MD 355 Central Corridor Advisory Committee Meeting #13

June 4, 2019
6:30pm – 8:30pm

Montgomery County Executive Office Building
9th Floor Conference Room
101 Monroe Street
Rockville, MD 20850

CAC members in attendance:

CAC members (marked with an "X" if Present)			
Joshua Raymond Arcurio		Anthony Kouneski	
Peter Benjamin	X	Jeremy Martin	
Jay Brinson		Chad Salganik	X
Elizabeth Crane		Eric Siegel	
Kristi Cruzat		Ana Milena Sobalvarro	X
Roger Fox		Gerard Stack	
Jerry Garson	X	Michael Tardif	
Peter Katz		Zachary Trupp	X
Arnold Kohn	X	Francine Watters	X

Stakeholders and members of the public in attendance:

Other attendees
Barry Gore, City of Rockville Steve Aldrich, MNCPPC Walker Freer, MNCPPC

Staff in attendance:

MCDOT staff	Consultant team members
• Darcy Buckley, Montgomery County Department of Transportation (MCDOT) Director's Office • Corey Pitts, MCDOT Division of Transportation Engineering, MD 355 BRT Project Manager	• Denny Finnerin, Gannett Fleming • Alanna McKeeman, Foursquare ITP • William Shuldiner, Foursquare ITP • Dan Lovas, VHB • Christine Potocki, VHB • Chris Bell, AECOM • Dalia Levin, AECOM

Introductions, Project Update, Overview of Agenda

Alanna McKeeman, CAC Facilitator, began the meeting and the project staff and CAC members all introduced themselves. Alanna reviewed the ground rules for the CAC meetings. She explained that this meeting would consist of a presentation given by Corey Pitts, MCDOT, reviewing the results of the alternatives analysis performed in this phase of the study. This presentation would take about 40 minutes, so Alanna asked CAC members to save questions until the end of the presentation.

Presentation

Corey Pitts, MD 355 BRT Project Manager, gave a presentation that included a brief overview of the project, as well as the project timeline and purpose. He then summarized the different segments of the corridor and each alternative to help CAC members re-familiarize themselves with since the last meeting. Corey described the two-level station screening performed by the project team and presented the station location recommendations. Corey then discussed the results of the modeling process and explained how each alternative measured in terms of the project objectives, such as increasing ridership, making trips faster and more competitive, improving transit quality, minimizing environmental impacts, and more. The presentation ended with a summary of the findings and CAC members were invited to ask questions or provide comments on the contents of the presentation. [The presentation is available at this link]

Questions, Comments, and Discussion

Questions

QUESTION (Q): How many hours a day is the ten-minute FLASH service?

RESPONSE (R): The proposed hours of operation are approximately 4:15 AM - 1:45 AM. Each of the 4 FLASH routes would operate every 10 minutes from 6 am to 9 pm. Where the routes overlap, buses would run every 3 to 5 minutes. The proposed operations are based on demand that is reflected in the modeling.

Q: The White Flint Master Plan encourages developers to dedicate right-of-way when redevelopment occurs. Was this considered during the price assessment?

R: The right of way price assessment was based on what is currently available, so right of way that could be dedicated in the future was not included. The right-of-way cost could go down, however, as more properties get redeveloped and developers dedicate right-of-way throughout the corridor. If waiting for more of this right-of-way to become available makes more sense for the project, the County could consider it.

Q: Is the project team planning to pursue federal grants, and if so when?

R: There has not been a decision made about applying for federal funding, however, the current process allows us flexibility to pursue federal grants in the future should we choose to do so.

Q: How does the data reflect people using FLASH? Are people riding it to connect to Metrorail or to make more "local" trips in which they only use FLASH.

R: The modeling data shows many riders traveling to Shady Grove in the northern section of the corridor as well as the Montgomery College Rockville campus in the middle portion of MD 355. There are also a large number of new trips throughout the corridor to places between Metro stations as the amount of development in these areas increases. In addition to these trips, there are also many trips reflected in the data where riders are using FLASH to connect to different transit modes, including Metrorail.

Q: Why would people use FLASH service instead of local bus service, especially if BRT stations are located far apart?

R: The two main reasons riders would choose FLASH service is because the trip is faster, and the bus comes more frequently. The model reflects the current assortment of ways people connect to transit, such as the local bus network, park and ride, biking, and walking, although it takes the fact that walking longer distances can be less attractive to riders into account.

Q: Are CAC members going to be able to see the data about ridership on MD 355?

R: All data will be available to everyone through multiple technical reports that will be released right before the Open Houses.

Q: When will the next CAC meeting be?

R: It depends on when the next phase of the project starts. Once the next phase begins, the project team will reengage the CACs to assist with the preliminary design process.

Q: Is the next phase of the project funded?

R: The next phase of the project is not yet funded, but it could be once a recommended alternative has been identified since this will provid more clarity about how the project will move forward.

Q: Why is the segment in the White Flint area so much more expensive than the other segments?

R: The main reason for the difference in costs is the cost of the right-of-way, since right-of-way is more expensive in this area. This segment is also longer than some other segments and the numbers presented are not costs per mile, but rather total costs, so it would make sense that this segment is more expensive.

Q: How were the right-of-way costs developed? Was future development considered?

R: Property values were estimated based on County and City Land Use Zoning and parcel size. To determine the extent of right-of-way needs, the project team relied on the limit-of-disturbance (LOD). For the LOD, the project team developed a cross section of the area and identified the topography. If there are areas that are more difficult for construction, this is accounted for and the disturbance area is increased.

Q: Did you model positive financial benefits of FLASH service as well as the negative ones?

R: The positive effects for businesses were modeled and the results showed many positive effects as a result of the new transit service, so the project team would expect this to be true for other properties as well. The permanence of a median running and even curb running alternative was taken into account since many developers have discussed that a higher level of permanence would help encourage more development around the new service.

Comment (C): Developers in the White Flint area have identified a greater opportunity for both private and public employment with median-running FLASH.

Q: How has the modeling and planning process taken autonomous vehicles and future developments in the transit industry into account?

R: Currently, autonomous vehicles are not large enough and do not have sufficient top-speed to provide bus service on the corridor, but autonomous vehicles could help riders connect to FLASH service in the future. The project team researched autonomous options to help reduce the right-of-way needs but found that autonomous vehicle technology has not spread as quickly into the transit industry yet as other transportation sectors such as cars and freight. If it becomes an option in the future, the built environment can be changed through processes such as narrowing lanes.

C: The project should use the amount development in an area at the time the service will start operating when determining what area to begin service in since this will allow for the greatest impact to the area.

C: The first phase of the project should capitalize on areas where ridership will be the greatest at the time since this will help show that the project is warranted and increase support for the new service.

Conclusion

Alanna thanked the CAC members for attending the meeting and providing constructive feedback. She invited them to attend the upcoming Open Houses that would take place at the end of June and said the asked for their help publicizing them.