



State Transportation Priorities

- Larry Cole, Master Planner, larry.cole@montgomeryplanning.org, 301-495-4528
- Pam Dunn, Acting Chief, pamela.dunn@montgomeryplanning.org, 301-650-5649

Completed: 12/18/14

Summary

The County Executive and Council are anticipated to forward soon their joint letter of recommendations for state transportation projects and studies to the Secretary of the Maryland Department of Transportation for his consideration. The last letter was sent on March 16, 2014 (see Attachment 1) and the new letter is anticipated to be sent in February 2015, reflecting the input of the two new County Council members. (Secretary Smith's September 25, 2013 response to County Executive Isiah Leggett is shown as Attachment 2.)

The joint priority letter serves as a standing guide to MDOT and SHA as to what the County's priorities are, but the letter also importantly serves as advice to the Montgomery County Delegation in their yearly budget negotiations, including the approval of the final FY2015-2020 Consolidated Transportation Program, the Draft of which was released in October 2014:

http://www.mdot.maryland.gov/Office_of_Planning_and_Capital_Programming/CTP/CTP_15_20/Index_Draft.html.

Discussion

Because a consistent message on our priorities for State projects is highly desirable, the priorities letter does not change significantly unless there is an event that would create new candidate projects and/or a potential reordering of the list. The adoption of the Countywide Transit Corridors and White Oak plans was considered in the priorities enumerated in the March 2013 letter. The most significant event this year is the election of two new Council members and the need for the priorities letter to reflect their input.

The following two sections describe the differences between what the Planning Board recommended and what the County Executive and Council approved a year ago, followed by our recommended changes:

Differences between the Planning Board's Recommendations and the Final 2014 Priorities Letter

The following reflects the more significant differences between the last list that the Planning board forwarded to the County Executive and Council (see Attachment 3) and the final priorities letter:

- The March 2014 letter incorporated the Purple Line and Corridor Cities Transitway (CCT) into the two enumerated lists – “Priorities for the Construction Program” and “Priorities for the Development and Evaluation (D&E) Program”, with the Purple Line taking the #1 position and Stages 1 and 2 of the CCT being combined to take the #2 position.
- Improvements in Bicycle-Pedestrian Priority Areas (BiPPAs) were listed as an above-the-fold high priority item in the Board’s letter, but are ranked as #8 in the D&E list. However, the Council voted to begin a program for the planning, design and construction of improvements in (BiPPAs) in FY15 and the planning is well underway, with participation by State Highway Administration (SHA) staff. Given that SHA has not yet finalized the guidelines for improvements in BiPPAs four years after the designation of the State’s first area in White Flint four years ago – and the twentieth anniversary of the legislation that permitted the designation will occur in the next legislative session – it seems likely that the County will continue to take the lead on this issue in the near-term.
- The US29 South BRT corridor was moved from the Construction list to the D&E list because no planning work had yet been done. It was combined with the US29 North corridor and the MD355 North and South corridors as the #1 D&E priority. Planning has now begun on those projects however.
- The MD97/Tech Road interchange was added to the Construction list above MD97/Fairland Road interchange to address transportation needs in White Oak.
- The MD97/MD28 interchange was moved from the Board’s #14 Construction priority to #8.
- The I-495 HOV lane and I-270 West Spur ramps were split into two separate priorities.
- The ICC Hiker-Biker Trail was added as the #8 D&E priority. This item had been on the list in previous years but had dropped off because SHA had said that it was the County’s responsibility.

Recommendations

The MD355 and US29 Bus Rapid Transit corridor studies have both begun planning and we recommend that these important projects be added to the Construction priority list. We also believe that more explanatory language is needed on a couple of items. The following recommended changes to the priority lists in the March 16, 2014 letter are shown in ~~strikeout~~ for deleted text and underline for added text, with ***bold italics*** used for additional staff commentary:

PRIORITIES FOR THE CONSTRUCTION PROGRAM

1. Purple Line
2. Corridor Cities Transitway, Stages 1 & 2
3. Montrose Parkway East: ~~contribution to~~ \$25 million for MD 355 to Parklawn Drive segment (MD 355 Interchange, Phase II) **Note: A specific dollar value is now associated with the State's expected contribution.**
4. US29 Bus Rapid Transit line, Burtonsville to Silver Spring **Note: This project is currently in planning. The northern segment of this project was included in the Board's last recommendations.**
5. Metro Bus Priority Corridor Network in Montgomery County: supporting road improvements
6. MD 97 (Georgia Avenue)/MD 28 (Norbeck Road): grade-separated interchange
7. US 29/Tech Road/Industrial Parkway: grade-separated interchange
8. US 29/Fairland Road/Musgrove Road: grade-separated interchange
9. MD 28 (Norbeck Road), Georgia Avenue to Layhill Road: widen to 4 lanes, with safety improvements
10. MD 586 (Veirs Mill Road) Bus Rapid Transit line, Rockville to Wheaton
11. MD 97 (Georgia Avenue) and Forest Glen Road: pedestrian underpass and left-turn lane construction safety improvements **Note: Clarification as to what improvements are anticipated.**
12. MD355 Bus Rapid Transit line, Clarksburg to Bethesda **Note: This project is currently in planning.**
13. MD 124 (Woodfield Road), Midcounty Highway to Airpark Drive: widen to 4 lanes
14. MD 117 (Clopper Road), I-270 to Seneca Creek State Park: improve intersections
15. I-270/Newcut Road: grade-separated interchange
16. MD 97 (Georgia Avenue), ~~Forest Glen Road~~ I-495 to MD 390 (16th Street): safety and accessibility improvements **Note: Project limits clarified to have the northern limit at I-495 so that it does not overlap with #11.**
17. MD 97 (Georgia Avenue) Bus Rapid Transit line, Olney to Wheaton **Note: Normally, all projects are ranked on the Construction priority list once they enter the D&E program, which was true for this project last year. However, this project does not have high ridership forecasts and should remain a low priority on the list, particularly given the County Executive's recent letter to Senator Karen**

Montgomery (see Attachment 4) stating that it's likely to be 15 years at a minimum before the County would consider moving forward with this project.

PRIORITIES FOR THE D&E PROGRAM

1. US 29 & MD 355 Bus Rapid Transit lines: additional funds to complete project planning
2. I-495 (Capital Beltway): extend HOV lane south of I-270 West Spur
3. I-270 West Spur: HOV ramps from/to the south side of Westlake Drive/Fernwood Road
4. MD 355 (Frederick Road)/Gude Drive: grade-separated interchange
5. Midcounty Highway Extended, ICC to Shady Grove Road
6. MD 119 (Great Seneca Highway)/Sam Eig Highway/Muddy Branch Road: grade-separated interchanges
7. MD 650 (New Hampshire Avenue) Bus Rapid Transit line, White Oak to Eastern Avenue
8. ICC hiker/biker trail: US 29 to MD 650, Bonifant Road to MD 182 **Note: Specific segments are now listed corresponding to the unbuilt segments in the ICC right-of-way.**
9. Bicycle-Pedestrian Priority Areas: bike and pedestrian facility improvements

Conclusion

The 2014 list of joint priorities should be revised to add language where necessary to clarify the County's priorities and add the MD355 and US29 BRT projects that began the D&E process last year.