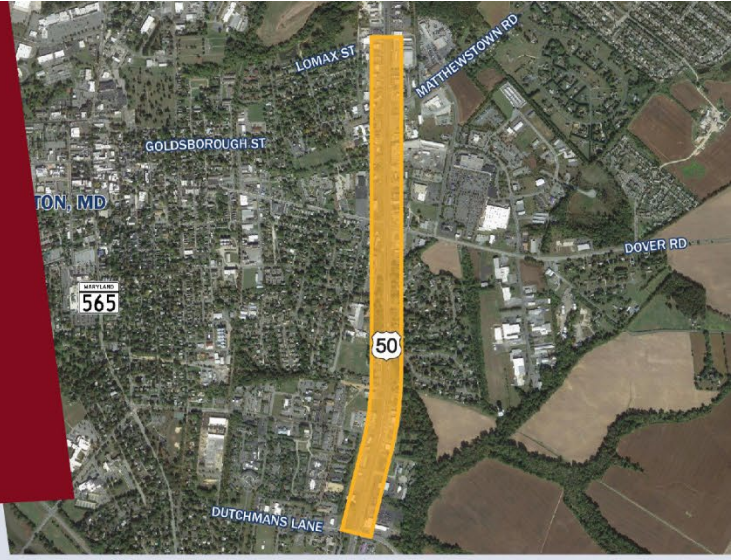
MARYLAND DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION



Enhancing Easton Neighborhood Access on US 50 Project

Maryland Department of Transportation

Capital Construction Grant Application

September 28, 2023

Key Information Table

Lead Applicant Name	Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT)
Organization Type	State or U.S. Territory
Lead Applicant State	Maryland
Lead Applicant Unique Entity Identifier	
Points of Contact	Joseph Burke Federal Legislative Analyst Office of Policy & Research 707 N. Calvert Street, C-412 Baltimore, MD 21202 Work: 410-545-0362 Cell: 443-282-8916
Program Question	Neighborhood Access and Equity Program
Grant Type	Capital Construction Grant
Project Title	Enhancing Easton Neighborhood Access on U.S. Route 50 (US 50) Project (the Project)
Project Description	The Project will include a comprehensive suite of improvements that will increase access to essential destinations for the community and have been identified as a local priority by the Town of Easton and Talbot County. The Project will include adding new sidewalks, pedestrian signals, and raised landscaped medians and removing challenging crossing areas to enhance the pedestrian experience and improve safety on an important corridor through a historically underserved community.
Match Question	80% Federal Funding
Is the lead applicant the Facility Owner?	Yes
Name of the Facility Owner(s) of the eligible facility creating the barrier or burden, if not the Lead Applicant	MDOT
If the lead applicant is not the Facility Owner, does the application include a Facility Owner endorsement?	Not applicable (N/A)
If a joint application, please provide organizational names of sub-recipients that will receive funds and other key partners	N/A
What is/are the Eligible Facility Type(s) that create(s) a barrier or a burden, that your application intends to address?	State Highway

Is the project located in an economically disadvantaged community?	Yes
Is the project located in a rural area?	Yes
Is the facility aged and likely to need replacement or significant reconstruction within 20 years?	Yes
What type of transportation facility is the focus of the proposed solution?	Pedestrian-Bicycle Complete Streets Road
Is the project included in a Climate Action Plan?	Yes
Total RCN Program grant request amount	$3,309,759
Total Project Cost	$5,911,158
Is the proposed project already included in the STIP, TIP, or equivalent? For transit projects, is the project in the Transit Asset Management Plan?	Yes, RU Safety and Spot Improvement https://www.mdot.maryland.gov/OPCP/FY2022_STIP_Final%20110921.pdf

Contents

Overview

The Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) requests $3,309,759 in the U.S. Department of Transportation's (USDOT's) Reconnecting Communities and Neighborhoods (RCN) grant funding for the Enhancing Easton Neighborhood Access on U.S. Route 50 (US 50) Project (the Project), which will dramatically improve access to daily destinations in a diverse rural community on Maryland's Eastern Shore. The Project will include adding new sidewalks, pedestrian signals, and raised landscaped medians and removing challenging crossing areas that, together, will enhance the pedestrian access to grocery stores, pharmacies, and schools on the corridor, better align with planned local land use patterns, and improve safety through a historically underserved community.

As one of oldest Black communities in the United States, Easton has a rich history rooted in resilience. The community has faced and overcome obstacles for decades, from the segregation and violence of the Jim Crow era to challenges accessing education, opportunities, and even essential needs (such as fresh, healthy food) and these challenges continue for the small, rural community into today. As shown by the Council on Environmental Quality's Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool (CEJST), Easton includes a disadvantaged community through a large portion of the Project area, which is in the 91st percentile nationwide for low median income when compared with median incomes in the area. In addition, Easton residents face a high housing cost burden according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA's) EJScreen tool. This leaves residents with few remaining resources to purchase and maintain a reliable vehicle; therefore, the ability to access the services available locally through alternative and active transportation is critical.

US 50, which is owned and maintained by MDOT, is a major highway that connects Maryland's Western and Eastern Shores and is the primary highway to the Maryland and Delaware beaches. The highway experiences heavy congestion and high speeds, presenting a safety challenge to pedestrians, particularly during the summer months when leisure travel to Ocean City, Maryland, and the surrounding beaches peaks. US 50, as shown in Figure 1, carves through the eastern portion of Easton, bordered on either side by a strip of businesses and educational institutions that include essential services, such as drug stores and pharmacies, grocery stores, and a K-8 school. US 50 was constructed in the 1920s and expanded in the post-war era, encouraging the development of a second business district away from Easton's historic and pedestrian-friendly downtown. Today, many of the most crucial and in-demand services in

Figure 1. Current Conditions along US 50

Easton are located along US 50, which caters primarily to travelers. This forces local residents to use a motor vehicle to reach essential destinations along the corridor, which has minimal pedestrian facilities and no sidewalks currently, contributing to pollution, congestion and inequity.

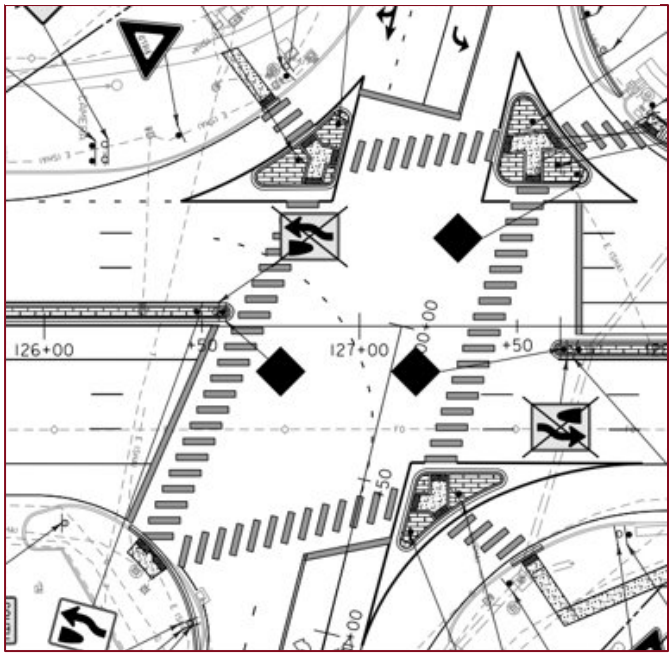
Although Easton's historic downtown is located to the west of US 50, the highway features many daily destinations that are essential to residents. US 50 is a long-distance highway that is essential for travelers to Maryland's Eastern Shore; this well-traveled roadway sees daily traffic counts approximately double the population of Easton itself. Although US 50 provides critical access for Easton residents to jobs, educational opportunities, and recreation, it also limits mobility and access to neighborhood resources for residents who do not or cannot drive a car because there are no sidewalks and very limited pedestrian infrastructure. Currently, pedestrians who do visit the businesses along US 50 must contend with a wide roadway, making crossing and access to services especially challenging. In addition, the corridor lacks *Americans with Disabilities Act* (ADA)-compliant ramps, a particular concern in a community where more than 25% of residents are older than 65 and a similarly large percentage have disabilities. The area is also classified as a food desert, according to EPA's EJScreen tool.

Providing safe and reliable pedestrian access to essential destinations, including grocery and drug stores, along the corridor is critical to supporting local land use efforts and objectives. The Project will also support the Town of Easton's 2010 Comprehensive Plan objectives, which include greater mixed-use commercial and residential development along US 50, along with improved accessibility.

The scope of the Project will include numerous safety enhancements including proven safety countermeasures (identified with an * in the list that follows) recognized by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) to dramatically reduce the likelihood of roadway injuries:

- Constructing sidewalks* and ADA facilities
- Creating high-visibility intercontinental crosswalks* (Figure 2)
- Adding pedestrian signals at the two major intersections (at Maryland Route [MD] 328 and MD 331 on US 50 from Dutchman's Lane to Lomax Street)
- Conducting median* landscaping and streetscaping to discourage mid-block crossings
- Adding pedestrian islands*
- Adding channelizing right-turn islands
- Lengthening left-turn lanes at select locations
- Modifying some median crossovers
- Resurfacing and rehabilitating pavement
- Managing drainage and stormwater, including blue-green infrastructure such as bioswales
- Minimizing impacts to existing utilities

Figure 2. Proposed Crosswalks at Intersections

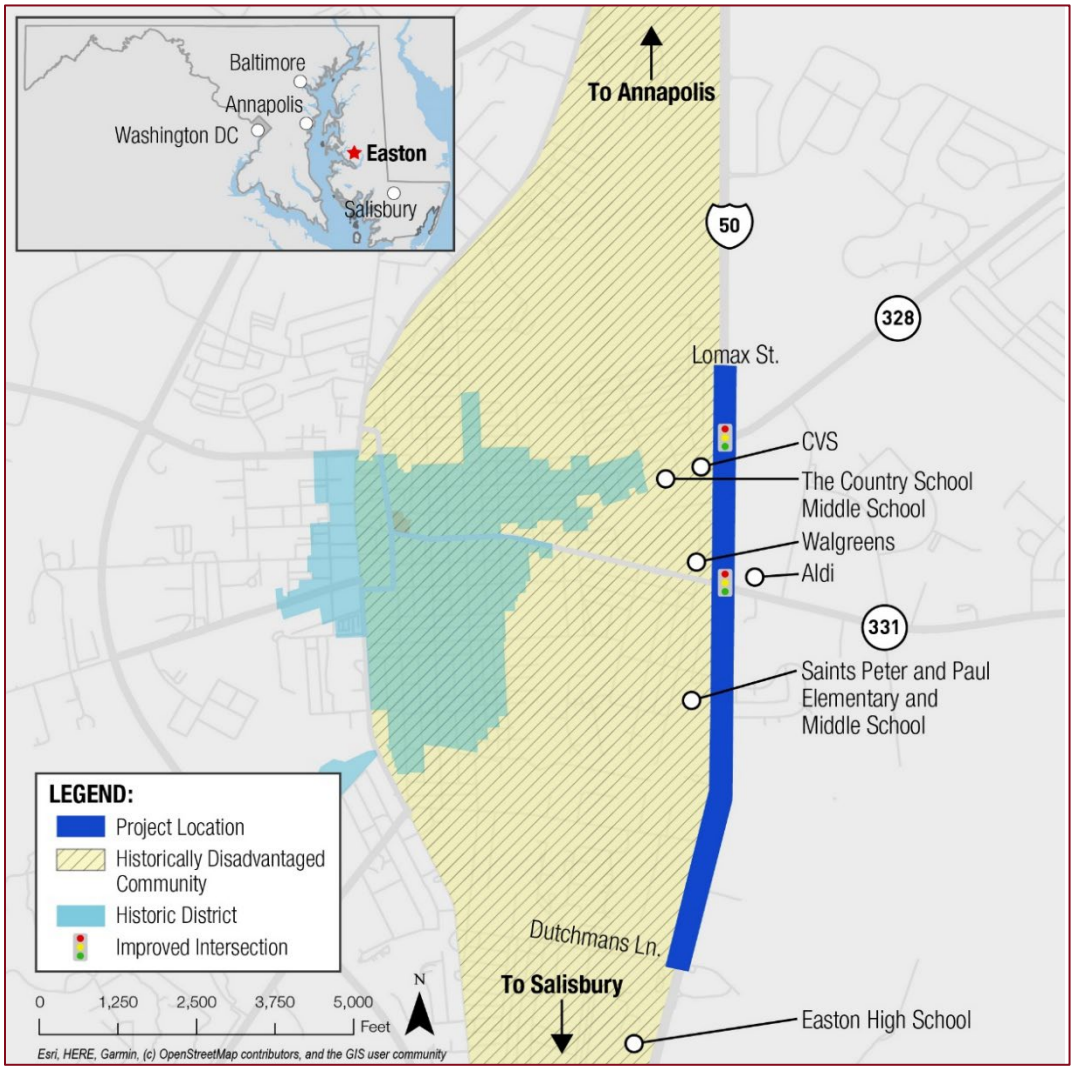


The Project strongly aligns with USDOT goals for the RCN Grant Program by proactively and holistically addressing barriers to community connectivity and access to essential destinations along US 50. This inclusive Project will dramatically improve quality of life and address historic inequities in a community that has seen essential services move to a car-dependent access model, with limited infrastructure to allow residents to access resources without relying on car ownership.

Location and Map

The Project is located in Easton, Maryland (Figure 3), with the majority of the Project taking place within Census Tract 24041960400, a disadvantaged community as defined by the Council on Environmental Quality's CEJST. Easton is a small rural town with a population of 17,118 people. Easton is not within an urbanized area of 200,000 or more and, therefore, is considered rural. Easton is on the Delmarva Peninsula of Maryland and is part of the Eastern Shore region. This region is characterized by rural landscape, agricultural history, and historic small towns like Easton. Easton is 42 miles from Annapolis, Maryland; 59 miles from Baltimore, Maryland; and 73 miles from Washington, DC.

Figure 3. Project Area: US 50 from Dutchman's Lane to West of Lomax Street



The Project area is contained within an identified historically disadvantaged community as defined by the Council on Environmental Quality's CEJST. Furthermore, the Project area is within a federally designated opportunity zone that provides federal tax incentives for investments in distressed communities. The State of Maryland identifies the town of Easton as a Priority Funding Area, which is a designation for local governments requesting state support for future economic growth and development. These designated areas receive priority funding over other projects within the state.

The population residing within proximity to the Project area endure socioeconomic, transportation, health, and environmental burdens. The USDOT Equitable Transportation Community (ETC) Explorer evaluates specific disadvantages to communities from the national level to the census tract. The census tract within the Project area rates three out of the five components exceeding the percentile for disadvantaged census tracts (ETC Explorer). The Project area census tract indicates a significant disadvantage for transportation insecurity, ranking in the 72nd percentile for transportation cost burden and within the 87th percentile for transportation safety. This rank indicates that only 13% of census tracts in the nation have transportation issues exceeding the Project area's census tract (ETC Explorer). The Project will work to minimize these disadvantages while promoting future opportunities for context-sensitive transportation and development standards within Easton along US 50.

Merit Criteria

The following table shows which of the merit criteria elements are discussed within the sections below with links to the locations where each component of the criteria are addressed.

Table 1. Reconnecting Communities and Neighborhoods Merit Criteria to be Addressed by the Project

Reconnecting Communities and Neighborhoods Merit Criteria	How this Project Addresses the Reconnecting Communities and Neighborhoods Merit Criteria
1. Equity and Environmental Justice	▪ Analysis of harmful historic or current policies ▪ How proposed solutions equitably distribute benefits and mitigate impacts ▪ Anticipated negative construction impacts and proposed mitigation plans
2. Access	▪ New or improved, context-sensitive, affordable transportation options to increase safe mobility and connectivity for all, including for people with disabilities, to daily destinations ▪ Safe accommodation for all users and seamless integration with the surrounding character, context, and land use, with consideration of public health, nature, and the economy ▪ Creating transportation choices for individuals to move freely with or without a car ▪ Existing feasibility studies
3. Facility Suitability	▪ Facility presents significant barriers to access, mobility, and economic development; poorly suited to the community ▪ Removal of barriers, including over-reliance on automobiles, to reconnect communities for people to live, work, play, and move freely and safely ▪ Eligible facility currently an environmental burden on the community ▪ Impacts to goods movement, both regional and local, that uses the eligible facility
4. Community Engagement and Community-based Stewardship, Management, and Partnerships	▪ Community-centered approach to envision a solution that reconnects and/or mitigates burdens to meaningfully redress inequities and benefit economically disadvantaged communities and addresses community priorities ▪ A complete description of resources committed to the Project and fully outlining funding commitments from federal and non-federal sources, including the following: USDOT formula funding, state or local funding, in-kind support, philanthropic contributions, public and private financing, and private sector funds; budget to numerically reflect all
5. Equitable Development	▪ Supportive of a local, regional, or state equitable development plan ▪ How the proposed Project will encourage public and private investments to support greater commercial and mixed-income residential development near public transportation, along rural main streets, or in walkable neighborhoods
6. Climate and Environment	▪ Reduction in transportation-related pollution, such as air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions ▪ Hot spot areas of extreme heat and lack of greenspace ▪ Consideration of climate resilience, stormwater, and flood risk management ▪ High-quality choices for lower-carbon travel, such as walking, cycling, and rolling, and transit that reduce greenhouse gas emissions and promote active travel ▪ A Local/Regional/State Climate Action Plan that results in lower greenhouse gas emissions has been prepared and the project directly supports that Climate Action Plan
7. Workforce Development and Economic Opportunity	▪ Local inclusive economic development and entrepreneurship, such as the inclusion of disadvantaged business enterprises, minority-owned businesses, women-owned businesses, or 8(a) firms

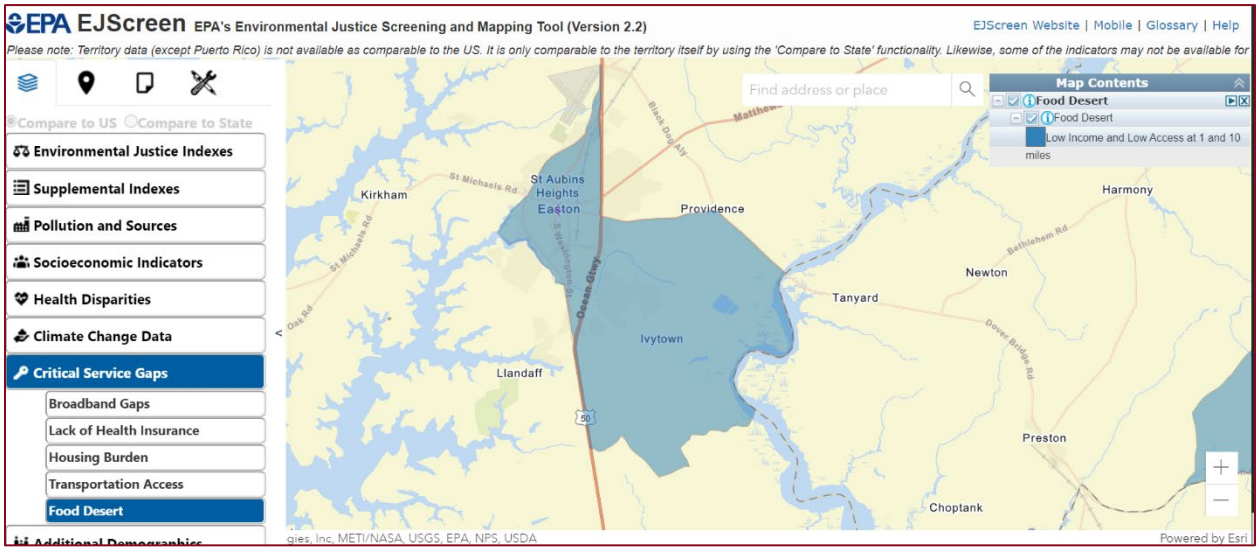
1. Equity and Environmental Justice

Analysis of Harmful Historic Policies

The town of Easton, in Talbot County, Maryland, is one of, if not the oldest, Black community in the history of the United States, with hundreds of freed slaves moving to the Hill neighborhood as early as the 1790s. Easton has a rich history that is deeply rooted in resilience. Having been established for so many generations, this community has dealt with significant setbacks and mistreatment that have harmful effects to this day, including limited opportunities for upward mobility. These harmful effects also include those of the Jim Crow laws through the 1950s that drastically affected Easton and the Eastern Shore at large by keeping wealth, resources, and power largely in the hands of white landowners, influencing housing, education, and employment for decades to come. Related to this, the Ku Klux Klan reemerged in Maryland in 1965, wreaking havoc in Black communities along the Eastern Shore, including Easton. These events instill generational trauma that affects how low-income and Black communities operate and mobilize over decades and has definitive impacts on these communities today.

Today, Easton's Black population, in particular, continues to struggle to achieve upward mobility, and a large portion of the town is considered disadvantaged. With a median income of $44,000, the historically disadvantaged census tract within the project area has a median income 52% lower than the state of Maryland (MDOTPlan). In addition, the median income for Easton is $73,000 and 20 percent lower than the state of Maryland's median income of $91,000. The Council on Environmental Quality's CEJST describes the majority of Easton as disadvantaged because of several thresholds, including a low median income in the tract compared with the national average. Additional challenges include access to healthy food and grocery options, as Easton is designated as a food desert according to EPA EJScreen (Figure 4), as well as residents facing a high housing cost burden (89th percentile nationwide according to the EPA's EJScreen tool), which only exacerbates inequity.

Figure 4. Easton Food Deserts



Source: EPA EJScreen Mapping Tool

Transportation is an important component of the challenges facing Easton residents. The USDOT Equitable Transportation Community (ETC) Explorer shows that the census tract within the Project area has three out of the five components exceeding the percentile for

disadvantaged census tracts (ETC Explorer) - in other words, the tract faces multiple types of burdens that interact and amplify each other to create challenges residents must face in their daily lives. The Project area census tract ranks in the 72nd percentile for transportation cost burden and within the 87th percentile for transportation safety. This means that just 13% of census tracts in the nation have transportation issues exceeding the Project area's census tract (ETC Explorer). Local providers have uncovered these challenges as well: the Neighborhood Service Center Inc. of Talbot County, a non-profit community action agency that provides services and assistance to low-income families and elderly residents, completed a Community Needs Assessment for 2019–2022, which identified reliable transportation as a top-5 need for Talbot County's low-income community. Out of 16 cities and towns in Talbot County, 69% of the Neighborhood Service Center's clients were from Easton.

US 50 is a crucial route for communities within Easton to access different parts of the town and connect with different communities. Unfortunately for the surrounding communities, the highway's design creates barriers to walking, cycling, using a wheelchair, and using other forms of active transportation, forcing community members to rely on expensive motor vehicles to access resources within their own town. In addition, the community faces the impacts of emissions and the health effects of traffic proximity from the roadway. There are low-income populations in Easton that are unable to access parks, community spaces, or grocery stores because of this barrier. Currently, driving is often the only viable method of transportation for these populations to access these vital services and destinations.

Proposed Solutions That Equitably Distribute Benefits and Mitigate Impacts

The Project will address these disadvantages by allowing Easton residents to safely access important resources without taking on the additional burden of car ownership. Pedestrian improvements to US 50 will allow the low-income population that cannot drive or cannot spare the resources for car ownership to access parts of the town that are currently inaccessible to them. Safe pedestrian access to grocery stores, greenspaces, and pharmacies along this important corridor will allow residents to reach essential daily destinations while avoiding the costs as well as the environmental impacts of car ownership.

Anticipated Negative Construction Impacts and Proposed Mitigation Plans

Given the short timeline for construction, very few negative impacts are expected on the Easton community. During construction, MDOT uses best practices to limit noise to include off-peak construction windows, communicate about disruptions to transportation through multiple-mediums, and ensure that construction debris, dust, and waste are handled appropriately with limited impacts to the environment and residents. Right-of-way for the project has already been acquired and a programmatic categorical exclusion (PCE) has been approved as of September 7, 2023. A meeting is planned in the Easton in October 2023 to ensure that community members are aware of the upcoming project and have an additional opportunity to provide input.

2. Access

Context-sensitive, Affordable Transportation Options to Increase Safe Mobility

Easton has a long history that favors small-town community character and a strong quality of life. Easton was listed within the top 100 small towns in America, according to Livability in 2023, and is a finalist in USA Today's Best Small Town Cultural Scene for 2023. Easton boasts cultural

amenities, such as the Talbot Historical Society Museum, Academy Art Museum, and Avalon Theatre. These cultural amenities are in the historic core of Easton west of US 50. The existing historic downtown Easton represents the desired character of the town. The historic downtown has urban character with walkable streets that are designed at the human scale. The Project elements extend these desired traits to US 50, promoting a human-scale environment.

The Project enhances access to Easton's historic core while repairing physical barriers that discourage access to essential services and daily destinations. Furthermore, the Project promotes access to regional fixed-route shuttle (Locally Operated Transit services (LOTS)) with the Maryland Upper Shore Transit (MUST) Program. The MUST program is a state-formed partnership with the local community service providers who provide planning and operational oversight, while the state provides funding and Federal Transit Administration (FTA) compliance through the Maryland Transit Administration (MTA). The MUST shuttle has four routes passing through Easton and two stops within the Project area near MD 328. Enhancing pedestrian and ADA access to these routes will promote safety and equitable access to local and regional transit services. The Project promotes safety through strategic design improvements at the human scale and traffic improvements to major intersections and turning lanes. Currently, pedestrian infrastructure along US 50 is either fully absent or deficient. The six-lane highway has several intersections with no signalized crosswalks, pedestrian islands, or sidewalk facilities. Street design and access within the Project area are designed for automobiles and nothing else.

Figure 5. Current Condition with Plastic Delineators

Prioritizes Safety for All Users of US 50

The Project is primarily a safety improvement effort that proposes new pedestrian facilities at major intersections, traffic flow improvements, and new sidewalks along the corridor.

The Project area is extremely car dependent and can present unsafe conditions for pedestrians and cyclists. A 2019 traffic study (attached to this application) noted observations of several pedestrians crossing mid-block at Arcadia Street and other locations away from traffic signals. The width, speed, and volume of US 50 makes crossing mid-block extremely hazardous for pedestrians and creates a barrier for access to daily destinations. The approximate width of US 50 including the median is close to 100 feet with six lanes of traffic and limited pedestrian infrastructure. The 2019 Traffic study illustrates peak Level of Service (LOS) as LOS D at the MD331 intersection indicating high density traffic and volume at near capacity. The American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials recommends pedestrian treatments at mid-block if the distance between signalized intersections exceeds 660 feet. With the lack of pedestrian signalization at intersections, the distance between signals at MD 328 and MD 331 is 1,700 feet. Although pedestrians crossing mid-block is extremely dangerous, the excessive distance between signalized crossings encourages these hazardous crossings.

Overall, the Project area has experienced a total of 217 crashes over a 4-year period from 2019 through 2022. Over this period, there were 116 injuries in the Project area. The statewide average is significantly lower with 73.5 injuries. The number of total crashes, crashes with injuries, and crashes causing property damage are all significantly higher than statewide averages (Table 2).

Table 2. Crashes in the Project Areas

Crash Type	Project Area	Study	Statewide
Fatal	0	0	1.2
Injury	116	118.3[a]	73.5
Property Damage	134	190[a]	132
Total	**217**	**309.2[a]**	**207.6**

Source: MDOT Office of Traffic and Safety Traffic Development & Support Division

[a] Significantly higher than statewide

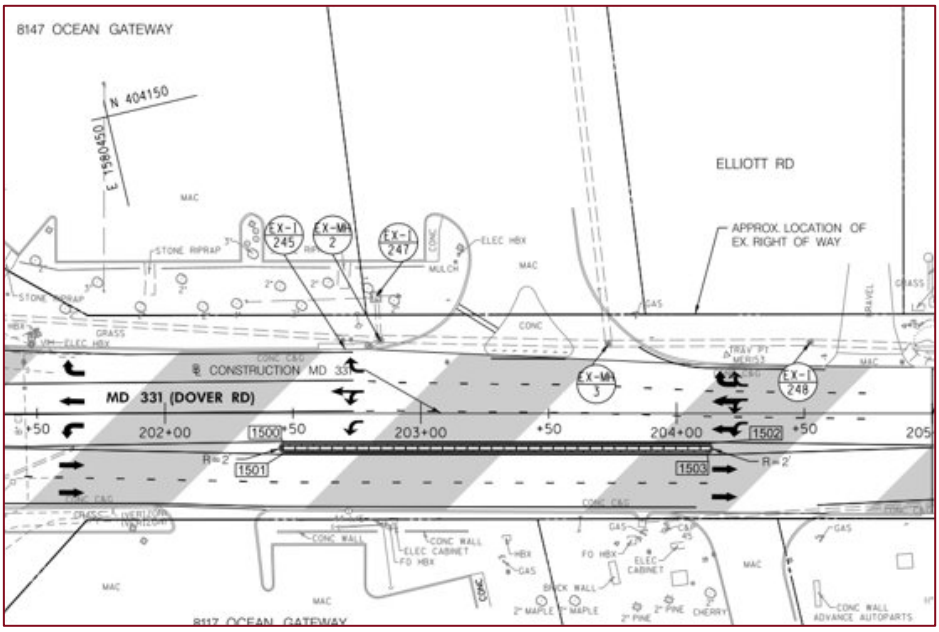
According to the 2019 traffic study, most of the crashes identified in the Project area occurred at two intersections of US 50 with MD 328 and MD 331. Nearly 43% of all crashes recorded between 2014 and 2018 occurred at these two intersections. This Project will prioritize safety improvements at these two intersections. The Project will lengthen the left-turn lane at the MD 331 intersection and construct paved sidewalks along with signalized high-visibility crosswalks and pedestrian islands.

Enhances Access to Daily Destinations

US 50 provides access to several places of business and activity zones in Easton. The local neighborhood grocery store, Aldi, is located at the intersection of MD 331 and US 50 and is an essential service to the local area. The Project will promote safe access to essential services like grocery stores, healthcare facilities, and public schools (Figure 6). Easton High School is on the southwestern corner of Dutchman's Lane and US 50. The major intersection for the school will see improved pedestrian infrastructure, replaced stop bars and an improved high-visibility crosswalk.

Promotes Access for All, including Aging Populations

Figure 6. Raised Median Proposed at Aldi Entrance



The improvements to US 50 will include ADA design elements that are currently nonexistent in the Project area. Nearly 25% of Easton population is 65 years and older, and this elder demographic is expected to increase as baby boomers continue to enter retirement age. ADA access to essential services is a priority for aging populations as their need for services increases. In addition, Easton has a large percentage of individuals with disabilities, with census tracts ranging from the 73rd percentile to the 93rd percentile nationwide for the percent population with disabilities. The Project is also strongly supported by community-based organizations and non-profits supporting individuals with disabilities, including the Arc of the Central Chesapeake Region, which has provided a letter of support attached to this application.

Existing Feasibility Studies

The attached March 2019 traffic study performed by Kittelson & Associates found that adding sidewalks and improving pedestrian facilities at intersections will dramatically improve safety for pedestrians, and therefore allow far better access to daily destinations along the corridor.

3. Facility Suitability

Facility Presents Significant barriers to Access, Mobility, and Economic Development and is Poorly Suited to the Community

The Project will address ongoing safety and traffic flow issues that act as a barrier to economic opportunity, equity of access, and public health and welfare. US 50 is a physical barrier for residents of Easton. The roadway is currently designed for long-distance travel and was originally constructed in 1926 to serve as a national east-west connection from Sacramento, California, to Ocean City, Maryland. Crossing the wide roadway presents safety concerns for pedestrians trying to reach daily destinations, especially with the current limited pedestrian facilities. With six traffic lanes and no sidewalks, US 50 is a massive and intimidating barrier for any pedestrian, trying to reach pharmacies or grocery stores, including wheelchair users or elderly residents. Similarly, school children are presented with a sea of pavement in order to simply get a middle or high school education on the other side of the roadway. US 50 serves as a long-distance road and is classified as an Urban Other Principal Arterial, meaning it was expanded to serve out-of-town travelers but presents a burden for residents. The annual

average daily traffic in 2017 was 38,800 within the Project area, creating a mismatch for Easton with a population of approximately 17,000. This issue affects Easton and its residents the most. Although US 50 functions as a commuter through the town, it needs to accommodate local traffic to promote safety among all users, which the Project aims to do through several design improvements that accommodate local traffic and active transportation.

Given the current design of the roadway, Easton residents must take on the burden of car ownership to safely and conveniently reach the daily destinations along US 50. This is an especially problematic situation given that a low income, disadvantaged community lines US 50 and includes a large portion of the Project area. That census tract is in the 91st percentile nationwide for low median income when compared with median incomes in the area, meaning residents there cannot afford to purchase and maintain reliable vehicles just to reach essential services in their own neighborhood. The relatively high cost of housing in Easton only adds to this burden.

Promotes Economic Opportunity by Enhancing Safe Access and Mobility for Vulnerable Populations

The Project addresses a significant mismatch between a long-distance, high-speed road design and the surrounding small town of Easton. The Project is an effort to bridge this well-known barrier within the town and promote economic opportunity through strategic enhancements of the corridor. The Project enables pedestrian access to several businesses along US 50, enhancing economic opportunity for business owners along the highway. In addition, intersection improvements at MD 328 and MD 331 will enable safer access to historic downtown Easton. With no crosswalk or pedestrian signalization available at these intersections, downtown access west of the Project area is hazardous and discouraged. The Project addresses these issues by constructing high-visibility continental crosswalks with pedestrian signalization and pedestrian islands. The proposed sidewalks along US 50 will connect to existing sidewalks on Dover Road and Goldsborough Street; these connections will act as gateways to downtown Easton. The Project will capture unrealized pedestrian trips to the historic downtown originating within proximity to US 50.

Eligible Facility Currently an Environmental Burden on the Community

With the volume of traffic on US 50, the roadway creates air pollution as well as dividing the community from essential resources. The Easton area is in the 52nd percentile for asthma and 66th percentile nationwide for traffic proximity and volume, in part because US 50 runs directly adjacent to Easton and several of its communities. Currently air quality in Easton is good to moderate, but the Town is at risk of extreme heat in the future, which could exacerbate the impacts of emissions from the roadway.

Impacts on Goods Movement

Impacts on goods movement are expected to be minimal for this small-scale project. While commercial vehicles including trucks may experience some short delays due to the signaling and sidewalks slightly narrowing the roadway, these mitigation measures will not have a significant effect on the supply chain.

4. Community Engagement and Community-based Stewardship, Management, and Partnerships

Community-Centered Approach to Envision a Solution That Mitigates Burdens

The Project has been identified by Talbot County as a top transportation priority and listed in the County's Consolidated Transportation Plan (CTP) 2023 state funding priority letter. Easton residents have contributed significant input to the development of the plans for the Project, which will mitigate the burden of car ownership for residents as well as the burden of the current, wide, car-centered US 50 roadway. The Project began with a traffic study in 2013, followed by a preliminary investigation in 2016, and a semi-final review that proposed median closures at Arcadia Street and Lomax Street in 2018. As a result of community concerns expressed in 2018, MDOT completed a second traffic study in 2019 and continued to engage the community through additional meetings from December 2018 through April 2019. The new traffic study requested by the Easton community resulted in updates, such as removing the median closures at Arcadia Street and Lomax Street. The MDOT team again worked with the Town of Easton in June 2019 and has also engaged the public throughout the Project as part of the MDOT planning process.

Partnerships and Resources Committed to the Project

The project has strong support from the Town of Easton and the Easton and Talbot County community, including civic, state, local, and philanthropic organizations. Talbot County included the Project in their transportation priority letter for MDOT's 2023 Consolidated Transportation Plan. Supporters include local agencies serving people with disabilities, transportation providers, state and local officials, the Talbot County Council, and the Easton Economic Development Corporation. MDOT will provide a local match of $1,121,600 which is committed to the project, as outlined in the Budget attached to this application, and substantiated in a letter of funding commitment signed by Secretary Paul J. Wiedefeld and attached to this application. No additional federal funds will be used for the project. Further details about the project budget are provided in the attached budget document.

The letters of support currently obtained for this Project and attached to this application include the following:

- Governor Wes Moore
- Delegate Chris Adams, 37-B
- Delegate Thomas Hutchinson, 37-B
- Easton Economic Development Corporation
- Mid-Shore Regional Council and MUST
- State Senator Johnny Mautz, 37
- Talbot County Council President Chuck Callahan
- The Arc Central Chesapeake Region
- University of Maryland, Talbot County Extension

5. Equitable Development

Supports Local, Regional, and State Equitable Development Plans

The Project is aligned with the state equitable development plan which identifies Bike and pedestrian infrastructure improvements as critical strategies toward equitable development.

In addition, the Project supports several local plans, including the Town of Easton's 2010 Comprehensive Plan and the 2009 Bicycle and Pedestrian Action Plan. A key objective outlined in the action plan is linking neighborhoods to the center of Easton, major activity centers, and other neighborhoods through a connected network enabling children and adults to walk comfortably between destinations. The plan also prioritizes filling in gaps within the existing sidewalk network on arterial and collector roadways. The Project works to accomplish both key objectives while also supporting safe access to essential services along US 50.

Project improvements are in alignment with the 2016 Talbot County Comprehensive Plan, which states a need to mitigate safety hazards, congestion, and high traffic volumes at points along US 50. US 50 is the primary principal arterial in Talbot County enabling regional access from urban centers including Annapolis, Maryland; Washington, DC; and Baltimore, Maryland.

Project area improvements have been discussed since the early 2000s, as safety has been a continually growing concern. The Talbot County Council lists several elements of the Project in their 2023 priority project letter, including street intersection improvements at MD 328 and MD 331.

Promotes Integrated Land Uses that Enhance Opportunity for Mixed-use Development and Additional Density along US 50

The Project area along US 50 in Easton is primarily defined by auto-oriented businesses and storefronts prioritizing access for vehicles traveling along the corridor. Encouraging pedestrian activity through the Project improvements (Figure 7) will promote connections to neighborhoods west of the corridor that are characterized by a more urban environment and contain pedestrian infrastructure. Over time, these connections will encourage integrated land uses and promote developments that consider pedestrian access. The Project supports opportunities for public and private investment in the corridor, with capacity for greater density. Future opportunities for investments can leverage the unique cultural and historic character of Easton in conjunction with infrastructure improvements enhancing access and quality of life for residents and visitors.

Figure 7. Proposed Improvements

6. Climate and Environment

Improves Air Quality and Reduction in Transportation-related Pollution

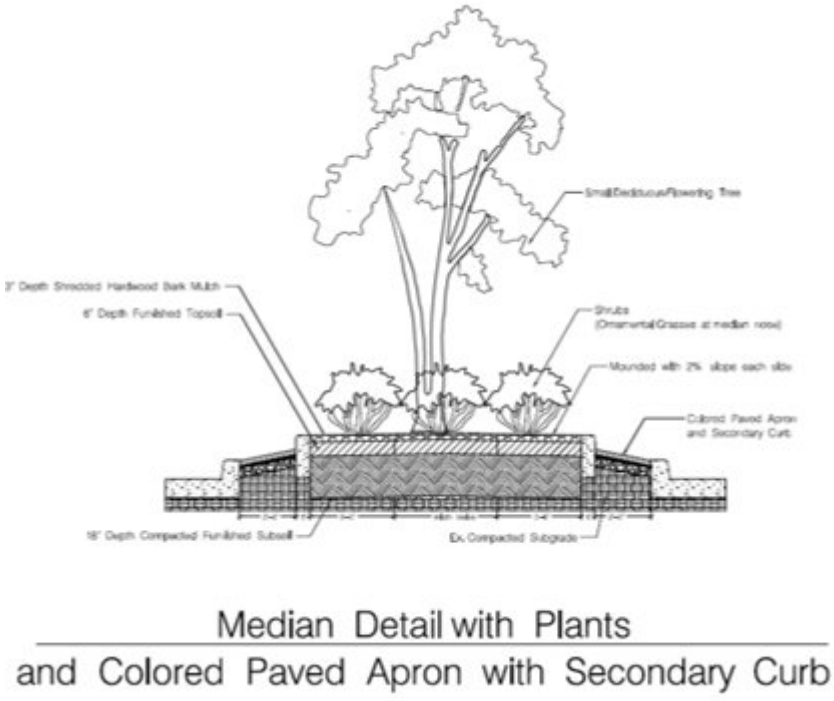
The Easton tract is considered disadvantaged by the Council on Environmental Quality's CEJST because of several threshold markings, including expected agricultural loss rate under climate change. This area sits on the 52nd percentile for asthma and 66th percentile for traffic proximity and volume. This does not come as a surprise given that US 50 runs directly adjacent to Easton and several of its communities. Although air quality in Easton is currently ranked as good/moderate, it remains at risk of extreme heat in the future with an expected 128.6% increase in the number of days with temperatures exceeding 104 degrees Fahrenheit over the next 30 years. Transportation projects do not stop climate change, nor do they stop cities from getting hotter. However, the increased need for driving over time leads to a buildup of particulate matter in the air that decreases air quality and leads to heat dome effects, which can be deadly.

The Project will influence how fast these climate change impacts happen and provide high-q-quality choices for active transportation options and access to transit, which is provided in the Town of Easton by MUST, which has provided a letter of support for the project. The Project will increase and enhance the infrastructure used by pedestrians, increasing the amount that Easton residents will opt to walk to different communities and town amenities. This increase in walking goes hand in hand with a decrease of driving over time, impacting the overall carbon emissions emitted by town residents and decreasing negative air quality impacts. This reduction in driving and increase in walking as a viable mode of transportation will also reduce noise burdens on communities adjacent to the highway and the town of Easton at large.

Increases Access to Greenspace while Addressing Hot Spots and Tree Canopy Gaps

The pedestrian infrastructure improvements will be conducive to more time spent at different greenspaces currently available within and around Easton as well as addressing hot spots through extensive plantings (Figure 8). Because these greenspaces are currently difficult to access or completely inaccessible by foot, the increase in accessibility to town amenities, like greenspaces, will bring more Easton residents to these areas. Plantings and landscape improvements have been included in the project both to address drainage concerns through blue green infrastructure and to mitigate the heat island effect that can occur along wide roadways such as US 50 as climate change worsens. Easton has several low-income communities that will bear the brunt of climate change. Improving access to town amenities, greenspaces, and grocery stores while addressing hot spots such as wide areas of pavement increase these communities' resilience as they face a heating planet and a changing climate.

Figure 8. Plantings and Landscaping Improvements



Consideration of Climate Resilience, Stormwater, and Flood Risk Management

Climate resilience and stormwater management are an important component of the Project. Bioswales and landscape improvements along the roadway will improve the stormwater drainage system of the town and increase resilience to flooding from extreme precipitation (Figures 9 and 10). Bioswales are a type of blue green infrastructure that sustainably addresses flooding to ensure local residents can access essential resources even during extreme weather events.

Figure 9. Proposed Bioswales

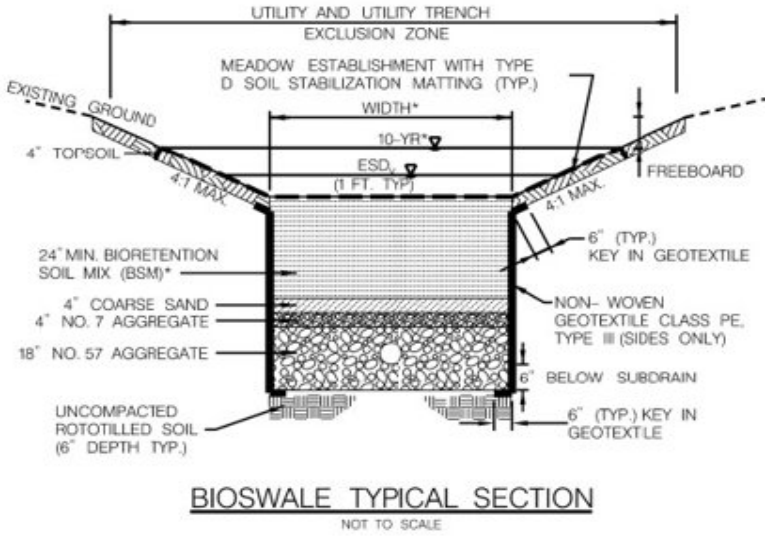


Figure 10. Proposed Stormwater Improvements

Supporting Climate Action Plans

The Project supports the 2020 *Maryland Department of Transportation Greenhouse Gas Reduction Act Plan*, which commits state agencies, including MDOT, to a 40% reduction in carbon emissions by 2030 and serves as the basis of the state's Climate Action Plan (CAP). MDOT's substantial contribution to this statewide plan includes dramatically reducing carbon emissions from the transportation sector through improvements, such as increasing bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure throughout the Maryland transportation network. This Project supports MDOT's CAP goal by implementing pedestrian improvements on a corridor that is currently car oriented, encouraging a mode shift from single occupancy- vehicles to climate-friendly, active transportation in the Easton community.

Supporting High-Quality Choices for Lower-Carbon Travel

The entire Project supports and encourages decarbonization and climate resiliency. Improving pedestrian infrastructure along US 50 will decrease community reliance on vehicles and open up opportunities for cleaner methods of transportation that reduce the area's carbon footprint and increase air quality, including walking and transit. Encouraging and supporting safe and convenient active transportation that allows residents to access daily destinations is the central goal of the project, as described in the Access section of this narrative. In addition to MDOT's Climate Action Plan, this Project is in line with the Town of Easton's 2009 Bicycle and Pedestrian Action Plan, which describes the Town of Easton's ambitions to increase pedestrian and bicycle access for its communities.

7. Workforce Development and Economic Opportunity

Local Inclusive Economic Development and Entrepreneurship

MDOT partners with DBEs to deliver projects. MDOT SHA examines each contract based on the exact contract bid items, quantities, and other factors and then compares that information to the available DBE subcontractors in the geographic area of the state for each bid item. This information is used along with other factors to determine the DBE goal for each specific contract. Recent community enhancement contracts have yielded DBE goals in the range of 12 percent to 25 percent.

Easton has a growing and diverse economy with approximately 7,900 employees and an employee growth rate of approximately 1% each year. The largest employee base in Easton is within the healthcare and social assistance industry. The median age in Easton is 42, with approximately 25% of the population above 65. Maintaining and growing the workforce in the healthcare industry is essential to promoting Easton's reputable and attractive quality of life. The Project enhances access for local employees and promotes safe mobility within the town. These Project features will help Easton promote their strengths as a vibrant small town with a growing diverse economy and essential health services for a growing population of seniors.

Enhances Economic Opportunity through Heritage Tourism

The Project improvements enhance opportunities in heritage tourism throughout Easton. Talbot County reported more than 660,000 visitors in 2021 generating $64 million in federal, state, and local taxes. These are the highest numbers in the history of the county, indicating that there is a vibrant cultural, heritage tourism, and arts scene on the Eastern Shore.
The Project is within a segment of the Maryland Scenic Byways system, which highlights prominent historical places and natural areas throughout the state. Specifically, the Project area is within the Chesapeake Country segment of the Maryland Scenic Byways system, which highlights cultural focal points in Easton, including the Avalon Theatre. This part of the Maryland Scenic Byways system boasts natural landscape characterized as the tidewater region. The area attracts outdoor enthusiasts as well as the casual passerby. In addition, the Easton Courthouse is a designated site on the Civil War Trails system, which attracts a substantial number of tourists each year, and there are many sites associated with the Underground Railroad within the region. The Project supports these amenities by mitigating safety issues present in the Project area and promoting active transportation through new pedestrian facilities.

Project Readiness and Environmental Risk

Environmental Risk

During its *National Environmental Protection Act* (NEPA) review process, the MDOT State Highway Administration (SHA) received a categorial exclusion for the Project and has advanced the Project to final design. A reevaluation was recently completed, with a programmatic categorical exclusion received on September 7, 2023. The Project is also included on the FY24 State Transportation Improvement Plan (STIP) as Rural Safety and Spot Improvement MC # 22-76 06/16/2023. With these approvals already complete, this Project would move expeditiously to construction if awarded funding.

MDOT SHA administers the Transportation Alternative Program (TAP) on behalf of FHWA. The program promotes projects that enhance mobility and accessibility, as well as the cultural, aesthetic, historic, and environmental aspects of Maryland's transportation network. TAP funds projects that create bicycle and pedestrian facilities, restore historic transportation buildings, convert abandoned railway corridors to pedestrian trails, and mitigate highway runoff. MDOT SHA assists TAP project sponsors to obtain necessary approvals and, as such, has the technical experience and expertise to deliver the environmental approvals for the Project.

Technical Capacity

In delivering the Project, MDOT will rely on its long history of working relationships and partnerships across jurisdictions, government agencies, the community, and engineering and construction consultants. MDOT will assume responsibility for the maintenance of the new infrastructure and can maintain it in a state of good repair. The ability of MDOT to work collaboratively with local government agencies and stakeholders will enable the agency to seamlessly transition between phases of the Project while continually engaging the community to gather additional input along the way.

MDOT is responsible for numerous transportation projects annually. For example, the MDOT Consolidated Transportation Program currently allocates SHA more than $1.5 billion dollars to its Major Construction Program for Fiscal Year (FY) 2024 alone. Capital transportation projects that include federal funding, like this Project, are standard for MDOT. Some recent examples of these efforts include the Calvert County 261 Chesapeake Beach Project, where MDOT SHA, in collaboration with local stakeholders, reconfigured the existing roadway to improve pedestrian accommodations.

Project Schedule

The Project began with a traffic study in 2013, with preliminary investigation completed in 2016 and an additional traffic study completed in 2019 upon request from the Easton community. MDOT held public meetings with the Easton community in December 2018 through 2019, as well as June 2019, and public engagement will continue to play a pivotal role in both shaping the Project and informing residents about the upcoming plans. MDOT has completed public involvement sessions throughout the course of the Project and will complete additional public engagement in October 2023.

The Project is currently at 90% design, and final design is anticipated to be completed by March 2024, with construction expected to begin in August 2024, as shown in the Project schedule in Table 3. Coordination with utilities and right-of-way acquisition have been

completed for the Project. Delays in right-of-way-- acquisition and utility coordination are not anticipated because the proposed alignment uses existing infrastructure where possible.

Table 3. Project Schedule

Task	Start Date	Completion	Duration (Months)
Public Engagement	October 2023	October 2023	1
Final Design	January 2024	March 2024	3
Advertisement	May 2024	May 2024	1
Bid Opening	June 2024	June 2024	1
Bid Award	July 2024	July 2024	1
Construction	August 2024	August 2027	36

Required Approvals and Permitting

The Project aligns with local comprehensive plans, including the Town of Easton's 2010 Comprehensive Plan, and is included in the FY 2024 STIP as Rural Safety and Spot Improvement MC # 22-76 06/16/2023. The Project will comply with ADA, NEPA, and all other applicable state and federal regulations (for example, pedestrian and bicycle facilities must meet state and federal standards for width, grade, signing, and materials). The Project also complies with MDOT SHA's utility permit and right-of-way acquisition process.

Project Risks and Mitigation Strategies

The following table outlines potential project risks and mitigation strategies that MDOT will use to ensure the project will be implemented within the proposed budget and on schedule.

Table 4. Project Risks and Mitigation Strategies

Project Risks	Mitigation Strategy
Environmental Impacts	The Project is anticipated to have a low environmental impact due to its location and proximity to existing transportation assets. The Project has already received a categorical exclusion. An additional review and update will be required, but no delays or significant environmental impacts are anticipated.
Delays in Permitting Process	MDOT has a strong relationship with the Town of Easton and Talbot County, and will work closely to communicate transparently through the design and construction process. MDOT SHA has strong working relationships with regulatory agencies and a programmatic agreement with FHWA to streamline the NEPA process for minor projects, and this has already been completed.