



Area Advisory Committee Two Meeting #7 Summary
Wednesday, March 18, 2015, 6:30 p.m.
Universities of Shady Grove
9630 Gudelsky Drive, Building 3, Room 3230
Rockville, MD 20850

Attendees:

Members

Wayne Berman	Rosalind MacLennan
John Brandt	Toby Lehman
Lisa Cline	David McDonough
John Dunlop	Sims Zhou
Tim Henderson	

Apologies

Marilyn Fleetwood	Tami Mensh
Kara Guthro	Melanie Weerakoon
Jefferson Jex	

Staff

Facilitator –Cathy Smith	Environmental Task Lead – Eric Almquist
Station Architects –John Bull, Todd Connelly, Kyle Kramer	Montgomery County DOT –Joana Conklin, Rafael Olarte
Segment Engineer – Karen Kahl	M-NCPPC - Patrick Butler, Steve Findley, Eric Feldman (Rhodeside and Harwell)
Traffic Engineer –Jason Rashid	Logistics Staff –Lineta Duren, Tori Leonard
Public Involvement Task Lead –Crystal Saunders	

Handouts:

Meeting packets included: Meeting #6 Summary; Meeting Agenda; Boardings and Alightings by Station-2020; Belward TAZ graphic; Environmental Presentation; Station Concept and Helix Concept progression renderings; LSC Loop Trail Presentation.

Introductions and Overview:

Facilitator Cathy Smith welcomed attendees and previewed the evening’s agenda. She asked if anyone objected to **Tori Leonard** recording the meeting for transcription purposes; there were no objections. Cathy introduced **Patrick Butler, Steve Findley** from **Maryland - National Capital Park and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC)** and **Eric Feldman** from **Rhodeside and Harwell**, a consultant to M-NCPPC, in addition to Station Architects **Kyle Kramer** and **Todd Connelly**, and Environmental Task Lead **Eric Almquist**.

Updates from Last Meeting:

Cathy pointed out that there was information in the packets to address questions raised at the last meeting including data on boardings by station, noting that ridership projections have increased

slightly since the last meeting--there is new data from 2014 now included in the ridership model. As requested, there is also a graphic of the transportation analysis zone at Belward Farm.

Environmental Documentation:

Eric Almquist presented a brief overview of the environmental document to be released in the next few months for public comments. An environmental assessment for Phase 1 of the CCT is being prepared to comply with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA). There will also be a Section 4 (f) evaluation of historic and archeological sites in the corridor. The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) will approve the environmental assessment and that will confirm NEPA compliance. The draft document is currently under review by the FTA, and will be posted on the project website and printed copies will be made available at public locations (libraries, etc.) in the community when it is approved.

The document contains five chapters: 1. Introduction/Purpose and Need; 2. Evaluation of Alternatives, which in the case of the CCT includes No-Build and Build alternatives with evaluations drawn from previous studies; 3. Impacts to Environmental Resources and Mitigation Efforts; 4. Draft Section 4 (f) Evaluation; and 5. Public Information and Outreach.

Eric further explained that the no-build alternative is an examination of what would happen if every project planned for by the state and county were built except the CCT. That is examined throughout the document and carried forward as a baseline to compare to the build alternative. A member asked if the no-build alternative would then not be considered as an option, but only as a compare-and-contrast tool. Eric responded that the no-build alternative is considered an option that is evaluated under this process.

A member asked if the project's goal was a 'finding of no significant impacts (FONSI).' Eric responded yes and explained that under NEPA, there are three document types that the project could submit for assessment. A categorical exclusion concludes that the project is already known to not have a significant impact on the environment and no further documentation is required; an EA or environmental assessment, which concedes that environmental impacts of the project are unknown and require more analysis to determine; an EIS or environmental impact statement acknowledges significant impacts and provides in-depth evaluation.

The member asked what type of document had been produced several years ago. Eric explained that an EIS was done when the CCT project was part of the I-270 Intermodal Project which was much larger in scope and would have had significantly more environmental impacts.

Eric continued noting that the build alternative for the CCT includes the alignment, stations, and the operations and maintenance facility. There are four major categories of assessment of environmental impacts of the build alternative: socio-economic resources, cultural resources, natural resources and physical resources. The assessment of socio-economic resources considers land use effects (residential, commercial, industrial and institutional), neighborhoods (strip right-of-way, two residential relocations, visual and moderate noise), parks (there will be 'strip' takes from parks at Washingtonian Woods and Muddy Branch), one business displacement, and overall impacts to the local economy. A member asked which business would be displaced. Eric believes it is a small business (a computer store that is now closed) next to the NIST campus.

Environmental justice looks at the effects of a project on low-income and minority populations. The CCT does not present disproportionately high or adverse effects on these populations in the corridor. The analysis also evaluates benefits of the project to these populations.

There are two types of cultural resources—historic architectural (above ground) and archeological (below ground). Following a process set out by Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, a number of properties were evaluated for eligibility on the National Register of Historic Places. The Ward House in Belward Farm is a historic property—since the alignment goes through Belward Farm, there would likely be an adverse effect. The next step is to coordinate with the Maryland Historical Trust to consider how to address those effects. A member commented that the Master Plan required that existing buildings on the Belward Farm property not be touched and there is a 12-acre perimeter park around the properties. Eric noted that the entire Belward Farm property is considered historic and the project has to consider impacts to the entire property. Eric explained that there were no archeological findings or sites of concern within the CCT alignment.

The environmental documentation also includes a draft Section 4(f) evaluation, a policy that transportation projects must follow if there are impacts to parks or historic sites. There are six properties included in the Section 4(f) evaluation, which is a separate evaluation from the environmental assessment—Muddy Branch Park, Washingtonian Woods Park, B&O Railroad, Ward House/Belward Farm, the NIST Headquarters Campus and England Crown Farm (under development now).

A member asked what is Muddy Branch Park. Eric explained it is the wooded, undeveloped area that surrounds Muddy Branch along Great Seneca Highway, next to the entrance to Lakelands. Eric detailed temporary and permanent impacts to natural resources—100-year flood plains, streams and waterways, wetlands, tree stands, tree covers and individual trees. All two-thousand trees along the alignment have been inventoried. There have been no endangered species identified in the corridor. A member asked what was looked for in a tree inventory. Eric explained that size, species and the health of each tree were documented in order to determine what would need to be replaced. The Maryland Reforestation Law requires a one-to-one replacement of any trees that would need to be removed for the project.

AAC Members asked if reforestation would be required to take place in the same area where trees were removed and whether trees planted around new stations would count towards the mitigation goals. Eric responded that it varies by area and is generally an unwritten requirement. For example, the City of Gaithersburg has asked that reforestation take place within the city limits if trees were removed to build the CCT within City limits. The intent is to mitigate as close as possible to the affected area. The agencies or jurisdictions will not approve the mitigation plans unless they meet certain goals. The trees planted around the new stations will count towards the overall mitigation.

A member asked if the wetlands on Muddy Branch in the section from Mission Hills to Great Seneca Highway were part of the environmental assessment. Eric responded that the area was included, as were all wetlands in the corridor. Another member asked what the boundaries were

for an area to be included in the assessment. Eric replied that it varies based on where the cut/ fill limits are and whether there are retaining walls or slopes, but accounts for a drainage buffer and temporary impacts. The project's limits of disturbance are used as a baseline.

A member asked about the impacts of the expansion of Muddy Branch Road into the wetlands at Great Seneca Highway and whether there would be an abutment, slope or retaining wall. Karen explained that there would be a slope there that would be graded down into the area.

A member asked if that area was considered a flood plain. Eric said he was not sure there was a 100-year flood plain at that location, but he would research the question. There is a flood plain at the lower end of Muddy Branch itself. A member asked if the permitting would happen after the environmental assessment. Eric explained that this process identifies the impacts in general terms. After the environmental document is completed, there is a permitting process involving the Army Corps of Engineers and the Maryland Department of the Environment, which will detail minimization measures taken on each of the wetlands and tree impacts. The project has established a conservative buffer area in order to account for the maximum impacts which will then be reviewed in more detail as the project gets further in design.

A member asked if there was a culvert carrying a stream from one side of Muddy Branch Road to the other. Eric explained there is a small tributary that runs underneath Muddy Branch Road--it's not clear if it is in the 100-year flood plain, but it is accounted for in the environmental assessment. The wetlands impacts are approximately two acres for the whole project. There is a joint permit application for the project. It is unclear whether wetlands mitigation will occur on site, but the intent is to stay within the watershed.

Eric continued with the presentation explaining the physical resource assessment includes moderate noise and vibration impacts to three receptor sites. Mitigation for two communities along Great Seneca Highway may potentially include noise barriers, but further assessment would have to determine what is feasible and reasonable. In the next few weeks, the project will contact affected residences that could benefit from the barriers.

A member asked if the mitigation would be the same all along Great Seneca Highway. Eric responded that the mitigation could be different depending on the desires of those affected. Karen pointed out that there is enough distance between the locations to offset the need for one continuous barrier. Another member commented that the footing underneath would determine whether a wall could be supported or if a shorter berm would be necessary. Eric replied that when evaluating feasibility, a host of solutions will be considered. A member asked if cost would be a factor in whether a community would get a noise barrier and what type. Eric explained that cost is a factor in reasonableness, and the amount of square feet per benefited residence is also a factor.

The presentation continued with a discussion of air quality impacts. With a transit project such as the CCT, a reduction in air pollutants (due to fewer cars on the road and reduced emissions) and energy is expected and that is the finding of the environmental assessment. No properties to be acquired by the MTA appear to be affected by hazardous materials. A member asked how the reduction in pollutants was calculated. Eric explained that both a local and a regional air quality

conformity review were conducted. The regional conformity review is based on a model developed by the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments. The CCT project is included in the master plan and contributes to the region meeting air quality goals. In addition, bus fleet improvements and resulting fuel efficiency are built into the model. A member asked how the buses would be fueled. Karen noted that it is assumed the vehicles will be diesel-electric hybrids, but at the time of purchase, the project will buy vehicles with the most advanced technology available.

A member commented that the project would reduce walkability in Washingtonian Woods since it will lead to dangerous road crossings at some intersections and wanted to know if that was factored in to the assessment. Eric responded that the model is not that specific and difficult to quantify down to that level. The CCT provides an option over cars and will promote walkability to the stations. A member asked whether a pedestrian overpass over main roads would alleviate safety concerns. Eric responded that was not part of the air quality solution. A discussion ensued about whether livability and walkability were addressed in the environmental document. A member asked whether the sidewalks were maintained along the alignment or if some would be lost. Karen explained that sidewalks would be maintained and/or relocated and, in some instances, expanded.

A member asked if there was an assumption that the CCT will have greater impacts on Great Seneca Highway pedestrian crossings. Eric explained that was addressed in the socio-economic and community aspects of the environmental assessment--whether the project would impose barriers to pedestrian access and community mobility. He acknowledged there would be some areas where it would be more difficult to cross, but the intent of the project is to ensure pedestrian access. In areas where the population is transit-dependent, the intent is to have riders that walk to and from the stations. A member asked what the radius of use was around the Belward Station. Karen responded that the walking radius was about ½ mile; the biking radius was about 1-2 miles. Eric noted that building pedestrian bridges is very expensive, but the project will work diligently to address the community's concerns about pedestrian access. Members emphasized that an integrated system of pedestrian and bike pathways was very important to them.

Patrick Butler pointed out that his goal was to talk about larger connectivity issues in the Life Sciences Corridor portion of the project. M-NCPPC will be updating the master plan of bikeways this summer, are coordinating with MTA and other agencies, and will discuss plans in more detail at the May meeting. Karen added that the project would look at creating a large pedestrian corridor map to help visualize where the sidewalks are and where the project will impact and replace them.

The environmental assessment is scheduled to be released in May for public distribution with a public hearing on the document in June. The project hopes to complete a final environmental impact document in the fall and expects that there will be a 'finding of no significant impact' issued by FTA.

Stations Update:

Station Architect John Bull provided an update from the stations meeting. He explained the comments from all three AACs were reviewed and categorized into different themes and the architectural team began to address them in a variety of studies including design barriers, lighting, and materials. Updates and design progression were made in areas including presence, enclosed space, safety, landscaping/greenscaping and weather protection.

Drawings were shared for several of the stations that were not shown at the earlier stations meeting—the side station at DANAC, smaller stations at USG and Traville Gateway Drive and the pedestrian bridge at the Metropolitan Grove station.

The architecture team had to choose between the helix and framework concepts reviewed at the earlier stations meeting. The team believes the helix concept is a more flexible and dynamic option, while maintaining a consistent architectural concept. In attempting to define the enclosed space, the team added short perimeter walls, reduced the column size and lowered the canopy slightly. The goal of the selected design was to provide a singular character that can be modified and/or applied in different ways to all the stations.

John explained that the design had to accommodate the height of emergency vehicles, particularly fire trucks that would be allowed to travel on the transitway. The platform is 14 inches high, the typical height for level boarding of the buses. There are no steps on the platform or the bus to accommodate level boarding.

The short perimeter walls were added for safety and to also give the station a defined sense of place. A member asked who would maintain the stations in the winter. Karen explained that the operator of the system would be responsible for maintenance. It has not yet been determined whether that will be the MTA, WMATA, a contractor, etc.

John continued that landscaping will be added along the sides of the station, possibly ornamental grass. The canopy was lowered providing more weather protection; the wind protection was enhanced with a deeper wind barrier. The canopy structure was refined to make it lighter and provide placement for artwork.

There are two center platform types—one in the median between traffic and the other along the side, such as at Firstfield. The platform and canopy are the same with the exception of grass and sidewalk barriers between traffic and the transitway. The drawings show parking for bikes. At Firstfield, the team was able to coordinate a bus stop for Ride On.

An AAC member raised concerns that the architectural drawings, with ten bike parking spaces per station as a prototype, was not sufficient space for bicycle parking. He noted that the Silver Line project built 20 bike spaces at a station but once opened, that station needed 200 bike parking spaces. This same AAC member stated that some property owners adjacent to the CCT alignment have indicated they would be willing to donate land near the stations for bike parking, but did not see that incorporated into the plans. John explained that the urban design team is conducting an analysis on the amount of bike parking needed at each station, including additional space that could accommodate Capital Bikeshare. Karen pointed out that although the

team is looking to identify space around each station for Bikeshare and will share that information with each of the local jurisdictions, the project does not plan to build Bikeshare stations at CCT stations.

A month ago, the project team met with the county, Gaithersburg, Rockville and Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning--specifically on bike parking compatibility at the stations--with another meeting planned for April to summarize comments and make recommendations. **Joana Conklin of Montgomery County DOT** noted that bike parking is estimated as a percentage of ridership at each station. Karen emphasized that transit operators, including WMATA, all have different formulas that generate different results, which the project is trying to synthesize. Joana reiterated that's why there was an effort underway to acquire space from owners of adjacent private properties. Karen said the MTA would need to weigh in on that, that the easement required for bike parking related to the limits of disturbance is complicated. Joana also noted that developers could be required to install bike spaces as part of the conditions for approval.

A member asked if plans to build out bike paths and provide more bike parking would impact the environmental assessment. Eric explained that the environmental assessment was based on the plans for the project and includes bike facilities and access. John noted that the urban design team was working to quantify bike spaces needed and incorporate them into the site plans.

A member asked what are the lengths of the station platforms? The standard length will be 150 feet long by 18 feet wide and can accommodate two buses.

John continued with the stations concepts with a review of the DANAC and USG stations. DANAC is one of the few side platform stations and measures 150 feet by 14 feet on each side. The station features a canopy that arcs over the transitway and is slightly recessed as it goes under Key West Avenue. The smaller USG station is 75 feet (half a platform length), 14 inches high and with the same canopy design and other similar elements—arranged slightly differently for a side platform--as other stations. There were some minor revisions made to the Kentlands station design, specifically column shapes and sizes, windscreens and further refinement of some structural elements.

The pedestrian bridge at Metropolitan Grove is necessary to cross the CSX tracks at that location. The bridge is designed as a simple, open-air structure with a perforated metal skin and a glass elevator tower. In response to a question about the optical illusion that such a structure could create, John noted that only providing small openings in the access bridge structure is a CSX requirement to keep people from throwing items onto the tracks/trains. Todd noted CSX actually prefer chain-link fences. The perforations act as an effective baffle for wind and also provide some weather protection.

A member asked if the design plans were shared with the city planners. Todd explained that all project design plans are coordinated with the cities. The member further noted that although the designs were gorgeous, they did not seem to be in keeping with community architecture. Todd explained that it is difficult to apply that architecture to a horizontal, linear structure. John

emphasized that a goal has been to maintain a consistent architectural theme throughout the project.

Great Seneca Science Corridor Loop Trail Presentation:

Cathy introduced Patrick Butler, Steve Findley, and Eric Feldman for a discussion of the Great Seneca Science Corridor (GSSC) Loop Trail.

Patrick pointed out that the organizations share the committee's concerns for bike connections and pedestrian mobility within the master plan area. The Life Sciences Center (LSC) loop is a major component of the GSSC master plan and is the organizing element of the open space within the plan area. Before stage two of the GSSC Master Plan opens, the LSC Loop must be fully funded in the county's six-year CIP (Capital Improvements Program) and/or through developers' contributions as part of plan approvals.

A member asked for an explanation of stage two. Patrick explained that the master plan is split into stages where certain milestones have to be met prior to the next stage opening for applications to be accepted by the Planning Department. Stage two is 2.3 million square feet of commercial development that would be available upon completion and opening of stage two. Before stage two opens, there are four milestones that have to be met: fully fund construction of the CCT, fully fund the relocation of the Public Service Training Academy, fund the LSC Loop trail, and attain an 18 percent non-auto driver mode share goal within the master plan area. The staging is intended to make sure the infrastructure needed to support the development stays in balance with it.

A member asked what buildings and which parts of the development are in stage two. Patrick explained that it includes the entire Life Sciences Center and whoever is ready to move forward with an application for development. The Planning Department cannot accept applications for any more than 2.3 million square feet of commercial development for stage two. A member asked if it would be premature to discuss what would be developed at the site of the current Public Service Training Academy. Patrick noted that it is all conceptual at this point.

Patrick continued by explaining that the LSC loop trail was a 3.5-mile recreation loop within the master plan area that connects the five LSC districts and destinations and facilities within the master plan area. It is the premier recreation and organizing element of the open spaces and green spaces of the master plan area. The loop is also envisioned to connect Rockville, Gaithersburg, the LSC districts and the surrounding neighborhoods to the LSC.

There are many challenges in organizing the loop, including existing conditions, intersections, stakeholder interests, etc. The project received a \$60,000 grant for technical assistance from the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (MWCOG) Transportation Land-Use Connections (TLC) program for design and a funding implementation strategy. Most of the grant proceeds will allow the project to receive assistance from Rhodeside & Harwell, an urban design/landscape architecture consultant.

Eric Feldman explained that R&H is early in the process—in the packets is a condensed version of a presentation made to the GSSC implementation committee last month. The goals are to

complete a 15 percent concept design for the loop trail that includes likely costs and identifies challenges to resolve, but will not be at an engineering level of detail; to develop a funding and implementation strategy to identify funding sources, roles and responsibilities, incentives and other strategies for building the trail; and satisfy the stage two requirement of the master plan.

A member asked for a more detailed explanation of the type of trail. Eric Feldman explained that according to the master plan, this is a shared-use trail facility. Design guidelines recommend that pedestrian and bike facilities be separated. They now have to determine how to fit them into the available right-of-way. Patrick added that they want it to be more than an asphalt path, they really want to create a sense of place that is unique and identifiable.

Eric Feldman explained that activities to date have included documenting existing conditions, developing preliminary alternatives with a goal of refining the alternatives into a preferred concept design over the next couple of months, and plans to begin discussions of funding and implementation strategies. Maps in the handout show the envisioned route for the trail, which would travel from Gaithersburg, on Omega Drive, Medical Center Drive, through the PSTA property, Johns Hopkins Drive, and Belward Campus Drive to Decoverly. An analysis has been done of the challenges and opportunities including a constrained right-of-way and what can fit there, topography and utilities. They will also review the master plan goals and the districts of the LSC to see how the trail could mirror the characters of those areas as envisioned by the master plan.

Members remarked that the loop trail seemed to follow the same route as the CCT and raised questions if there was any consideration to extending the loop across I-270 using the structure that would be built for the CCT, and if the orange dotted lines (‘proposed green connector’) were a recommendation to the jurisdictions to connect to the trail. Eric Feldman noted that there are a few segments where the trail will overlap with the CCT which will require close coordination with the cross sections of those roadways. Karen explained that the trail would actually be on the bridge across I-270. It does not appear on the loop map because it is not part of the official loop, but is part of the CCT. Patrick explained that the proposed green connector is a separate connection not related to the loop—it might connect to the loop but would most likely not look like the loop.

A member raised a concern about an area shown on the GSSC Master Plan LSC Loop drawings that connects King Farm to Washingtonian Boulevard (shown in yellow) and asserted that the community would strongly oppose any efforts to take the property indicated by the yellow line. Steve Findley explained that the image was taken from the master plan in 2010, but the project recognizes what is beyond its jurisdiction and committed to working with the City of Gaithersburg to do whatever is appropriate for that area. He emphasized that what they are trying to implement is the loop itself, but some of the connections will allow greater access by surrounding communities.

Steve noted that there would be an update of the master plan of bikeways that would look more broadly at the overall bicycle network and be coordinated with the Cities of Rockville and Gaithersburg. At a recent GSSC meeting, M-NCPPC and the Cities of Gaithersburg and Rockville discussed ways to connect their three different proposed bike networks to make them

more efficient, and to further collaborate on planning. A member commented that the bike plans do not appear to be centric to the CCT stations.

Eric Feldman continued by noting that the proposed trail is different from an asphalt trail and showed examples of place making features, notably those of the Indianapolis Cultural Trail. The Indianapolis Cultural Trail is eight miles long and incorporates art, landscaping, street furniture, distinctive signage and paving, in addition to encouraging bike use and creating economic benefits in the area. This project is striving for something similar for the loop trail that lends an identity and brand to the Life Sciences Center. Key elements would be signage, way finding, distinctive graphics, street furniture, lighting, public art, distinctive paving to demarcate pedestrian space from bicycle space to avoid conflicts, landscaping and low-impact development features. A big issue will be treatments to the crossings of major roadways and visibility. Patrick added that they could provide updates to the AAC in May.

A member noted that the loop has a decidedly recreational aspect, making connectivity key especially west and north and at I-270, and between communities such as Crown Farm and Rio and links to the Gaithersburg and Rockville trails. Steve noted that the master plan for the Great Seneca Science Corridor envisions adding 7,500 residential units and more employment in the corridor. The PSTA site is zoned for two-thousand residential units and the area is developed on the model of a suburban office park. The loop project wants to integrate housing into the LSC to enable people to live and work there and commute using the loop. The goal is to make it attractive so that it can be used as a recreational and transportation corridor. Patrick added that this is not the only bike corridor they are planning.

David McDonogh distributed “Proposed Phase 1 Corridor Cities Transitway Regional Bikeway Network Plan Executive Summary” to the members. A work group has been formed with the goal of developing a regional bikeway system that provides access to the CCT.

General Discussion/Closing Thoughts/Next Meeting:

Cathy noted that the bike discussion would continue at the next meeting and asked members to bring back station name suggestions. She reminded members that they have a copy of the MTA’s facilities naming policy.

A member asked if the MTA would consider advertising in the stations instead of artwork. Cathy said that would depend on the operator of the system. The MTA does have a history of privatizing bus shelters, particularly in the Baltimore area. The bus shelters are well-maintained and do generate revenue via advertisements.

Cathy announced that the next (and final) meeting will be held at USG on May 13th. Some members said they would like to see the 30 percent design concepts – Cathy said she would relay that to MTA and perhaps they would agree to a meeting in the fall to share those designs.

The meeting adjourned at 8:45pm.

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