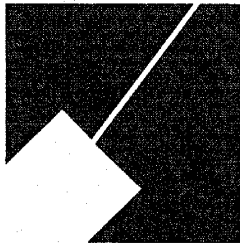


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MONTGOMERY COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF PARK AND PLANNING

THE MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL
PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION

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MCPB
ITEM NO. 13
4-27-06

April 14, 2006

MEMORANDUM

TO: Montgomery County Planning Board

VIA: Richard C. Hawthorne, Chief *RCH*
Transportation Planning

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SUBJECT: Environmental Evaluation and General Plans for the Glenmont Parking Structure
Georgia Avenue East and West Alternatives
Glenmont Sector Plan Area

STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS

Staff requests that the Planning Board approve transmittal of the following staff recommendations to the Montgomery County Council, the Montgomery County Department of Public Works and Transportation (DPWT), and the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA):

1. Proceed with the overall alternatives study for the proposed Glenmont Metro Station parking structure with focus on the alternative on the east side of Georgia Avenue (Alternative B) as the preferred alternative since:
 - a. A parking structure on the west side of Georgia Avenue (Alternative A) would be inconsistent with the goals and objectives of the Glenmont Sector Plan.
 - b. A parking structure on the west side of Georgia Avenue would be more intrusive to the existing residential community on the west.
 - c. A parking structure on the west side of Georgia Avenue would potentially result in greater environmental impact and forest loss.
2. Design and locate the proposed expanded kiss-and-ride lot on the west side of Georgia Avenue under Alternative B (with garage on east side), cognizant of the Glenmont Sector Plan recommendation that environmentally sensitive portions of this property should remain undeveloped and should be enhanced as a natural green area to serve the Glenmont community since a significant portion of the west side consists of wetlands and tree save areas. A kiss-and-ride design that parallels Georgia Avenue, in place of one that extends to the forested portion of the site is preferred.
3. Develop the west side of Georgia Avenue with a pedestrian-friendly greenway that reduces impervious surfaces and provides visual relief from the extensive pavement associated with any new roadway and expanded kiss-and-ride/short-term parking facilities.
4. Use “best management” approaches for noise mitigation at the proposed parking structure since the noise analysis presented indicates that there are currently no sensitive receptors within the area of expected impacts for both proposed alternatives.
5. Assess the degree of engineering expertise and time needed to satisfy the site stormwater management requirements through coordination with Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and Department of Permitting Services (DPS) at the earliest, as this is essential. Consider use of Environmentally Sensitive Development (ESD) approaches, including innovative infiltration approaches for the project.
6. Prepare and submit a Natural Resource Inventory/Forest Stand Delineation (NRI/FSD) to Environmental Planning staff for approval prior to a mandatory referral.
7. Under Alternative B, separate in/out private vehicular traffic at the existing parking garage from the in/out bus traffic to Glenallan Avenue with separate access driveways for the bus loop and the parking garage.
8. If a fire station is to be located on the west side of Georgia Avenue, identify a separate stand-alone access driveway for the proposed fire station to Georgia Avenue to separate traffic activity related to the fire station from traffic activity related to Glenmont station.

9. Provide more than one access point to any development on the west side, in consideration of non-availability of the Glenallan Avenue access point to Georgia Avenue in the event of an emergency or an incident.
10. Provide real-time signs on parking availability along roadways that lead up to existing and proposed future parking structures.
11. Advance the planned Georgia Avenue Busway project as a viable enhancement to the parking structure project to insure continued efficient and cost-effective access to the Glenmont Station given the fact that the demand on the station originates mostly from residents to the north of the station. Additionally, confirm if the bus loop under alternatives considered could accommodate service associated with the Georgia Avenue Busway and any other planned expansion of Ride-On and Metrobus services.
12. Emphasize to the Maryland State Highway Administration (SHA) the need to expedite design and funding for the construction of the Georgia Avenue/Randolph Road interchange given the documented capacity constraints and potential availability of new local funding.

PURPOSE OF THIS BRIEFING

This briefing for the Montgomery County Planning Board on the Glenmont Metro Station parking structure project is to:

1. Summarize and present to the Planning Board input received at the April 26, 2006, public hearing conducted by the WMATA on the Environmental Evaluation and General Plans for the Glenmont Parking Structure Alternatives (see Attachment No. 1), and
2. To request Planning Board comments, and approval to transmit recommendations on the project to the Montgomery County Council, DPWT and WMATA.

The County Council Transportation & Environment Committee is scheduled to hold a hearing on the project on May 2, 2006.

PROJECT LOCATION AND EXISTING CONDITIONS

At the request of Montgomery County, WMATA is considering construction of a parking structure near the Glenmont Metrorail Station, within the triangle formed by Georgia Avenue (MD 97), Glenallan Avenue, and Layhill Road. The station location and local features are shown on Attachment No. 2.

As shown on the attachment, Georgia Avenue is to the west, Layhill Road is to the east, and Glenallan Avenue is to the north of Glenmont station. The Glenmont Shopping Center and the Layhill Triangle commercial areas are to the south of the Metro station. Areas to the east, north, and west of the station are mostly residential.

The main entrance to the existing Glenmont Metro Station and the five-level commuter parking structure (containing 1,781 parking spaces) are located on the east side of Georgia Avenue. This area also contains a bus loop to the front of the parking structure along Georgia Avenue, and a kiss and-ride/short-term parking lot (containing 68 parking spaces) along Glenallan Avenue to north of the bus-loop. Additionally, a second station entrance, a kiss-and-ride drop-off area, and a short-term parking lot (containing 24 parking spaces) are located on the west side of Georgia Avenue, opposite from its intersection with Glenallan Avenue.

Access to the existing Glenmont station parking structure is from Georgia Avenue, Glenallan Avenue, and Layhill Road. Access to the east side kiss-and-ride/short-term parking lot is from Glenallan Avenue, and access to the west side kiss-and-ride/short-term parking lot is from Georgia Avenue. Currently, access for both northbound and southbound buses to the bus loop is from Georgia Avenue, directly opposite from its intersection with Urbana Drive, which is also shared by private cars.

PROPOSED ALTERNATIVES – LOCATION, ACCESS, AND CIRCULATION

WMATA is considering two alternative sites for the proposed new parking structure at Glenmont station. The General Plans for the two alternatives are provided as Attachment No. 3. **Staff notes that the number of parking spaces and parking structure levels documented in several of the available reports is inconsistent.** Information presented in this section is drawn from the General Plans.

Alternative A on the west side of Georgia Avenue (see Attachment No. 4) consists of a six-level parking structure on the site of the existing kiss-and-ride/short-term parking lot, and provides approximately 1,200 new parking spaces. This represents a net addition of approximately 1,176 parking spaces as this alternative will eliminate 24 existing parking spaces on the west side kiss-and-ride/short-term parking lot. **Under this alternative, Montgomery County is also considering an option to separately co-locate a future fire station on the WMATA property to the north of the proposed parking structure.**

The parking structure under Alternative A is proposed to use the existing entrance to the west side kiss-and-ride lot for access. This will not physically affect the existing parking, bus loop, and kiss-and-ride facilities on the east side of Georgia Avenue. It is anticipated that the new west side parking structure would capture a majority of the parking demand from the north currently experienced at the existing parking structure, and in turn would increase availability of parking at the existing parking structure to service demand from other areas.

Physical and operational intersection improvements proposed under Alternative A for the Georgia Avenue/Glenallan Avenue intersection include:

- Construction of a right turn deceleration lane on southbound Georgia Avenue for vehicles entering the structure at Glenallan Avenue.

- Reconfiguration of the west leg of the intersection with a reversible center lane to allow for two inbound lanes/one outbound lane during the morning peak, and one inbound lane/two outbound lanes during the evening peak. This will permit dual left-turn movement for traffic exiting the parking structure to travel northbound on Georgia Avenue during the evening peak with a left, left/through/right lane combination.
- Reconfiguration of the east leg of the intersection from a left, through, right lane combination to a left, shared through/right, right lane combination.

Alternative B on the east side of Georgia Avenue (see Attachment No. 5) consists of a five-level parking structure attached to the current Glenmont station parking structure, and provides approximately 915 parking spaces. The new east side parking structure would be located over the existing bus loop, which would be relocated to the area currently occupied by the east side kiss-and-ride/short-term parking lot. Alternative B would also expand the existing west side kiss-and-ride/short-term parking lot to a total of 91 parking spaces. **Alternative B has no option to separately co-locate a future fire station on the WMATA property.**

Vehicles would enter and exit the east side parking structure via the existing bus-loop access point opposite Urbana Drive, as well as bridges to and from the existing parking structure. The proposed bus loop access to Georgia Avenue will be right-turn in/right-turn out only, and would accommodate inbound busses from the south and outbound buses to the north. Inbound buses from the north and outbound buses to the south would use the Glenallan Ave access. Access to the expanded kiss-and-ride/short-term parking lot on the west side of Georgia Avenue would use the existing entrance to the west side lot.

Physical intersection operational improvements proposed under Alternative B for the Georgia Avenue/Glenallan Avenue intersection include:

- Providing an additional lane on the west leg of the intersection to reconfigure the west leg from a left/through, right lane combination to a left, through, right lane combination.

Staff notes that the west side parking structure alternative (Alternative A) does not address the issue of ingress and egress movements at the proposed fire station. Traffic activity related to the fire station should be separated from traffic activity related to the Glenmont station. **Staff also notes that evaluation of Alternative B does not address the issue of ingress and egress movements at Glenallan Avenue from the proposed new bus loop and the existing parking garage, and recommends separation of in/out bus traffic to Glenallan Avenue from in/out private vehicular traffic at the existing parking garage with separate access driveways for the bus loop and the parking garage.**

The alternatives study should also consider more than one access point to potential development on the west side of Georgia Avenue, since the access scheme proposed under the current plan does not consider non-availability of the Glenallan Avenue access point in the event of an emergency or an incident.

Staff also recommends consideration of real-time signs on parking availability along roadways that lead up to the parking structures. Locating these signs well in advance of the station and directing vehicles to the appropriate parking structure could help users decide early where they could park, manage movement of traffic, minimize unnecessary cruising and delays to locate a parking space, and improve overall parking efficiency.

PROJECT CHRONOLOGY

A narrative on the Glenmont Parking Structure project chronology, as excerpted from the WMATA Metro Electronic Action Document is included as Attachment No. 6. Under current schedule, the WMATA Board adoption of the project into its Adopted Regional System (with a specific alternative approval) is anticipated by Summer 2006. A new Glenmont parking structure is currently scheduled to open in Summer 2008.

PROJECT FUNDING PROFILE

Montgomery County has programmed approximately \$3.8 million in General Obligation Bonds towards the Glenmont Parking Structure project. In addition, approximately \$2.1 million is available for the project in Federal and State aid commitments, and \$10.1 million is available in bond proceeds and cash flow that will be generated by the parking surcharge. The total identified and/or programmed funds available for design and construction of either parking structure is an estimated \$16.0 million.

The estimated cost for constructing Alternative A (west side) is approximately \$17.7 million (excluding the fire station; at \$15,600 per space) and the estimated cost for constructing Alternative B (east side) is approximately \$21.2 million (at \$23,000 per space). The above costs are based on 2004 dollars, escalated to the mid-point of construction. There remains a funding gap with either alternative, with the gap or shortfall for Alternative B being significantly larger. The parking structure is programmed for construction in FY07-08.

The "total cost" for Alternative B is higher than that for Alternative A since the east side parking structure is being proposed at the location of the existing bus loop, requiring its relocation to the existing kiss-and-ride lot on the east side of Georgia Avenue. Additionally, Alternative B includes relocation and enlargement of the existing west side kiss-and-ride operation. The east side alternative provides no room for construction staging either, and will severely limit the hours available for construction as the pedestrian walkway to the station will have to be protected through the construction zone. Alternatively, the parking structure on the west side of Georgia Avenue (Alternative A) is on an unconstrained site, and its construction would minimally interfere with existing transit operations.

The co-location of a fire station on the west side of Georgia Avenue as proposed under Alternative A would possibly allow for the sharing of some of the infrastructure costs also. **However, it is not clear from available documents why the same infrastructure cost savings will not be available for Alternative B if a fire station could be located at the same location under this alternative. Staff believes that a fire station could be located on the west side of Georgia Avenue regardless of the ultimate parking structure location.**

CONSISTENCY WITH GLENMONT SECTOR PLAN

The Glenmont Sector Plan encourages the use of transit and emphasizes goals and policies that would enhance the use of the metro station. The Sector Plan also emphasizes creating a pedestrian friendly environment through redevelopment of vacant parcels while avoiding negative impacts on the adjoining community. The overall planning goals of the Sector Plan include the following (from page 10 of the Sector Plan):

- “Ensure that the new development is compatible with the existing community.”
- “Provide safe and efficient traffic circulation for local and regional travel, balancing transportation needs with the impacts on the community.”
- “Encourage the use of the existing and future public transportation systems and reduce reliance on travel by single occupant vehicles.”
- “Develop a transportation system that serves as the foundation of an emerging Center in Glenmont.”

The Glenmont Sector Plan has specific comments about the WMATA triangle (the subject site for the west side parking structure scenario), which is currently zoned RT-12.5. The Plan recommends rezoning the site to RT-15 to maximize housing potential on the site while protecting its sensitive environmental features.

On page 35, it states: “The application of RT-15 Zone to the WMATA Triangle would help to mitigate the significant development constraints impacting this parcel. A sizeable portion of the WMATA Triangle may be utilized for important community facilities, a proposed Kiss and Ride, and a possible child daycare center. (A western entrance to the Metro station has also been located on this site.) Another significant portion of the property consists of wetlands and tree save areas. This environmentally sensitive land should remain undeveloped and be enhanced as a natural green area serving the community.... Given these constraints, the application of the proposed RT-15 Zone may be necessary to maximize the yield of this strategically located parcel and provide increased housing opportunities near the Metro station.”

On Page 56, the Plan states: “Construct a minimal drop-off or Kiss and Ride facility at the western Metro entrance with vehicular access from Glenallan Avenue extended. It should include a circular drop-off area to provide turnaround for northbound traffic and a pavilion to shelter the station entrance. Seating and bicycle parking should also be provided...”

Community-Based Planning staff believes that the proposed six-level parking structure of approximately 186 feet x 350 feet, approximately 64 feet high, on the west side of Georgia Avenue would be inconsistent with the goals and objectives of the Glenmont Sector Plan. The structure will be more intrusive to the existing community of one-family detached houses or townhouses (if in the future redeveloped under proposed zoning of RT-15) than a five-level structure of approximately 183 feet x 333 feet on the east side of Georgia Avenue next to the existing parking structure.

Community-Based Planning staff therefore recommends that the study focus on the east side of Georgia Avenue for building additional parking capacity at the Glenmont Metro Station. Another alternative would be to explore the feasibility of building the proposed Georgia Avenue Busway as an option to accommodate increased ridership and parking demand at the Glenmont station since a large portion of the parking demand stems from the Olney area residents. Additionally, any alternatives on the west side of Georgia Avenue, if included in the study, must incorporate the Glenmont Greenway as discussed in the Glenmont Sector Plan.

GEORGIA AVENUE BUSWAY STUDY

The Georgia Avenue Busway Study was completed in August 1998. The study findings confirmed the feasibility of a two-lane bi-directional busway within the median of Georgia Avenue providing frequent (15-20 minute) peak hour service between Olney and the Glenmont Metro Station. The County has included additional project planning efforts as a funding priority for Maryland Department of Transportation's consideration but to date no additional analysis has occurred. The busway is included in the applicable master plans for the areas where the busway is to be located.

The Georgia Avenue Busway Study includes a discussion about the operation of the buses at the Glenmont station. More specifically, the study notes:

“At the southern end of the busway, there would be a need for a bus passenger pick-up and drop-off area. Representatives from the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority indicate that a good opportunity for such an area exists at the Glenmont Metrorail Station. One possibility is to re-designate WMATA's kiss-and-ride lot on the east side of Georgia Avenue for the busway's buses, as well as for taxis, and at the same time adjust the size of the lot on the west side of Georgia Avenue and consolidate all kiss-and-ride spaces at that location. More detailed analysis during a state sponsored project planning study may uncover other possibilities as well.”

The study therefore proposed an approach to accommodate the busway service that is similar to the concept proposed under Alternative B. It should be noted that both the busway study and Alternative B locate a bus loop on the existing east side kiss and ride lot location and call for the expansion of the west side kiss and ride lot.

Currently, nine out of 31 bus trips exiting the Glenmont Station in the morning peak hour travel northbound on Georgia Avenue. In the evening peak hour, eight out of 28 buses exiting the Glenmont Station travel northbound on Georgia Avenue. The busway, once implemented, will add approximately four arrivals and departures (eight trips per hour) to and from the north at the introduction of the service.

Given the importance of the Georgia Avenue Busway project, staff believes that the busway terminal, as well as boarding and alighting area requirements should be incorporated into the design for the parking structure alternatives. It is unclear to staff if that analysis has taken place in the consideration of the two presented alternatives.

Staff recommends that the east side parking structure alternative (Alternative B) retain some flexibility to provide an additional bus boarding area on the west side (possibly at the expense of some kiss-and-ride spaces), as this side may better accommodate arriving southbound and departing northbound buses compared to the east side. In contrast, the west side parking structure could result in the busway using either the current bus loop or using the existing kiss-and-ride area for boarding and alighting. At a minimum, the analysis should take into consideration the capacity of the existing bus loop to accommodate the busway service and other bus service expansion if the parking structure is located on the west side.

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

Environmental Planning staff has provided the following preliminary comments on the alternatives under consideration. It is noted that staff was unable to make specific comments on the project given the absence of detailed design drawings and/or profiles for the proposed parking structures.

1. **Staff supports selection of Alternative B (on the east side of Georgia Avenue) as the preferred alternative as this option will potentially result in the least environmental impact and forest loss. In its design and location of the proposed Alternative B parking structure, WMATA should give strong consideration to developing the west side of Georgia Avenue as a pedestrian-friendly green boulevard (“Greenway”) that provides visual relief from the extensive pavement associated with the roadway and kiss-and-ride/short-term parking facilities, and should reduce impervious surfaces as much as possible.**
2. A significant portion of the site along the west side of Georgia Avenue, proposed for the expanded kiss-and-ride lot under Alternative B, consists of wetlands and tree save areas. **The project should design and locate the proposed development cognizant of the Glenmont Sector Plan recommendation that environmentally sensitive portions of this property should remain undeveloped and should be enhanced as a natural green area to serve the Glenmont community.** Staff prefers a kiss-and-ride design that parallels Georgia Avenue, rather than one that extends into the forested portion of the site.