

Intercounty Connector

Limited Functional Master Plan Amendment

STAFF DRAFT

May 2008



Prepared by the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission

8787 Georgia Avenue, Silver Spring, Maryland 20910-3760

Intercounty Connector Limited Functional Master Plan Amendment Staff Draft

THE MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION

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The Commission is charged with preparing, adopting, and amending or extending *On Wedges and Corridors*, the general plan for the physical development of the Maryland-Washington Regional District.

The Commission operates in each county through Planning Boards appointed by the county government. The Boards are responsible for all local plans, zoning amendments, subdivision regulations, and administration of parks.

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The Plan Process

The **STAFF DRAFT PLAN** is prepared for presentation to the Montgomery County Planning Board, which reviews it and makes preliminary changes as appropriate, and approves it for public hearing. After the Planning Board's changes are made, the document becomes the Public Hearing Draft Plan.

The PUBLIC HEARING DRAFT PLAN is the formal proposal to amend adopted master plans. Its recommendations are not necessarily those of the Planning Board; it is prepared for the purpose of receiving public testimony. The Planning Board holds a public hearing and receives testimony, after which they hold public worksessions to review the testimony and revise the Public Hearing Draft Plan as appropriate. When the Planning Board's changes are made, the document becomes the Planning Board Draft Plan.

The PLANNING BOARD DRAFT PLAN is the Board's recommended Plan and reflects their revisions to the Public Hearing Draft Plan. The Regional District Act requires the Planning Board to transmit a sector plan to the County Council with copies to the County Executive who must, within sixty days, prepare and transmit a fiscal impact analysis of the Planning Board Draft Plan to the County Council. The County Executive may also forward to the County Council other comments and recommendations.

After receiving the Executive's fiscal impact analysis and comments, the County Council holds a public hearing to receive additional public testimony. After the hearing record is closed, the Council's Planning, Housing, and Economic Development (PHED) Committee holds public worksessions to review the testimony and makes recommendations to the County Council. The Council holds its own worksessions, and then adopts a resolution approving the Planning Board Draft Plan, as revised.

After Council approval the plan is forwarded to the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission for adoption. Once adopted by the Commission, the plan officially amends the master plans, functional plans, and sector plans cited in the Commission's adoption resolution.

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Background

In May 2006, the Federal Highway Administration approved the Record of Decision (ROD) for the Intercounty Connector (ICC), which established the specific highway alignment and interchange locations, and identified impacts as well as the measures to mitigate those impacts. The ROD also recommended a number of related master planned elements that would be implemented with the highway project, including parks, bikeways and sidewalks, and including seven miles of the master planned ICC shared use path (SP-40 in the *Countywide Bikeways Functional Master Plan*) being built with the ICC highway project. Certain alignment and implementation decisions included in the ROD are inconsistent with prior master plan guidance.

This ICC limited functional master plan amendment (ICCLFMPA), is intended primarily to amend County master plans to reflect the ROD highway alignment. It also evaluates alternative alignments for the master planned shared use path along the ICC (SP-40), essentially using as a starting point for discussion county agencies' majority viewpoints to affirm prior Planning Board recommendations to remove the path from sensitive environmental areas. The amendment analyzes in substantial detail the State's alternative routes along parallel roads and recommends changes to master plans needed to upgrade or enhance the routes to meet the needs of all potential pathway users.

Why a limited plan amendment?

The ICCLFMPA is needed to reconcile the highway, bicycle, pedestrian, and pathway facilities in the Selected Alternative described in the 2006 ICC ROD with the related elements in the County's master plans. This report describes the history, vision, and prior master plan guidance for the highway and parallel shared-use path, including past decisions by the Planning Board, the County Council, and the Maryland Department of Transportation that were all incorporated within the ROD.

The ICCLFMPA will modify two functional master plans:

- *The Master Plan of Highways within Montgomery County*
- *Countywide Bikeways Functional Master Plan(CBFMP)*

The ICCLFMPA will also amend the Planning Board's *Countywide Park Trails Plan (CPTP)* and has been coordinated closely with the ongoing *Upper Rock Creek Trail Corridor Plan* and the Northwest Branch Park Master Plan update.

This plan amendment addresses two relatively narrow issues and one larger, broader issue. The narrow issues involve amending the Master Plan of Highways to 1) modify the ICC alignment to reflect the ROD; and 2) establish interchange locations at Briggs Chaney Road and Midcounty Highway. The broader issue involves evaluating cross-county bicycle and trail connectivity along the ICC corridor, to provide connections to logical destinations and fill in critical gaps in response to portions of the path being built with the highway project.

The interchange at Briggs Chaney Road is more procedural than technical. The ICC ROD identified this location for an interchange and this plan amendment will simply affirm and reflect prior decisions. The interchange at Midcounty Highway must be studied further because the alignment selected for the ICC utilized portions of the right-of-way(ROW) intended for Midcounty Highway, and thus shifted the location of a future interchange further north and west.

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Purposes

The purposes of the ICCLFMPA are to: **1)** determine appropriate uses for master planned ROW not used by the approved highway project, with a particular focus on use of ROW that passes through parkland for a future bikeway or trail in conjunction with the approved ROD highway alignment; **2)** propose new alignment(s) for the master planned bicycle and pedestrian facilities along the ICC Corridor; and **3)** reconcile approved highway design elements with master plan guidance regarding certain interchange locations.

The ICCLFMPA examines key issues and challenges related to the CBFMP and the CPTP to clarify the County's vision for bicycle and pedestrian mobility and access along the corridor, which is consistent with our commitment to the Planning Board when we presented the ICC Bikeways Implementation Strategy in early January 2007. For an overview of the areas that are described in detail as part of this amendment, refer to **Figure 1**.

Key Plan Objectives

- **Highway Design and Alignment**
 - Modify the Master Plan of Highways to identify the ROD selected alternative as the highway's official master plan alignment.
 - Examine and provide guidance for the design of the future interchange at Midcounty Highway and the ICC (See **Figure 2**) and the related connection to Shady Grove Road.
 - Affirm prior Planning Board decisions (no paved pathway/trail due to environmental sensitivity) for master planned ROW segments passing through parkland that are no longer needed for the ICC.
 - Rock Creek Option A (**Figures 3 and 4**)
 - Northwest Branch Option B (**Figures 5 and 6**)
 - Consider removing from County master plans a bikeway/trail alignment through Paint Branch Stream Valley Park. (**Figure 7**)
 - Identify Briggs Chaney Road and the ICC as an interchange. (**Figure 7**)
 - Establish the new master planned alignment of SP-40. (**Figure 8**)

- **Bicycle and Pedestrian Access and Mobility**
 - Identify and recommend the required changes to policy guidance to enable the successful implementation of the State Highway Administration's (SHA) Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan, henceforth referred to as **SHA Bike Plan** (refer to **Figure 1**), to safely accommodate both novice/family bicyclists, pedestrians and other users along the route's full length.
 - Identify and recommend policy changes needed to implement the full-length master planned shared-use path in the highway ROW, SP-40 in the CBFMP, henceforth referred to as the **County Bike Path (CBP)** (refer to **Figures 1 and 8**), or an equivalent and suitable alternative route along new paths or wide sidewalks of parallel highways, arterials and neighborhood streets, in order to avoid environmentally sensitive areas particularly in stream valley parks.
 - Modify the CBFMP and the CPTP to ensure safe and efficient bicycle and pedestrian access to and from the SHA Bike Plan.

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Other issues studied include:

- Identify a funding mechanism that would permit potential participation by the private sector, through the Local Area Transportation Review, to help construct or fund portions of the SHA Bike Plan or CBP.
- Determine feasibility of interim use by mountain bikers (and equestrians) of segments adjacent to the highway ROW where the master planned CBP would eventually be built in the future.

Refined objectives

The above plan objectives were starting points for discussions. As the planning process progressed during fall 2007, four key questions emerged which we posed to both agency staff as well as the public during the public meetings in March/April 2008.

1. Does the County agree with the State's recommendations for routing the CBP along existing bikeways, sidewalks and paths (SHA Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan)?
2. What improvements are needed along these roads to improve bicycle and pedestrian accommodation and address the needs of all potential user groups?
3. Should the County remove from master plans CBP sections through environmentally sensitive park resources?
4. What related master plan amendments are required to achieve any recommendations resulting from solutions intended to address the above?

