



Montgomery County Government

ROCKVILLE, MARYLAND 20850

May 14, 2020

Gregory Slater, Secretary
Maryland Department of Transportation
7201 Corporate Drive, P.O. Box 548
Hanover, MD 21076

Dear Secretary Slater,

Montgomery County is a diverse community with many transportation needs. As always, we appreciate our cooperative relationship with the State of Maryland so that, together, we can meet the needs of our residents and businesses. The Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) has continued to make significant contributions to the transportation network in Montgomery County, including providing needed funding for WMATA, completing the interchange of Randolph Road and Georgia Avenue, initiating the I-270 Innovative Congestion Management project, constructing the Watkins Mill interchange, and advancing construction of the Purple Line.

Notwithstanding these accomplishments, our County continues to need expanded investment in its transportation system. For the FY2021-2026 Consolidated Transportation Program (CTP), we have organized our priorities by emphasis area to aid in programming of future State resources toward the transportation needs in Montgomery County.

Vision Zero Implementation

Vision Zero is not a stand-alone activity, rather it is a culture shift to a systematic safety approach. In past decades, the road network in Montgomery County was developed under policies designed to increase speed, minimize delay and maximize throughput for motor vehicle traffic. While motor vehicle travel is an important piece of our transportation system, emphasis on walking, biking, and transit access are, appropriately, higher priorities for investment in the road network today. In addition to education, enforcement, and advocacy, implementation of Vision Zero through engineering needs to inform every change made to the design and operation of the road network.

Montgomery County is in the third year of its Vision Zero action plan. The first two years brought improved collaboration with MDOT in the identification of high-hazard locations and implementation of safety countermeasures on both State and County roads. An example of the progress that has been made is MDOT/State Highway Administration's (SHA) *Context Driven Access and Mobility for All Users* guide.

While progress has been made, we continue to see significant numbers of severe and fatal crashes on our road network, particularly for pedestrians. To achieve our Vision Zero goals, in addition to continuing work on improving guidelines and standards, we need MDOT to increase the allocation of resources to implement pedestrian safety, accessibility projects, and speed reduction strategies. We request that MDOT initiate a new statewide program with significant funding to expedite implementation of pedestrian and bicycle safety engineering improvements with a particular emphasis on urban and suburban communities and transit access. In addition, MDOT/SHA should continue to evaluate every project it is undertaking to make sure the projects are informed by Vision Zero and will result in improved safety outcomes.

Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Implementation

Bus Rapid Transit is a key element of the County's Master Plan. FLASH on U.S. 29 – the first of its kind in Maryland – is advancing as a Federally and County-funded project and is expected to open in 2020. Montgomery County will need MDOT assistance and cooperation to continue advancement of our BRT system that is critical to expanding the economy of Maryland in Montgomery County.

We thank the State for completing repairs to the shoulders on US 29 and ask that the shoulder condition remain a high maintenance priority on this roadway. We request State participation in the implementation of strategies to manage congestion and improve transit travel time reliability between Tech Road and Silver Spring to be determined through the ongoing County-led US 29 Mobility and Reliability Study.

Building upon prior MDOT planning activities, the County has initiated design of BRT on MD 355 between Clarksburg and Bethesda and on MD 586 (Veirs Mill Road) between Rockville and Wheaton. These two projects will unlock the redevelopment potential of White Flint and will improve transit service to the thousands of daily transit riders who depend on services connecting Wheaton and Rockville. As both corridors are State Highways, MDOT's engagement during design and construction and financial participation in these projects will be important.

Park-and-ride capacity is of limited supply and heavily used in Montgomery County. Key locations in need of park-and-ride facility expansions include Burtonsville, to accommodate BRT passengers from Howard County, and along the MD 355 corridor in Clarksburg, Germantown and Gaithersburg to accommodate local commuters and those from Frederick, Carroll and Washington Counties.

The Corridor Cities Transitway (CCT), a long-standing State project, needs to be restored as a project in the CTP. This project is a key ingredient to the success of the biotechnology industry in the Great Seneca Science Corridor and State engagement in its implementation is important to the economic strength of Maryland.

In the next few years, planning will be initiated for the MD 650 (New Hampshire Avenue) corridor and the North Bethesda Transitway. BRT on New Hampshire Avenue is a candidate

State-led project as it is located in both Montgomery and Prince George's Counties and connects into the District of Columbia at the Fort Totten Metro Station. In addition, this corridor provides vital links to the Food and Drug Administration's White Oak Headquarters, a key economic engine for the East County. Given the multijurisdictional nature of this project, it should be led by MDOT. The North Bethesda Transitway will also provide a substantial economic opportunity by linking the Rock Spring area to White Flint.

Locally Operated Transit Support (LOTS)

We thank MDOT for its capital and operating support of the Montgomery County Transit System, including Ride On, Ride On Extra, the Flex and, starting in 2020, the Flash. Sustained financial support from MDOT is critical to providing quality transit service in Montgomery County. Priorities for Locally Operated Transit Support include:

1. ***Electric bus infrastructure.*** The County is moving toward deployment of electric buses as a regular component of its transit fleet. To enable this transition from traditional fuels, we request State technical and financial assistance with the installation of electric charging infrastructure at the three County transit depots.
2. ***Ride On ExtRa.*** Services like the Ride On ExtRa, operating on MD 355 between Lake Forest and Medical Center, have proven to be an effective model for improving the performance of transit and attracting additional customers. Montgomery County requests increased assistance through the LOTS program to extend Ride On ExtRa to Germantown and Bethesda and to operate the service all day instead of its current peak period configuration.

Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) Investment

MDOT should be commended for providing major capital and operating support to WMATA. Priorities for WMATA include:

1. ***White Flint North Metro Entrance.*** The County has identified that providing a second entrance at the White Flint Station is a high priority improvement. We ask for MDOT's advocacy to include this project in the WMATA Capital Program.
2. ***Metrobus priority treatments.*** We also ask for State support of implementation of bus priority treatments as called for in the WMATA Bus Transformation Study Strategic Plan, inclusive of Metro Extra service on Veirs Mill Road and MD 355 between Wheaton and Montgomery College.

Commuter Rail Expansion

The MARC system operated by MTA is important for moving commuters to Rockville, Silver Spring and Washington, D.C., and the system could provide even greater benefit through enhancements to the service and increasing the system's accessibility. The potential of the MARC system is even more significant with direct connection to the Virginia Railway Express (VRE) system to provide seamless links between key activity centers in Northern Virginia and those in

Montgomery County. Priorities for MARC enhancements include:

1. ***Boyds Station Expansion*** (Design and Construction). Recently, the County acquired the property adjacent to the Station with the expectation of MDOT making additional facility improvements beyond the parking and bus loop included in the County Capital Improvements Program.
2. ***Midday and Off-Peak Service*** (Planning and Operating). MARC service provides an option for peak period, peak direction commuting. As travel patterns change and reverse commuting becomes more significant, providing more midday and off-peak trains will increase the value MARC service provides to Montgomery County and will increase the attractiveness of employment in Maryland for the growing population in the District of Columbia and Northern Virginia.
3. ***Shady Grove Station*** (Planning). The Shady Grove Sector Plan calls for construction of a commuter rail station with direct connections to the WMATA station and the numerous bus services that operate from Shady Grove. This location has the promise to increase its significance as a multimodal hub if commuter rail connections could be made here. We ask that MDOT initiate a planning study for adding a commuter rail station at this location.
4. ***White Flint Station*** (Planning). The White Flint Sector Plan calls for construction of a new MARC Station and we request that MDOT advance study of the station.

Pedestrian and Bicycle Facilities

Improving pedestrian and bicycle safety as highlighted in our Vision Zero Program, creating a safe and attractive walking environment in our key growth areas, and the implementation of Bikeshare as a permanent component of our transportation system are critical needs for State support. Priorities for pedestrian and bicycle facilities enhancements include:

1. ***Pedestrian/Bicycle Safety Implementation on State Highways*** (Design and Construction). We request that the State increase funding to address sidewalk gaps, crosswalk conditions, trail crossings, and other issues in support of the County's Vision Zero Action Plan. Many of our highest-need locations are on State highways.
2. ***Bicycle and Pedestrian Priority Areas (BiPPAs)*** (Planning, Design and Construction). The County has identified over 30 BiPPA's and has prioritized five for early actions. To be effective, the County will need State cooperation and financial support to implement improvements to State infrastructure in these priority areas. A high priority activity within this program is to make improvements on access routes to the Purple Line and State funding for these improvements will help accelerate their construction.
3. ***Bikeshare Program Support*** (Grants). Federal, State and private grants have been essential for Bikeshare in Montgomery County, a system that has now grown to 80 stations. Bikeshare contributes to achieving non-auto-driver mode share (NADMS) goals in focus areas within the County and provides an excellent complement to local and regional transit systems. State operating support for this system will help secure its long-term future.
4. ***Intercounty Connector (ICC) Multiuse Trail*** (Planning). A multiuse trail was constructed concurrent with the ICC for much of its length. We request that the State begin planning

for completion of the gaps between MD 182 (Layhill Road) and Notley Road and between MD 650 (New Hampshire Avenue) and Briggs Chaney Road.

State Highways

The following projects represent our highest priorities for improvements to non-Interstate State Highways:

1. ***MD 97 (Georgia Avenue) Forest Glen/Montgomery Hills Improvements*** (Design and Construction). We strongly encourage MDOT to advance the recommendations of its planning and NEPA study into design and construction. When completed, this project will improve a major gateway into the Silver Spring Central Business District and improve safety and accessibility within the Montgomery Hills and Forest Glen communities.
2. ***MD 117 (Clopper Road) Improvements*** (Design and Construction). After construction of the Watkins Mill Interchange is completed, traffic patterns of MD 117 will change substantially. MDOT completed planning activities for improvements to MD 117 between the Seneca Creek State Park entrance and the I-270 southbound on-ramp. Montgomery County submitted a Chapter 30 funding application for this project in 2018 and 2019. With the opening of the Watkins Mill Interchange, implementation of these improvements between I-270 and Longdraft Road will be important to accommodate the changes in Interstate access.
3. ***MD 355 (Frederick Road) Improvements from MD 27 to Stringtown Road*** (Planning). Expanding MD 355, consistent with the Clarksburg Master Plan, may be the most cost-effective and least impactful way of improving access to and from this community. In addition to capacity, the improvements need to address pedestrian and bicycle connectivity, access to schools, and transit needs. We look forward to reviewing the results of the initial planning that MDOT is now advancing and to defining a project that addresses the needs on this corridor.
4. ***Accelerated Traffic Signal Modernization*** (Design and Construction). The State traffic signal system contains many locations with structural impairment, inefficient incandescent fixtures, underperforming detection, and pedestrian crossing configurations that do not meet today's needs. MDOT/SHA and Montgomery County would benefit from prioritization and acceleration of traffic signal modernization in the County, including deployment of additional adaptive traffic signal controls on key corridors within the County.
5. ***U.S. 29 Comprehensive Plan*** (Planning, Design and Construction). Traffic operations at several locations on U.S. 29 between Stewart Lane and MD 198 in Montgomery County result in recurring congestion and safety concerns. We request a comprehensive assessment of the signalized intersections on the U.S. 29 corridor, taking into consideration community preferences, approved land use plans, BRT operations, pedestrian and bicycle needs, traffic safety and throughput.
6. ***MD 198 (Spencerville Road) Improvements*** (Design and Construction). Concepts for improvements between Old Columbia Pike and U.S. 29 through the Burtonsville business district have been identified. The County requests that the State select and refine a design concept for this portion of the corridor that is supportive of the *Burtonsville Crossroads*

Neighborhood Plan (2012) goals. In Burtonsville, the project should also identify ways to reduce the width of Old Columbia Pike north of MD198 to better match reduced traffic demands and to reduce the barrier formed by this roadway.

7. **MD 97 (Georgia Avenue) and MD 28(Norbeck Road) Intersection** (Planning). The intersection of MD 97 and MD 28 is constrained and congested, particularly due to the proximity of the MD 200 Interchange just to the north and the intersection of MD 28 and MD 115 just to the west. Improvement to this location is important for facilitating access between Olney and Silver Spring and for the connection from Rockville to MD 200. We request that the State initiate a new evaluation of solutions to address this long-standing transportation bottleneck.
8. **MD 28 (Norbeck Road)** (Design and Construction). We request that the State fill remaining gaps to complete the pedestrian and bicycle network along and across MD 28 between MD 97 (Georgia Avenue) and Wintergate Drive.
9. **MD 108/Laytonsville Bypass** (Planning). The Town of Laytonsville has planned a bypass route for MD 108 around the west side of the town. This bypass, now partially constructed, will alleviate congestion at the intersection of MD 108 and Brink Road/Sundown Road, improving the character of the historic center of town.

Interstate Program

The County has been an active participant in the MDOT/SHA process for projects on I-270 and I-495. We agree with the need to improve the performance of these corridors, including expanded transit options. Montgomery County remains seriously concerned with the implementation of four additional toll lanes on I-495 between the west spur of I-270 and I-95 and requests that the State restore as an alternative congestion management strategies like ramp metering and peak-period shoulder use, or other spot improvements that are respectful of our natural resources and communities. To meet the travel needs between I-270 and I-95, we also believe MDOT should revisit its decision to eliminate the MD 200 alternative.

We acknowledge the recent announcement of a coordinated approach between Maryland and Virginia to address the American Legion Bridge and to connect the proposed Capital Beltway modifications in Maryland to those planned by Virginia. However, we remain concerned about encroachment of highway facilities beyond existing right-of-way and into buffer space within the right-of-way. All modifications to these corridors need to reflect input from local communities and all efforts must be taken to mitigate environmental and community impacts of both the current highway and its expansion.

As approved in 2019 by the Board of Public Works, the American Legion Bridge and I-270 projects should be implemented at the same time as the first phase of the Traffic Relief Plan Public-Private Partnership (P3) if the project proceeds. We also encourage MDOT to include the Dorsey Mill Road bridge in Germantown and a new interchange and Little Seneca Parkway in Clarksburg into the I-270 project, for which we believe reversible lanes will be most effective. In all cases, the modification of the Interstate system needs to consider the performance of the local road network, include expanded transit services, and include bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure on the crossings of the freeway facilities. We look forward to reaching agreement with MDOT for

local transit funding as required by the Board of Public Works P3 approval.

We thank you again for your continued partnership in meeting the needs of Maryland residents and businesses in Montgomery County. If you have questions about our priorities, please contact us.

Sincerely,



Marc Elrich
County Executive



Sidney Katz, President
County Council

cc: The Honorable Larry Hogan, Governor, State of Maryland
Montgomery County House Delegation
Montgomery County Senate Delegation