

Greater Colesville Citizens Association

PO Box 4087
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LABQUEST

716 Edelblut Dr
Silver Spring, MD 20901
July 10, 2023

Montgomery County DOT
Attn: Corey Pitts, Project Manager
Rockville, MD 20850

Re: New Hampshire Ave BRT Alternatives Study

Dear Corey Pitts

The Greater Colesville Citizens Association (GCCA) has reviewed the draft New Hampshire Ave alternatives presented to the Corridor Advisory Committee (CAC) on May 18, 2023, which is posted on the DOT web page. Our comments on the alternatives are provided below.

General Comments

The design of the New Hampshire Ave BRT needs to be considered as part of the entire transit network (BRT, Ride On and Metrobus). The primary purpose of local bus is to collect people from where they live, work, shop or play and get them to Flash stations. We recommend that the BRT network in eastern Montgomery County be as recommended in the Appendix. DOT's studies are looking at each corridor in isolation and thus is failing to address the transit system as a whole. That will produce a disjointed system, not an effective one. As indicated in the appendix, the New Hampshire Ave BRT should stop at FDA and not proceed north to Randolph Road. That segment rather needs to be served with good Ride On service. Colesville would be served by BRT along Randolph Rd. The New Hampshire Ave BRT corridor south of FDA needs to connect with the Randolph Corridor through the LifeSci and White Oak activity centers.

This New Hampshire Ave study indicates few people working at FDA will use the BRT service. Nothing can be further from reality. That statement was probably accurate during the pandemic when almost everyone was working from home. Some FDA employees are now returning to work. While more FDA employees will telework in the post-pandemic workplace, FDA will relocate more employees to the campus. They have also converted some assigned offices into hoteling space with the result that in the next year or so more employees will be on site during the Monday-Thursday peak period than worked on campus before the pandemic. Thus, by the time BRT can be built, there will be more than the 9000 people on site on the peak days. Many of these people will want to use the transit system especially since parking will once again be in short supply. They will want to use the recommended system shown in the appendix, not the one DOT is proposing.

We realize that this study cannot consider all parts of this recommended design at this time and therefore we will provide comments on the presented alternatives.

It is nearly impossible to understand what is being proposed without extensive back-and-forth study of different charts. Even with that, it is hard to fully understand the proposed design. A different method needs to be used in

presenting the material to the public – maybe present the information one segment at a time. The colors for segments 2-4 are too close to each other and thus it is hard to tell the extent of each segment.

Concept Comments

Comments On charts 14 and 15 are as follows:

- Concept 2b should be labeled Alternative 2 Hybrid. In a like manner concepts 2d and 2e should be labeled as Alternative 3 Hybrids.
- The difference between concepts 3a, 3b and 3c need to be explained, since they appear to be the same concept, described slightly differently.
- For segment 5, concepts 2, 3 and 4 would not apply since the BRT is running in mixed traffic. Therefore, a different shading is needed.

Comments on the Number of lanes (Alternatives 2 and 3):

Segment 5 (North of FDA): We agree that dedicated BRT lanes not be provided in this segment, because there is so little congestion. The congestion that does exist largely occurs during the period when the schools are opening and closing, and then only for about 15 minutes.

The FDA station must be on the Federal Research Center (FRC) at the existing location so that that many FDA employees will use the service. The overall design must accommodate sites that have large numbers of people who will use the transit system. In eastern Montgomery County, FDA, Montgomery College, White Oak Medical Center, and Viva White Oak are the locations that will have the largest number of transit passengers. Hillandale and Langley Park will also have many such transit passengers.

The design fails to address how transit passengers will transfer between the New Hampshire Corridor and the Orange US29 Corridor. Our requested direct connection from FDA to the BRT station on Lockwood Dr would provide such a transfer solution. As we previously requested, that connection would be between the two Self Storage businesses and garden apartments.

Segment 4 (Beltway to FDA): Repurposing a single dedicated curb lane is the best alternative with concept 2a or 2b. The curb lane should be used for BRT, not the median, and accommodate local bus and HOV vehicles. There is little congestion with three general purpose lanes but it would become congested if one is repurposed without being used for local bus and HOV.

As noted below, the station should be north of Alton Rd, not north of Powder Mill. The curb lane should be used rather than the median so that the BRT vehicle would not be frequently switching between the curb and median in this segment. The Hillandale station needs to be in the curb lane since there is not space for a dedicated median lane under the Beltway overpass.

Segment 3 (South of the Beltway to Piney Branch Rd.) We support alternative 3 in this segment since it provides two BRT lanes and retains three lanes for auto traffic in this very congested segment.

Segments 1 and 2 (Piney Branch Rd to DC line.) We support alternative 2 (concept 2a/2b) that repurposes the curb lane for BRT lanes and local buses. In addition, HOV vehicles need to use those lanes as well. This section today is congested, so more capacity is needed when one lane is repurposed. Alternative 3 would not allow HOV vehicles to use the BRT lane. The BRT/HOV lane needs to operate in an uncongested manner.

Comments on Station Locations (From the interactive Map)

Colesville Station. The proposed station just south of Randolph Road would have a major impact on existing businesses due to the loss of parking and access: the Verizon store on the west side and bank building on the east side. A better location would be north of Exxon station on the west side and 7-11 store on the east side. Those locations would not eliminate access and only take several parking spaces on the west side from the Shopping Center.

Valley Brook Dr: Agree with the proposed location.

Jackson Rd Station: Agree with the proposed location.

FDA Station at Mahan Rd. This station must not be on New Hampshire but must be on the Federal Research Center either at its existing location (on the NW Loop Rd) or at the proposed transit center, if GSA builds it. The station needs to be close to the potential passengers and not a long walk away. Expanded Ride On service should circulate in the residential area east of New Hampshire and take them to the FDA station (many of those using Ride On would work at FDA) or the US29 White Oak station on Lockwood.

Powder Mill Rd. The proposed locations for both Alternative 2 and 3 are unacceptable for multiple reasons. First, they will impact existing businesses. Second, they make the severely congested traffic situation south of Powder Mill worse. Third, the stations are too far away from where the vast majority of the potential passengers originate or terminate. Rather the station should be just north of Elton Rd. Most potential passengers will come from the Hillandale Gateway project that will start construction later this summer, the businesses along Elton Rd and the shopping center.

Also, the WMATA bus stop on the east side just south of Powder Mill Road needs to be eliminated and thus use the other existing one by Safeway, near the proposed BRT station. This bus stop at Powder Mill causes extensive backups on northbound New Hampshire Ave in the PM peak by blocking vehicles turning onto Powder Mill Rd and exiting the shopping center. There cannot be a worse location for a bus stop.

Since there is no direct access to the beltway westbound from Elton Rd, Elton Rd should be extended across New Hampshire Ave as a slip ramp and join the existing ramp from southbound New Hampshire. That would eliminate U-turns at Powder Mill or trips forced to exit that quadrant onto Powder Mill.

Other Stations. The proposed location of the remaining stations south of the Beltway are acceptable except in Langley Park. Rather than a station on the east side of New Hampshire, it would better for the northbound travel to stop in the existing transit center.

If you have any questions, please contact Dan Wilhelm at 240-553-0060 or 301-928-2197 (cell) or djwilhelm@verizon.net.

Sincerely

Daniel L. Wilhelm, GCCA President

Robert Richardson, LABQUEST Exec Committee

Appendix

The Flash network needs to be considered in a much larger geographic area. It must consider the development and BRT slated for the White Oak Science Gateway Master Plan, proposed Fairland/Briggs Chaney Master Plan and service to Burtonsville and Howard County.

Within the Fairland Master Plan, some people residing in the two residential areas will want to access retail in the Briggs Chaney Shopping Center and businesses (Auto dealers, Verizon, and Adventist HQ). More than that they will want to access the Life Science and White Oak centers. This includes large employers in Viva White Oak, White Oak Medical Center, Montgomery College, FDA, two large shopping Centers and a large number of office buildings. Some people within the White Oak Center and LifeSci Center (Viva is projected to add 5000 housing units) will want to access retail facilities, auto dealers, gov't center, Paint Branch High School and recreation center in Briggs Chaney area. The routes within the transit Master Plan have always been considered as illustrative and thus understood that deviations would occur when the final design is undertaken.

The proposed Flash configuration integrates four BRT corridors. (The US29 corridor is actually two routes: Blue from Burtonsville and Orange from Briggs Chaney.) The four corridors are US29 Blue and Orange, Randolph Road and New Hampshire Ave. The configuration is illustrated in Figure 1 and consists of the following:

- The Blue Line from Burtonsville is unchanged within Montgomery County but is extended to Howard County. DOT indicates an extension to Maple Lawn is only two years away. The provision of a dedicated lane along US29 is needed to provide truly rapid service.
- Orange Line from Briggs Chaney should use Old Columbia Pike to the Tech Road Station for two reasons. The first reason is to provide good transit to four additional stations: Shopping Center/Auto Park, Old Columbia Rd/Briggs Chaney Rd (shopping, housing and Paint Branch HS), Verizon (if fully used – looks empty now), and Adventist HQ/New mixed-use development. The second reason is to stop at the US29 Tech Rd BRT station and then be able to turn east on Tech Rd. If US29 continues to be used, the BRT vehicle will not be able to undertake both actions.
- Orange Line routed through Life Science Activity Center rather the Stewart Ln. It picks up new stations at Montgomery College (New Apartment development, hotel/restaurants, businesses), WOMC (Businesses, shopping center, Riderwood), and Viva White Oak (12M sq ft of development).
- Orange Line crosses Paint Branch from Viva directly to WO Rec Ctr (new station) and picks up existing stations in the White Oak Activity Center. The connection to FDA will go directly from the White Oak Station. When the White Oak Shopping Center redevelops (eg Sears), the BRT station will be moved from Lockwood into that center and BRT routing will be changed to use the frontage road (these won't affect other stations.)
- Randolph Rd Corridor (red) will follow the above orange routing and connect with the New Hampshire Ave (Green) Corridor at the FDA station, effectively becoming a single red line.

The following table tabulates the number of seats needed it will take to get between the 17 location pairs - not available, one, two or three.

	Master Plan (MP)	MP+VIVA	Recommended
one	21	22	117
Two	13	19	19
Three	2	3	0
N/A	117	109	17
Total	153	153	153

Master Plan Configuration (with US29 As Built)



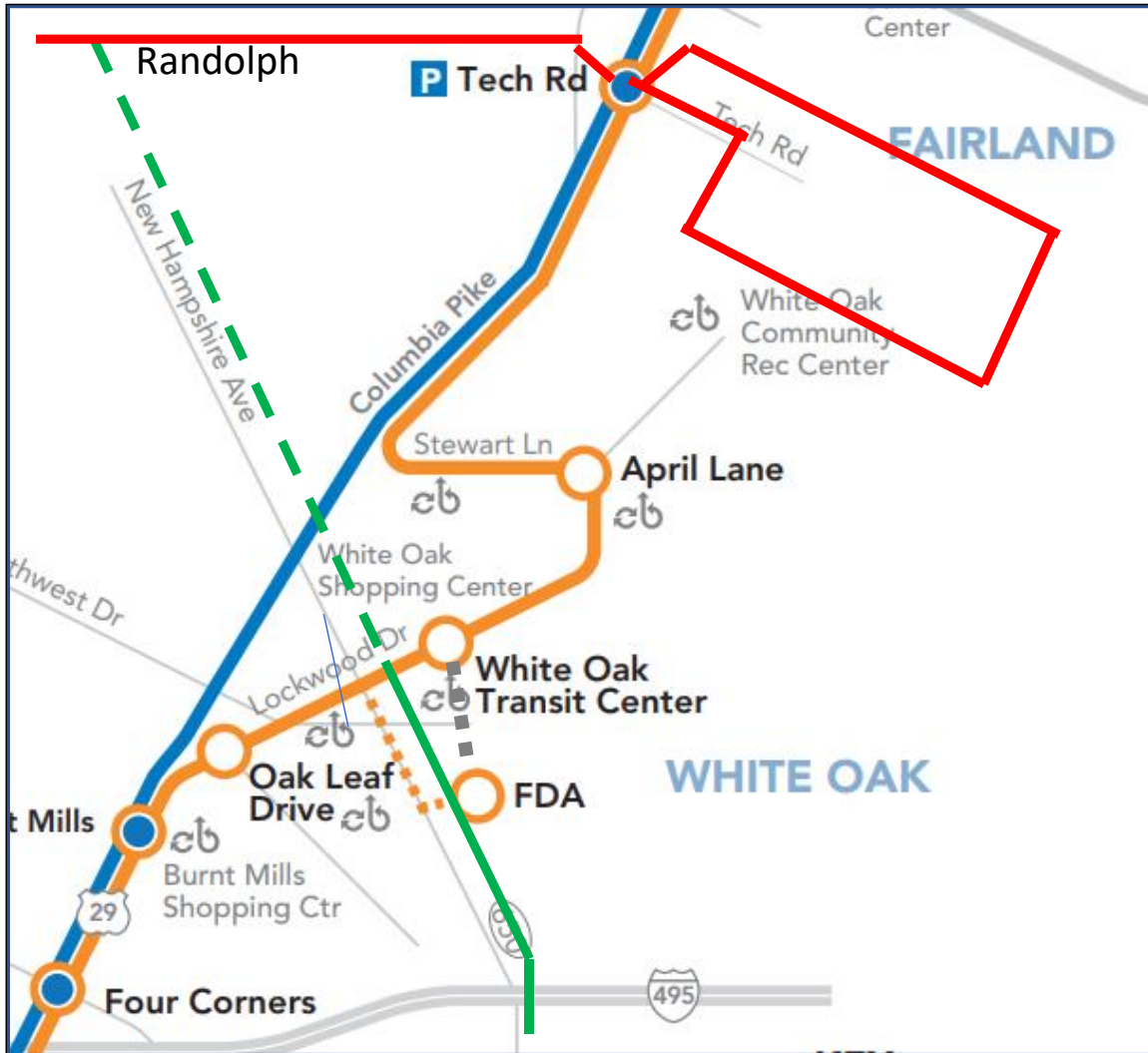
Blue: US29 Orange: Briggs Chaney Green: New Hampshire south (Hillandale) Red: E Randolph Rd west.

Master Plan Configuration Connectivity Matrix (From/To)

		Tech Rd Station	Viva	MC	WOMC	Stewart Ln	WO Shop ctr	FDA	WO Rec Ctr	E County Rec	Auto Pk	HS	Verizon	Adv HQ	North	SE	SW	West	East	
Life Sci Ctr	Tech Rd Station																			
Life Sci Ctr	Viva	Yellow																		
Life Sci Ctr	M College	Yellow	Yellow																	
Life Sci Ctr	WOMC	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow																
WO Ctr	Stewart Ln	Oran			Yellow															
WO Ctr	WO Shop Ctr	Oran				Oran														
WO Ctr	FDA	Oran				Oran	Oran													
WO Ctr	WO Rec Ctr				Yellow			Yellow												
Briggs Ctr	Rec/Castle	Oran				Oran	Oran	Oran	Yellow											
Briggs Ctr	Shop ctr/Auto Pk									Yellow										
Briggs Ctr	Old Colombia/HS										Yellow									
Briggs Ctr	Verizon											Yellow								
Briggs Ctr	Adv HQ/												Yellow							
North	Burtonsville/Maple Lawn	Blue				Blue	Blue & Oran	Blue & Oran		Blue & Oran				Yellow						
SE	Hillandale/DC/Langlely/Purple	Green & Oran				Green & Oran	Green	Green		Green & Oran					Red & Green & Oran					
SW	Four Corners/SS	Blue				Oran	Oran	Oran		Oran					Blue	Green & Blue				
West	Colesville/Glenmont	Red				Red & Oran*	Red & Oran*	Red & Oran*		Red & Oran*					Red & Blue	Red & Oran & Green*	Red & Blue			
East	PG County				Yellow				Yellow										Yellow	

Yellow: No BRT Connection
 Clear: one BRT Vehicle Ride
 Blue: Two BRT Vehicle Ride
 Red: Three BRT Vehicle Ride

Master Plan Configuration Plus Viva White Oak



Blue: US29 Orange: Briggs Chaney Green: New Hampshire south (Hillandale) Red: E Randolph Rd west & Viva

Recommended Configuration

