of a BRT network. The report provides additional detail on how the vision may potentially be attained and in doing so presents both the advantages and challenges of implementing the network.

We have the following comments on more specific items in the Task Force’s report that will be considered in the Functional Plan:

- **Corridors in the proposed network**
 - **Comment:** Since our current area Master Plans are in balance between transportation and land use, the task force’s proposed network could create a huge amount of transportation capacity beyond that needed to support our current planned land uses. Since our transportation needs are already severely underfunded, our priorities may need to be re-examined even if additional sources of funding become available. Some planned transportation facilities could be removed from plans as transit facilities are added to provide a more sustainable balance between transportation capacity and land use, as well as reducing the backlog of road projects awaiting funding. Alternatively, the proposed BRT network could support additional development density if provided in future area Master Plans; a Master Plan effort that would address land use in BRT station areas is in the Planning Department’s work program for FY14.
 - **Comment:** We will begin additional modeling work shortly to determine the impacts of lane-repurposing on other vehicular traffic and on ridership forecasts. This evaluation includes three additional corridors that were added to the network we presented to the Planning Board in February to reflect the recommendations of the task force’s consultant, the Traffic Group, earlier this year. This network does not include all of the corridors recommended in the final task force report, but is consistent with our

discussions with MCDOT, as well as the direction that the Planning Board gave us in February 2012.

- **Comment:** Corridor 5 from Rockville Metro Station to the Great Seneca Science Corridor was determined in the MCDOT study to be a feasible BRT corridor but is not included in the task force's plan. It has been retained in the network that we are modeling however.
- **Comment:** The report likens the transit network to the roadway classifications, but omits a potentially more important part of our transit network in the future: the MARC Brunswick line, which has the fastest service for the longest regional trips.
- **Number of additional lanes on the proposed corridors, including the right-of-way needed to accommodate these lanes**
 - **Comment:** The report does not clearly recommend which corridors need to provide two-way all-day frequent transit service and which only need frequent peak-hour peak-direction commuter service. More detail is provided in the Concept Plan developed by the Task Force's consultant; however, some of the assumptions used in the plan need further review. The reduced lane widths assumed in the Concept Plan for instance have been questioned by multiple agencies. The Concept Plan recommends that in some areas the Functional Plan should recommend 12 to 15 feet additional right of way beyond the existing right of way along each side of the road. Our approach along many segments will be first to try and determine if it is feasible to use existing lanes and/or reduce the amount of additional right of way required while still providing for the priority treatment that results in higher bus speeds and shorter travel times.
- **Median vs. curb lane busway**
 - **Comment:** While there may be a minor difference in the right-of-way requirements to accommodate the busway itself, the left-turn restrictions engendered by a median operation could have a significant effect on the right-of-way required, the extent of which may depend on the existence of a grid network of streets to lessen the need for left turns lanes on the same road as the busway. This is particularly true in station areas. The detailed traffic modeling that would be required to determine where additional left turn lanes are needed is beyond the scope of the Functional Plan and must be done as part of the Facility Planning for each corridor during which the implementing agency will determine whether a median or curb-lane operation is the preferred alternative. The Functional Plan, when approved and adopted will give the County the authority to protect needed ROW. If small amounts of additional ROW are needed beyond that shown in the Master Plan, the county would have the authority to purchase them at the time of implementation.

- **Sustainable Complete Streets**

- **Comment:** The task force appears to place a lesser importance on achieving Sustainable Complete Streets than on achieving the recommended transit network and treatment. While there are many roadway elements that will have to be balanced, the starting point for the Functional Plan recommendations will be that achieving all the elements of Sustainable Complete Streets is our goal.

- **Phasing**

- **Comment:** If the BRT network is intended to serve development for the next fifty years and longer, it should be built in concert with that development. The task force’s plan calls for building the entire network in the next nine to twenty years, but that puts completion 30-40 years ahead of some of the intended development. Building the BRT network too far ahead of development greatly reduces the ability of the public sector to require that development to contribute to its cost, e.g. the White Flint Sector Plan area, and risks providing service to areas without sufficient density to support it.

- **Stormwater Management**

- **Comment:** The space required to achieve the required stormwater management is not included in the right-of-way assessments for the task force’s network but will be addressed in greater detail in the Functional Plan.

Master Plan Requirements – the link between transportation and land use

The following excerpts from our General Plan were included in staff memos this winter on the Functional Plan, but are repeated as background for the task force’s presentation to the Board.

The 1964 General Plan states on page 142: *“Efficient rapid transit depends on relatively few highly traveled routes supported by closeness of residences and businesses to its stations, frequent service, fast and comfortable equipment. It is only under these conditions, found in the corridor pattern and to a somewhat lesser extent in the satellite pattern, that rapid transit will be attractive to a large enough number of people so that the insatiable need for highways can be brought under control.”*

The 1969 Updated General Plan includes in its Circulation section (pages 19-21):

Objective A: Transportation routes and facilities should be used not merely to accommodate travel demand, but more importantly, to facilitate the orderly growth of urban areas within the context of general plan goals.

Guideline 5: In locating major transportation routes in built-up areas, minimize the disruption of local businesses and the demolition of sound residential structures.

Objective B: Provide for a coordinated rail-bus transit system that is as capable of shaping desirable growth patterns as it is in serving present population and employment centers, and provide for convenient ease of transfer between transit and other modes.

Guideline 3: Explore the feasibility of exclusive bus-ways where rail transit service cannot economically be extended because of low projected passenger volumes.

Objective E: While providing adequate capacity through built-up urban areas, retain the liveability and amenities of such areas.

Guideline 1: Encourage the use of mass transit rather than the use of the automobile for travel through built-up areas.

Ongoing Studies

SHA has recently begun Project Planning for two projects: Veirs Mill Road BRT from the Rockville Metro Station to the Wheaton Metro Station, and Georgia Avenue Busway from the Glenmont Metro Station to Olney. Both projects are part of the BRT network recommended by the task force and being studied as part of the Functional Plan. These studies are being funded by Montgomery County but are being led by SHA staff since they are both on State highways. The Veirs Mill Road project team held its first public meeting on May 23, 2012 and the Georgia Avenue project team will hold its first public meeting on June 26, 2012. Our staff is participating in both studies, which will take approximately three years to complete.

Next Steps

We have just begun additional travel forecasting work that will include the three additional corridors noted above and will consider the potential impacts of lane-repurposing on other traffic and on forecast transit ridership. This modeling will assist us in formulating our recommendations on whether exclusive BRT lanes should be achieved by adding new lanes or by purposing existing travel lanes, the final decision on which will also be influenced by a determination of the right-of-way and private property impacts.

This modeling is the near-term next step for the Functional Plan, but once that Plan is approved and adopted, it should be followed up by a countywide reevaluation of our Master Planned highway improvements. If the County's decision is to pursue a large-scale BRT network to transform the pattern of our future development and how our residents get around, we cannot also pursue every element of the proposed highway improvements that are in our current Master Plans. It is unlikely that there will be sufficient money to do both, and the transformative goal of the BRT network would likely be undermined by providing the same level of highway improvements planned before the BRT network was envisioned. The Board's discussions to date on Transportation Policy Area Review (TPAR) include more of a focus on transit improvements in urban areas, highways in rural areas, and more of a mix of the two

in suburban areas. Our Master Plan of Highways and Transitways should reflect a similar focus once the network for BRT is clear and the Functional Plan is adopted.

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