

A Report to Governor Martin O'Malley and
the Maryland General Assembly

regarding

Southern Maryland Transportation Needs Assessment
(SB 200/HB 507, Chapters 27 and 28, Acts 2008)

Commission to Study Southern Maryland Transportation Needs
(Staffed by the Tri-County Council for Southern Maryland
& the Maryland Department of Transportation)

June 2008

Southern Maryland Transportation Needs Assessment (SB 200/HB 507, Chapters 27 and 28, Acts 2008)

This report was prepared in response to SB 200/HB 507, Chapters 27 and 28, Acts 2008, which reenacted Chapter 14 of the Acts of the General Assembly of 2006. This statute authorizes the Commission to Study Southern Maryland transportation Needs (“Commission”) to reconvene for certain purposes and requires a report of the Commission’s findings and recommendations to the Governor and the General Assembly by June 30, 2008. The language directs that:

“The Commission shall:

- (1) review the study prepared by the Maryland Department of Transportation regarding mass transit in Southern Maryland under Chapter 594, Acts of 1998, the Southern Maryland Regional Transportation Strategy, the MD 5/U.S. 301 Transit Service Staging Plan, and any other relevant mass transit studies and plans;*
- (2) study the Southern Maryland rail transit alternatives, including a light rail transit system in the Maryland Route 5 corridor from White Plains to Branch Avenue;*
- (3) study the current and future impact of traffic congestion in Southern Maryland, including traffic levels on roads including U.S. Route 301 and Maryland Routes 2/4, 4, 5, 210, 228, 231, 235, and 260;*
- (4) make recommendations on potential strategies, including roadway improvements and mass transit, including light rail transit to reduce traffic congestion on the roads specified in item (3) of this subsection and throughout the Southern Maryland region;*
- (5) study and make recommendations regarding the amount of funding necessary to implement traffic congestion reduction strategies in Southern Maryland;*
- (6) assess the barriers to implementing roadway improvements and mass transit, including light rail service, in Southern Maryland and make recommendations to address those barriers; and*
- (7) make recommendations for potential funding mechanisms to implement traffic congestion reduction strategies in Southern Maryland.*

The Commission shall report its findings and recommendations to the Governor and, subject to §2-1246 of the State Government Article, to the General Assembly on or before June 30, 2008.”

A 21-member Commission was established to study transportation needs in Southern Maryland. The Commission met five times over the past year in order to:

- Collect existing data and analyze existing conditions and trends of the transportation system (population, demographics, economics, congestion, etc);
- Develop a vision statement with goals and objectives for transportation in Southern Maryland;
- Host an initial series of public meetings on existing conditions and goals/objectives;
- Identify existing and future transportation needs, trends, strategies, etc.;
- Identify transportation projects, programs, strategies and opportunities, along with order-of-magnitude costs;

Southern Maryland Transportation Needs Assessment (SB 200/HB 507, Chapters 27 and 28, Acts 2008)

- Host a second series of public meetings on needs and recommendations;
- Outline funding needs and challenges; and
- Prepare Transportation Needs Assessment Report.

The Transportation Needs Assessment will enable the Tri-County Council for Southern Maryland to update the Southern Maryland Regional Strategy – An Action Plan for Transportation completed in 1998. Substantial growth in the region and changing commuting patterns has created the need to update the 1998 effort based on the following legislative directions:

- 1) Review the study prepared by the Maryland Transit Administration (MTA) under Chapter 594, Acts of 1998, the Southern Maryland Regional Transportation Strategy, the MD 5/U.S. 301 Transit Service Staging Plan, and any other relevant mass transit studies and plans.**

As part of the initial phases of the Transportation Needs Assessment, the Commission evaluated existing conditions and reviewed the existing reports and studies available for transportation corridors within Southern Maryland, as well as portions of southern Anne Arundel and Prince George's counties. This evaluation included the review of the 1998 Southern Maryland Regional Transportation Strategy, the MD 5/US 301 Transit Service Staging Plan, State studies of individual corridors and projects in Southern Maryland, and county comprehensive plans, transportation plans, economic development plans, and other relevant studies. The goals developed for the 1998 Transportation Strategy were used as the starting point for the development of goals and objectives for the Needs Assessment and the review of plans provided a basis to identify key issues of concern within the study area.

- 2) Study the Southern Maryland rail transit alternatives, including a light rail transit system in the Maryland Route 5 corridor from White Plains to Branch Avenue.**

The Maryland Transit Administration (MTA) has initiated an 18-month study to identify a transit corridor for a future high capacity transit system, such as Bus Rapid Transit or Light Rail Transit, within the US 301/MD 5 Corridor between Branch Avenue and White Plains. Identification of this Corridor will enable local jurisdictions to protect the alignment from development until such time as land use intensity and traffic conditions warrant construction of the transit line. Since it was not possible to complete this study within the timeframe of the initial legislation, the legislation provided a second date, June 2009, to conclude this more detailed transit evaluation.

Southern Maryland Transportation Needs Assessment (SB 200/HB 507, Chapters 27 and 28, Acts 2008)

- 3) **Study the current and future impact of traffic congestion in Southern Maryland, including traffic levels on roads including U.S. Route 301 and Maryland Routes 2/4, 4, 5, 210, 228, 231, 235, and 260.**

The Commission evaluated the current and future impact of traffic conditions on all State roadways in Southern Maryland, including those explicitly outlined in the legislation. Southern Maryland is projected to be one of the fastest growing regions of the State over the next 20 years, straining the existing roadway network and public transit system. Southern Maryland's challenges include relatively low density development; a roadway system that is signalized and lacks access control in many places; a transit system oriented around commuter bus services that must negotiate that same roadway system; and bridges that lack sufficient capacity for the future. More details can be found in Chapter 3, which details the existing conditions of the study area, and Chapter 4, which identifies transportation system needs within the study area.

- 4) **Make recommendations on potential strategies, including roadway improvements and mass transit, including light rail transit to reduce traffic congestion on the roads specified in item (3) of this subsection and throughout the Southern Maryland region.**

The Commission's report on Transportation Needs identifies recommendations on potential projects, programs and strategies for Southern Maryland based on the existing conditions and existing and future needs assessment. The recommendations include major highway infrastructure projects (new mainline capacity and bridge improvements) that will help Southern Maryland accommodate future growth; investments in transit service (both capital and operational) that can provide meaningful alternatives to single occupant vehicle travel; and investments in maintaining and promoting trails and pedestrian and bicycle linkages throughout Southern Maryland that promote a healthy quality of life. Supporting policies and strategies are necessary to ensure that these future investments will provide the expected benefits. Specific policies and strategies needed include:

- Effective access management policies, especially around new developments in the region along major state highways;
- Promotion of smart growth land use policies, including mixed land use development along transit corridors and at activity centers to position transit as a preferred mode of travel;
- Continued investment in commuter bus services to provide meaningful transit options for Southern Maryland in the short term; and
- Addressing operational improvements for both highways and transit, such as increasing available information on congestion and transit services, prioritizing mobility of commuter buses to help compete with single occupant vehicles in terms of travel time; and similar strategies.

Detailed project and strategy recommendations are provided in Chapter 7 of the report.

Southern Maryland Transportation Needs Assessment (SB 200/HB 507, Chapters 27 and 28, Acts 2008)

5) **Study and make recommendations regarding the amount of funding necessary to implement traffic congestion reduction strategies in Southern Maryland.**

The Commission reviewed the costs for the recommended projects and identified the gap in funding for those projects and project phases not yet funded. Between \$6.0 and \$7.3 billion in total unfunded transportation system needs (compared to roughly \$40 billion in statewide unfunded needs) have been identified in Southern Maryland through this assessment process. Of this total, between \$2.1 and \$2.4 billion has been identified as the top regional priorities, and another \$3.3 to \$4.1 billion has been identified as county projects of regional importance. In reviewing the financial forecasting of Transportation Trust Fund dollars, between \$640 and \$770 million are anticipated to flow to Southern Maryland between 2012 and 2030. This leaves a funding gap between \$5.4 and \$6.6 billion for all unfunded needs and between \$1.5 and \$1.8 billion for the top priority regional needs, not including the potential high capacity transit service currently under study in the MD 5/US 301 Corridor, which could add in the order of \$1.2 billion in capital costs if the more expensive light rail transit option is pursued. Funding would also be required for right-of-way acquisition, engineering, and maintenance and operations, which could cost as much as \$30 million per year.

The estimates only include investments in State transportation infrastructure, and do not include key improvements that the counties need to implement to meet the transportation needs of Southern Maryland. These county improvements remain of great importance, as they provide access to and from the State system, helping to provide overall transportation system relief.

6) **Assess the barriers to implementing roadway improvements and mass transit, including light rail service, in Southern Maryland and make recommendations to address those barriers.**

The Commission assessed the barriers to implementing State transportation improvements. These barriers include:

- ***Funding Challenges*** – Several of the top priority projects for the Southern Maryland region are for regionally significant investments that easily exceed the typical funding available for transportation projects in the region. Increasing materials and fuel costs and declining purchasing power of Federal and State transportation funding sources make funding any new transportation investments challenging. In an environment where all states, regions, and localities are competing for constrained resources, only the most critical programs may get funded. Therefore, continued regional approach to transportation planning, as currently exists in Southern Maryland, will be an important factor in the process of determining which projects receive State funding.
- ***Project Development Challenges*** – Many of the top priority projects may impact significant environmental, community and natural resources areas, thereby adding time and complexity to the project planning and development processes. Establishing an

Southern Maryland Transportation Needs Assessment (SB 200/HB 507, Chapters 27 and 28, Acts 2008)

integrated planning and environmental linkage will help streamline the process and move the projects forward.

- ***Growth, Planning, and Zoning Challenges*** – Southern Maryland is expecting to continue its rapid growth over the next 20 years, increasing the need for new transportation investments and presenting new planning and zoning challenges. Some parts of Southern Maryland may have trouble embracing higher-density suburban and urban land use patterns that are vital for mixed-use centers, transit use, and walkable and bikeable lifestyles. The region needs to face the challenges by working together to implement land use policies and targeted strategies that will help make Southern Maryland more transit accessible.
- ***Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) Issues*** – Though the military bases in Southern Maryland were not significantly impacted by the most recent round of BRAC, the expansion of bases in Maryland highlights their importance to the State and regional economies. Southern Maryland and the State will need to continue to improve mobility to the Patuxent Naval Air Station and the Indian Head Naval Surface Warfare Center, as they are key economic drivers for the region. At the same time, the recent round of BRAC may divert State resources to regions that were more directly impacted.
- ***Geographical Limitations*** – Southern Maryland is a peninsula bounded by water on three sides and split by the Patuxent River. This configuration reduces through traffic and helps the region maintain its charm and rural character, but also increases the costs of connections across these water barriers. Plans under consideration to construct additional reactors at the Calvert Cliffs Nuclear Power Plant in Lusby may present additional traffic challenges in the short term as a result of increased commuting across the Governor Thomas Johnson Memorial Bridge and on MD 2/4, unless timely improvements are made to accommodate the additional vehicular traffic.

7) Make recommendations for potential funding mechanisms to implement traffic congestion reduction strategies in Southern Maryland.

The funding challenges faced by Southern Maryland and the State will not be easily overcome. The large-scale infrastructure projects needed in Southern Maryland are generally beyond the current funding capabilities of the region or the State. Over the long term, it will be vital to consider options to improve the efficient use of existing infrastructure, by increasing reliance on transit, more efficient land use development patterns, and operational improvements that can enhance roadway functional capacity. The Commission recommends that the State and counties continue to promote the following strategies to reduce traffic congestion and promote strategic funding for transportation improvements in Southern Maryland:

- Expand park and ride facilities and commuter bus routes and capacity
- Improve locally operated transit service and coordination
- Enhance transit and highway information and dissemination

Southern Maryland Transportation Needs Assessment (SB 200/HB 507, Chapters 27 and 28, Acts 2008)

- Promote steps to implement high capacity transit options, including right-of-way protection or acquisition, alignment identification, and engineering
- Promote local road connections to facilitate commuting options
- Promote transit and highway improvements, including in the US 301/MD 5 Corridor
- Promote bridge access and capacity improvements
- Promote access management
- Promote operational improvements
- Promote travel demand management
- Promote ridesharing, including carpooling and vanpooling
- Promote safety strategies
- Promote capacity expansion strategically
- Promote regionally significant projects to provide greater benefits across all Southern Maryland counties
- Provide trail, bike, and pedestrian options and connectivity of the multimodal system

Funding some of the large infrastructure projects identified in this report may require new and innovative funding mechanisms that are not currently available, including local option sales tax, tax increment financing and other value capture methods, property taxes, payroll taxes and others. Some of these methods would require State enabling legislation (such as a local option sales tax) and all would have to be carefully evaluated for their ability to generate revenue and their appropriateness for Southern Maryland. Additionally, the State may wish to pursue potential revenue generating strategies for the roadway system, such as tolls of bridges (e.g., as is currently done on the Governor Harry W. Nice Memorial Bridge) or of new limited access highway facilities.

Given the significant transportation financing challenges facing Southern Maryland (between \$6.0 and \$7.3 billion in total unfunded needs), as well as the State of Maryland (roughly \$40 billion in statewide unfunded needs) and the nation as a whole, it will become increasingly important to identify alternative funding and financing mechanisms for new transportation infrastructure investments and for local governments to participate actively in development of projects. Southern Maryland represents a good example of how government officials can work well together to address important transportation investment challenges.