



Charles County Government

CHARLES COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

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April 26, 2022

The Honorable James F. Ports, Jr., Secretary
Maryland Department of Transportation
7201 Corporate Center Drive
Hanover, Maryland 21076

Dear Secretary Ports:

Thank you for the opportunity to present Charles County's transportation priorities for Fiscal Year 2023. Throughout the past year, we have been working closely with the individual modal administrations of the Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT), our elected colleagues in neighboring jurisdictions, the Transportation Planning Board of the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments, and the Tri-County Council for Southern Maryland to address our significant local and regional priorities.

First, we are excited to begin working with the Maryland Transit Administration (MTA) team and our partners in Prince George's County on the Project Planning Phase of our highest transportation priority, the Southern Maryland Rapid Transit (SMRT) project. As you know, this will be a transformative project for the Southern Maryland region bringing a fixed-route, high-capacity transit service within a dedicated transitway in the MD 5/U.S. 301 corridor from the Branch Avenue Metrorail Station in Prince George's County to Waldorf and White Plains in Charles County. Based on MTA's 2017 Alternatives Report and the 2010 Southern Maryland Transit Corridor Study, we have integrated the studies' preferred alignment into the Charles County Comprehensive Plan as well as the Waldorf Urban Redevelopment Corridor Master Plan.

We look forward to completing the design, engineering, and National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) processes to secure a Record of Decision for the SMRT project. The inclusion of this project in the FY2022-FY2027 Consolidated Transportation Program (CTP) initiated the first critical step toward the establishment of the Project Planning Phase. Thanks to the support of our Congressional Delegation, we have secured the federal investment of \$5 Million of Congressionally Directed Spending (CDS) funds to match funds from the Maryland Department of Transportation, and the project will now be included in the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments' Constrained Long Range Plan (CLRP) and the Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP).

In order to secure a Record of Decision and complete 30 percent of the required engineering for the project, our project team estimates that an additional State investment of \$20 million will be needed. It will be necessary for us to complete "Project Planning" in order to position this project for future consideration in the federal "New Starts" program. Our goal is to complete this formal planning phase within the next two to three years. We need MDOT to commit additional

funding in the FY2023-FY2028 CTP for its completion.

As this project develops, it is critical that right-of-way and corridor preservation remain a priority for the future viability of the SMRT project. Not only are transit needs in this congested and rapidly growing highway corridor steadily increasing, it is vitally important that a 70-foot wide, grade-separated transitway for future high-capacity, fixed-route transit service continue to be preserved and integrated with improvements that the State Highway Administration is planning along this corridor. The continued efforts of SHA are greatly appreciated as additional growth could inhibit the viability of the transit corridor.

Partnerships and collaboration with neighboring jurisdictions are essential for the successful delivery of the SMRT service. Throughout the planning process for the SMRT project, we have worked closely with Prince George's County's elected and appointed officials, including the Prince George's County Executive and Council, the staff of the Prince George's County Planning Department (the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission), and the Prince George's County Department of Public Works and Transportation. Both jurisdictions have worked tirelessly to promote transit-oriented development along this corridor, including re-zoning efforts, infrastructure investments, and development incentives to support the project. When coupled with the SMRT, these investments will help preserve highway capacity, manage congestion, enhance local mobility, facilitate shorter commutes, create job opportunities, economic development, and investment opportunities near transit.

In addition to our top priority, we have attached a full list of the County's transportation priorities for the upcoming year. We believe these projects are consistent with MDOT's goals of developing a Resilient Transportation System, Providing Better Transportation Choices, Modernizing Maryland's Multimodal Transportation System, Reducing Congestions, and Facilitating Economic Opportunity. Therefore, we are requesting your commitment to the following transportation system improvements (organized by our top priorities, followed by our remaining priorities by modal agency and phase of development):

Top Transportation Priorities

1. Southern Maryland Rapid Transit (SMRT)

As mentioned above, the highest transportation priority for Charles County is the appropriation of *full funding* to complete the Project Planning phase of the Southern Maryland Rapid Transit (SMRT) project, a fixed-route, high-capacity transit service from the Branch Avenue Metro Station to Waldorf/White Plains. We are requesting that MDOT undertake all necessary steps to complete the design, engineering, and National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) processes and to secure a Record of Decision for the SMRT project.

2. US 301 Corridor Waldorf Improvements

As congestion in the region continues to increase, the MD 5 (Branch Avenue) and US 301 corridors continue to carry the largest volume of vehicles in Southern Maryland. While our primary priority is delivering high-capacity transit to the region, it is understood that such a transit service would not serve all destinations. This corridor is also experiencing substantial increases in truck traffic as an alternate route to Interstate 95, creating significant roadway congestion. This is anticipated to be further exasperated when the new Nice-Middleton Bridge is open to traffic. Therefore, we request MDOT conduct and implement a traffic timing or advanced sensor implementation survey to improve traffic congestion in the corridor as an interim measure.

3. Pedestrian Safety Enhancements at US 301 at Smallwood Drive & MD 228 at Western Parkway

Pedestrian safety is a top priority for both the County and the State alike but many intersections involving State roadways in Charles County lack adequate pedestrian accommodations such as ADA-compliant curb ramps, crosswalks, and pedestrian signal phases. To improve pedestrian safety and connectivity, and to complement investments in high-capacity transit service, we are requesting that MDOT install ADA-compliant curb ramps, crosswalks, and pedestrian signal phases at two intersections: US 301 at Smallwood Drive and MD 228 at Western Parkway. These intersections serve as significant barriers for pedestrians wishing to access nearby commercial, residential, and institutional land uses, and the lack of pedestrian accommodations at these intersections significantly degrades pedestrian safety.

4. Hughesville Area Improvements

We are requesting that MDOT SHA District 5 complete: 1) planning and design for a streetscape on MD 625 (formerly known as MD 5 Business) in Hughesville, inside the limits of the Hughesville Bypass; 2) the redesign/relocation/combination of the intersections of MD 5 (Leonardtown Road) with Gallant Green Road and with MD 625 (MD 5 Business); and, 3) design and construct the extension of MD 625-A (Foster Lane) from the College of Southern Maryland Campus to MD 231 (Prince Frederick Road) with an appropriate traffic control design at MD 231.

5. Gov. Harry W. Nice/Senator Thomas “Mac” Middleton Bridge Replacement

We are extremely grateful to MDOT-MdTA for funding the construction of the new bridge and we look forward to the completion of this 4-lane structure, creating a consistent lane configuration on both sides of the Potomac River and easing the current bottleneck on US 301. As the bridge construction nears completion, we request MdTA and SHA work together to analyze and evaluate increased traffic impacts to US 301 intersections to the north of the bridge, from MD 234 to the Charles County line in Waldorf.

SHA Project Planning Priorities

US 301 Interim Improvements – Interim improvements are needed to the US 301 Corridor in Waldorf and White Plains to alleviate congestion while the US 301 Corridor Study is being completed in the longer term. This would potentially include the construction of an interchange along US 301 at MD 228/MD 5 Business and US 301 at MD 5 (Mattawoman-Beantown Road). These intersections carry the highest volume of traffic in Charles County.

MD 5 Business Traffic Flow Improvements – Roadway design and traffic signal timing improvements are needed to allow traffic to flow through the MD 5 Business Corridor from St. Charles Parkway to US 301. These improvements will benefit our local and regional commuters as well as local businesses and support the Waldorf Urban Redevelopment Corridor. This route is a major corridor to gain access to MD 210 (via MD 228), and experiences significant congestion, impacting local roads such as MD 925/Old Washington Road, Post Office Road and St. Charles Parkway.

MD 5 Business/MD 925 Corridor Improvements – As a direct action to improve mobility, and in concert with implementation of the County's Waldorf Urban Redevelopment Corridor (WURC), we are requesting the construction of roadway improvements along MD 5 Business and MD 925 within the new Waldorf Urban Center zoning district for mixed-use Transit Oriented Development (TOD). Consistent with the Waldorf Urban Design Guidelines and the County's Urban Road Standards, we seek to reconstruct these roadways as Urban Arterials with barrier-separated bicycle lanes, expanded sidewalks, and bicycle/pedestrian accommodations at

intersections to assist the County in creating the planned walkable, transit-oriented community.

MD 231 Corridor Improvements – As traffic continues to grow in the MD 231 corridor, we seek an analysis of Travel Demand Management (TDM) enhancements to ease congestion and reduce conflict points. The need for this project is identified in the SHA Highway Needs Inventory and as a recommended State highway project in the County's 2016 Comprehensive Plan (Page 8-22). Also, the MD 231 project is on the regional transportation priority list prepared by the Regional Infrastructure Advisory Committee of the Tri-County Council for Southern Maryland.

MD 210/MD 227 Intersection Improvements – As growth has continued in the Bryans Road area, congestion has increased. Charles County has been working with developers to make several roadway improvements to the surrounding roadway infrastructure, including the intersection of MD 210/MD 227. However, the intersection requires significant improvements that are not necessarily associated with specific developments. A comprehensive overhaul of the subject intersection is necessary to improve safety and accommodate multi-modal transportation measures, including ADA compliant facilities.

Capacity/TDM Analysis for US 301 between Smallwood Drive and MD 227 – Building on previous transportation priorities that were not funded, the County is requesting that MDOT perform capacity and travel demand management analysis on US 301 between Smallwood Drive and MD 227. This would include an analysis of the number of vehicle trips on the road, the performance of intersections, the demand for pedestrian and bicycle accommodations, and the safety and condition of the highway, among other aspects of the roadway. The analysis would be used to determine appropriate road improvements.

SHA District 5 Priorities

MD 488/Radio Station Road Intersection Improvements/Traffic Control – As a related component of the local upgrade of Radio Station Road to a 4-lane boulevard design, the County is seeking to address the intersection with MD 488 (La Plata Road). With the completion of St. Charles Parkway/Rosewick Road a few years ago, traffic has been increasing on Radio Station Road. Together with traffic from the adjacent educational facility campuses along Radio Station Road, driver safety has become an increasing concern. Therefore, we are seeking State funds to assist in finalizing the design and subsequently installing a traffic signal or roundabout at this intersection.

MD 6 (Charles Street) Pedestrian Safety Improvements & Community Enhancements – The Town of La Plata and the La Plata Business Association are seeking various roadway corridor improvements within the business district along MD 6 (Charles Street) in order to improve pedestrian safety and to create a more walkable environment. As traffic congestion has increased, the La Plata Town Council and the business community have raised concerns over the public being able to safely cross the roadway to homes, businesses, and the local hospital and associated facilities. We urge you to work with the Town and community members to investigate various improvements to make a safe and business-friendly roadway corridor.

MD 210 - Indian Head Highway Streetscape Project – This streetscape project is a critical component of the Indian Head Economic Revitalization Strategy developed by the Town of Indian Head. Charles County and the Town of Indian Head are requesting SHA's assistance in implementing a plan for the visual enhancement of Indian Head Highway with trees and landscaping, median improvements, bicycle paths, sidewalks and pedestrian-friendly crosswalks, attractive and easily maintained pavers, and other amenities, creating a boulevard effect along the two miles of MD 210 within the Town of Indian Head. As the gateway to the Naval Support Facility-Indian Head, the County's largest employer, the Indian Head Highway's visual appearance creates a first impression of the Town and the Naval base. Combined with the implementation of the other 15 priorities in this strategy, a streetscape project equal to those implemented on other Maryland highways would dramatically improve the perception of the Town and its prospects as a location for new private sector investment.

MD 6 – Liverpool Point Road to MD 224 (Riverside Road) - Road improvements are needed on this section of MD 6 (Port Tobacco Road) in Nanjemoy to include pavement reconstruction/resurfacing, reinforcement and improvement of the roadway shoulders, and drainage improvements to handle both average and significant storm event flows. This rural area of Charles County is highly dependent on this roadway and is greatly affected by its deteriorating conditions.

Maryland Transit Administration Priorities

Increased & Improved Service in the Waldorf/St. Charles Urban Area – We request funding to allow for enhanced and expanded operations of the VanGo locally-operated transit service within Charles County’s urban area that will *increase the frequency* of service on high-capacity routes during the peak periods. As population has increased, many of the routes are operating at capacity. Adding additional buses to existing high-capacity routes will increase the frequency of service, reduce high passenger loads, and *expand the routes* to improve the convenience of public transit. Also, Charles County is experiencing rapidly escalating demand for specialized transportation that is compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and additional funding is critical for adequately meeting the demand for this important mode of transportation.

Local Transit Operations and Maintenance Facility – The Charles County Department of Planning & Growth Management has nearly completed the design phase of this project that will ultimately result in the construction of a local transit operations and maintenance facility. This County-owned facility will act as a turnkey facility from which a transit contractor will house their operations and maintenance functions. The establishment of such a facility will enhance competition when transit services are put out to bid and will significantly reduce the real estate costs reflected in contracted operational rates. Over time, operational savings will more than offset the capital costs of this project. We request funding for construction in FY2023.

Park & Ride Implementation – We request that MTA continue to implement the recommendations of the “MD 5/ US 301/ MD 228 Corridors Park and Ride Feasibility Study-Site Identification Report,” published in October 2001. New facilities in proximity to proposed transit stations and existing rail lines within Charles County are necessary to meet the growing demand for VanGO and MTA Commuter Bus service parking. The following Park and Ride locations are requested: 1) Downtown Waldorf Station (Waldorf Redevelopment Corridor), Mattawoman/Pinefield Station, and potential locations for a new Park & Ride lot that could address the capacity issues at the Accokeek Park & Ride Lot.

Commuter Bus Enhancements – We request that MTA continue to support operational measures along the MD 5/US 301 corridor as well as the MD 210 corridor that would reduce travel times on commuter bus routes, improve the reliability of the service, and further incentivize commuters to ride transit. Heavy peak hour congestion is a daily reality for County residents. Improving travel times for commuter bus routes and allowing buses to avoid the major delays associated with congestion would provide interim relief for commuters while SMRT is in design and construction.

Restoration of WMATA Route W-19 or Effective Alternative Service – As part of major WMATA Metrobus service reductions in July 2017, WMATA’s W-19 route between the Town of Indian Head in Charles County and the Southern Avenue Metrorail station was eliminated, severing a vital link and bi-directional transit connection between Charles County and the Metrorail system. As a result, the MD Route 210 corridor in Charles County is now served by MTA Commuter Bus routes 640 and 650, with no connections offered to the Metrorail system prior to the L’Enfant Plaza Station adjacent to the National Mall in Washington, D.C. The considerable gap in public transit options for people who live, work, or visit western Charles County or the Town of Indian Head is a limiting factor for this area’s economic development and poses challenges for the transportation network in light of the Naval Support Facility Indian Head’s imminent expansion. In addition, the service elimination has placed

added strain on the MTA Commuter Bus routes and other transportation services in this area. The County is therefore requesting that MTA appropriate funding to restore the W-19 bus route or to establish an effective alternative service.

MARYLAND DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION, SECRETARY'S OFFICE

Design of Indian Head Rail Trail – Three Notch Trail Connection – We greatly appreciate the Maryland Bikeways Program grant funding in FY22 to Charles County for feasibility of the trail connection between the Indian Head Rail Trail and the Three Notch Trail. Connecting these two trails would enhance the bicycle and pedestrian connectivity of Charles and St. Mary's Counties, expand the reach of the National Capital Trail system, and provide a high-quality transportation and recreation option to Southern Maryland residents. Construction of this trail connection would promote economic development by bringing additional visitors to the communities of Charles and St. Mary's Counties.

ADDITIONAL PROJECT REQUESTS FROM THE TOWN OF LA PLATA

The following projects are additional requests from the incorporated Town of La Plata that the Charles County Commissioners support, listed by roadway:

Charles Street (MD 6):

- Pedestrian Safety – Restriping crosswalks and consideration of adding electronic warning signs
- Request for a Comprehensive Study Rt. 301 (Crain Hwy) to Rt. 488 (La Plata Rd.);
- Request for review of safety upgrades to the intersection with Hickory Lane
- Storm water structure deterioration and related road conditions
- Left turn signal to Garrett Avenue (hospital and library entrance)
- Tweak the timing of Garrett Avenue and La Plata Road/488 Light (try to sync).

Crain Highway (US 301):

- Standing water in front of 6720 creates a potential hazard;
- Hawthorne Road intersection – Poor visibility, light timing and traffic pattern review is needed
- Request to plant thorny bushes in the median on 301 to deter pedestrians from crossing there to get to Deluxe Inn and to Patuxent Inn


La Plata Road (MD 488):

- Request for consideration of installation of Hiker/Biker trail
- Request for review of crosswalk to neighboring pedestrian path to Tilghman Lake Park
- Request for review of safety issues at Kings Grant entrance

We thank you for your continued cooperation and support, and we look forward to working with you and your staff on these priorities. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Ms. Deborah A. Carpenter, AICP, Director of the Department of Planning & Growth Management by calling (301) 645-0595, or by E-Mail to CarpentD@charlescountymd.gov.

Very Truly,

COUNTY COMMISSIONERS OF
CHARLES COUNTY, MARYLAND




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Mayor Jeannine James, Town of La Plata
Mr. Brent Manuel, Town of La Plata
Mayor Brandon Paulin, Town of Indian Head
Mr. Ryan Hicks, Town of Indian Head
Mr. John Hartline, Tri-County Council
Mr. Jason Groth, Charles County
Mr. Jeffry Barnett, Charles County
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