

Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) improvements to US29.

Conclusion: The concept of BRT is that transit vehicles need to be rapid, which means that they are not stuck in stop-and-go traffic like cars and other vehicles. The existing design of US29 does not meet that criterion. The community lobbied MC DOT for such a design in the 2016-2017 timeframe, but as we can all observe, we were not successful.

We were successful in 2000 in getting the Council to approve funding to address this shortcoming, including a Median Lane Alternative that had been developed by several community members. DOT compared that design without any refinement to one they developed, called the Managed Lane /HOV Alternative. Since the result was not a fair comparison, the Council directed DOT in 2021 to improve the Median Alternative and compare it with the Managed Lane/HOV alternative. The results of this last study, called US29 Reliability Study, was presented to the public, Planning Board, and Council this fall. On November 29, 2022, the Council approved the Median Lane Alternative and appropriated \$9.5M to undertake the detailed design.

Alternatives: The conceptual designs of the two alternatives are shown below. The Managed Lane Alternative repurposes one of the three existing general-purpose lanes in the peak direction and uses it for the BRT vehicles and HOV-2 vehicles. While an improvement, it failed to provide such a dedicated lane between Stewart Ln to MD650 and between Lockwood Dr (PM)/Southwood Dr (AM) to Sligo Creek Pkwy. The middle section is where congestion is most severe and thus where a dedicated BRT lane is the most needed.

The Median Alternative provides one or two dedicated lanes from Tech Road to Sligo Creek Pkwy.

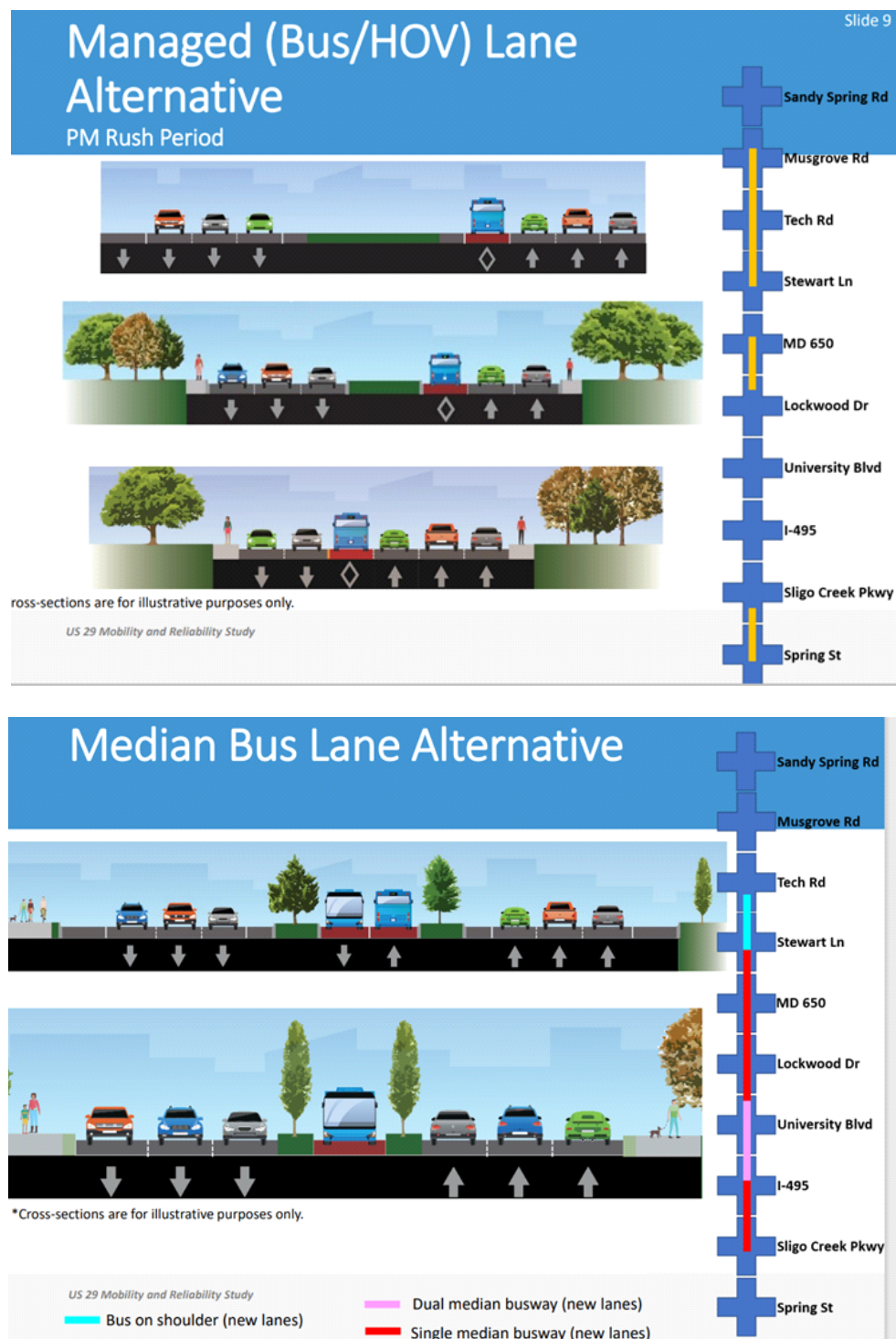
North of Tech Rd: In both alternatives, the section between Tech Rd and MD198 in theory provides a dedicated lane since the outside shoulder can be used. This is not happening in practice. Further discussion of that section is on hold pending the outcome of the Fairland/Briggs Chaney Master Plan. The staff draft of that plan is expected in the next several months.

South of Sligo Creek Pkwy: For both alternatives, the section from Sligo Creek Pkwy to Spring St is being investigated as part of another study. This is the section where lanes shift. During the AM peak period, there are four lanes southbound and two lanes northbound. In the PM peak, the number of lanes switches. The Reliability Study found that providing a dedicated BRT lane for this very short segment makes little difference in travel time.

Alternative Evaluation. The Reliability Study found that the travel times for all vehicles (BRT, carpool and passenger) were best under the Managed Lane Alternative. The modeling for that study assumed that 10% of the existing single-occupant vehicles would switch to carpool and that those currently carpooling would continue to carpool (for a total of 29%). However, as more people switch to carpooling, this would likely induce more travel in the corridor. If people did not switch to carpooling, the taking of a travel lane will substantially increase congestion. Since the BRT/HOV lane is not isolated from the other lanes, many single-occupant drivers will be tempted to use it. This becomes a major enforcement issue. The modeling also assumed pre-pandemic travel patterns, thus did not fac-

tor in increased working from home. That assumption also failed to address future job growth and other traffic changes. While DOT felt the carpool assumption was conservative, the Council and many others felt it was not realistic.

While the Managed Lane Alternative is projected to cost less initially, the Council felt the design would need to be redone in a few years – thus long term, the Median Alternative would be the most cost effective. The Managed Lane Alternative also failed to satisfy other county policies – including the recently approved Thrive 2050 Plan and Climate Action Plan. Those plans envision extensive transit service and less reliance on driving. The Managed Lane continues to encourage driving.



Other Improvements related to US29 BRT

Pedestrian: The 2021 study proposed many pedestrian and bicycle improvements near the BRT stations so people would be able to easily and safely access the stations. The Council separated them from the BRT design and created a separate capital improvements project to provide those improvements.

Intersections: Another recommendation from the 2021 and 2022 studies was to make seven intersection improvements for the Managed Lane Alternative and two for the Median Alternative to reduce passenger car congestion. While some of those improvements are needed, the council decided they would be addressed separately, not as part of the BRT design. Also, several of those intersections need improvements to accommodate Viva White Oak and other planned development.

Extend to Howard County: Montgomery County has been holding conversations with Howard County about extending the service to that area. The discussions center on Montgomery County operating the service with Howard County covering the extra cost. Three stops are initially being considered: Maple Lawn, Applied Physics Lab and Columbia Mall. This could happen in as little as two years. Federal funds have been requested to purchase more BRT vehicles.

Integration with local bus: Another part of the BRT concept is that BRT and local bus need to be integrated. The local buses would circulate in and around residential and commercial areas near the BRT stations to take people to/from the BRT stations. DOT is presently conducting a local bus Reimaging Study to meet that objective as well as improve/expand local bus service. That study team held a public meeting on Nov 15 where they presented survey results. Their next step is to analyze the existing service.

Other Needed East County Transit Facilities

In addition to making the changes identified above, additional improvements are needed in East County to fully achieve the vision, including the following;

- BRT on New Hampshire Ave. with a stop at FDA and direct connection through the existing development to the US29 BRT at the White Oak Transit Center. This study is underway.
- BRT on Randolph Rd., with transfers at Tech Rd. to US29 BRT. Funding is needed for this study.
 - If the Viva White Oak development occurs, adding a new road from Viva White Oak across Paint Branch to the White Oak Rec Center. This would replace the widening of Old Columbia Pike south of Industrial Pkwy and Bridge Replacement over the Paint Branch. This could be an outcome of an ongoing study concerning Old Columbia Pike.
 - If above bridge is built, reroute US29 BRT (Orange route from Briggs Chaney), Randolph Rd. BRT and New Hampshire Ave through the Life Science Activity Center and White Oak Activity Center from Tech Rd. to FDA using the above new bridge. Viva White Oak will add a huge amount of housing and commercial development in this area. That new route will also connect to other major destinations including White Oak Medical Center, Montgomery College and existing/planned housing and commercial development.