

CHALLENGES OF IMPLEMENTING THE GENERAL PLAN

*Choose always the way
that seems the best,
however rough it may be;
custom will soon render it
easy and agreeable.*

—Pythagoras

The mere statement of goals, objectives, and strategies is of little importance unless these policy statements are implemented. As a long-range, County-wide plan that will guide innumerable decisions, the challenge of the General Plan's implementation is consistency and political will. Montgomery County is not generally shaped by one or two momentous decisions; it takes its shape from many small, incremental decisions which occur over time. Every decision that is made without asking, "What guidance does the General Plan offer?" is a lost opportunity toward achieving a coherent land use vision.

The master plans and sector plans are important vehicles for implementation of this Refinement. As such, each plan must address the manner in which it conforms to or departs from the guidance of the Refinement. One way to promote adherence to the Refinement is to explore alternative methods to integrate the goals and objectives of the General Plan Refinement into the deliberations that mold the individual master plans and sector plans.

Challenge 1

MAINTAINING WEDGES AND CORRIDORS

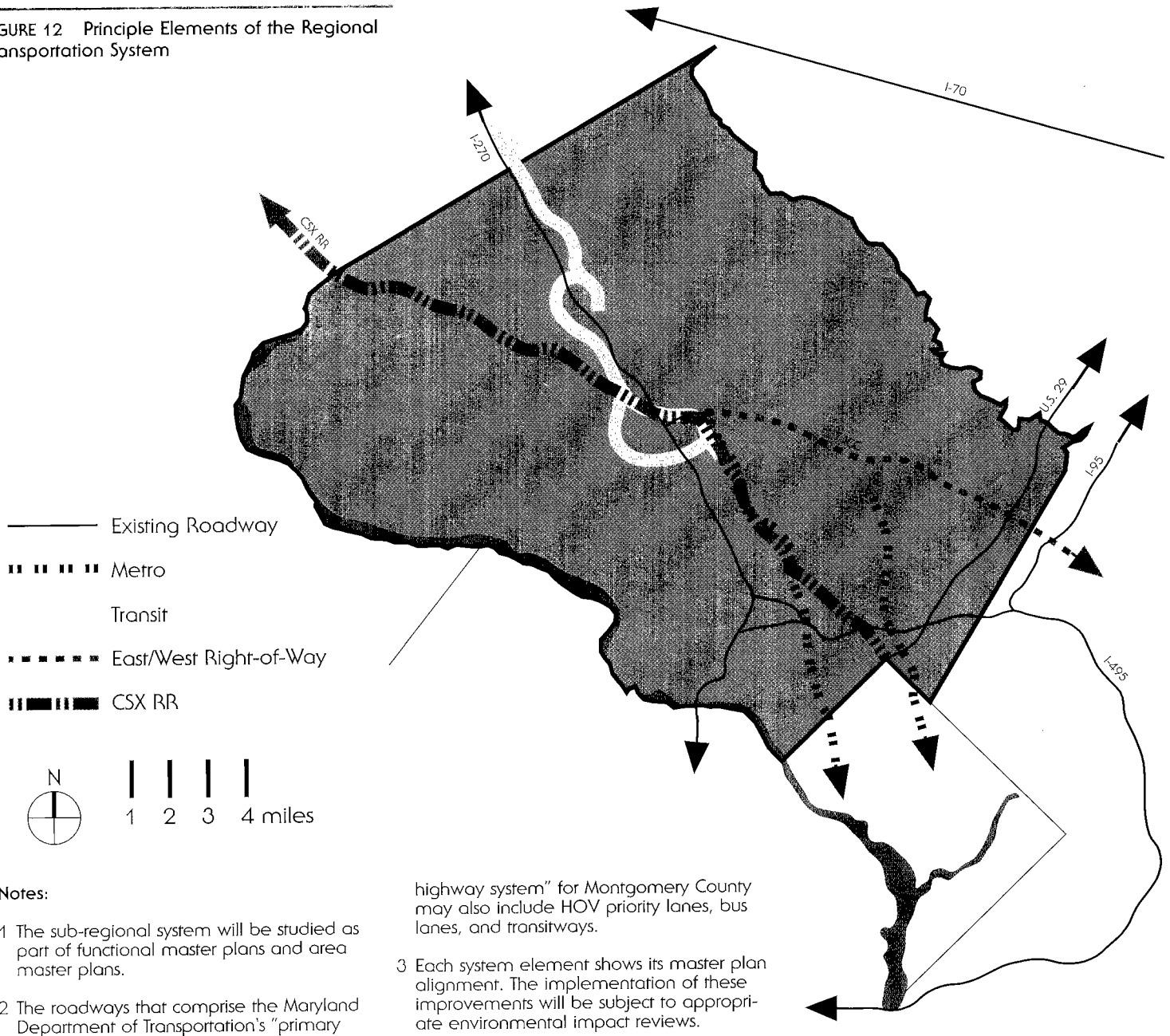
The vision of the Wedges and Corridors pattern requires protecting the Agricultural and Residential Wedges while encouraging high-density centers in the Urban Ring and the I-270 Corridor. Market forces will create pressure to intensify development in the Wedge areas. The challenge of maintaining the Wedge will be to resist intensification. The Wedge can be preserved if the most intense development is directed to the Urban Ring and I-270 Corridor.

CHALLENGES

Relatively dense, diverse, and compact centers in the Urban Ring and I-270 Corridor are necessary to have a dynamic and growing economy while protecting the Wedge. It will be a challenge to make these centers even more attractive to the market by providing them with the best possible public facilities, infrastructure, and design. As land becomes scarce, the revitalization and

full development of existing centers must be a cause for celebration, not confrontation. It will be a challenge to ensure that those centers continue to be good neighbors and desirable places to live. That only will occur when issues such as compatibility and livability are given as much consideration as profitability.

FIGURE 12 Principle Elements of the Regional Transportation System



Notes:

- 1 The sub-regional system will be studied as part of functional master plans and area master plans.
- 2 The roadways that comprise the Maryland Department of Transportation's "primary

highway system" for Montgomery County may also include HOV priority lanes, bus lanes, and transitways.

- 3 Each system element shows its master plan alignment. The implementation of these improvements will be subject to appropriate environmental impact reviews.

Challenge 2

GUIDING MARKET PREFERENCES

Some of the visions of the General Plan Refinement conflict with current market preferences. For example, the General Plan Refinement advocates increased intensity of development in the Urban Ring and the I-270 Corridor to accommodate growth, while preserving the Wedge areas, reducing traffic congestion, and protecting the environment. To achieve this greater intensity, the Refinement supports the development of multi-family housing, higher density employment locations, and alternatives to the single-occupant automobile. The market, meanwhile, prefers the privacy and spaciousness of the single-family detached house and the campus-style office park and wants to retain the convenience of the automobile.

Montgomery County must aggressively explore new approaches to guide these market preferences to ensure that the vision of the General Plan Refinement can be realized.

Challenge 3

MANAGING LIMITED RESOURCES

Montgomery County's supply of land, natural resources, and fiscal resources is limited and will continue to be limited in the foreseeable future. The prudent management of scarce resources is essential to the future well-being of the County. The need to do more with less will continue.

Careful management of scarce resources will be necessary. The General Plan Refinement recognizes the importance of public investment to implement the Wedge and Corridor concepts of the Refinement. One on-going challenge will be to determine the appropriate amount of flexibility for environmental constraints based on the location and density of a proposed development. When a decision is made to alter the environment to accommodate human activities it must be managed in a way that permits development, yet preserves open space and the natural environment.

Challenge 4

PROVIDING FOR FUTURE MOBILITY

Providing for future mobility, given both fiscal and environmental constraints, will be a significant implementation challenge. It will be very difficult for new transportation rights-of-way to match single-occupant vehicle demands, given current behavior patterns. Previously master planned rights-of-way and alternatives to single-occupant vehicles must be available in the future, if Montgomery County is to achieve the goals of this General Plan Refinement.

The accompanying map (Figure 12, page 35) depicts principal elements of the regional transportation system, existing and planned. The regional transportation system illustrates roads defined by the State of Maryland as those roads, existing and planned, that are classified by the State as State primary highways. (The State and Montgomery County maintain separate classification systems; County primary highways are not included in Figure 12.) Rail links, defined as those rail links in Montgomery County that are incorporated into current master and sector plans, are also illustrated in Figure 12. These road and rail connections to neighboring jurisdictions and locations are considered major components of a regional network that stretches far beyond Montgomery County's borders.

These links are vital.

Without them, it would not be possible to make the economic and social connections that Montgomery County citizens and their neighbors depend upon. Moreover, these links are an integral part of the regional transportation system. Planned land use patterns and densities are determined to be reasonable based on assumptions that certain planned transportation links that are vital, both within and outside the planning areas, will provide the needed transportation capacity. Should these planned transportation links fail to materialize, the balance between land use demands and transportation supply of many master and sector plans could be undermined.

These links are frail.

The present alternatives to these rights-of-way range from few to none; in operation, a single accident or breakdown can disrupt them for an intolerable length of time.

These links are expensive.

Montgomery County has relied on federal and State funding for the vast bulk of transportation capital costs. Reliable funding sources are needed to expand the network to serve future growth.

Montgomery County residents and employers rely upon a regional transportation network for their economic well-being. Figuratively, closing the gates at Montgomery County's borders can hurt Montgomery County's residents and workers as much as their neighbors. Managing the existing transportation system and planning for its future is a mutual responsibility of neighboring jurisdictions that will require a frank exchange of ideas and decisive action by a regional partnership. Future transportation links will not be used as a justification to change the land use character of an area. This is particularly true for any east-west links which tend to traverse Wedge areas.

Challenge 5

SEEKING REGIONAL SOLUTIONS THROUGH REGIONAL COOPERATION

Montgomery County shares many major problems with its neighbors, including air pollution, water pollution, and traffic congestion. Major elements of the region's infrastructure cross jurisdictional boundaries. To solve regional problems effectively, new approaches must be explored to reach regional consensus.

The impediments to regional cooperation often lie in the inability of local government to overcome short-term interests to achieve long-term solutions. The existing regional framework often creates an environment better suited for competition than cooperation. There is competition for scarce federal and State funds. There is

competition for clean, revenue-producing commercial activity. There is competition for the prestige and visibility of federal headquarters. This competition sometimes prompts decisions that can be justified on the grounds of economic gain, but questioned from a broader and longer-term fiscal or land use perspective.

The fate of the individual areas that constitute the Baltimore-Washington region will become increasingly intertwined. The greater region will continue to influence Montgomery County's future and vice versa. The County cannot afford to be isolated in its thinking or actions. It must become a partner in coordinated decision making. Montgomery County, with its economic and cultural ties to Washington, D.C., and fiscal and political ties to Annapolis and Baltimore, is in an excellent position to work within these regional and state-wide frameworks.

Challenge 6

ENCOURAGING COOPERATION WITH MUNICIPALITIES

Although this Refinement is designed to guide land use activity in Montgomery County, consistent implementation will not occur without the cooperation of the municipalities that have planning and zoning authority within the County's borders. This Refinement invites an acceptance of its basic concepts by all entities involved in land use decisions. The County and the municipalities must cooperate to achieve the Refinement's vision.

CONCLUSION

The General Plan Refinement presents a vision for the future, but it does not create that future. It is a call to action and invites participation in the planning process to help implement its vision. It is a call to form effective partnerships of public and private interests, rural and urban philosophies, and new and old ideas. It is an invitation to be guardians of Montgomery County's future.