



MONTGOMERY COUNTY PLANNING DEPARTMENT
THE MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION

February 24, 2010

MCPB
ITEM # 2
March 4, 2010

MEMORANDUM

TO: Montgomery County Planning Board

VIA: Dan Hardy, Chief – Move/Transportation Planning Division *DKH*

FROM: Tom Autrey (301-495-4533), Supervisor, Move/Transportation Planning Division *TA*
David Anspacher (301-495-2191), Planner Coordinator, *DA*
Move/Transportation Planning Division
Katherine Holt (301-495-4549), Planner Coordinator, *KH*
Vision/Community-Based Planning Division

SUBJECT: Purple Line Functional Plan – Worksession Number One

STAFF

RECOMMENDATION: Approve selected revisions to Draft Plan.

Recommendations, Prior Actions and Schedule

Recommendations

Staff asks Planning Board concurrence on the following discussion topics. A second worksession will be scheduled to review a Final Draft and approve the transmittal to County Council.

1. Retain Draft Plan trail location on north side of the Georgetown Branch right of way between Bethesda and Jones Mill Road.
2. Retain Draft Plan at-grade crossing at Lynn Drive with understanding that active warning devices such as lights, pedestrian gates, bells, and or other components may be part of hazard mitigation at this location. Request MTA to review potential alternatives to this crossing.
3. Retain Draft Plan double track configuration along entire segment of Purple Line.
4. Confirm objectives related to Capital Crescent Trail and Met Branch Trail connections at the Silver Spring Transit Center.
5. Confirm status of concept design and analyses underway related to the Purple Line along Bonifant Street.
6. Clarify Draft Plan width of Silver Spring Green Trail on Wayne Avenue as minimum eight foot wide joint use path and five foot buffer.

7. Confirm Draft Plan recommendation that design will incorporate space necessary for possible future station in vicinity of Dale Drive.
8. Approve selected technical edits in response to comments received from public, stakeholders, and governmental agencies.
9. Approve selected formatting and editorial changes recommended by staff.

The following paragraph provides specific recommendations, findings, and proposed revisions to Plan wording for each of these topics (**in bold**). Recommended additions to the Plan wording are in **bold underline**, and all recommended changes are also labeled as “a.” through “g.” for reference in Topics 1 through 9.

Prior Action

Prior actions related to this phase of Purple Line project planning include the following:

- October 30, 2007 – Master Plan Advisory Group Meets for First Time
- October 17, 2008 – Maryland Transit Administration Releases Alternatives Analysis / Draft Environmental Impact Statement (AA/DEIS)
- January 15, 2009 – Planning Board Recommends Medium Investment Light Rail Alternative with modifications as Locally Preferred Alternative
- January 27, 2009 – County Council Recommends Medium Investment Light Rail Alternative with modifications as Locally Preferred Alternative
- February 2, 2009 – County Executive and County Council forward recommendation on Locally Preferred Alternative to then Secretary Porcari (see Attachment A)
- August 4, 2009 – Governor O’Malley Selects Medium Investment Light Rail Alternative with modifications as Locally Preferred Alternative
- October 29, 2009 – Planning Board Approves Public Hearing Plan Draft Plan
- December 10, 2009 – Public Hearing on Purple Line Functional Plan

Future Tentative Schedule Related to the Functional Plan

- March 4, 2010 – Worksession Number 1
- April 1, 2010 (Tentative) – Worksession Number 2
- April 2010 – Planning Board Forwards Draft Plan to Council
- May and June 2010 – County Executive Fiscal Review of Plan
- June 2010 – County Council Hearing Notice Period
- July 2010 – County Council Review and Adoption of Plan.

Latest Estimated Schedule for MTA Purple Line Project Planning

- Winter/Spring 2010 - MTA submits New Starts application and request to enter Preliminary Engineering (PE) / Final Environmental Impact Study (FEIS)
- Spring 2010 – Begin PE/FEIS
- Winter 2012 (First Quarter Calendar 2012) – Complete PE/FEIS

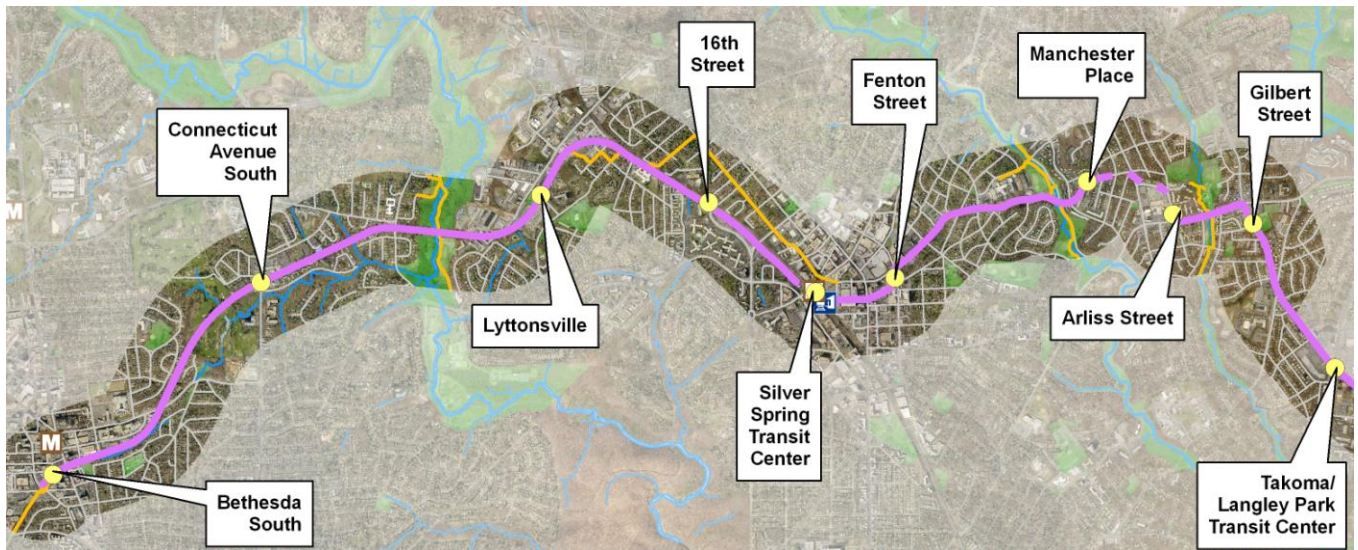
- Spring 2012 – Begin Final Design
- 2013 / 2014 – Begin Construction
- 2016 / 2017 – Complete Construction

Background

The Planning Board Public Hearing Draft Plan was approved on October 29, 2009. A Public Hearing on the Purple Line Functional Plan was held on December 10, 2009. The comment period closed on February 12, 2010. The comment period was extended twice – the first time because of a technical error in the Public Hearing notice and a second time because of newspaper failure to publish the notice related to the snowstorm in December. This is the first worksession on the plan.

The Purple Line Functional Plan is an update of the Georgetown Branch Master Plan Amendment (January 1990) and as such, will amend other adopted plans and the Master Plan of Highways that previously reflected a Purple Line from Bethesda to Silver Spring. This Public Hearing Draft Plan also confirms the previously adopted alignment over the Georgetown Branch right of way with the adjoining Capital Crescent Trail and (unlike previously adopted plans) extends the Purple Line east of Silver Spring to the County Boundary on University Boulevard (MD 193) where the Purple Line enters Prince George’s County and continues east to New Carrollton. Figure 1 depicts the Purple Line within Montgomery County.

Figure 1 – Purple Line Within Montgomery County



Public Testimony

A total of 40 individuals testified at the Public Hearing on December 10, 2009 – some representing groups but many testifying as individuals and not representing any specific group. Over 80 additional individuals or groups submitted written testimony prior to the close of the comment period at the end of the day on Friday, February 14, 2010. The staff also received a

number of comments in advance of the Public Hearing – between the time the Public Hearing Draft was approved on October 29, 2009 and the Public Hearing on December 10, 2009. All of the above testimony or comments are summarized in Attachment B of this staff memorandum. Attachment B also includes staff responses to the testimony or comments. The testimony and comments are in chronological order.

Worksession Objective

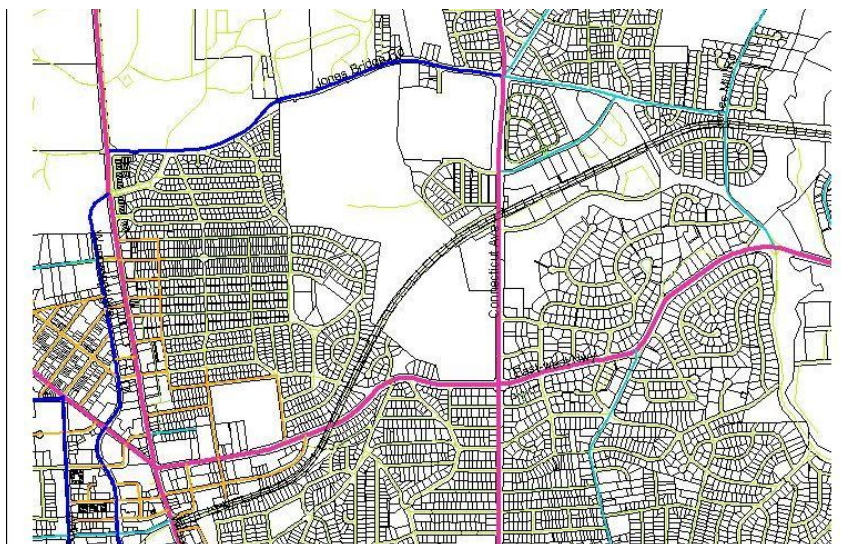
The objective of this first worksession is to examine those issues raised by the testimony that have not been previously addressed by the Planning Board and County Council. In that regard, this memo does not revisit the issues of the Purple Line alignment or mode. This memo also does not examine mitigation efforts related to environmental impact – important considerations that were included in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement and that will be further examined and refined throughout Preliminary Engineering (PE) and the development of the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS).

This memo, therefore, focuses on other issues raised in the testimony for which the staff is seeking guidance prior to the development of the Planning Board Draft Plan that will be forwarded to County Council. There are also proposed changes and/or housekeeping items related to the document layout, organization and narrative that the staff would also like to review with the Planning Board that were not part of the public testimony.

1. THE CAPITAL CRESCENT TRAIL – NORTH SIDE OR SOUTH SIDE IN BETHESDA-CHEVY CHASE?

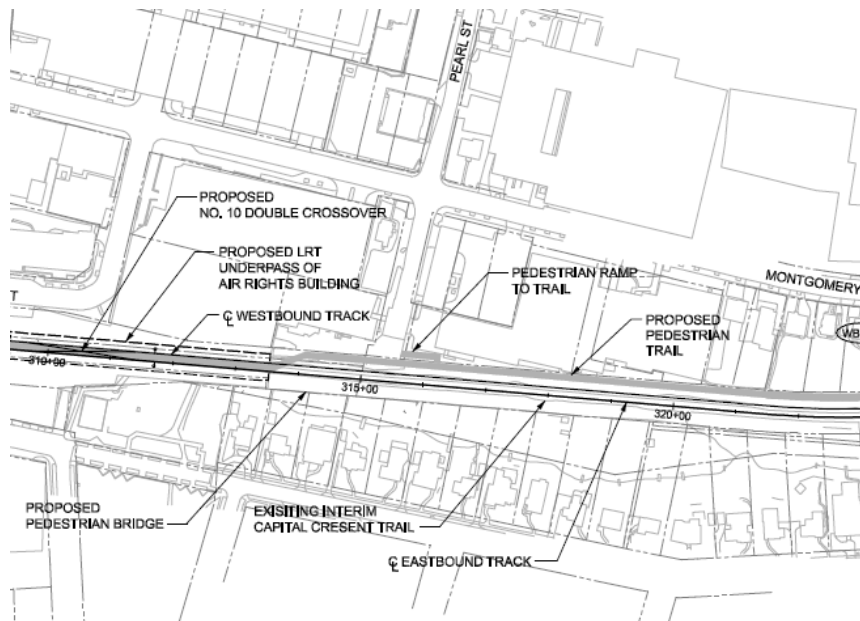
The Public Hearing Draft of the Purple Line Functional Plan reflects the Locally Preferred Alternative and therefore shows the trail on the north side of the Georgetown Branch right of way from Pearl Street in Bethesda east to a point just south and west of the Jones Bridge Road / Jones Mill Road intersection where the trail crosses to the south side before going under Jones Mill Road. Figure 2 depicts the segment where the trail is on the north side of the right of way.

Figure 2 – Purple Line from Bethesda to Jones Mill Road



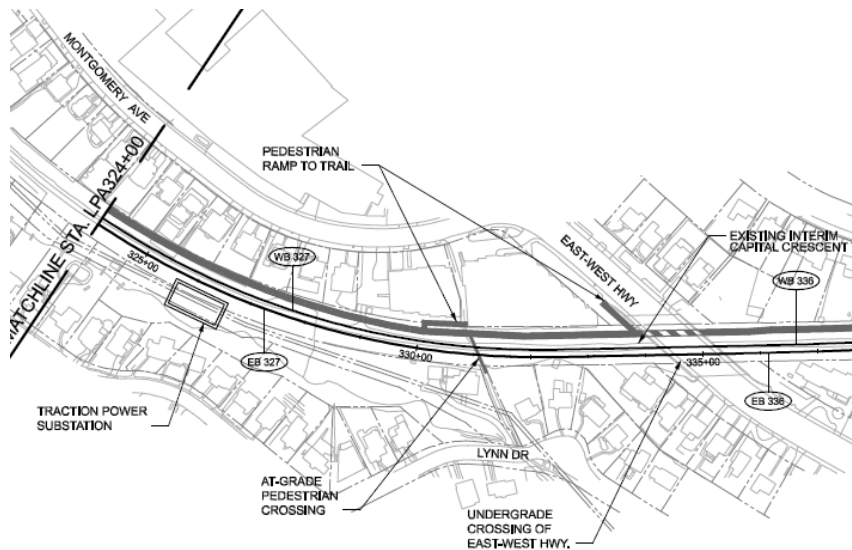
The Town of Chevy Chase boundary in this area extends east along the south side of Georgetown Branch right of way from 47th Street (just east of Wisconsin Avenue) to East West Highway. There are three trail access points in this area – one at Pearl Street (see Figure 3), one at Lynn Drive (see Figure 4), and one from East West Highway (also shown in Figure 4).

Figure 3 – Purple Line and Trail @ Pearl Street



Source: MTA Website – LPA Drawings

Figure 4 – Purple Line and Trail @ Lynn Drive and East West Highway



Source: MTA Website – LPA Drawings

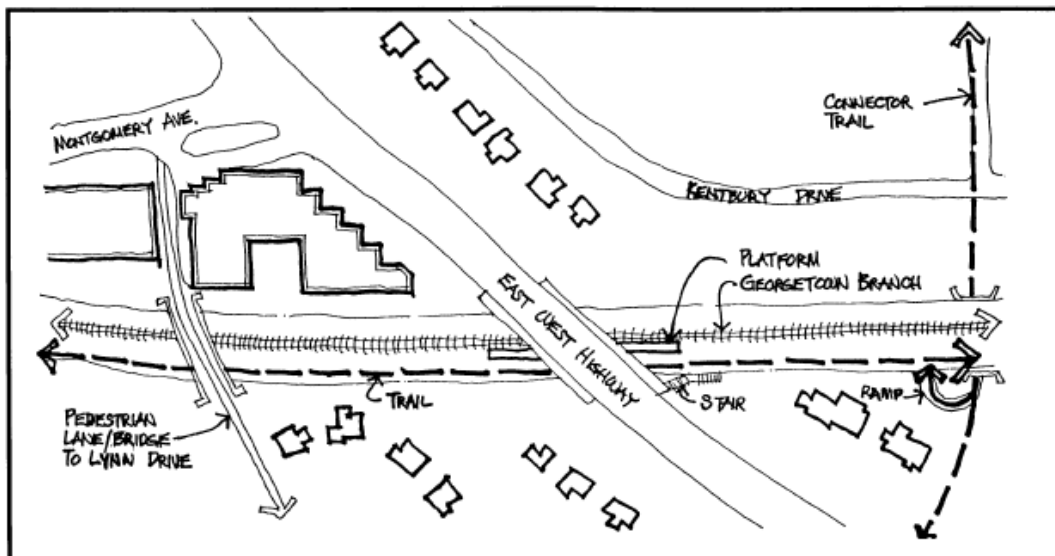
The Town of Chevy Chase presented testimony at the December 10, 2009 public hearing and also submitted supplemental written comments on February 12, 2010. The testimony and supplemental comments are included as Attachment C. The Town’s testimony and comments include a number of concerns. One particular focus (particularly in the case of the supplemental comments) is the location of the trail and the at-grade crossing that provides pedestrian access to the trail at Lynn Drive (to/from the south) and Montgomery Avenue (to/from the north). A discussion of some of the factors related to this issue is presented below.

It should be noted at the outset of this discussion that the supplemental comments submitted by the Town conclude with a request to “deny the State’s request to amend (the plan) ... until the State conducts sufficient preliminary engineering on both alternatives (trail on either north or south side) ...”

Current Master Plan (1990 Georgetown Branch Master Plan Amendment)

The 1990 Master Plan includes a trail on the south side of the right of way and a “pedestrian lane/bridge” over the right of way providing a path between Montgomery Avenue to Lynn Drive (see Figure 5 below). The closest access point to the trail to the west is at Elm Street Park. The closest access point to the east is a stairway on the north side of East West Highway. Just to the east of that location is a pedestrian path on County right of way at Sleaford Road that goes under the Georgetown Branch right of way. The 1990 Master Plan includes a proposed future station under East West Highway that would be served during off-peak hours only.

Figure 5 – Lynn Drive Access Point in Current Master Plan



Source:

Georgetown Branch Master Plan Amendment – Approved and Adopted – January 1990, Figure 22, page 56.

Public Hearing Draft Plan and Locally Preferred Alternative

The Draft Plan reflects the LPA as shown in Figures 3 and 4 above and therefore shows the trail on the north side with access points provided via pedestrian ramps on the north side of the right

of way at Pearl Street, Lynn Drive, and East West Highway and via a pedestrian path on the south side at Lynn Drive. The crossing of the right of way at Lynn Drive is at-grade – there is no bridge.¹ There is also no planned station at East West Highway in the Draft Plan.

Proximity to the Right of Way Center Line

One issue raised by the Town is proximity to the light rail vehicles – specifically the loss of the buffer provided by the trail on the south side of the right of way along the Town boundary.

A fundamental question in responding to this concern is how many people and what type of buildings are in closest proximity to the light rail vehicles? The staff examined the issue of proximity along the right of way between the Bethesda Station and Jones Mill Road. Specific segments were identified to facilitate review by the various stakeholders.² These segments included:

- Elm Street Park to Western Edge of Columbia Country Club
- Connecticut Avenue to Jones Mill Road

The methodology included examining the number of parcels where the structure closest to the right of way fell within 30, 50, or 80 feet from the center of the right of way – ignoring for a moment where the train and trail are located relative to one another. The underlying objective (for residential locations in particular) is to try and determine if there is any significant difference when comparing the north side and the south side.

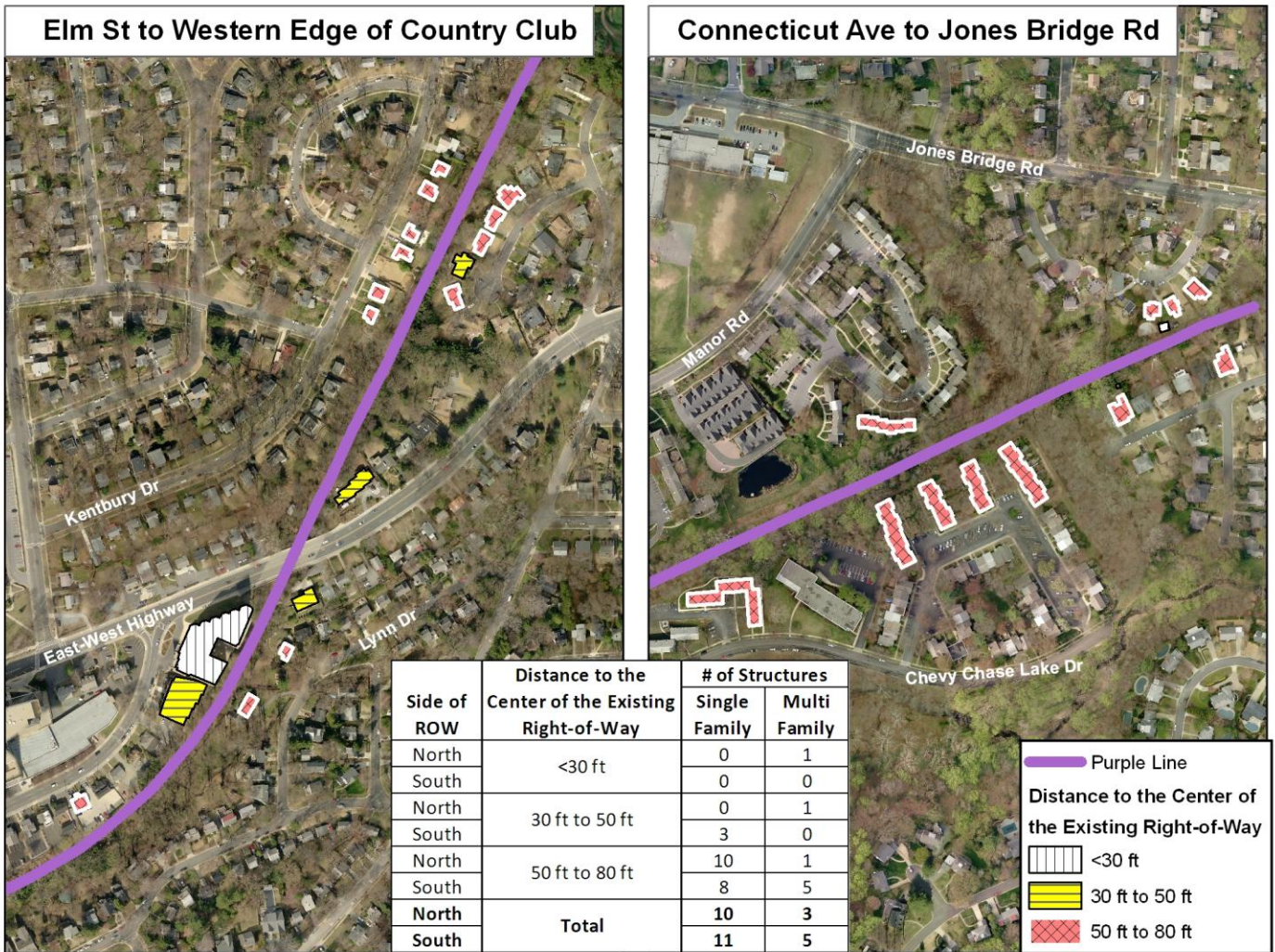
A summary of the findings is presented in Figure 6 below. As noted in the summary, there is no significant difference in the number of parcels when considering the entire segment from Elm Street Park to Jones Mill Road. Within the segment that includes the Town boundary to the south, there are two more single family homes than on the north side but there are more residences (multi-family) on the north and those residences are closer to the centerline.

The staff therefore does not believe there is any material difference between the north side and the south side when considering proximity to the right of way. If anything, the number and proximity of the residences on the north side in the segment along the Town boundary favor placing the trail (as a buffer if proximity to the train is the major or sole criteria) on the north side – not the south side.

¹ There was a bridge proposed over the right of way at the Lynn Drive access point with the trail on the south side of the right of way in an earlier concept plan developed by the MTA Project Team. One example can be found in the Purple Line Functional Master Plan Purpose and Outreach Report – January 2008 (page 33). The drawing is dated November 2005. The link to the report is:
<http://www.montgomeryplanning.org/transportation/projects/documents/FINALPURPOSEANDOUTREACHREPORT010808.pdf>

² While the focus of this discussion is on the concerns expressed by the Town of Chevy Chase, it should be noted that there are stakeholders that prefer the trail be located on the north side of the right of way. The East Bethesda Citizens' Association, for instance, has submitted written testimony specifically noting its opposition to the position taken by the Town of Chevy Chase.

Figure 6 – Residential Proximity to Georgetown Branch Right of Way



Source: Staff Analysis

Noise Related To Train Operations

The Town of Chevy Chase has also raised eight specific concerns related to the methodology used by the MTA in assessing the noise impact of train operations (see Attachment C). The MTA has indicated that it will be responding specifically to those concerns raised by the Town. It is anticipated by staff that any modifications to the evaluation and proposed mitigation will be identified by the MTA in the FEIS and throughout preliminary engineering. The noise effects of the LRT are not expected to be significant from an acoustical perspective but noise effects will be considered in developing screening techniques.

Staff concurs with the MTA evaluation that the location of the trail has no significant effect on the noise impact from light rail vehicles on adjacent properties to either side of the right-of-way.

Trail Experience

One reason for locating the trail on the north side of the right of way between downtown Bethesda and Jones Mill Road is that the existing topography allows for the trail to be on average about four feet above the rail along segments where there are no changes in elevation required for transition into a tunnel (e.g., Bethesda) or underpass (e.g., Jones Mill Road) without incurring significant additional expenses related to providing the vertical separation. Under East West Highway for instance, the trail and train tracks are separated by a bridge support. A MTA illustration of the trail separation is provided below in Figure 7.

Figure 7 – Purple Line and Trail Just West of East West Highway



Source: MTA

The Town has noted in its comments that “trail experience” as a reason for moving the trail from the south side to the north side “seems not be based upon on any specific engineering and cost analyses”.

The staff finds the MTA was responsive to stakeholder concerns about the need to provide as much separation (both horizontal and vertical) as possible between the trail user and the train. The staff also believes that the topography on the south side along the Town boundary is such that additional costs would be incurred to construct the trail on the south side – relative to the costs of the trail on the north side (all other considerations being equal).

2. LYNN DRIVE AT-GRADE PEDESTRIAN CROSSING

The Town has expressed concern about the at-grade crossing at Lynn Drive. As previously noted, the 1990 Master Plan and earlier (December 2005) concept planning done by the MTA Project team located the trail on the south side of the right of way with a pedestrian bridge or overpass at Lynn Drive.

It is important to review the operational and design context of this crossing. Some of the key characteristics include the following:

- Hours of train service – similar to Metrorail.
- Frequency of service in peak period – six minutes in each direction.
- Design speed along this segment – 45 mph.
- Right of way width – 66 feet.
- Two schools on the north side of East West Highway.
- Existing “tunnel-like” pedestrian approaches to the right of way from both directions
- Two major one-way roadways north of the Georgetown Branch right of way

A map depicting the location of the trail access at Lynn Drive in relation to the surrounding area is provided in Figure 8.

Figure 8 – Trail Access at Lynn Drive



The current trail access is a path that is narrow (about 5-8 feet) and bordered by a fence (south of the right of way) and building walls (north of the right of way).

A photo of the access from Lynn Drive on the south side of the right of way is shown in Figure 9.

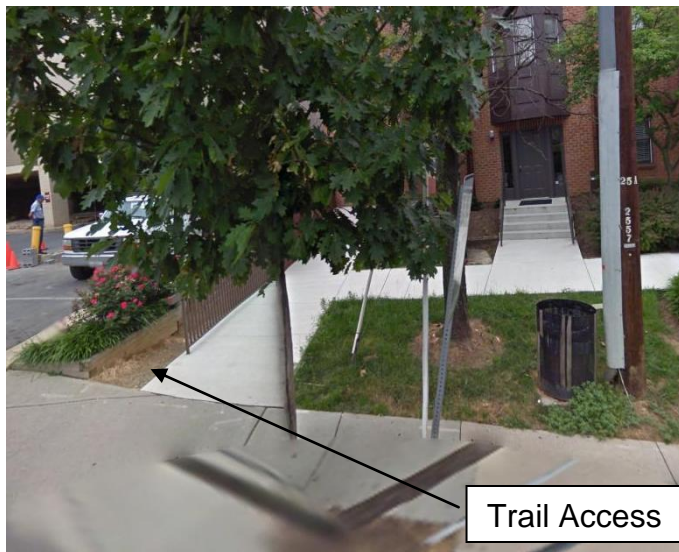
Figure 9 – Entrance to Trail Access from Lynn Drive



Source: Google Earth

The constraints on the north side of the right of way are similar. The path west of the Rivera Apartments is even narrower than the path on the south side as noted in Figure 10 below.

Figure 10 – Entrance to Trail Access from Montgomery Avenue



Source: Google Earth

Given the operating environment and design or physical constraints with the setting, staff reviewed available literature related to safety criteria for light rail pedestrian crossings. We were

interested in reviewing standards related to at grade crossings given the Town's concerns and the proposal as contained in the Draft Plan.

One document in particular provided guidance – standards used by the Tri-County Metropolitan Transportation District of Oregon or Tri-Met, the transit agency serving the greater Portland, Oregon area.³ According to the article, Tri-Met's general approach to planning and design is to eliminate hazards where possible, then mitigate or warn. More specifically, the approach is to:

- Eliminate hazards through planning and design where feasible.
- Mitigate unavoidable risks by providing safety treatments in instances where planning and design does not allow for the elimination of hazards.
- Provide warning devices (passive or active) where neither planning, design, nor safety treatments effectively eliminate identified hazards or adequately reduce associated risks and hazards.
- Determine whether an identified risk or hazard that cannot be eliminated or mitigated is acceptable.

In the staff's opinion, the above approach is reasonable – one that would be expected to be a normal part of the preliminary engineering phase the Purple Line project planning is about to enter. **We will to explore this issue with the MTA Project Team at the work session.**

The Tri-Met standards call for consideration of both active and passive warnings at pedestrian crossings in environments like that at the Lynn Drive crossing⁴. Active treatments include pedestrian flashing signs/light, audible warning devices, and/or automatic pedestrian gates.

The Tri-Met standards also examine the sight distance requirements for various speeds. The standards indicate the sight distance required for unanticipated stops at a speed of 45 mph is 651 feet.⁵ Our cursory review suggests that sight-distance at the Lynn Drive crossing is sufficient, but we do not have the capability to make that finding based on the planning-level materials available to us. **We will also review this issue with the MTA Project team at the work session.**

One question the staff has in reviewing this issue is whether we want to provide a crossing at Lynn Drive at all. A case could be made that the focus of any (new) design considerations should be on directing pedestrians (students specifically) to cross East – West Highway at Pearl Street or provide some type of grade separated crossing of East – Highway (either over or via the trail under the highway) rather than directing pedestrians toward the intersection of Montgomery Avenue and East – West Highway.

³ Transportation Research Circular E-C058 presented at the 9th Annual Light Rail Transit Conference, "Safety Criteria for Light Rail Pedestrian Crossings", Don Irwin, Tri-County Metropolitan Transportation District of Oregon, pages 266 – 288.

⁴ Ibid. Table 1, page 286.

⁵ Ibid. Figure 4, page 287.

From a safety standpoint, it would therefore appear some consideration should be given to alternative ways to cross the Purple Line from the south side of the right of way at Lynn Drive. Examples might include:

- Constructing a second trail on the south side parallel (and within to the extent space allows) to the right of way from the Lynn Drive access point east to a ramp that would provide access to the north side of East – West Highway or extend the trail to Sleaford Road where a planned pedestrian path will go under the right of way and provide access to the north side.
- Utilizing the existing sidewalk on Elm Street to connect with a planned ramp that would provide access to Pearl Street via a ramp in the Air-Rights Building tunnel and a pedestrian bridge over the right of way from the south side at Elm Street Park to the north side.
- Constructing a path on the south side of the right of way west from the Lynn Drive access point to connect with the ramp accessible via Elm Street Park.
- Constructing a pedestrian overpass at the access point at Lynn Drive (similar to the 1990 Plan concept in Figure 5). Due to space constraints adjacent to the Riviera Apartments, this option might preclude access between the trail and Montgomery Avenue via the path next to the Riviera Apartments.

These options would address the safety concerns posed by the at-grade crossing but would likely increase capital costs. Examining the feasibility of these types of solutions (or other alternatives) is an example of the process outlined in the Tri-Met process. The first step is to determine if a safety concern can be eliminated altogether and then to examine mitigation techniques. It is also an example of the kind of more detailed analysis that is part of the preliminary engineering phase of the project.

The staff therefore agrees with the Town that additional study is needed to identify approaches to either eliminate or mitigate the safety concern created by the at-grade crossing. Our review of the Tri-Met approach to this issue suggests that an at-grade crossing at this location could be designed in a manner that would mitigate potential hazards. The design would include passive devices such as fencing and might involve active warning devices like signals, pedestrian gates or barriers, and/or bells.

As previously noted, there is also the potential that pedestrians crossing from south to north could be directed toward Elm Street Park and East West Highway. This guidance is an operational element involving signing, marking, and public education (with community concern specifically directed toward school students); below the radar of a master plan. The proposed Elm Street Park access, however, is not well described in the Public Hearing Draft Plan.

Staff recommends that the following modification be made to the Public Hearing Draft Plan:

- a. **Replace the wording associated with the 5th bullet under the description of the trail features on page 14 with the following sentence:**

“trail access to and from the south side of the Georgetown Branch right of way via a pedestrian ramp within the tunnel adjacent to Elm Street Park.”

3. SINGLE TRACK SEGMENTS ALONG GEORGETWON BRANCH RIGHT OF WAY

Many comments were received expressing opposition to the fact that the Draft Plan reflects the Locally Preferred Alternative and therefore proposes that the Purple Line will have double tracks – one track in each direction – along the entire segment. This is different than the current plan that featured some single track segments between Bethesda and Silver Spring – the limits of the current adopted plan.

Staff maintains that double tracking is necessary for the following reasons:

- Double tracking provides more line capacity.
- Double tracking makes it much easier to respond to travel time delays created by operating in mixed traffic or non-exclusive right of ways – key features of the Purple Line east of the Silver Spring Transit Center. Schedule adherence would suffer with single track segments.
- Double tracking allows for more efficient and cost-effective operations related to emergency responses, preventative and unscheduled maintenance, and other factors like weather, disabled trains, etc.

The MTA completed a separate analysis of this issue in response to community concerns and concluded by stating “the MTA strongly recommends against single-tracking any segment of the Purple Line.”⁶

4. CAPITAL CRESCENT TRAIL AND MET BRANCH TRAIL CONNECTION AT THE PAUL S. SARBANES SILVER SPRING TRANSIT CENTER

The Washington Area Bicyclist Association (WABA) and other stakeholders have expressed concern that the Functional Plan is not clear with respect to how the Capital Crescent Trail will connect with the Metropolitan Branch Trail at the Silver Spring Transit Center.

⁶ See the following link to the MTA Purple Line web site:

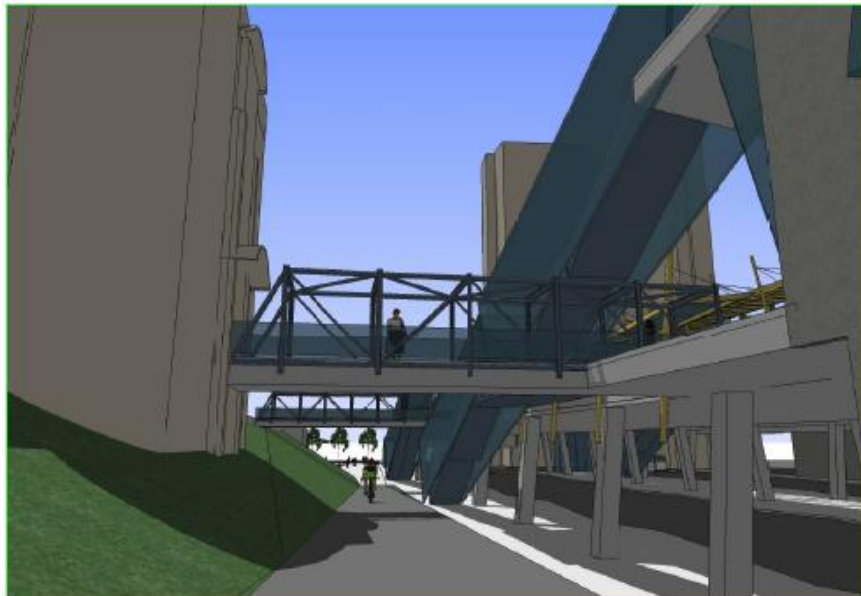
http://www.purplelinemd.com/images/stories/purpleline_documents/Opportunity%20for%20Single%20Track%20-%20Final%204-3.pdf

The Met Branch Trail extends north from the District of Columbia to the Silver Spring Transit Center. Part of the trail is already constructed in the District. The Planning Board recommended at its February 4, 2010 review of the County Executive’s CIP that design, land acquisition, and construction of the trail be accelerated so that the project schedule more closely matches that of the Silver Spring Transit Center and the trail construction to the south.

Stakeholder concern is focused on the need to develop a design that allows the two trails to safely connect without requiring cyclists to dismount or conflict with transit passengers.

The challenge is creating a design that brings the Capital Crescent Trail down to grade east (or south) of Colesville Road to meet the Met Branch Trail, while avoiding conflicts with pedestrians in the plaza area in front of the Metrorail station entrance and transit passengers on the bridge connecting the Transit Center with the MARC tracks. A rendering of how the Met Branch Trail would pass between the Transit Center (on the right), the MARC/Metrorail (elevated and to the left), and the MARC bridge in the foreground, is shown in Figure 11. The Purple Line is not shown but essentially would be elevated (higher than the MARC / Metrorail tracks) above the area where the Met Branch Trail is shown.

Figure 11 – Looking Northwest along the Met Branch Trail (Toward Colesville Road with Transit Center on Right)



VIEW ALONG METROPOLITAN BRANCH TRAIL,
COLESVILLE ROAD IN THE DISTANCE

Source: Montgomery County DOT

The Planning Board held a Mandatory Referral Hearing on the Transit Center in 2007. The staff report for the hearing noted that following:

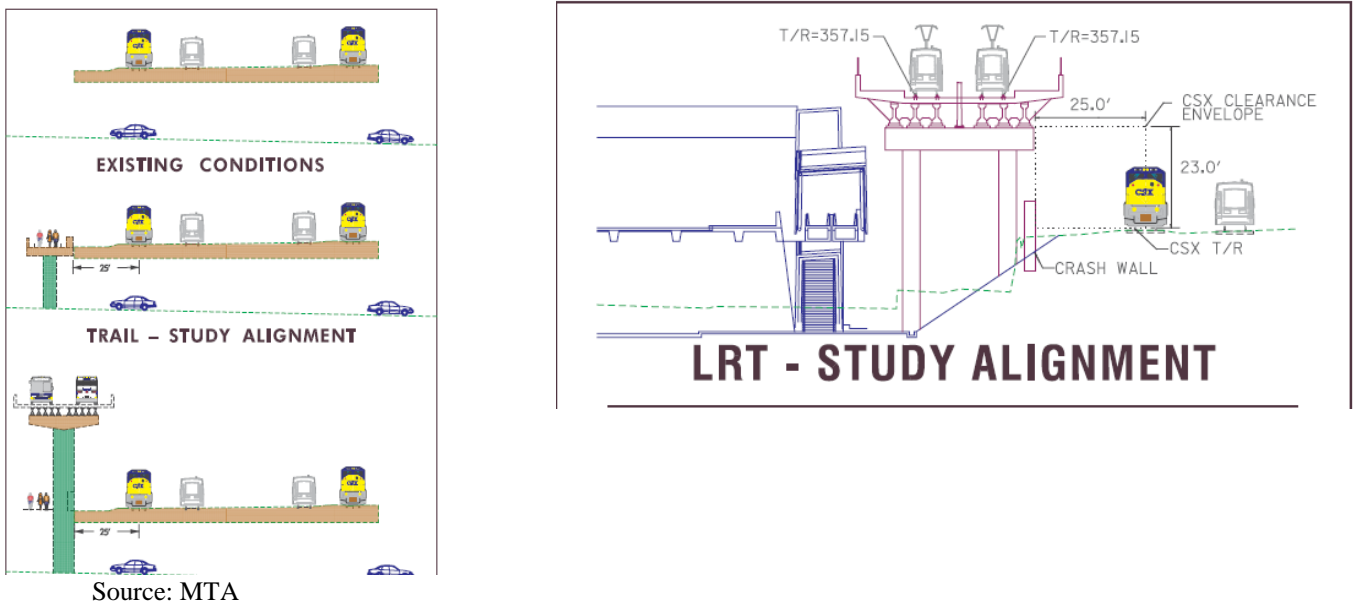
“As was the case with the initial submittal, the Transit Center plans provide for the Metropolitan Branch Trail through the site adjacent to the CSX right of way, sloping down to meet the planned Metro Plaza Park. The latest submittal also includes a connection to the third level of the Transit Center at Bonifant Street, a feature that was not included in the original design.”

Continuation of the Capital Crescent / Metropolitan Branch Trail along the Purple Line Master Plan alignment north and west of the Transit Center is included as part of the Purple Line DEIS/AA effort. Currently, the MTA Project Team is optimistic that they will be able to provide permanent trail access to the second or third level of the Transit Center over Colesville Road. This feature (i.e., the crossing of Colesville Road on an aerial structure) is part of the work that is being conducted by the MTA on the Purple Line planning effort and is not part of the Transit Center scope of work.”

The current plans call for the Purple Line to cross Colesville Road and enter the Transit Center area from the northwest at a point where it is about 10 feet higher than the 3rd level of the Transit Center and about 23 feet above the Metrorail / MARC tracks (the 2nd level of the Transit Center). The Capital Crescent Trail would cross Colesville Road from the west and enter the space between the MARC / Metrorail tracks and the Transit Center at an elevation that is about the same as the 2nd level of the Transit Center.

Earlier MTA drawings of the vertical and horizontal relationship among the Purple Line, trail and Metro/MARC tracks are shown below in Figure 12.

Figure 12 – Purple Line and Trail Over Colesville Road and Purple Line Platform at Silver Spring Transit Center (Looking Southeast toward Bonifant Street) – Along With Current Conditions Looking In Same Direction



A view of the existing conditions – looking east toward the Transit Center is shown in Figure 13.

Figure 13 – Photo Looking Southeast as MARC / Metrorail Cross Colesville Road



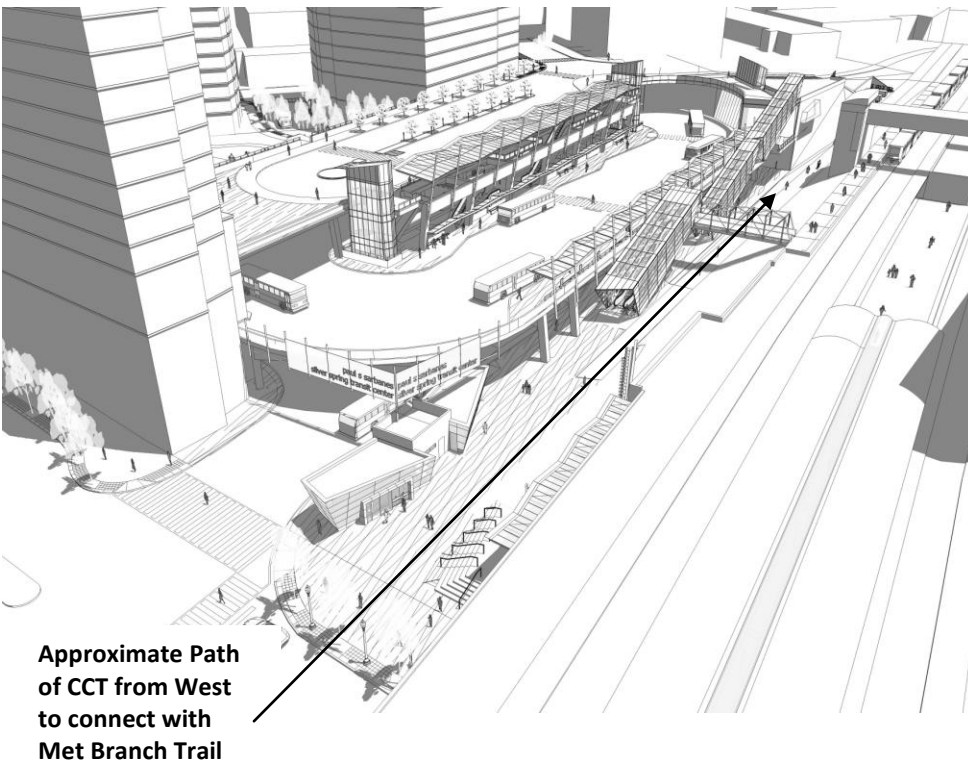
Source: Google Earth

Currently, the MTA Project Team is examining how and where to bring the (eastbound) Capital Crescent trail down (after crossing Colesville Road) to grade to directly connect with the Met Branch Trail, while minimizing conflicts with pedestrians in the plaza area in front of the Metrorail station entrance and transit passengers on the bridge connecting the Transit Center and the MARC tracks. A look at the Transit Center (from Colesville Road) is provided below in Figure 14.⁷

The MTA has identified three potential solutions in which the Capital Crescent Trail is elevated over the plaza area and then either passes: a) over, b) under, or, c) intersects the MARC bridge, before connecting with the Met Branch Trail at grade. The last example is not ideal because it brings higher speed cyclists and high-volumes of transit passengers into a common area, creating safety concerns.

⁷ Some elements shown (e.g., the information store at the location shown near Colesville Road) are no longer part of the scope of the project. The development shown adjacent to the Transit Center is a concept plan. No development in that area has been approved to date.

Figure 14 – Silver Spring Transit Center



Source: Transit Center Illustration - Montgomery County DOT. Adjacent development is based on conceptual plans – not approved plans.

This issue is important for a number of reasons. The respective trails make up a significant part of the regional trail system. There are many pedestrians and some of them will be in an unfamiliar area – looking for information and maybe in a hurry to get to a bus or train. **Every effort needs to be made to insure a direct and safe connection that avoids conflict between trail users and transit passengers.** The staff agrees that the Plan wording should be revised to better describe the overall location of planned connections.

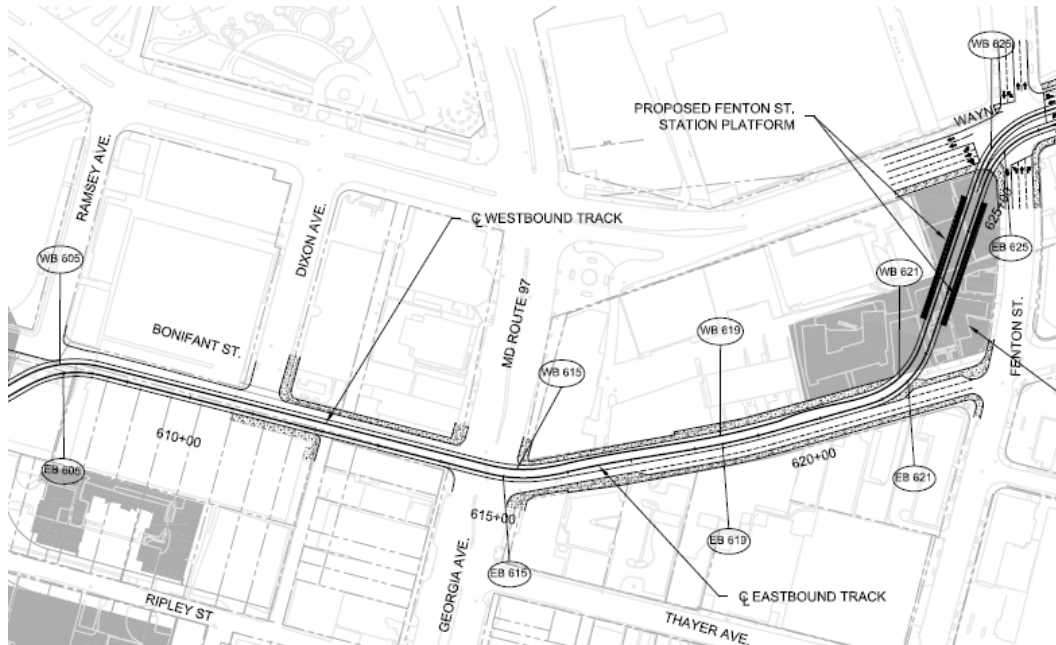
The staff recommends modifying the existing wording on page 20 of the Draft Plan related to where the trails will connect at the Silver Spring Transit Center:

- b. Replace the 6th bullet under the Capital Crescent Trail section on page 20 with “the trail will cross Colesville Road on a bridge and enter the Silver Spring Transit Center area between the Metrorail/MARC tracks and the bus bays at or near an elevation close to the second level of the Transit Center.”**
- c. Replace the 7th bullet under the Capital Crescent Trail section on page 20 with “the trail will provide access to the Transit Center for rail and bus users.”**
- d. Add the word “area” after “Transit Center” in the sentence associated with the next to last bullet under the Capital Crescent Trail section on page 20.**

5. BONIFANT STREET

The Purple Line alignment is on the south side of Bonifant Street west of Georgia Avenue and (going east) transitions to the north side of Bonifant Street east of Georgia Avenue (see Figure 15). The Purple Line (again going from west to east) is elevated at the Transit Center and returns to grade just west of Dixon Avenue.

Figure 15 – Purple Line along Bonifant Street



Source: MTA

Currently, there is two way traffic and no on-street parking allowed on Bonifant Street west of Georgia Avenue. Once the Purple Line is constructed in this area, Bonifant Street traffic will be westbound only in this segment west of Georgia Avenue.

Currently, there is two way traffic and on-street parking on both sides of Bonifant Street east of Georgia Avenue (see Figure 16).

Figure 16 – Bonifant Street East of Georgia Avenue – Existing Conditions



Source: Google Earth

The ultimate traffic pattern on Bonifant Street between Georgia Avenue and Fenton Street is under review by the County DOT and MTA. The options (with the Purple Line on the north side of Bonifant Street) include (1) one lane of one-way traffic and on street parking or (2) two lanes of traffic.

The community, the Department of Public Libraries, and other stakeholders have expressed concern about the potential impact on small businesses that the removal of parking and changes in traffic circulation created by one-way traffic could have in the long term. The elimination of any on-street parking on Bonifant Street – along with any resulting impact on traffic operations - is an issue that the MTA and the County DOT are currently reviewing.

The staff agrees that the current wording in the plan needs to be revised to more clearly distinguish between Bonifant Street on the east and west sides of Georgia Avenue and that the issue of the ultimate configuration on the east side remains an operational element requiring further review. The staff therefore recommends:

- e. **In Table 12 on page 23, delete the paragraph related to parking and replace with “On-street parking along Bonifant Street east of Georgia Avenue may be prohibited to accommodate the Purple Line. Some of the on-street parking could be retained if the street was restricted to one lane of vehicular travel. Recommendations for traffic**

operations on Bonifant Street will be finalized during later phases of project planning.”

6. SILVER SPRING GREEN TRAIL

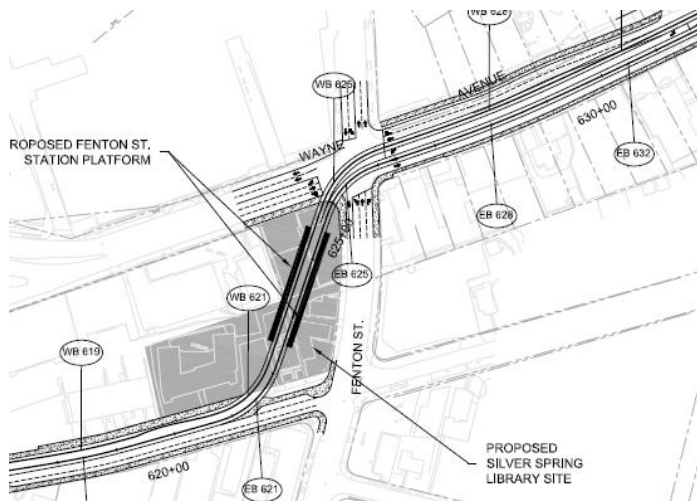
The Silver Spring Green Trail is a master planned shared use bike path that is planned to be on the north side on Wayne Avenue parallel to the Purple Line from Fenton Street to Sligo Creek Parkway. The Draft Plan (page 24) notes that the path is to be eight feet wide.

The Silver Spring Green Trail is not part of the Purple Line project but the Purple Line project planning needs to be closely coordinated with the Green Trail project planning and design objectives. The MTA Purple Line project planning is accommodating a Green Trail that includes an eight foot trail and a five foot green buffer area between the path and the curb on the north side of Wayne Avenue. This is a typical section that the staff has supported as a reasonable compromise to provide a safe and functional trail while at the same time reducing the potential for requiring additional land in the form of the strip acquisitions required at certain locations along Wayne Avenue.

Various stakeholders (e.g., some residents in East Silver Spring and the Washington Area Bicyclist Association) have expressed concern that an eight foot wide Green Trail is not what other Master Plans have contemplated for this facility and is not consistent with AASHTO standards (10 feet). The preference is for a separate ten foot joint use bike path and five foot sidewalk.

There are locations along Wayne Avenue where it is going to be difficult to devote more than 13 feet to any combination of path, sidewalk and/or buffer. One location is on the north side of Wayne Avenue where Whole Foods is located. The current concept plan for this area is shown below in Figure 17 and existing Green Trail on the north side of Wayne Avenue is shown in Figure 18. The Green Trail is also shown on the north side of Wayne Avenue in Figures 19 and 20 in the following discussion on the Dale Drive Station.

Figure 17 – Purple Line at Fenton Street and Wayne Avenue



Source: MTA

Figure 18 – Existing Green Trail Adjacent to Whole Foods



Source: Google Earth

The MTA is currently reviewing the plans to determine the areas where additional room for the Green Trail could be provided without requiring additional right of way. In a preliminary review conducted by staff, there appears to be some areas where an additional space could be devoted to the Green Trail. There are other areas like the area shown above where it is unlikely that additional space will be available.

The staff recommends that no change be made in the plan that would suggest anything other than a minimum of thirteen feet of combined path, sidewalk or buffer be dedicated to the Green Trail in the area where it is adjacent to the Purple Line.

The staff does believe that the Plan’s current wording of at least eight feet wide does not make it clear that the current planning is based upon providing a minimum of a total of 13 feet from the curb line on the north side of Wayne Avenue for some combination of path, sidewalk and buffer. Staff therefore recommends that the following modification be made to the Public Hearing Draft Plan:

- f. Delete the phrase “at least eight feet wide” on page 24 and insert a new sentence:**

“The combined trail and buffer will be at least 13 feet wide with a minimum 8 foot wide trail.”

This revision would better communicate the intent that a path wider than eight feet is contemplated in some areas and that trade-offs will be required in considering the ultimate configuration.

7. POTENTIAL STATION AT DALE DRIVE

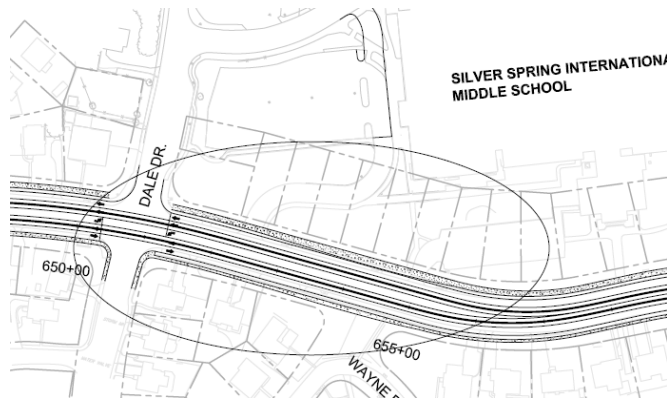
The Planning Board recommended to the County Council that the proposed station at Dale Drive be eliminated from further consideration. The County Council recommended that the MTA project planning provide for the ability to add the station at some later date if desired. The Locally Preferred Alternative as identified by the Governor refers to the status of the Dale Avenue station as “under study.” The Draft Functional Plan refers to the station as “not being included in initial construction phase; the timing of implementation to be determined.” Staff views this wording as consistent with the recommendation by County Council.

The MTA has conducted an analysis of the Locally Preferred Alternative and found that the elimination of the Dale Drive station results in a ridership loss of about 1,600 boardings and an increase in the cost-effectiveness from \$22.12 per hour to \$23.27 per hour. The MTA is recommending that the County reconsider its position on not including the station in the Locally Preferred Alternative. The MTA recommendation is not based solely on the improvement in the cost effectiveness rating but also a position that the community would benefit from the improved access to the Purple Line. On a related item, US Secretary of Transportation LaHood recently announced changes to how candidate New Starts projects will be evaluated. The changes effectively place less emphasis on cost-effectiveness and more emphasis on how the project helps meet livability and sustainability goals.⁸

The concept plan – both without and with the station platform is shown below in Figure 19 and 20.

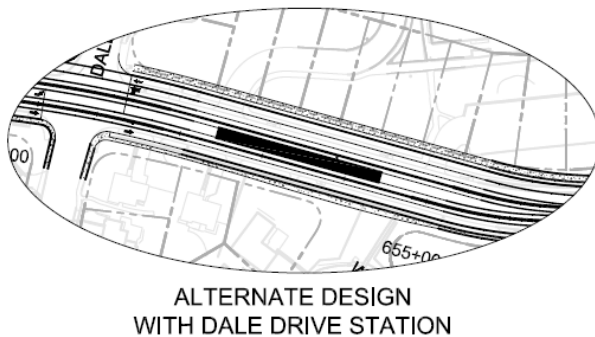
⁸ See the following link on the USDOT web site:
http://www.fta.dot.gov/documents/Dear_Colleague_New_Starts_and_Small_Starts_Project.pdf

Figure 19 – Purple Line at Wayne Avenue and Dale Drive without Station



Source: MTA

Figure 20 – Purple Line at Wayne Avenue and Dale Drive with Station



Source: MTA

It appears in reviewing the concept plans in Figure 19 and 20 that there is additional right-of-way acquisition required on the north side of Wayne Avenue east of Dale Drive if there is a station platform. While that is understandable, the staff has interpreted the County Council recommendation as requesting that the initial construction and design include all of the area that would ultimately be required to later construct the platform and other supporting facilities without requiring additional land acquisition. **The staff will review this issue with the MTA Project Team at the worksession.**⁹ This issue is also related to the ultimate configuration of the Silver Spring Green Trail on the north side of Wayne Avenue (see following discussion).

⁹ Staff also needs to seek clarification on the signalized intersections along Wayne Avenue that will have separate or dedicated left turn lanes. The Draft Plan notes that the only one that will not have a separate left turn lane is the eastbound to northbound left turn at Cedar Street.

The MTA has issued an evaluation of the merits of the station.¹⁰ The evaluation essentially makes the point that the ridership for the Dale Drive station is in part due to the riders from the area south of Wayne Avenue – the high rise apartments on Thayer Avenue being an example.

The MTA analysis estimates that a Dale Drive station in 2030 would have double the boardings of the Fenton Street Station (i.e., 1,400 vs. 750). Staff has previously discussed with the Board our concerns about this estimate given the level of detail in the forecasts to account for differences in walk access between stations in close proximity. MTA acknowledges the walk-access forecasts will be a focus of subsequent model refinement.

The community remains divided on this issue. Many residents agree with the MTA position and believe the community would ultimately benefit from a station. An MTA representation of how the station might look in the median of Wayne Avenue is presented to the left in Figure 21.

Figure 21 – Dale Drive Station



Source: MTA

Many other residents believe the location of a station at Dale Drive would present problems with school access and/or could potentially lead to higher densities in the immediate area. It should be noted that there are Planning Department work program elements in FY 10 and FY 11 that advance Purple Line Station Area planning underway in the Takoma Langley Crossroads, Long Branch, and Chevy Chase Lake station areas – so that community based visions can be adopted for guiding new development and reinvestment initiatives. There is no similar planning effort contemplated for the Dale Drive station area – now or in the future. As for school access, the MTA Project Team and staff from the Planning Department and the County Department of

¹⁰ See the following link to the MTA Purple Line web site:
http://www.purplelinemd.com/images/stories/purpleline_documents/Dale%20Drive%20and%20Wayne%20Avenue%209-14-09.pdf

Transportation continue to work with representatives from Montgomery County Public Schools on issues related to the Purple Line.

Staff recommends that the Planning Board retain the language in the Draft Plan with respect to the Dale Drive station and show the station location on Plan maps. Staff also recommends that the MTA continue to examine the issue in subsequent model runs with an emphasis on refining how the model accounts for walk access to station in close proximity of one another.

8. RESPONSES TO OTHER TESTIMONY

We received 132 comments on the Draft Plan. All of the comments and the staff responses to those comments are included in Attachment B.

Many comments were related to the issues previously examined in this staff memo. A summary of additional comments from agencies and individuals follows as a means of providing additional understanding of the subject areas and the staff responses.

Executive Branch Comments

The Executive Branch, through the Department of General Services, submitted comments on the Draft Plan that reflected both a consolidated commentary and interests of individual Executive Branch Departments (see Attachment D and the staff response in Attachment B comment 79).

Elements in Joint Letter of February 2, 2009

The Executive Branch comments note that the Draft Plan “reflects the County Executive and County Council February 2, 2009 joint letter (also included in Attachment C) containing recommendations for the locally preferred alternative and closely follows the Maryland Department of Transportation locally preferred alternative.” The joint letter recommended nine specific objectives or additional analyses that should take place in preliminary engineering. The Executive Branch comments include a recommendation that the Plan should “list these additional analyses and identify the right of way issues associated with each”.

The staff agrees that the items should be addressed in subsequent analysis but we do not agree that they need to be referenced in the Functional Plan. The staff believes subsequent planning and engineering coordination activities remain the appropriate forum for defining the scope and potential solutions of these issues.

Department of Transportation (DOT) Comments

A summary of County DOT comments is provided below:

The Plan should identify feasible locations for electrical substations – specifically how they will be accommodated along the Capital Crescent Trail and the East Silver Spring segments.

The MTA has begun to identify some preliminary locations (see Figure 2 of this memo) for the traction power substations that are subject to change. The staff believes the MTA should continue to identify these locations throughout preliminary engineering in concert with other technical analysis along the alignment. The Draft Plan (see last paragraph on page 11) acknowledges that the Plan's "dimensions, features, and description are subject to modifications as project planning continues into preliminary engineering, final design, and construction."¹¹ The staff therefore does not recommend that the Functional Plan identify final locations for these facilities.

The Plan does not develop comprehensive station area plans and leaves out how formal and informal kiss and ride will be accommodated. The Plan should also identify the location and condition of sidewalk and bicycle access to each of the stations and identify facilities that need to be built or reconstructed to accommodate the Purple Line stations.

Station area planning is underway in the Takoma Langley Crossroads Sector Plan, the Long Branch Sector Plan, and the Chevy Chase Lake Sector Plan. The staff, County DOT staff, and the MTA Project Team (through our development review coordination process) has been actively involved with the coordination of Purple Line project planning at the Bethesda and Silver Spring stations – in addition to selected locations all along the alignment. Where known, these station area attributes have been included in the Draft Plan. The MTA Project team as part of its on-going work is examining station access and passenger amenity components at all stations including stations where there is no station area planning or major development plans underway (e.g., Lyttonsville, Manchester Place, and Gilbert Street). This work is still underway and modifications to the location, design, and scope of the station area support components will change as the project proceeds through preliminary engineering and even subsequent phases. The staff therefore does not recommend that the Functional Plan identify features that have yet to be finalized and are still at a concept level stage. As noted above, the Draft Plan has language on page 11 acknowledging that modifications are expected as project planning continues into the preliminary engineering phase and beyond.

The Plan delves into operational issues (proposed restrictions to existing on-street parking, adding left turn lanes at existing signalized intersections, etc.) where the Purple Line is intended to be located on existing streets. DOT opposes having such details in a planning document and urges their removal.

The staff believes most of the Draft Plan statements related to operations are highly qualified and clear that additional analyses will be undertaken. The proposed changes described in Topic 5 of this memorandum are intended to help clarify this position.

Department of Police Comments

The Police Department recommends that an interagency working group similar to the Interim Operations Working Group for the Silver Spring Transit Center Project construction be created to deal with and plan for traffic patterns and coordination during the construction of the Purple Line.

¹¹ A similar qualifying statement is included as footnote at the bottom of page 31 of the Draft Plan.

The staff agrees.

Department of Public Libraries Comments

Libraries would like the recommendation to make Bonifant Street one way eastbound with parking on the south side to be reviewed before a final decision is made to include this recommendation. This decision would make for a very awkward access path to the Libraries' drop off/book drop location. This will also require wayfinding. If Bonifant is to be one way, the Department of Public Libraries strongly recommends that the one-way direction for Bonifant Street be studied by MCDOT to see what is the most appropriate direction for making Bonifant Street safe and convenient for the public.

The staff agrees, as described in Topic 5 of this memorandum.

Department of General Services Comments

The impacts on parking and driveway access in the commercial areas are of critical importance to the businesses in downtown Silver Spring. The Purple Line Functional Plan should emphasize the need to for these details to be addressed in the final design of the Purple Line. If parking must be removed from a commercial street, then it may be necessary for off-street public parking to be provided. Loss of parking can have severe economic impacts on businesses that depend on public parking for their customers.

The Plan should also address the importance of maintaining access to businesses for loading and parking via drives and alleys. This access should be maintained for left turns, particularly into high volume entrances such as the Whole Foods Market off Wayne Avenue.

The impact of parking by transit riders on neighborhood streets should be reviewed around station located in residential areas as a design issue to ensure that it addressed in the final design and location of these transit stations.

The Executive Department appreciates the hard work of the Planning Staff and of the Advisory Committee in preparing the Plan. We will continue to work with Planning Staff and the Maryland Transit Administration to develop a Plan that preserves the right of way needed for the Purple Line and identifies transportation issues that need to be addressed in the preliminary engineering phase of the Purple Line.

The staff agrees and believes the issues raised by the specific comments of the Department of General Services have been addressed by the inclusion of the nine items noted on page one of the Department's letter (see the additional Plan language as noted in Topic 7 above).

The Department of General Service comment related to parking in neighborhoods adjacent or near transit stations is a valid concern directly related to station location and the fact that many Purple Line stations are "walk-up" stations where walking and bus are expected to be the primary modes of access. Stations at Chevy Chase Lake, Lyttonsville, 16th Street, Fenton Street, Dale Drive, Mansfield Place, Arliss Street, and Gilbert Street all fit this category.

In practical terms, parking restrictions and enforcement are used to prohibit parking in neighborhoods that would reach a level where safety, access or functionality is compromised.

Of particular importance is that in both instances – our station area planning and the MTA’s preliminary engineering work – plans are evolving and changing at the station area level as the Functional Plan is being considered and adopted. Some potential changes could involve (as an example) the location of the alignment and platform in some of the station areas. Discussion of potential changes in the Arliss Street and Gilbert Street station (platform) locations have been a part of the very early work as part of the Long Branch Sector Plan activity. The MTA is currently examining the feasibility of moving the platform at the Lyttonsville Station further east to improve access to that station. The staff believes the statements included in the Draft Plan at the bottom of pages 11 and 31 adequately convey the fluid nature of the project planning at this time.

MTA Comments

MTA submitted a number of technical comments as included in Attachment E. These proposed changes are largely technical or editorial and staff proposes to include the changes in the Planning Board Draft unless noted otherwise in this staff memo or in Attachment B.

Comments Related To Purple Line Alignment

Many comments expressed opposition to the Purple Line alignment. As previously noted, the Draft Functional Plan reflects the Locally Preferred Alternative. Staff response to specific comments related to this issue are included in the summary in Attachment B.

Comments Related to Wording and Suggested Changes of a Technical Nature

A number of comments related to routine editing and other changes specific to the Draft Plan text were submitted. These are also included in Attachment B. The staff response includes recommendations on whether the staff is recommending these changes be made.

g. Staff supports technical changes as described in Attachment B for the following comments:

- **Comments 3 and 4 from Bethesda Chevy Chase Chamber of Commerce**
- **Comments 11, 12, and 14 from the MTA (as subsequently summarized in Attachment E)**

9. STAFF RECOMMENDED CHANGES

In addition to the above comments and responses, the staff recommends the following additional editorial modifications to the Draft Plan:

- Change the format to 8 ½ x 11 – the current format is attractive but is difficult to view on our web site.

- Show trail access points on maps.
- Page 2 – add all of the other Master Plans that will be amended once the Purple Line Functional Plan is adopted.
- Page 4 – update the County Council and Planning Commissioner’s list.
- Page 4 – Note the development shown around the Transit Center is illustrative.
- Page 7 – Add a Glossary and change the title of the existing Glossary to “List of Acronyms”
- Page 8 – Add Dale Drive Station as “Potential Future Station” to Map 1 and Map 5.
- Page 12 – Change “Kentbury/County Club” to “Columbia Country Club.”
- Page 18 – revise graphic and/or narrative to reflect that location of crossing of CSX right of way at or near Rosemary Hills Elementary School is under study.
- Page 19 – Add map showing location of yard and shop facility.
- Page 22 – show Capital Crescent Trail in correct location – immediately adjacent to CSX right of way.
- Page 33 – Update staff list

TA:DA:tc

Attachments

- Attachment A: County Executive and County Council forward recommendation on Locally Preferred Alternative to then Secretary Porcari
- Attachment B: Staff Responses to Testimony and Comments
- Attachment C: Testimony and Supplemental Comments from the Town of Chevy Chase
- Attachment D: Comments from Executive Branch
- Attachment E: Comments from Maryland Transit Administration

cc: Mike Madden – MTA Project Manager
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 Glenn Kreger
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 Margaret Rifkin
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 Kathy Reilly
 Mellissa Williams
 Bill Barron