Martin O'Malley, *Governor*
Anthony G. Brown, *Lt. Governor*

Beverley K. Swaim-Staley, *Secretary*
Neil J. Pedersen, *Administrator*

October 22, 2010

Ms. Françoise M. Carrier
Chair
Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission
Montgomery County Planning Commission
Office of the Chairman
8787 Georgia Avenue
Silver Spring MD 20910

Dear Chair Carrier:

Thank you for your letter regarding the Mandatory Referral Review for the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) Intersection Improvement Project at MD 185 (Connecticut Avenue) and Jones Bridge Road/Kensington Parkway. The State Highway Administration (SHA) understands the importance of this project not only for BRAC in Bethesda, but also for the neighborhoods of the surrounding area. The SHA has reviewed your concerns on this project, to which we offer the following responses:

1. *Our staff received a revised Mandatory Referral submission on July 7th, only one week prior to the due date for a public posting of their memo to us. We believe that the truncated review time was not sufficient for a full review.*

   Response: Since the official submittal of the Mandatory Referral package in March, SHA has been working extensively on the review with the Montgomery County Planning Board, Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC), Montgomery County Department of Transportation (MCDOT), Howard Hughes Medical Institute (HHMI), local communities, and other stakeholders. The submittal was not intended to be an official submittal; rather, it was an interim submittal to address comments prior to an official submittal to the Montgomery County Planning Board. Once an official submittal is made, SHA will provide enough time for a thorough review by M-NCPPC.

2. *Phase 3 was deleted from the project under review, but since the intent is to build it as part of the same overall BRAC program, it should have been submitted with Phases 1 and 2.*

   Response: The BRAC intersection project at MD 185 and Jones Bridge Road/Kensington Parkway has been separated into three construction phases and, at this point, only Phase 1 and Phase 2 will be moving forward due to funding and time constraints. Phases 1 and 2 will include the widening along southbound and northbound MD 185, and Phase 3 will include the widening along eastbound and westbound Jones Bridge Road. Phase 3 of the proposed scope will affect the Montgomery County Category I Forest Conservation Easement along the frontage of HHMI. At the request of HHMI in early July, SHA decided to pull out Phase 3 from the Mandatory Referral Review package and only submit Phases 1 and 2.

3. *The ultimate SHA proposal requires the Board's approval of a forest conservation easement revision as well as additional park impacts that were not submitted for Mandatory Referral review.*

   Response: At the request of HHMI, Phase 3 has been pulled out from the submittal for Mandatory Referral review and deferred to a later date. The SHA has been working actively with the Montgomery County Planning Board, M-NCPPC, and HHMI regarding impacts and mitigations to the Forest Conservation Easement and park property. Our goal is to provide all necessary improvements at this intersection with minimum impacts to the environment and surrounding neighborhoods including M-NCPPC and HHMI, and to look for appropriate treatments and locations, both on-site and off-site, to mitigate the impacted forest conservation easements.

4. *The combined SHA and MCDOT agency proposals to address access concerns to the Chevy Chase Valley community that could be adversely affected by the proposed project seem to prematurely presume M-NCPPC concurrence on a new roadway crossing North Chevy Chase Local Park.*

   Response: The SHA has been in close coordination with MCDOT and the Chevy Chase Valley Community on the access and safety issues associated with the Chevy Chase Valley area. We have reviewed and evaluated the Spring Valley Traffic Study provided by MCDOT. The SHA concurred with the findings of the county's study that the Platt Ridge Road Extension will provide the best solution to address the community access concerns, while minimizing the impacts to the surrounding roadway network. The SHA also supported the construction of a temporary traffic signal at Jones Bridge Road and Spring Valley Road. And SHA agreed the Spring Valley Road signal is a reasonable way to address the access concerns in the interim, while the ultimate solution is being sought.

During the past years, SHA attended four community meetings, with the residents seeking resolution to their concerns. At the latest meeting on October 4, the Chevy Chase Valley Community agreed to the interim solution of a temporary traffic signal and the ultimate solution of Platt Ridge Road Extension. The Platt Ridge Road Extension will have impacts to the North Chevy Chase Local Park, owned by M-NCPPC. The SHA agrees to begin the Preliminary Engineering phase for the Platt Ridge Road Extension when funds become available, provided MCDOT accepts the ownership and maintenance of the new roadway and the Montgomery County Planning Board and M-NCPPC supports the park impacts of the new roadway.

5. *The eastern end of the Jones Bridge Road Shared Use Path project proposed by MCDOT is affected by your project as submitted and also by the Phase 3 project. In our approval of MCDOT's project on July 15, 2010, we recommended that the eastern 350 feet be constructed as part of your intersection project, but also that an alignment of the path along the south side of Jones Bridge Road be considered (see Enclosure 2).*

   Response: The Jones Bridge Road Shared Use Path project proposed by MCDOT will tie into the sidewalk improvement of this BRAC intersection project at MD 185 and Jones Bridge Road. The SHA has been in close coordination on the design and schedule with MCDOT and M-NCPPC. With regard to the proposal to relocate the path from the north side of Jones Bridge Road to the south side, we will evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of these two options, including physical constraints, park impact, forest easement impact, community opposition, and funding availability, with input from MCDOT, M-NCPPC, HHMI and other stakeholders.

6. *Providing a good level of landscaping as part of these projects is important in achieving the residents' vision for their community, the fulfillment of the Master Plan's vision for the Green Corridors Policy, and the General Plan's vision for the county (See Enclosure 3, a memo from our Urban Design Division). This is true on Connecticut Avenue as well as the other state highways covered by these projects.*

   Response: The SHA is aware of the Bethesda-Chevy Chase (B-CC) Master Plan in regards to the Green Corridors Policy and strives to construct Master Plan amenities throughout the project limits with support from the affected property owners. As stated in previous correspondence, the proposed design will provide a 3- to 10-foot-wide buffer or wider curb-attached sidewalks, wherever feasible. Wide enough median areas will receive turf grass, perennials, shrubs, flowering trees or street trees. Where it is not possible to provide a median of adequate size for trees, other appropriate types of plant materials will be provided. When determining the location and selection of plant materials, SHA will take into consideration issues such as sight visibility, signs, overhead and underground utilities, and any other potential conflicts. The SHA will also consider your recommendations on the selection of plant materials.

7. *While the BRAC coordination process demonstrated extensive community coordination, the public testimony we received revealed that the affected communities and individual property owners at this location do not yet have an understanding or consensus on how their long-standing access and safety concerns are being addressed. The community's concerns, and ours, are exacerbated by the many moving parts itemized above.*

   Response: Mitigating for BRAC and providing improvements that benefit all stakeholders have been, and continue to be, challenging endeavors. The SHA has attended four community meetings with the Chevy Chase Village Community, two community meetings with the Chevy Chase Park Community, and five meetings with HHMI, working with affected property owners and addressing citizens' concerns. Communication and coordination with the surrounding neighborhoods has been ongoing, and our goal is to reach an understanding in the near future.

Thank you again for your letter. If we may be of further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me or Ms. Yuqiong Bai, Project Engineer, Highway Design Division, SHA at 410-545-8816, toll-free 1-888-228-5003 or via email at ybai@sha.state.md.us.

Sincerely,

Neil J. Pedersen
Administrator

cc: Ms. Yuqiong Bai, Project Engineer, Highway Design Division, SHA
Mr. Brian Young, District Engineer, SHA

bcc: Mr. Eric E. Marabello, Chief, Highway Design Division, SHA
Mr. Kirk G. McClelland, Director of Highway Development, SHA