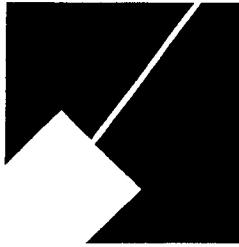


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MONTGOMERY COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF PARK AND PLANNING

THE MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL
PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION

8787 Georgia Avenue
Silver Spring, Maryland 20910-3760

MCPB
Item No. 11
11-13-03

November 7, 2003

MEMORANDUM

TO: Montgomery County Planning Board

VIA: Jeffrey Zyontz, Chief
County-wide Planning Division

Richard C. Hawthorne, Chief
Transportation Planning *RCH*

FROM: Larry Cole: 301-495-4528, for the Park and Planning Department

SUBJECT: Consolidated Transportation Program
Maryland Department of Transportation
FY2004-FY2009

The Maryland Department of Transportation has released its draft FY04-09 Consolidated Transportation Program (CTP) and held the tour briefing of state and local officials on November 6, 2003, at the Montgomery County Council Office Building. The Transportation and Environment (T&E) Committee of the County Council will be making recommendations on the Council's priority projects to move forward in the program on November 20, 2003. The full Council will make their recommendations before the winter recess, although no date has been set yet. The Council President has asked the Board to provide recommendations on CTP priorities to the Council (see Attachment 1, which includes a memo from Council staff. Attachments 1 and 2 are included for the Planning Board only.)

RECOMMENDATION: Transmit comments to the T&E Committee

Our comments will focus on transportation projects that are intended to have more of a County or local benefit rather than a regional benefit. There are a number of project of statewide significance that are already in the Development and Evaluation program in the existing CTP. They include the Intercounty Connector (ICC), the Bi-County Transitway (formerly known as the Purple Line), the Corridor Cities Transitway, extending the I-270 HOV lanes, and widening I-495 for HOV lanes. Given the current status of these projects, none of them could be under construction within two years. From a transportation perspective, all of these projects are needed today. Any phasing of these projects that minimizes the time before they are all on the ground is desirable. All of these projects have at least one build alternative that is consistent with the Planning Board's Transportation Policy Report recommendations.

Within these statewide projects, the ICC is the Governor's top priority and staff does not suggest slowing the momentum of that project. But, the General Plan seeks a balanced future transportation network. Thinking beyond the ICC, we believe that major roadway improvements should be paired with improvements to the transitway network. Providing an adequate level of funding for the rehabilitation and purchase of Metrorail cars is the highest transit priority, but an expansion of the transitway network is needed. The Bi-County Transitway would support our existing urbanized ring by serving areas of high congestion and high potential ridership. However, the disagreements about the alignment and mode will ensure continued obstacles to its construction. None of those obstacles are apparent with the Corridor Cities Transitway. So while staff believes that both transitways are valuable projects, we support the CCT moving first to implementation.

Staff recommends that the Board adopt the following recommendations for funding priorities as comments to the County Council.

Additions to the Construction Program

All projects currently in the Interstate, Primary and Secondary Construction Programs are fully funded and construction is either underway or will be shortly. The following recommended additions to the Construction Program were selected by staff from the Interstate, Primary and Secondary Development and Evaluation Programs shown in Attachment 2, the FY04-09 highway portion of the Draft CTP for Montgomery County, pages H-11 through H-24. Staff recommends the following priority ranking for the projects shown on page 2 of the Council staff's memo, with the addition of No. 10.

1. Rockville Pike (MD 355) interchange at Montrose and Randolph Roads (First Phase)
2. Georgia Avenue (MD 97) interchange at Randolph Road
3. Woodfield Road (MD 124) Widening (First Phase)
4. Clopper Road (MD 117) Widening
5. Georgia Avenue (MD 97)/Norbeck
6. US 29/Musgrove Road/Fairland Road interchange
7. MD 97 Brookeville Bypass
8. Randolph Road/CSX Grade-Separation (west of MD 355, Second Phase)
9. I-270/Watkins Mill Road Extended
10. Veirs Mill Road (MD 586) at First Street Interchange (First Phase, Rockville Town Center Project)

Additions to the Development and Evaluation Program

The following additions to the Development and Evaluation Program were selected from the County Council's 10-year Transportation Plan, which is shown in Attachment 1.

Transit Projects

1. Veirs Mill Road (MD 586) Bus Rapid Transit from Wheaton to Rockville and Veirs Mill Road Widening from Twinbrook Parkway to Randolph Road
2. Georgia Avenue Busway from Glenmont to Olney
3. University Boulevard Bus Rapid Transit and Pedestrian Improvements from Wheaton to Langley Park

Highway Projects

1. Georgia Avenue (MD 97) between Sixteenth Street and north of Forest Glen Road.
2. Frederick Road (MD 355) interchange at Gude Drive
3. Rockville Pike (MD 355) interchange at Nicholson Lane
4. Great Seneca Highway (MD 119) Flyover at Sam Eig Highway
5. Frederick Road (MD 355) Streetscaping and Pedestrian Improvements in the City of Gaithersburg

STAFF ANALYSIS

Due to the drop in State revenues, no projects have been added to the CTP this year or in the previous two years of the CTP. However, no projects in Montgomery County have been dropped from the list either. The general consensus appears to be that a revenue increase will be passed by the legislature, although the amount of the additional funding will not be known until Spring 2004.

Staff's recommended projects listed above have been selected from previous years' priority lists. Beginning early next year, when the staff issues our report on congestion, other new projects may be identified as additional priorities.

The recommendations in this memorandum reflect a desire to focus the County's resources on improving conditions in developed areas, rather than developing areas that are more likely to be the beneficiaries of developer-funded improvements.

Construction Program

The top three staff recommendations for additions to the Construction Program are discussed below.

The intersection of *Georgia Avenue (MD 97) and Randolph Road* and the intersection of *Rockville Pike (MD 355) and Randolph and Montrose Roads* are among the most congested intersections in the County. These two projects need additional funds to complete their design and need funds for right-of-way and construction. Construction of the latter project will help realize much of the benefit of the County's Montrose Parkway West Project. The Rockville Pike grade-separation has recently been made a standalone, first phase project separate from the CSX grade-separation. The lower initial cost should make it easier to get this first phase moving.

The *Woodfield Road Widening* project, from Midcounty Highway to Warfield Road, has recently begun final design and the decision has been made to break the project into three phases for construction: 1) South of Airpark Road to north of Fieldcrest Road, 2) Midcounty Highway to South of Airpark Road, and 3) North of Fieldcrest Road to Warfield Road. No funds are included in the draft CTP for right-of-way or construction. Staff recommends that right-of-way and construction funding be provided for the first phase of this project, which carries the most traffic.

Development and Evaluation Program

Transit Projects

Staff recommends that the following three transit projects move into planning.

Veirs Mill Road Bus Rapid Transit, from Wheaton to Rockville, has one of the highest transit riderships, but buses regularly get delayed by congestion on this road. The goal of this project would be to give buses priority in the traffic flow. The project limits would encompass those of the widening project, which are from Twinbrook Parkway to Randolph Road. Therefore, the projects should be planned together. The widening project would support the Montrose Parkway East project now being studied by DPWT and would likely provide a grade-separation for the Matthew Henson Trail at Turkey Branch.

The *Georgia Avenue Busway* study report was accepted by the Planning Board in 1998. The busway would be between the Glenmont Metro Station and Olney and would have a two-lane bus operation in the median of Georgia Avenue. Subsequent SHA Congestion Relief Study (CRS) projects have either accommodated the future busway or been dropped because their construction would have prevented the future implementation of the busway. The current Georgia Avenue (MD 97) at Norbeck Road (MD 28) interchange study would also accommodate the future busway. The Georgia Avenue Busway was also recommended in the Transportation Policy Report and is recommended in the Staff Draft of the Olney Master Plan update. Congestion and continuing development require that this project move forward.

In the absence of any movement on the Georgetown Branch Trolley and the Bi-County Transitway, getting *Bus Rapid Transit on University Boulevard* becomes all the more important. In addition, it is well recognized that the safety of University Boulevard for

pedestrians needs to be greatly improved. Although SHA has announced that they will fund some minor pedestrian improvements in the vicinity of the New Hampshire Avenue intersection through their Safety and Resurfacing program, the larger International Corridor project, from Piney Branch Road to Adelphi Road in Prince George's County, is on hold with the rest of the other Neighborhood Revitalization projects. Staff believes that the transit and pedestrian improvements projects need to be designed together and that this very transit-dependent corridor is the highest priority.

Highway Projects

The top three staff recommendations for highway projects to move into planning are discussed below.

The Planning Board has recommended for the last few years that the ***Georgia Avenue study in Montgomery Hills*** move forward. This segment of roadway has the highest traffic volume on an arterial highway in the State of Maryland. The concept of redesigning Georgia Avenue to restore the median and allow more peak period turns was discussed during the North and West Silver Spring Master Plan process and recommended in the update in 2000. The project is needed to improve vehicular and pedestrian accessibility and to improve the aesthetics and viability of the commercial area. Since the Master Plan work, the several changes to the operation of Georgia Avenue at the Beltway, while improving Beltway traffic flow, have made traffic operations in the northbound direction much worse. In addition, pedestrian access to the Forest Glen Metro Station across Georgia Avenue and vehicular congestion at the Forest Glen Road intersection continue to be a problem.

The ***Frederick Road (MD 355) intersection at Gude Drive*** was a candidate for a CRS intersection project, but the high cost of an at-grade solution did not warrant the traffic improvement that would be gained. SHA recommended a grade-separation as the appropriate solution. A grade-separation is also recommended in the Transportation Policy Report, the City of Rockville Master Plan and in the Staff Draft of the Shady Grove Sector Plan. Funding a study would continue SHA's previous work.

The ***Rockville Pike (MD 355) intersection at Nicholson Lane*** is regularly near the top of the list of the County's most congested intersections. Significant development continues in North Bethesda, including the close-by LCOR/White Flint East project, and the capacity of the transportation system must keep pace. Staff therefore recommends placing this project on the priority list in line with the Council's continuing strong focus on the need to solve the County's congestion problems.

LC:kcw
Attachments

mno to mcpcb re CTP.doc