Application to U.S. DOT's Reconnecting Communities and Neighborhoods (RCN) Program

Unlocking University Boulevard-Greenbelt Road Community Connectivity

September 28, 2023

Applicant: Maryland Department of Transportation
State Highway Administration

MARYLAND DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
STATE HIGHWAY ADMINISTRATION

1. OVERVIEW

The University Boulevard-Greenbelt Road (MD 193) Corridor is a state route that bisects the cities of Greenbelt and College Park, and the town of Berwyn Heights, in Prince George's County, Maryland with critical connections to transit, essential services, and jobs, including the City of College Park and the University of Maryland. The Greenbelt Community, established in in the 1930s, was part of the "green belt" town program to provide work relief for the unemployed, provide affordable housing for low-income workers, and serve as models for future town planning in America.[1] Now, this important urban corridor is at a crossroads, having lost businesses to newer, outlying shopping centers, and grappling with disinvestment and traffic congestion.

A key impediment to the area's economic development and revitalization is the corridor's lack of safe pedestrian and bicyclist access and dedicated transit infrastructure. Sidewalks are missing along key segments of the corridor; curb cuts and closely- spaced driveways are common; and heavy, fast-moving traffic makes the corridor a potentially dangerous barrier between the area's commercial center and surrounding residential zones.[2] Between 2018 to 2022, injury and property damage only crash statistics along the MD193 Corridor exceeded average state levels.[3]

MDOT is requesting funding under both the Reconnecting Communities Pilot (RCP) and Neighborhood Access and Equity (NAE) Programs.

To improve these safety and access barriers to the area's residents and visitors, MDOT is seeking funding to support the "Unlocking University Boulevard-Greenbelt Road Community Connectivity Planning Project" (aka, "the Project"), a community-driven Planning and Environmental Linkage (PEL) study process to analyze options for revitalizing the MD 193 corridor.

MDOT intends to use the PEL process to comprehensively examine and advance its goals for the corridor, as they relate to its economy, land use, and transportation. With this application, MDOT is seeking grant funding to orchestrate a comprehensive public outreach and PEL process for the MD 193 corridor and ultimately improve the corridor's safety and accessibility concerns, centered around equitable and inclusive access to local amenities. Issues to be analyzed during this PEL study include:

- The feasibility of implementing a road diet along the corridor and removing auxiliary lanes and weaves;
- Sidewalk gap analysis and widening of sidewalks, including an ADA assessment;
- Determination of the need for, and feasibility of, dedicated bus lanes;
- Assessment of transit stop locations and needs;
- Identification of appropriate bicycle infrastructure;
- Exploration of ways to improve trail and recreation connections with the corridor; and
- Assessment of the safety and utility of crosswalk locations.

[1] Greenbelt Museum. Greenbelt History, https://www.greenbeltmuseum.org/greenbelt-history
2 Urban Land Institute. Creating a Future for Greenbelt Road/MD-193 – Technical Assistance Panel Report. Page 4. June 2018.
3 MDOT Sate Highway Administration, Office of Traffic and Safety Traffic Development & Support Division

2. LOCATION & MAP

The corridor is owned and operated by the Maryland State Highway Administration (SHA). Exhibit 1 provides a map of the area identified for PEL study along MD 193 from Rhode Island Avenue to Hanover Parkway.

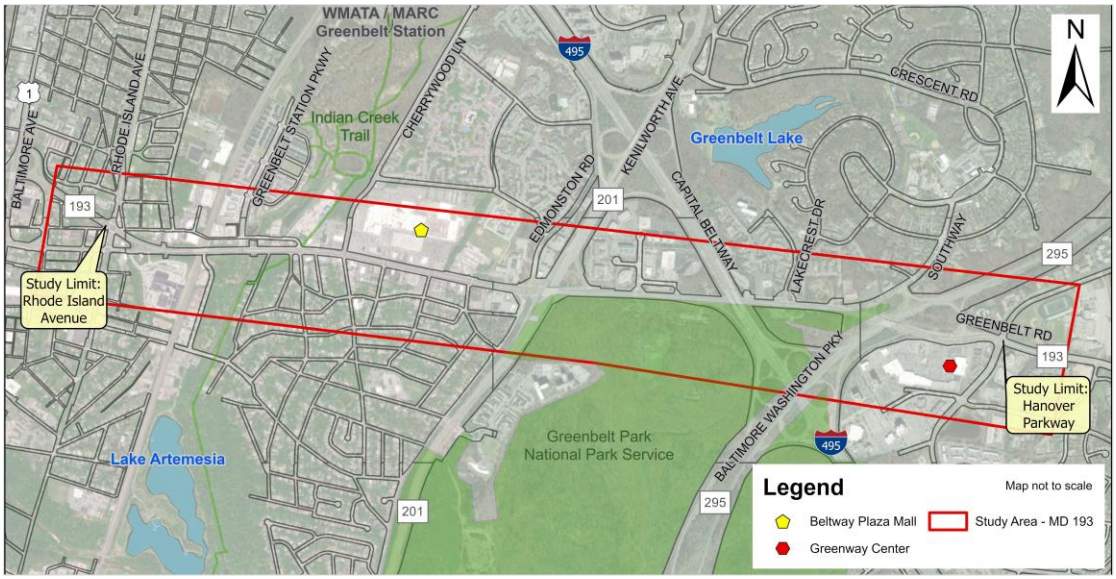

Exhibit 1: MD 193 Corridor and Project Study Location

The Project area is close to several major employers, including NASA Goddard, the Children's Hospital, and Kaiser Permanente. It is two miles from the University of Maryland, and close to shopping areas along MD 193; as well as Greenbelt Park (a National Park), the Indian Creek trail, and Lake Artemesia. The corridor's proximity to the Capital Beltway, the Baltimore-Washington Parkway, the Greenbelt Station of the regional Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) subway service, and Maryland Area Rail Commuter (MARC) stations has made it popular for both residential and commercial development. In addition, the area stands to benefit from the development of the Purple Line that will extend from Bethesda to New Carrollton and should be fully operational by 2027.[4]

3. MERIT CRITERIA

3.1 Equity and Environmental Justice

Addressing the Needs of the Surrounding Community

The Project area is characterized by socio-economic disparities. Two of the nine census tracts are designated as "disadvantaged" by the Council on Environmental Quality's Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool (CEJST), as shown in Exhibit 2. Further, a number of census tracts also fell on the border of the threshold and were characterized by:

[4] MDOT. "MTA Purple Line Overview." purplelinemd.com.

- Linguistic Isolation: four fell in 85th percentile (top 15 percent of households where no one over age 14 speaks English very well)
- Low Median Income: seven fell in 75th percentile (top 25 percent of households where median income for the area is the lowest)
- High School Attainment: five contained more than 10 percent of households where persons over 25 year did not attain a high school diploma
- Ethnic diversity: five contained a population where more than 80 percent were non-white
- Aging population: three contained populations with 15 – 20 percent over 65-years old

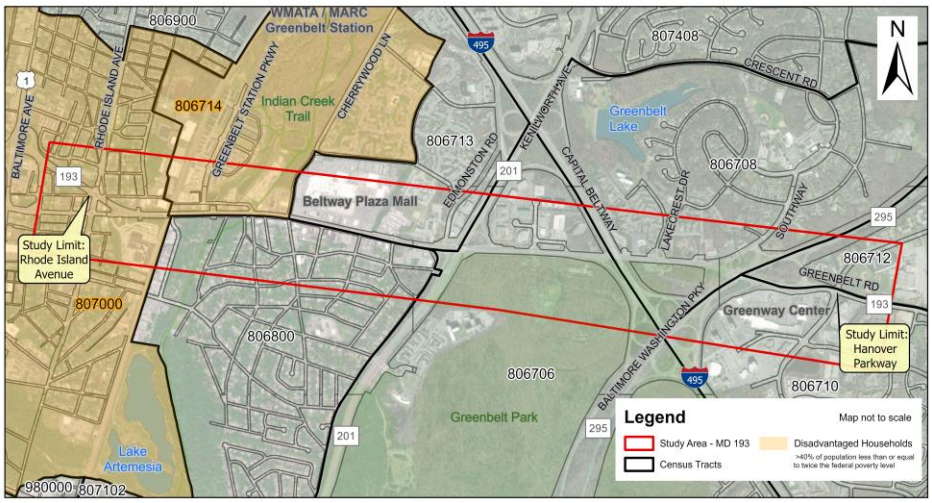

Exhibit 2. Disadvantaged Census Tracts adjacent to Project Area

Improved multimodal transport would provide increased accessibility to area jobs and improved continuity between nearby residential, retail, and outdoor park spaces. Addressing ADA compliance and safety concerns would promote bike/pedestrian usage. Although these vulnerabilities are complex, undertaking a PEL study to facilitate a renewal for this corridor would mark a tangible step toward improving accessibility and quality of life for these disadvantaged communities.

3.2 Access

Encouraging Thriving Communities to Work, Live, and Play

In spite of the rich mix of residential, commercial, and recreational facilities in the area, the MD 193 corridor serves mainly as a pass-through for vehicular traffic rather than a thriving community destination. Traffic proximity and volume for several census tracts in the study area exceed the 90th percentile threshold defined in the CEJST. However, non-motorized access to amenities is limited due to low vehicle ownership. USDOT's Equitable Transportation Community (ETC Explorer) mapping tool shows in four of nine census tracts at least 85 percent of the population do not own a personal vehicle. Further, the ETC Explorer substantiates that six of the nine census tracts adjacent to MD 193 are inadequately served by transit. On average, the maximum time needed to access points of interest by car (across all census tracts in the study area) is about 10 minutes, while access time via walking to those same locales is much higher:

- Only three area census tracts are located within a 15-minute walk of a grocery store,

- Six census tracts are located within a 15-minute walk of a medical facility,
- Five census tracts are located within a 15-minute walk of a park, and
- No census tracts are located within a 15-minute walk to adult education.

Prior planning work in the corridor documented four community-identified goals for providing equitable, non-motorized access to the area:[5] (1) facilitation of the comfortable, equitable, and safe movement of all people along and across MD 193, whether they are walking, biking, riding transit, or driving; (2) Provision of key connections to residential communities, businesses, neighborhoods, parks, transit/metro stations, and trails along and across the corridor; (3) Support of livability and economic development by improving access to, along, and across the corridor; and (4) Creation of a greener and more human-scale environment to serve the people living along the corridor.

Exploring Context-Sensitive, Affordable Transportation Options

Several issues[6] have been identified along the corridor that impact the quality of life of users and limit their access to safe transit through the area:

- Vehicular Speeding – actual speeds often exceed the posted speed limit of 40 mph.[7]
- Accessibility Challenges – utility poles located in the middle of sidewalks impede access, particularly for those with vision and mobility disabilities.
- Poor Land-Use/Transportation Interaction – while the corridor has a mix of residential, commercial/retail and institutional land uses, connectivity for non-motorized modes is challenged by gaps in sidewalks, curb cuts, closely spaced driveways, and heavy traffic.

The PEL process will comprehensively identify all such issues through various phases, including a needs assessment, a public engagement period, and an environmental resource inventory.

Providing Safe Accommodations and Seamless Integration

Compared to Statewide crash statistics, the study area has a higher-than-average crash rate, as shown in Exhibit 3 Between 2018 and 2022, injury crashes for the identified segments were 64 percent and 32 percent higher than statewide averages. Similarly, property damage crashes were reported to be 26 percent and 21 percent higher. Fatalities for one segment were 33 percent greater than statewide averages. Exhibit 4 provides a map of the Project area's crash history.

Exhibit 3: Project Area Crash Statistics along MD 193 (University Bld.), 2018 - 2022

Crash Type	From: West of Rhode Island Ave; To: Northbound MD 201 On-Ramp	From: Northbound MD 201 On-Ramp To: Hanover Pkwy	Statewide
Fatal	1.6	0.9	1.2
Injury	120.9*	96.9*	73.5
Property Damage	167.6*	160.8*	132.9

* Significantly higher than Statewide rates.
Source: MDOT

[5] Kittelson & Associates, Greenbelt Road (MD 193) Corridor Plan, November 2022
[6] Kittelson & Associates, Greenbelt Road (MD 193) Corridor Plan, November 2022.
[7] Based on conditions observed during a field walk in March 2022 and referenced from previous plans and studies (Greenbelt Road (MD 193) Corridor Plan (2022), page 40)

In addition to the high number of vehicular incidents, pedestrian/bike usage along the corridor remains precarious, and non-motorized users have reported feeling unsafe. An analysis of the area's "Pedestrians' Pathway Comfort Level" and "Crossway Comfort Level" both attained the lowest possible score of four – translating to "undesirable" conditions for walkers and bikers.[8] Furthermore, the poorly maintained nature of the corridor's sidewalks also makes transiting on foot undesirable, shown in Exhibit 5.

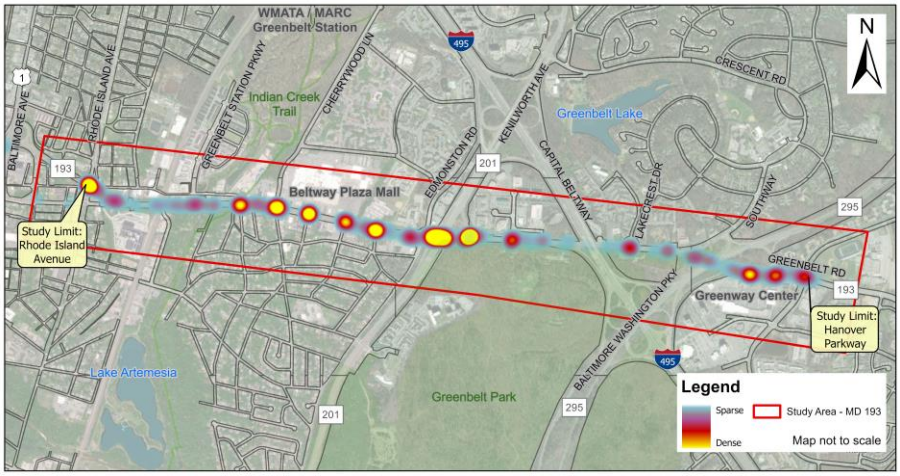

Exhibit 4: MD 193 Corridor Crash History (2018 – 2022)

An in-depth analysis of conditions in these areas of safety concern, as well as potential mitigations, will be undertaken during the Project's PEL needs assessment phase. By identifying safety issues at an early stage, MDOT can develop comprehensive safety solutions that thoughtfully consider design features of existing roadways, as well as the specific needs of the community.

3.3 Facility Suitability

Addressing Barriers to Access, Mobility, and Economic Development

As discussed above, land use patterns along MD 193 that have historically been shaped almost entirely by auto accessibility have translated into an unsafe environment for pedestrians and bicyclists. For both segments of the study area, injuries, property damage, and total crashes were significantly higher than state averages (see Exhibit 3). In addition to safety risks, access for non-motorized travelers to a wide area of local amenities (including employment, education, parks and recreation, and healthcare) has been challenged by the corridor's auto-centric development. Pedestrian access to bus stops and the Greenbelt Metro Station is both difficult and potentially dangerous. This is a particular problem for this area, where a high percentage of local commuters do not own personal

Exhibit 5: Photos of Poor Sidewalk Conditions

[8] Kittelson & Associates, Greenbelt Road (MD 193) Corridor Plan, November 2022.

vehicles and rely on alternate modes for transportation. In fact, in four census tracts, more than 15 percent of households do not own personal vehicles; in the other five census tracts, 5 percent of households do not own personal vehicles. This PEL study will look to address issues of connectivity and automobile overreliance, as well as any disparities in access.

3.4 Community Engagement and Community-Based Stewardship, Management, and Partnerships

Facilitating Meaningful Engagement in Planning, Design, Construction, Operations, and Related Land Use Decisions

Prior planning work on the corridor has demonstrated strong community participation and public involvement. Such collaboration will be continued and built upon by SHA during the PEL process. The PEL provides a collaborative and integrated approach to transportation decision-making that the environment, community, and economy during the planning process.[9]

The Project will provide a robust and context-sensitive opportunity community involvement. A Community Participation Plan will be developed to guide public outreach activities and effectively engage under-represented, vulnerable households. The Project Team will engage communities when developing various PEL components, such as purpose and need, logical termini, and identification of reasonable concept-level alternatives.[10] The PEL process can thus give the public an early opportunity to assess project components and provide meaningful input in a way that is accountable and responsive to the community.

Based on the lessons learned from SHA's prior planning work, the Project's public outreach will include activities such as:
- Visioning and goals workshop;
- Public open house to introduce the project and gather information from the public;
- Online surveys to receive feedback from community members;
- Engagement with groups offering support to businesses such Prince George's County Chamber of Commerce;
- Open house to share the draft plan and gather public input on the recommendations.

"Recognizing the diversity of the communities in the study area, SHA will translate project materials into languages represented in the impacted communities and will provide opportunities to have on-site translators at public meetings."

Developing Formal Partnerships

MD 193 is owned and operated by the SHA, but coordination between all jurisdictions, in addition to WMATA and the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC), will continue to be necessary. Support letters have been provided by Metropolitan Washington Council of Government (MWCOG), City of Greenbelt, College Park, WMATA, and Prince George's County. In addition, community buy-in for the project is high, with partners proactively investing in early planning activities for the corridor, as seen in the studies and activities listed in Exhibit 6.

[9] USDOT Federal Highway Administration, *Planning and Environment Linkages Fact Sheet*. September 2021
[10] USDOT Federal Highway Administration (FHA). *PEL Benefits: Measuring the Benefits of Planning and Environmental Linkages (PEL)*. October 2015

Exhibit 6: Documented Community Activities and Key Stakeholders

Name of Study	Date	Partners involved/Description
Greenbelt Road (MD 193) Corridor Plan	November 2022	Commissioned by: City of Greenbelt, Maryland. Funded by: MWCOG
Community Walk	September 2021	Activity hosted by Maryland State Delegate Alonzo T. Washington. After the walk, Delegate Washington documented Areas of Concern in a letter to SHA.
Prince George's County 2035 Master Plan of Transportation[11]	2021 – ongoing	Developed by: Prince George's County. Identifies Greenbelt Road corridor as a high priority area for development at the county level for bike/pedestrian facilities.
Walkable Bikeable Berwyn Heights Task Force[12]	2020	The Task Force identified a series of recommendations that built on successful efforts to upgrade pedestrian infrastructure, ranging from installation of wayfinding to pedestrian overpasses.
Creating a Future for Greenbelt Road/MD-193[13]	June 4-5, 2018	Sponsored by: City of Greenbelt, City of College Park, Town of Berwyn Heights, MWCOG.
Establishment of Greenbelt Road Working Group	Ongoing	Representatives from College Park, Berwyn Heights, and Greenbelt have established a working group to advance their common interest in making MD 193 safer and more accessible to non-motorized users.

Establishing Community Representation

During the PEL process, a community advisory group will be established with representation from various community organizations, including those identified in Exhibit 7. Among its functions, the community advisory group will have a mandate to provide guidance on transportation-related disparities and support outreach activities for hard-to-reach populations. Further, public involvement plans will consider the appropriate mix of digital and print media, and the need for translation services to mobilize Low English Proficiency residents.

Exhibit 7: MD193 Corridor Stakeholders

City of Greenbelt Advisory Boards	Homeowners Association	Community Groups
- Advisory Planning Board - Parks and Recreation Advisory Board - Green ACES (Environmental focus) - Arts Advisory Board (Publico art/placemaking)	- Greenbelt Station Association - Greenbriar Community Association	- Greenbelt Business Alliance - Friends of Greenbelt East Trail, Inc. - Walkable Bikeable Berwyn Heights Task Force - Berwyn Heights Green Team

3.5 Equitable Development

Advancing Creative Place-Making

The Project provides a critical link between local, regional, and national level trails. Though the Project area is situated within close proximity to recreational sites, its auto-centric nature has promoted fragmented development. In addition to the community trails developed by the City of Greenbelt, the Project will also be a section on the 3,000-mile East Coast Greenway Trail that connects 15 states and 450 cities and towns from Maine to Florida. The Project also improves connectivity to the National Parks Service's Greenbelt Park, which is the only campground for

[11] Prince George's County Planning Department, Prince George's County 2035 Master Plan of Transportation. May 2014
[12] Town of Berwyn Heights Maryland, Walkable Bikeable Berwyn Heights Task Force. February 2020
[13] Urban Land Institute. Creating a Future for Greenbelt Road/MD-193 – Technical Assistance Panel Report. June 2018

tents and RVs within ten miles of the Washington Monument. These connections will enable the businesses along the Project corridor to provide goods, services, and dining options to accommodate trail users. Essentially, the Project area can serve as a suburban trail town for the region.

Recommendations have been put forward by community groups to maximize place-making through wayfinding, community art exhibits, improved amenities, and enhanced trail connectivity. A PEL study is essential to coordinating such efforts and informing a cohesive vision. Its interdisciplinary approach will incorporate an analysis of the area's diverse community needs as well as any environmental constraints. Further, the process will require a series of concept development phases that will culminate in the prioritization and phasing of place-making improvements.

Supports Local/Regional/State Equitable Development Plans

A Better Maryland State Development Plan identifies key strategies to promote equitable development at the state level. By addressing connectivity barriers, the Project will put forward tangible solutions that support equity planning and environmental justice needs identified in the State's Development Plan. In the case of *Prince George's County General Plan*, developing multi-modal infrastructure in the Innovation Corridor will be substantiated by the proposed Project. Exhibit 8 highlights how the Project will support development plans at the local, regional, and state levels.

Exhibit 8: Development Plan Context

Name of Plan	Objectives/Strategies/Policies in Development Plan	How Project Supports Plan
A Better Maryland State Development Plan (undated)	• Addressing Maryland's Transportation, Infrastructure and Technology Challenges and Opportunities • Improving Economic Growth and Development in Existing Communities • Creating Quality Places • Sustaining the Environment into the Future • Adapting and Becoming Resilient to Climate Change	By tackling barriers to connectivity at the community level, the Project addresses the multi-faceted strategies identified in Maryland's State Development Plan. The proposed PEL process adheres to equity planning and environmental justice principles through issue identification and inclusive outreach.
Plan Prince George's 2035 General Plan (Innovation Corridor) (2014)	• Support the development of the Innovation Corridor around the College Park-U of MD and Greenbelt Metro Stations and along US 1 and MD 193. • PA2.2 - Designate the Innovation Corridor for …. targeted infrastructure improvements. New infrastructure may …., **bike amenities and lanes, sidewalks, public facilities,** and other amenities to support research and development entities and **enhanced access to public transportation.**	The Project has a strong emphasis on improving facilities for transit, as well as for non-motorized travel. Previous community planning efforts support improvements in walkability and bikeability along the corridor. The PEL study will build on previous work done in the corridor in a collaborative and inclusive manner.

Source: Purple Line Equitable TOD Strategy, Plan Prince George's 2035 General Plan, A Better Maryland State Development Plan.

3.6 Climate and Environment

Providing High-Quality Choices for Lower-Carbon Travel

The Project will provide high-quality choices for lower-carbon travel options. In February 2022, during visioning meetings held for the formulation of the University Boulevard-Greenbelt Road (MD 193) Corridor Plan,[14] the community identified two goals directly linked to non-motorized transportation and environmental sustainability: (i) facilitate the comfortable, equitable, and safe movement along and across MD 193, whether they are walking, biking, riding transit…; and (ii) create a greener and more human-scale environment to serve the people living along the corridor. To achieve these goals, key components of the needs assessment phase in the PEL study will include transit accessibility, structures, non-vehicular traffic, and safe routes to school.

Supporting Local/Regional/State Climate Action Plan

The Project's vision actively promotes mode shift to carbon neutral alternatives. Under the Greenhouse Gas Emissions Reduction Act – Reauthorization (GGRA of 2016), the State of Maryland is required to achieve a minimum of 40 percent reduction in statewide greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from 2006 levels by 2030. The 2030 GGRA Plan[15] proposes a set of measures to meet this goal. Of these, MDOT has taken the lead on transportation-related emissions through initiatives to improve transit capacity/service expansion and expand bike/pedestrian system. MDOT's GGRA Plan (2020) identifies policy scenarios that support the GGRA goal of achieving a 40 percent GHG reduction by the year 2030 for the transportation sector,[16] shown in Exhibit 9.

Exhibit 9: MDOT GHG Emission Reduction Policy Strategy

	Strategy	Description
1.0 Policy Scenario 1 (On-the Books)	1.4 Public Transportation (new capacity, improved operations/frequency, bus rapid transit (BRT))	This strategy includes projects designed to increase public transit capacity and improve operations and frequency; as well as new BRT corridors not included in MPO modeling in plans and programs.
	1.9 Bicycle and Pedestrian Strategies (Provision of non-motorized infrastructure including sidewalks and bike lanes)	This strategy assumes that improved directional miles of bicycle facilities and bicycle level of comfort will increase through 2030, consistent with the trend reported in the Annual Attainment Report from 2015 through 2019.
2.0 Policy Scenario 2 (Emerging and Innovative)	2.10 Expanded bike/pedestrian system development	Assumes VMT reductions due to availability of bicycle facility lane miles and improved bicycle level of comfort consistent with a 50% increase in existing and planned infrastructure improvements, repaving, and new facilities highlighted in the 2020 - 2025 CTP and current SHA plans.

Addressing Transportation-Related Pollution and Disproportionate Environmental Impacts on Disadvantaged Communities

To quantify the Project's potential impact on environmental resources (air pollution, Greenhouse Gas emissions, greenspace, climate resilience, stormwater, noise reduction) the PEL process undertakes both an:

[14] Kittelson & Associates, Greenbelt Road (MD 193) Corridor Plan, November 2022.
[15] Maryland Department of Environment. "2030 GHG Reduction Act Plan" (2030 GGRA Plan).
[16] Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT). "2020 Greenhouse Gas Reduction Act Plan."

- **Environmental Resource Inventory** to identify (i) environmental resources and environmentally sensitive areas; (ii) potential environmental effects and (iii) mitigation needs for a proposed project, and
- **Environmental Agency Coordination**, which facilitates information sharing and feedback on impacts, potential permitting issues, and conceptual mitigation efforts that will inform what can be retained for National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) evaluations.

The PEL process also facilitates early identification of environmental resources, which can help avoid or reduce costly impacts and schedule-intensive processes during each environmental review. Information from a PEL study helps get a head start on, and tailor, subsequent NEPA activities.

3.7 Workforce Development and Economic Opportunity

The Project fully intends to support local inclusive economic development and entrepreneurship in both its short-term Project Development & Environment (PD&E) and construction processes. PD&E and construction will be executed by MDOT, which also administers Maryland's Minority Business Enterprise (MBE) participation goal and Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) participation goal for contracts that receive assistance from the USDOT. Current regulations set the MBE Program's statewide aspirational goal at 29% across 70 participating agencies and departments.[17] SHA has set overall DBE goals for fiscal years 2023 and 2024 at 26.39 percent.[18] Planning and construction of this corridor revitalization will fully adhere to small business hiring goals consistent with these programs.

Improving this corridor will also strengthen long-term, inclusive access to economic opportunity for its ethnically and socioeconomically diverse population, as well as drive economic activity into the area by providing better access for visitors and tourists. Stakeholders identified common ideas for area development, each emphasizing the interplay between land use and transportation decision-making as an important foundation for improving quality of life and increasing economic activity for local communities:[19]

- Creating quality open space where the community can gather informally or for programmed events such as farmers' markets, festivals, and concerts.
- Introducing different kinds of retail that could allow residents to do more shopping in their community, as well as providing more opportunities for residents to dine out or be entertained without leaving.
- Highlighting the area's proximity to several major employers, including NASA Goddard, the Children's Hospital, and Kaiser Permanente, a rich transit ridership base.
- Building demand for transit services, which would promote WMATA's drive to increase recruitment from this metro area.[20]

The benefits from these potential outcomes underscore the importance of this investment to revitalize the corridor and to fuel local development undertaken by public and private sector entities.

[17] State of Maryland, Governor Office of Small, Minority & Women Business Affairs, MBE Program
[18] Maryland Department of Transportation, Office of Minority Business Enterprise Overview Website
[19] Urban Land Institute. Creating a Future for Greenbelt Road/MD-193 – Technical Assistance Panel Report
[20] WMATA Recruitment Flyer, https://www.wmata.com/about/careers/upload/Metro-Bus-Driver-Open-House.pdf

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