MTA Maryland

MARYLAND TRANSIT ADMINISTRATION

MARYLAND DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

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

James T. Smith, Jr., Secretary • Robert L. Smith, Administrator

December 22, 2014

Mr. Glenn E. Nelson
915 Hillside Lake Terrace, Apt. 402
Gaithersburg, MD 20878

RE: Letter of October 3, 2014 – How to Preserve the Berm
Letter of October 29, 2014 – Addendum to Oct. 3, 2014 Comments on CCT

Dear Mr. Nelson:

This letter is in response to the subject letters on the Corridor Cities Transitway project (CCT). I apologize for the late response. However, I wanted to take the time to answer your questions after having the team give serious consideration to your ideas.

For the CCT, the Maryland Transit Administration (MTA) is adhering to Federal Transit Administration requirements for conducting the project in conformance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) and other FTA and MTA requirements. Under the NEPA process, the MTA is developing an Environmental Assessment (EA) and eleven supporting technical reports. The EA and technical reports will document the assessment of impacts for the entire project including impacts from the CCT in the Washingtonian Woods area. Impacts to specific neighborhoods will be discussed in the Socioeconomic Technical Report (SETR). The technical reports will be made available at the time the EA is released. These reports will be posted on the project website and made available at area County government buildings (libraries, regional services center, etc.). The schedule for the publication and release of the EA is early 2015.

This letter contains responses to the various points raised in your correspondences. My team and I considered your comments very carefully and have prepared this response which addresses the topics raised in each letter.

Letter 1: How to Preserve the Berm

Your letter suggests that the transitway could be moved closer to Great Seneca Highway and farther away from the residences at the Vistas at Washingtonian Woods by eliminating or relocating the existing Ride-On bus stop located in the southwest quadrant of the Great Seneca Highway intersection with Muddy Branch Road, in the hopes of preserving the existing earth berm. The project team believes this suggestion has merit.

Ride-On reviewed the average daily boarding and alighting information and is open to studying a relocation of this bus stop. As such, the team is looking in to several typical section options to minimize the distance between Great Seneca Highway and the transitway, taking into consideration protective barriers such as guardrail or concrete barrier needed for protection between the roadway and transitway, as well as adequate space to allow ADA-compliant access to the crosswalks on Great Seneca Highway and Muddy Branch Road.

As the CCT project moves toward 30% Design in the summer 2015, we may modify the alignment in this location to minimize impacts to Washingtonian Woods. However, as you note in your letter, it is anticipated that the entire berm will not be able to remain as it is today and some modifications and impacts will still occur.

Additionally, the traffic team will evaluate the length of the right turn lane from eastbound Great Seneca Highway to southbound Muddy Branch Road. However, Great Seneca Highway is a state route which is owned and maintained by the Maryland State Highway Administration (SHA), and thus has ultimate control regarding the needed length of the right turn lane. The project team is coordinating regularly with SHA and will continue to work on this issue.

Letter 2: Addendum to October 3, 2014 Comments on CCT

Your addendum letter focuses on the CCT alignment along Muddy Branch Road and Great Seneca Highway and raises four concerns. These are addressed here and will be further addressed in the EA and supporting technical documents described above.

Concern A: CCT Operations through Intersections

Your letter raises concerns regarding the operation of the CCT buses approaching and passing through the Great Seneca Highway intersection with Muddy Branch Road. The transitway and related improvements to the existing traffic signal system (also addressed in more detail in Concern C below) will be designed to accommodate all necessary motor vehicle and CCT bus movements, including concurrent passing movements of inbound and outbound buses approaching each other in the intersection. Additionally, the transitway, traffic signals, pavement markings, and signing will be designed to discourage and prohibit the "quasi-outlaws" as described in your letter from impeding the CCT buses.

To specifically address your concerns of potential delay factors, it is important to understand that we strive to create a balanced transportation network that continues to serve the motorist while providing for a high quality bus rapid transit service. In doing so, compromise to bus travel time sometimes needs to be made in certain areas to provide for the safest service while a slight increase in delay to lower volume motorist turning movements may be the better decision in other circumstances. One of our current signal design phasing principals throughout the entire corridor is to have the CCT bus travel through intersections when the adjacent motorist through movement is operating. Therefore, when the CCT bus turns from Great Seneca Highway to Muddy Branch Road (the turning movement you discussed), the CCT bus phase will occur concurrent with the eastbound Great Seneca Highway through phase. We do not intend to introduce a fifth signal phase exclusively for the CCT. Since the Great Seneca Highway through phase is allotted the most time in the signal cycle at this intersection, we are maximizing the potential for the bus to proceed through the intersection and minimizing delay for the bus. However, as mentioned above, signal phasing is always a balance and, as a result, the only compromise with this approach will be minimal delay imposed on the right turning motorists from Great Seneca Highway to Muddy Branch Road. Vehicles turning right will have to wait in the Great Seneca Highway right turn lane until the bus has passed.

Concern B: Noise impacts along Muddy Branch Road

Noise analysis performed as part of the CCT indicates that no noise mitigation is required along Muddy Branch Road. The EA and supporting Noise and Vibration Technical Report will include a noise analysis of long term and short term effects from the CCT. The report will identify noise receptor locations which were evaluated and state the findings of the analyses. For locations where impacts are identified, the team will work under State and Federal guidance to determine what, if any, mitigation measures are

appropriate. The CCT bus will operate through the corridor and at the intersections in a fashion similar to general traffic. It will not beep as a standard practice. Also, there will be no bells or gates at roadway crossings.

Concern C: Additional Traffic along Muddy Branch Road

Traffic signals have been proposed on Muddy Branch Road at the intersections of Midsummer Drive/Mission Drive and at Midsummer Drive/Belward Campus Drive to provide safe vehicular and pedestrian crossings of the transitway. As part of this project, the project team observed and studied the existing traffic along Muddy Branch Road and Great Seneca Highway. The team created a detailed traffic simulation model called VISSIM using existing volumes and projected growth to the year 2035 to assess the present and future quality of operations of general traffic and the CCT bus. We are confident that the addition of these two signals along Muddy Branch Road can create good progression along the corridor and will provide safe ingress and egress to the neighborhoods of Washingtonian Woods and Mission Hills. The proposed signals will protect turning movements from being in conflict with the CCT bus, will provide protected pedestrian movements across Muddy Branch Road, with audible pedestrian signals and countdown pedestrian signal heads (a major concern of the communities) and will also eliminate the stacking of turning vehicles in the median.

Further, in order to protect vehicular turning movements and optimize operations, exclusive turn lanes and left turn signal phases will be introduced along Muddy Branch Road. Based on field observations and feedback from community members, it is already difficult to turn onto Muddy Branch Road from Midsummer Drive and Mission Drive. Traffic from Midsummer Drive tends to use the median area as a refuge and up to three cars have been observed pulling into the median at the same time. This behavior causes sight distance issues and completely blocks the intersection for other turning vehicles, thus diminishing traffic operations and increasing intersection delay. Introducing a signal at both intersections will better serve the side street traffic and turning movements. Further, all the signals along Muddy Branch Road from Great Seneca Highway to Darnestown Road will be coordinated, which means the signals will communicate with each other and the signal timing will be optimized to allow for progression through the corridor.

Concern D: Selected Location of the CCT Alignment along Great Seneca Highway and Muddy Branch Road

The selection of alternatives and options under consideration for the CCT are based on many factors. These include a full range of environmental impacts, capital costs to construct, stormwater management implications, travel time for CCT buses, quality of CCT bus operations, impacts to existing and future traffic, constructability, consistency with local plans, right-of-way requirements, and coordination and input from government agencies, residential communities, businesses, and institutions. Rarely does one singular alternative offer the best results in all of these areas.

The MTA is accountable for and makes technical decisions on the CCT project. The MTA is supported by a project team which includes consultants with expertise in engineering, transportation planning and environmental analysis. Although MTA is the lead agency responsible for technical decisions, these decisions are not made in a vacuum. There is ongoing coordination with a wide range of stakeholders and their input is taken into account in making decisions. Examples include individual residents; community associations; businesses; institutions; multiple agencies within State government (i.e. the Maryland State Highway Administration, the Maryland Department of the Environment, the State Historic Preservation Office); multiple departments within the governments of Montgomery County, the City of Rockville, and the City of Gaithersburg; Federal agencies (i.e. the Federal Transit Administration, US Army Corps of

Engineers); the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority; utility companies; and many other interest groups. The MTA is part of the Maryland Department of Transportation and reports to its Secretary and the Governor of Maryland.

In terms of process, the MTA assesses alternatives and discusses that assessment with many of those listed above, depending on the specific topic. The process often becomes iterative, with refinements made in alternatives based on the input received. Ultimately, the MTA is responsible for selection of the preferred alternative. Alternatives may be revised as the project moves forward in planning and design, and becomes "final" at the completion of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process. Based on additional engineering and new information, an alternative may be revised after the completion of NEPA, but this may require an Environmental Re-Evaluation.

I appreciate your continue interest in the CCT. If you have any further questions, please feel free to contact me at 410-767-1380 or by email at rkiegel@mta.maryland.gov.

Sincerely,

Rick J. Kiegel

Rick J. Kiegel, P.E.
Project Manager, Corridor Cities Transitway

cc: Mr. Henry M. Kay, Executive Director for Transit Development and Delivery
Mr. Kevin Quinn, Director, Office of Planning and Programming