

4. Public Outreach & Agency Coordination

Public involvement and agency coordination has played an important role in the development of the CCT Project. The public and interested stakeholders (station area residents, businesses, community organizations, and institutions) are encouraged to provide feedback during the planning and preliminary design of the Project as they are the experts about their communities and have first-hand knowledge and experiences to share.

MDOT MTA's goal for the CCT Public Involvement Program is to inform and educate the public and stakeholders about the Project. Since the announcement of the LPA in May 2012, the MDOT MTA has focused the CCT Public Involvement Program on educating the public and stakeholders about BRT characteristics, as well as solicit input regarding all aspects of the Project. In striving to achieve this goal, several initiatives were implemented to share information about the Project. These outreach efforts, since the LPA announcement in May 2012, are summarized in this chapter.

4.1 Project Website

The Project website is available at www.mta.maryland.gov/cct. The Project website includes Project information, - previous environmental documents, engineering terms and reports, proposed operational information, public meeting announcements, mapping of the alignment, and information on special reports and studies. The Project website also includes a comment form to submit comments or contact Project staff.



4.2 Community Presentations

MDOT MTA is steadfast in its commitment to educate and inform the public and stakeholders about the CCT Project. One approach was to present community presentations at regularly scheduled homeowner's association meetings to inform communities throughout the study area corridor and interested areas about the Project. These presentations were designed to encourage a targeted dialogue with the community about their concerns. Thus far, MDOT MTA has presented to approximately 40 community groups and organizations and is constantly reaching out to additional organizations for opportunities to present the Project. The scheduling of meetings is continuous as the goal is to inform as many stakeholders as possible of the Project.

A variety of questions and concerns have been discussed at these community presentations and some of the consistent themes include: noise, pedestrian and bicyclist facilities and safety, parking (which stations would have it, would riders take spaces away from residents), traffic impacts, stations, potential impacts to existing bus service, construction schedule (including funding), and potential impacts to the capacity at the Shady Grove Metro Station to carry additional commuters.

4.3 Neighborhood Events

In 2012, a refocus on neighborhood events was initiated as the MDOT MTA proactively started attending various events throughout the Project area to reach out to the public and inform more stakeholders about the Project. Since then, staff have participated in and informational tables have been included in approximately 40 events, including fairs, festivals, community days, and events displaying general Project information, newsletters, fact sheets, brochures, and sign-up sheets for the mailing list. At these events, staff also provided giveaway materials, including magnets, note pads, ink pens, fare card holders, lanyards, and reusable bags labeled with the CCT logo and website address.

4.4 Printed Materials

Traditionally, newsletters are mailed to stakeholders to provide project news and status updates. The MDOT MTA developed two newsletters; first to announce the LPA and second to describe the work of the Area Advisory Committee (AAC) and the 15 percent design plans. Both newsletters are available on the Project website. The last newsletter was distributed in early January 2015. The current mailing list includes approximately 2,500 addresses of citizens and stakeholders interested in receiving information about the Project.

Additionally, MDOT MTA has developed four fact sheets explaining both general Project information and specific topics that include: Frequently Asked Questions; Noise Analysis and Mitigation; How the VISSIM Model Works; and SWM Techniques. To educate the public about the new transit mode – BRT, the MDOT MTA published a brochure and fact card, in both English and Spanish, defining BRT and detailing the benefits, vehicles, running ways, and stations associated with BRT. The Project placed meeting advertisements in local newspapers including the *Washington Post Media - Local Living Montgomery County*, *Afro American - DC Edition*, *Montgomery County Gazette*, and the *Frederick News Post*. Advertisements were also placed in Spanish newspapers: the *Washington Hispanic* and *El Tiempo*. English and Spanish posters were posted throughout the corridor, such as the Rio Shopping Center, announcing the public meeting. Additionally, a video, showing examples of BRT in other US cities, was posted to the Project website to provide a unique perspective on how BRT would operate in the community. These materials have been developed and distributed at various events. All Project newsletters, fact sheets, and brochures are posted on the Project website.

4.5 Open House

Since the announcement of the LPA, one Open House meeting was held on Wednesday, October 30, 2013, and more than 130 residents, elected officials, and interested stakeholders were in attendance to learn more about the CCT Project. The Open House, held at the Universities at Shady Grove Conference Center, featured advanced design concepts for the Project. Engineers were on hand to walk interested attendees through aerial maps of the alignment and detailed typical sections. Display boards and other pertinent Project information were available for review. Attendees discussed and provided comments on a variety of topics, including noise, vehicle type, ridership, SWM options, and traffic operations. A limited number of concerns were identified by participants at the meeting including localized noise and parking impacts, a request for an alignment modification near Muddy Branch Road and Great Seneca Highway, and the need for public art as part of system amenities. The materials displayed at the meeting are available on the Project website. The Open House also served as the launch for the CCT AACs. Interested attendees asked questions about the process and took time to complete self-nomination forms.

4.6 Area Advisory Committees

A cornerstone of the MDOT MTA public involvement program is the establishment of the AACs in March 2014. They were established to provide stakeholders with an interest along the corridor and throughout the region with an opportunity to participate in the Project. The AACs were developed to encourage community involvement in the design and construction of the transitway. These AACs also provide community stakeholders the opportunity to participate in the process of designing how the proposed transit stations would be integrated into their communities. By working with designers, architects, and planners, these AACs will provide input to the MDOT MTA on: Traffic, Station Design and Amenities, SWM, Safety, Mobility (pedestrian/bicycle), and Sustainability.

More than 90 stakeholders submitted self-nomination forms for consideration. As a result, 46 stakeholders were selected and three AACs have been formed to cover the full Project length.

- AAC One encompasses the Metropolitan Grove, Firstfield, NIST, and Kentlands Stations.
- AAC Two includes LSC Belward, LSC West, Traville Gateway Drive, USG, LSC Central; DANAC, and the Crown Farm Stations.
- AAC Three consists of West Gaither, East Gaither, and the Shady Grove Stations.

The AACs met bi-monthly until June 2015 to discuss specific issues related to the design, construction, and operation of the CCT. Based on these discussions, the AACs were encouraged and charged with maintaining communication with the larger CCT community. This two-way feedback allowed the Project design team and the community to work together to develop the best project possible.

4.7 Agency Coordination

Local, state, and federal agency coordination has been an essential, ongoing component of the CCT Project development. After the transit component of the CCT Project was deemed to have independent utility in 2011 and the Project's LPA was announced in 2012, agency coordination was re-initiated.

Four federal resource agencies with potential interest in the CCT Project were invited by MDOT MTA, in coordination with FTA, to become cooperating agencies in the environmental review process: the EPA, the USACE, the NIST, and the NCPC. The first three invitations were sent on June 12, 2014, while the NCPC invitation was sent on September 8, 2014. EPA and NIST accepted the invitation to become cooperating agencies in writing (**Appendix A**).

Relevant local, state, and federal agencies were provided in-person Project updates at an Interagency Review Meeting (IRM) held on November 20, 2013 at the Maryland SHA headquarters. Eleven agencies, including the following, were present at the IRM:

- Baltimore Metropolitan Council (BMC)
- Maryland Department of Natural Resources (MD DNR)
- US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)
- Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)
- Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE)
- Maryland Department of Planning (MDE)
 - Maryland Historic Trust (MHT)
- Maryland State Highway Administration (SHA)
- US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE)
- US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)

A presentation provided an overview of the CCT Project history, proposed alignment, associated environmental studies, agency and public involvement efforts, and schedule. Agency representatives were invited to ask questions and provide input on the Project. Several agencies had questions answered related to agency coordination and potential environmental impacts, including the MDNR, USACE, EPA, and the MHT/SHPO.

Agency coordination was also important in terms of the documentation of cultural resources and natural resources. FTA initiated the Section 106 consultation process with the MHT via an invitation sent on April 18, 2014, and MHT confirmed the initiation with a response sent on June 10, 2014. Two days later, the following agencies and organizations were invited to act as Section 106 consulting parties: City of Gaithersburg Historic Preservation Advisory Committee, City of Gaithersburg, City of Rockville, Gaithersburg-North Potomac-Rockville Coalition, Gaithersburg Historical Association, Heritage Tourism Alliance of Montgomery County, Johns Hopkins Real Estate, M-NCPPC, Montgomery County Historical Society, Montgomery County Preservation, Inc., NIST (within the US Department of Commerce), Peerless Rockville, and Preservation Maryland. The consulting parties who accepted the invitation were provided the opportunity to

review Section 106 Project deliverables simultaneously with MHT, MDOT MTA, and FTA, before information was released to the public.

In order to identify and thoroughly document impacts to natural resources, MDOT MTA coordinated with both the MDNR and the USFWS. MDOT MTA requested information on state-listed RTE species in the Project area from the Maryland DNR Wildlife and Heritage Service via a letter sent on January 8, 2014. This letter also included a Coordination Sheet for information on fisheries resources, including anadromous fish, related to Project locations and study areas for the CCT, to be completed by the Maryland DNR Environmental Review Unit (this request was completed on December 4, 2013). MDNR Wildlife and Heritage Service responded on February 7, 2014, confirming that a portion of the CCT Project route has the potential to impact Potato Dandelion habitat. MDOT MTA replied to MDNR on April 14, 2014, stating that the LOD of the proposed transitway would not impact Potato Dandelion habitat. On May 29, 2014, MDNR Wildlife and Heritage Service replied that there were no further concerns for direct impacts to Potato Dandelion habitat. On March 28, 2014, MDNR's Environmental Review Unit provided a completed Coordination Sheet. (Refer to **Appendix A.**)

MDOT MTA submitted a request for RTE Information via the USFWS online Information, Planning, and Conservation (IPaC) System on January 8, 2014. The USFWS responded with an Online Certification Letter on February 18, 2014, stating that except for occasional transient individuals, no federally proposed or listed endangered or threatened species are known to exist within the CCT Project area. Additionally, MDOT MTA requested information from the USACE regarding the presence of waters of the United States within the study area via e-mail on October 21, 2014. The USACE responded on December 15, 2014 with a completed Preliminary Jurisdictional Determination Form. Lastly, FTA submitted a letter to USFWS on February 17, 2016 to request consultation of the potential impacts of the CCT Project to the threatened Northern Long-Eared Bat. In a letter dated March 14, 2016, the USFWS, determined the Project is not likely to adversely affect the Northern Long-Eared Bat. (Refer to **Appendix A.**)

Telephone correspondence and in-person meetings were conducted as necessary throughout the Project process. In addition to direct, interagency correspondence, agencies were invited to attend public meetings and submit comments throughout the Project process.