

April 22, 2005

MEMORANDUM

TO: Montgomery County Planning Board

VIA: Jeffrey Zyontz, Chief
Countywide Planning Division

Richard Hawthorne, Chief
Transportation Planning

FROM: Alex Hekimian, 301-495-4525, for the Park and Planning Department

SUBJECT: State Highway Administration Briefing on Capital Beltway Study

The purpose of this briefing is to update the Planning Board on the progress being made on the Capital Beltway Study. The Study is currently in the final stages of determining the Alternates Retained for Detailed Study (ARDS). The State Highway Administration (SHA) is now proposing only three alternates:

- No Build
- 6 General Purpose Lanes and 4 Express Toll Lanes (2 new lanes and 2 converted lanes)
- 8 General-Purpose Lanes and 2 Express Toll Lanes (2 new lanes)

It is important to define, in general terms, the types of highway lane concepts that are discussed in this memorandum:

High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) lane:	reserved exclusively for carpools, vanpools, and buses and used without a fee.
High Occupancy Toll (HOT) lane:	in which carpools, vanpools, and buses have priority and are not charged a fee, and in which single-occupant vehicles are allowed to use any leftover capacity and charged a fee.
Express Toll Lane (ETL):	in which every vehicle is charged a fee.

The final step in determining ARDS is obtaining concurrence on the alternates from federal agencies reviewing the project. Most federal agencies have concurred, but at a meeting on April 7, 2005, staff from the U. S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) requested, as the County had previously done, that SHA include other “managed lanes” options, such as HOV lanes and HOT lanes, in the ARDS. As of the writing of this memorandum, we are still awaiting SHA’s response to EPA’s request.

In the meantime, since SHA has been conducting public meetings in the affected communities to present the impacts of the project, it is timely to have SHA make a similar presentation to the Planning Board. While SHA does not yet have complete and very detailed information on the impacts, it has enough information to provide a useful presentation.

The comments provided in this memorandum are meant to alert SHA about the types of information that our staff and the Board would need before making a recommendation on a preferred alternate at the time that SHA issues the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS), which is expected in Fall 2005. The comments are a compilation of input from staffs of Transportation Planning, Environmental Planning, Park Planning and Resource Analysis, Park Development, and Historic Preservation.

STAFF COMMENTS

Staff requests that the Planning Board endorse the following comments, whereupon staff would transmit them to the State Highway Administration as input to the preparation of the DEIS for the Capital Beltway Study.

In order for Department of Park and Planning staff to evaluate and provide recommendations on the upcoming DEIS for the Capital Beltway project, SHA will need to provide, at a minimum, the following information:

- 1. Provide documentation that demonstrates the proposed project’s transportation impacts.**
 - a. Provide an analysis of differences in people-carrying capacity for HOV, HOT, and ETL alternates on the Capital Beltway.

- b. Show projected merging and weaving movements, including motorists weaving from the outside general purpose lanes to the inside toll lanes and then weaving back out, and the impacts on potential accidents and overall safety.
- c. Make projections of the types of users (local vs. long-distance, trucks vs. cars, affluent vs. low-moderate income motorists) who would use the ETLs, usage of the ETLs by time periods of a typical day, and the level of tolls that would be necessary to achieve free-flow conditions during peak periods.
- d. Make projections of future traffic conditions in the general-purpose lanes, at interchange ramps, and nearby intersections, and for changes in transit, carpool, and vanpool use as a result of the project.
- e. Compare the total cost and impacts of the project with the benefits that would accrue from the project.
- f. Provide assumptions and calculations that lead to how much revenue would be generated from the toll lanes.

2. Provide documentation that demonstrates the proposed project's environmental and community impacts.

- a. Provide maps and reports that show the locations and acreage of areas within the limits of disturbance, required rights-of-way, and buffers for sensitive areas such as streams, seeps and springs, 100-year flood plains, steep slopes, wetlands, forests, known rare, threatened, and endangered species, and significant habitats.
- b. Show limits for stormwater management and details about all proposed stormwater management facilities.
- c. Show all trails, such as parks trails, bikeways, and community connector trails, and potential impacts to those trails in the vicinity of the Capital Beltway.
- d. Identify ownership or easement rights of existing and proposed rights-of-way along Capital Beltway. Show the location and acreage of parklands required for the project, and since most, if not all, of the parkland potentially affected by this project was acquired by Maryland-Capital Park and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC) using federal money under the Capper-Cramton Act, properties acquired under this program cannot be used for non-parkland purposes without evidence of prior review and approval by the National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC); thus, SHA, will be required to coordinate with and obtain all of those necessary approvals from NCPC. Any expansion of rights-of-way into parkland owned by M-NCPPC will also need the approval of both the Montgomery County Planning Board and the M-NCPPC. If any parkland is titled in the name of Montgomery County, the County government will also have to give its approval to any rights-of-way taken.

- e. Evaluate noise and air pollution impacts on adjacent communities and parklands.
- f. Locate all the historic properties in the vicinity of the project, not just within the level of disturbance, including, but not limited to, the First Agape AME Zion Church in Gibson Grove, In the Woods/Fairchild House, National Park Seminary, Capital View Historic District, and Forest Glen Historic District, and an analysis of potential impacts.
- g. Examine the applicability of, at a minimum, the following environmental mitigation strategies that would be further detailed during the Final Environmental Impact Statement process:
 - i. Minimize the size of storm water management facilities, and consider placing some of them underground so that buildings and trees will not have to be removed.
 - ii. Restore stream banks.
 - iii. Identify forest replacement and compensation sites.
 - iv. Improve vegetated buffers for streams and wetlands where impacts would occur.
 - v. Make improvements to Beach Drive to reduce or eliminate flooding between Cedar Lane and Capital Beltway by raising the pavement to improve drainage and other techniques that have been previously suggested by staff.
 - vi. Improve and enhance the wetlands along the entire stream channels in Rock Creek and Cabin John areas.
 - vii. Coordinate with the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission's Bi-County Water Supply Main Study to identify potential conflicts and opportunities between the proposed water main and Capital Beltway projects, and show ways to minimize impacts due to both projects on parks and communities.
 - viii. Build trail bridges or trail connectors.
 - ix. Mitigate noise impacts with noise walls and other techniques to achieve noise standards in adjacent communities.

BACKGROUND

In early 2004, the County approved master plan amendments that recommended widening the portion of the Capital Beltway between the American Legion Bridge and the West Spur of I-270 to add an HOV lane in each direction. Knowing that rights-of-way are seriously constrained for the portion of the Beltway between the West Spur of I-270 and the Prince George's County line, a recommendation on that portion was postponed until impacts were better defined by the Capital Beltway Study.

At the Planning Board session of June 10, 2004, our staff and SHA staff made presentations on ARDS for the Study. As a result of the Board's discussion at that session, the Board recommended to the County Council that SHA be asked to study alternates that included HOT lanes (either one new lane or one new lane and one converted lane) rather than ETL in each direction for the entire length of the Capital Beltway within Maryland, as well as for only the portion of the Beltway between the American Legion Bridge and the I-270 West Spur (the only portion that is consistent with current area master plans). The Board also asked that right-of-way impacts on the First Agape AME Zion Church property be minimized.

The County Council subsequently discussed this issue and decided to send a letter to Maryland Secretary of Transportation, Robert Flanagan, (see attached) which adjusted the Board's recommendation to request a study of one new HOV lane or one new HOT lane in each direction and no conversions of existing lanes on the Capital Beltway. The Council did not recommend continuing study of the ETL alternate, although it recognized that studying that alternate may be useful as a comparison to the Council's preferred HOV and HOT lanes alternates. The Council further stated, "The Bi-County Transitway is a higher priority transportation improvement in this general corridor than widening the Capital Beltway."

Thus far, SHA has not included the Council's recommended alternates in the set of alternates selected for detailed study. However, as indicated earlier in this memorandum, EPA has echoed the Council's request for inclusion of HOV and HOT lanes alternates in the ARDS in addition to ETLs.

As previously mentioned, SHA has recently been holding public meetings in affected communities, which have attracted large numbers of people who have raised concerns regarding the ETL proposal. Residents of affected communities are especially concerned that the proposed widenings will cause displacements and other negative impacts on homes near the Beltway right-of-way. They have also expressed concerns regarding increased noise and air pollution, impacts on property values, the potential inequity of toll lanes that would be used primarily by long-distance and affluent motorists, and the study's lack of emphasis on other transportation alternatives.

AH:gw
Attachment

memo to PB re Capital Beltway Study 4-22-05.doc



ROCKVILLE, MARYLAND

July 2, 2004

The Honorable Robert L. Flanagan, Secretary
Maryland Department of Transportation
7201 Corporate Center Drive
Hanover, Maryland 21706

Dear Secretary ~~Flanagan~~ *Flanagan*:

We have reviewed the progress to date of the Capital Beltway Corridor Study, and we recommend the following four options to be the Alternatives Retained for Detailed Study:

1. Within Montgomery County, constructing one new lane in each direction for high-occupancy-vehicle (HOV) lanes for only the segment of the Capital Beltway between the American Legion Bridge and the I-270 West Spur. The improvement from I-95 east under this option should be whatever is recommended by Prince George's County.
2. Within Montgomery County, constructing one new lane in each direction for high-occupancy-toll (HOT) lanes for only the segment of the Capital Beltway between the American Legion Bridge and the I-270 West Spur. The improvement from I-95 east under this option should be whatever is recommended by Prince George's County.
3. Constructing one new lane in each direction for HOV lanes for the entire length of the Beltway.
4. Constructing one new lane in each direction for HOT lanes for the entire length of the Beltway.

The first two alternatives are the only ones that are consistent with Montgomery County's master plan. However, we are interested in seeing the results of the latter two as well. We understand that the 'No Action' and 'Transportation System Management/Transportation Demand Management' (TSM/TDM) alternates will be carried forward in any case, since they are required by the National Environmental Policy Act. We do not recommend continuing study of the express toll lane alternate, although we recognize that studying this alternate may be useful as a comparison to the others.

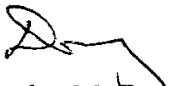
We urge you to expedite the completion of the Bi-County Transitway Study. The Bi-County Transitway is a higher priority transportation improvement in this general corridor than widening the Capital Beltway. Furthermore, we urge you to begin to explore a potential rapid transit connection west to Virginia.

The Honorable Robert L. Flanagan
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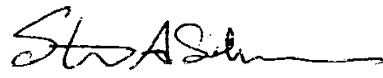
We want to extend our appreciation to the State Highway Administration, its staff, and its consultant team working on the Capital Beltway Corridor Study. We particularly want to acknowledge the contributions of Doug Simmons, Sue Rajan, and George Walton, who briefed the Council's Transportation and Environment Committee on the study on June 22.

If you have any clarification about our comments, please contact us.

Sincerely,



Douglas M. Duncan
County Executive



Steven A. Silverman
Council President

SAS:go

Copies: The Honorable Robert L. Ehrlich, Governor, State of Maryland
The Honorable Paul Sarbanes, United States Senate
The Honorable Barbara Mikulski, United States Senate
The Honorable Christopher Van Hollen, U.S. House of Representatives
The Honorable Albert Wynn, U.S. House of Representatives
The Honorable Ida Ruben, Chair, Montgomery County Senate Delegation
The Honorable Charles Barkley, Chair, Montgomery County House Delegation
The Honorable Gloria Lawlah, Chair, Prince George's County Senate Delegation
The Honorable Carolyn J. B. Howard, Chair, Prince George's County House Delegation
The Honorable Jack Johnson, Prince George's County Executive
The Honorable Tony Knotts, Chair, Prince George's County Council
The Honorable Gerald Connolly, Chair, Fairfax County Board of Supervisors
Nelson Castellanos, Division Administrator, Federal Highway Administration
Neil Pedersen, Administrator, Maryland State Highway Administration
Derick Berlage, Chair, Montgomery County Planning Board