

Planning



BALTIMORE COUNTY

MARYLAND

October 16, 2008

JAMES T. SMITH JR.
County Executive

Mr. John Porcari, Secretary
Maryland Department of Transportation
7201 Corporate Center Drive
P.O. Box 548
Hanover, MD 21076

Dear Secretary Porcari:

The communities of Baltimore County are alive today as never before. For the past six years, our historic communities have been in the midst of a renaissance that is bringing new businesses and new residents to our historic downtowns. At the same time, newer communities like Owings Mills and White Marsh are flourishing as they attract major national businesses and create new neighborhoods each and everyday.

As our older beltway communities thrive and our newer town centers grow ever more prosperous, it is important that we prepare our infrastructure with a long view—one that not only recognizes the requirements of today's Baltimore County, but also anticipates the needs of our communities tomorrow.

The projects that we have identified as priorities are important to the future of Baltimore County's communities. I am well aware that the State's structural deficit poses a significant challenge to us all, but I am confident that along with the Maryland Department of Transportation we will be able to develop a plan for meeting the needs of Baltimore County's infrastructure in a fiscally responsible manner.

Given the latest budget forecast and realignment we are very pleased that resources remain available to continue the study for the Dolfield Boulevard/I-795 Interchange project. In light of the new fiscal realities, we have pared our priority list from thirteen to ten projects.

1. Dolfield Boulevard/I-795 Interchange and the Owing Mills New Town Development

The Dolfield Boulevard/I-795 interchange remains Baltimore County's number one local transportation priority. A preliminary feasibility study, partially funded by the County, has been completed, and the study documented the need for the interchange and associated improvements not only for the County but also as improvements to the State's existing system. As you know, we recently entered into another partnering agreement with the State Highway Administration to fund up to \$625,000 of a project planning study for this vitally needed improvement.



I do have several minor concerns that the analysis conducted so far may underestimate the consequences of the no-build option on the local and State road system and that the needed intersection improvements on some of the local roads may be excessive. However, the Project Planning Study will provide an appropriate vehicle to review these minor concerns. I am also hopeful that Project Planning will identify opportunities for staged construction that will permit the interchange to be constructed prior to much of the associated mainline widening of I-795. Although that widening is also needed, it would add considerable cost to the overall project, possibly delaying the advancement of the Construction program.

2. Continue Beltway Improvements

Located almost entirely in our borders, I-695 has become Baltimore County's main street; however, it also serves as a major component in the infrastructure of the entire Baltimore region. It is vital that the current Beltway construction projects are kept on track to ensure that the Beltway provides adequate support for the region's mobility needs and economic growth. It is important that we keep the current construction projects on schedule so that other necessary repairs, such as the mainline widening projects, can begin.

3. BRAC Corridor Improvements

With the expected BRAC development and redevelopment along Pulaski Highway, we must examine potential improvements at major intersections along this corridor. In addition to potential intersection improvements, I would also like to assess whether additional through capacity is needed. We feel special consideration should be given to improvements along US40 between Ebenezer Road and Middle River Road. As we continue to refine our potential land use changes we will undoubtedly update our socio-economic forecast. In the southern portion of this corridor where Campbell Boulevard crosses US40 (current Mohrs Lane Bridge) and MD7, we continue to encourage the State to address needs for intersection improvements along with us.

Also, several businesses in the vicinity of the White Marsh Boulevard and Philadelphia Road interchange have indicated that they are having difficulty accessing the regional highway network through the existing partial interchange. Due to the nearby reconstruction that will be occurring as a result of the I-95 project, we feel it would be appropriate for the State to conduct an interchange study of MD 43 and MD7 to determine what improvements might be feasible and warranted to improve access to the regional highway network. Additionally, the proposed high-density mixed-use development at Nottingham Ridge will more than likely require improved access to White Marsh Boulevard.

With the BRAC realignment drawing closer and closer, it is imperative that we have the appropriate infrastructure to accommodate the new residents and jobs that we anticipate adding to this area. Our most urgent Streetscape request is for Pulaski Highway from the Harford County Line to the Baltimore City Line. The State Highway Administration has already funded a similar Streetscape Enhancement Project in Harford County that included removal of the concrete barrier, road resurfacing, construction of a planted and tree-lined median, and safe pedestrian crosswalks.

We hope that these Streetscape enhancements will be continued in the US40 corridor through Baltimore County. US40 is a "main street" linking Baltimore, Harford, and Cecil Counties as well as Baltimore City (the "Chesapeake Science and Security Corridor"). This is the area that will be most affected by BRAC expansion at Aberdeen Proving Ground. In Baltimore County, the corridor has a large inventory of low-intensity land-uses and thus offers tremendous potential to accommodate BRAC-related growth in a utility-served, Priority Funding Area.

However, in order to realize this potential the corridor needs a major streetscape project comparable to that done in Harford County, as well as the capacity enhancements suggested earlier. This Streetscape project will be an essential element of the branding for the Chesapeake Science and Security Corridor and will be coordinated with a revitalization plan for the US40 Corridor being undertaken by the County as part of its implementation of the BRAC Action Plan. We appreciate the commitment that the State has already made to improve US 40 between White Marsh Boulevard and Middle River Road. Given the new financial realities we would still like this project to move to construction as soon as possible.

4. Martin MARC TOD

With the renaissance of the Middle River area, the imminent BRAC realignment, and the ongoing development of MD43, the Road to Opportunity, I believe that a relocated and expanded MARC Station in Middle River has great potential. That potential is recognized in the new "MARC Growth and Investment Plan," which calls for parking expansion and station improvements for the Middle River facility. However, the County hopes to take this report's vision for MARC in Middle River even further. We hope to relocate the station to the east side of MD43, allowing it to be part of the redevelopment of the 2-million-square-foot former GSA Depot facility that was auctioned last year to a private investor for \$37.5 million. Baltimore County is eager to see the facility redeveloped as a mixed-use, transit-oriented development that can serve the need for additional office and residential space related to BRAC.

The County hopes that the relocation of the Middle River station will be part of the MARC investment plan during its initial ten-year horizon. However, to fully achieve the utility of all our MARC stations will require investment in double-decker coaches and eventually parking structures to provide adequate storage of commuter vehicles.

5. Streetscapes

In addition to the BRAC corridor Streetscape, we request a logical extension of the existing Loch Raven Boulevard Streetscape from Taylor Avenue to the Baltimore City Line as well as two eastside enhancement projects. We would like to see a streetscape project initiated on Merritt Boulevard from Peninsula Expressway to German Hill Road and another project on Eastern Boulevard from White Marsh Boulevard to Chase. Finally, we respectfully request construction funding for the Wilson Point Road Streetscape Project. This project began with a community-based planning process in 2000, but was unfortunately sidetracked for many years. Engineering began in early 2007 and will be completed in 2008. The project includes sidewalk

improvements on Eastern Boulevard from Martin Boulevard to Wilson Point Road, and roadway, drainage, and streetscape improvements on Wilson Point Road from Eastern Boulevard to Strawberry Point Road. This is an important project for the Wilson Point community, and they are eager to see it brought to its completion. I look forward to working together with the Department of Transportation to find a way to fully fund and finally complete this \$6.15 million project.

6. Construct New Rail Transit Lines

Baltimore County continues to be a strong supporter of the Baltimore Region Transit Plan and the transit planning process. A first class mass transit system is vital to the continued growth of communities throughout the Baltimore region. A comprehensive and integrated transit system is as important to the region's infrastructure as having appropriate highway capacity. With the release of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement, and the beginning of the public hearing process we draw ever closer to making a local selection for the Red Line corridor. We intend to do all we can to help keep the process on track for the beginning of construction in four years. As you are aware, last year the BRTB took the unprecedented step of swapping highway construction funds for transit construction funding in an attempt to elevate the profile of regional rail transportation. The MPO is in the midst of amending the long-range plan to include \$340 million in additional transit and transit related projects. For years the County has not had the resources to maintain the wooden bus shelters we built over thirty years ago. We would like to see the MTA take over ownership of these facilities as a transit element in the amended long-range plan.

7. Reisterstown Road

The pace of development in Owings Mills and the new development slated for the Metro Center site will require upgrades to Reisterstown Road and its associated intersections sooner than expected. We are pleased to see that design will continue on this project even though the right-of-way phase has been delayed due to budgetary restrictions.

8. Leeds Avenue Ramp Connector

The success of the Halethorpe MARC station has had the unintended consequence of adding significant traffic to the Arbutus community. This is particularly true during evening peak rush hours as commuters leaving the rail station utilize local Arbutus streets to reach the Leeds Avenue ramp westbound to I-695. We urge SHA to pursue a project to provide a direct connection from Southwestern Boulevard to the existing Leeds Avenue on-ramp.

9. I-695/MD144 The Promenade At Spring Grove

We understand the challenges in providing access for the significant amount of traffic likely to be generated by the proposed Promenade development. The Spring Grove site and adjacent parcels offer a unique opportunity for the Catonsville community. We urge the State Highway Administration to consider an access proposal to solve both existing traffic problems, and accommodate the needs of the proposed development, which support the vision for the

adjacent community including the recommendations of the Spring Grove 2010 Community Task Force.

10. I-83

Over the years, there has been explosive growth in Southern Pennsylvania along the I-83 corridor. Many of the people who live in these Pennsylvania towns are former Maryland residents who commute to Baltimore County and the Baltimore Region. As this increased traffic causes more congestion and delays along I-83, many commuters are starting to use rural County roads as alternative methods of travel. We believe it is time to begin an investigation of options and improvements that would relieve our rural roads from these commuter burdens. We are aware of York County's consideration of express commuter bus service to Hunt Valley and Light Rail connections. There appears to be significant interest in our northern communities in this proposal, and I hope that the Department of Transportation will support this effort.

I would also like to partner with the Department of Transportation to conduct a feasibility study on potential improvements to I-83 south of the Padonia Road interchange, as well as nearby intersections to relieve chronic traffic congestion on the ramps serving I-83.

I would like to thank you in advance for your consideration of all our critical projects. Given the recent write-downs from all levels of government and private sector I am keenly aware of the additional pressure you and your department are currently managing. I look forward to your county visit on November 10th and continuing to work with the Department of Transportation to provide Baltimore county and the State of Maryland the critical infrastructure it deserves.

Sincerely,

James T. Smith, Jr.
County Executive

- c: Honorable Martin O'Malley, Governor
Honorable Norman R. Stone and Baltimore County Senate delegation
Honorable Eric M. Bromwell and Baltimore County House delegation
Honorable Thomas V. Mike Miller, Jr., Senate President
Honorable Michael E. Busch, House Speaker
Fred Homan, Baltimore County CAO
Edward C. Adams, Jr., Director, Baltimore County Public Works
Emery Hines, Baltimore County Transportation