



Item #
September 18, 2008

Staff Report: Planning Board Draft of the Intercounty Connector Limited Functional Master Plan Amendment

Send date: September 8, 2008

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Via: Dan Hardy, Acting Chief, Transportation Planning

RECOMMENDATION: Approve the Public Hearing Draft of the Intercounty Connector (ICC) Limited Functional Master Plan Amendment (as amended) as the Planning Board Draft and transmit to the Montgomery County Council.

Summary of Proposed Plan Recommendations

The ICC Limited Functional Master Plan Amendment (LFMPA) recommends selected changes to the shared-use path identified as the ICC bike path (SP-40) in the Countywide Bikeways Functional Master Plan. The ICC LFMPA also amends ICC roadway alignment and interchange recommendations to reflect the selected highway alternative now under construction.

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This memorandum provides a summary of changes to plan amendment resulting from the Planning Board's July 21st worksession, including

- Substantive Changes (and affirmations)
- Editorial and Design Changes

Substantive Changes (and affirmations)

On July 21, 2008, the Montgomery County Planning Board held the first worksession on the plan amendment, during which the Board reviewed public testimony from the July 10th public hearing. The Board engaged key stakeholder groups in attendance in productive discussions about staff recommendations, particularly concerning the Upper Paint Branch Stream Valley Park (SVP) and Special Protection Area. While the Board did not modify the staff-recommended alignment for SP-40 through the area, they did ask staff to highlight in the plan a proposed alignment for a future park trail – consistent with, and reflecting recommendations contained in the 1998 Countywide Park Trails Plan – through Upper Paint Branch SVP that would complement the staff-proposed realignment of SP-40 through this area along New Hampshire Avenue, East Randolph Road and Fairland Road. The Board also approved staff requests to

change the plan's format and structure to make the plan consistent with recently approved master plans, as requested by the County Executive.

In summary, on July 21 the Planning Board supported a plan amendment that enhances connectivity for both the countywide shared use path and park trails by:

- realigning those portions of SP-40 away from areas with the greatest natural resource and parkland impacts to locations that better connect communities and park destinations,
- reducing the estimated cost for SP-40 by about \$12M, and
- directing the Parks Department to further study specific park trail alignment options to destinations within the Northwest Branch and Upper Paint Branch Stream Valley Parks.

The first two elements above help to streamline implementation of the Countywide Bikeways Functional Master Plan. The third element responds to public testimony for additional trail connectivity while retaining Planning Board authority for park trail planning and resource stewardship.

Staff estimates that the proposed realignment of SP-40 in the Plan amendment increases the total length of the east-west trail from 13.0 to 14.2 miles and reduces the implementation cost from \$31.5M to \$19.2M.

Three key elements of the July 21 discussion are described in greater detail below:

- Clarification of the term “right-of-way” in describing why the bike path cannot now be “added to the ICC right-of-way”,
- The Board’s concurrence with the Public Hearing Draft Plan rationale in the Upper Rock Creek and Northwest Branch Stream Valley Parks, and
- The Board’s revision to the Public Hearing Draft Plan documentation of future studies in the Upper Paint Branch Stream Valley Park.

Clarification of the term “right-of-way”

The State Highway Administration (SHA) has acquired that right-of-way (ROW) required for current construction needs, for both the highway (and path, where included) and interchanges. The SHA ROW was defined through the Federal environmental impact statement process that began in 2003 and the right-of-way was limited to acquisition needed to build the project as approved in the May 2006 Record of Decision. Where the ICC is adjacent to park property but SHA is not building a shared use path, additional land would be required to add the future path regardless of the ultimate landowner. For instance, where the ICC roadway right-of-way abuts parkland in the Upper Paint Branch SVP, the addition of a future shared-use path next to the current roadway design would mean that either the path would be built on Parks Department property or that additional Parks Department property would need to be converted to right-of-way at some point in the future (reinitiating discussions about Section 4(f) impacts to parkland for transportation purposes).

Concurrence with recommendations in Upper Rock Creek and Northwest Branch SVPs

The Board reiterated its support for removing SP-40 from passing through sensitive resources in both Upper Rock Creek and Northwest Branch SVPs. Specifically, the Board endorsed recommendations in the plan amendment to eliminate SP-40 from passing through the Redland Springs Ecologically Sensitive Area of Upper Rock Creek SVP west of Needwood Road, for the very same reasons that the highway alignment does not pass through it. Also recommended for removal is the portion of the old SP-40 alignment that would have routed the trail/path through Northwest Branch SVP south of Bonifant Road that features steep slopes, wetlands, RTE habitat and other sensitive resources.

The Board did, however, support recommendations to route SP-40 through Northwest Branch SVP between Layhill and Bonifant Roads, a hard surface trail that will be studied as part of the Northwest Branch Park Master Plan Update and constructed ultimately by the Department of Parks to connect Layhill Local Park with the National Capital Trolley Museum site. The Board also supported the extension of Matthew Henson Trail from its current terminus at Alderton Road to Notley Road, utilizing the highway ROW between the park boundary and Notley Road which is being designed to accommodate the future trail. As indicated in Figure 5 in the ICC LFMPA, alternative routes for this connection should be studied that preserve the natural resources between the ICC and the current Matthew Henson Trail terminus.

Revisions to details in Upper Paint Branch SVP

As a result of considerable discussion with key stakeholders of the plan, the Board directed that the plan emphasize and highlight the staff-recommended (in July 21st worksession memo) alignment for a future park trail corridor study, shown as the green dotted line on Figure 7 of the revised attached plan. This potential alignment will be studied as a preferred alternative when the Department of Parks studies this park trail corridor in the future. The Board noted that this trail does not replace SP-40 through this area, but rather complements the overall bikeway and trail system in this area of the county and offers a possible off-road alternative to the new alignment for SP-40 along New Hampshire Avenue, East Randolph Road and Fairland Road.

Editorial and Design Changes

Following the July 21st worksession, the plan was handed over to the Commission's editorial team to redesign and restructure the plan in response to recent guidance from the Planning Director. The plan was edited to clarify and emphasize key points by shortening sentences, making language more concise, moving some text to appendices, and generally making the plan's style more attractive as well as consistent with recent plans published by the Planning Board, including Germantown. In addition, all the maps and photographs were changed to ensure consistent typology and design. Finally, we created a new graphic for Figure 2 (ICC/MidCounty Highway interchange) to highlight ROW requirements in response to County Executive comments as well as to ensure consistency with other maps in the plan.