

Agenda

1. Meeting Began
2. Discussion – Purple Line Now letter on MPAG agenda and email response of MPAG members of March 27, 2008
3. The Work Program Going Forward
4. Philadelphia SEPTA Visit Discussion
5. MTA – Silver Spring Presentation
6. Looking Ahead
7. Upcoming Meetings

Master Plan Advisory Group (MPAG) Members: Pat Baptiste, Veda Charrow, Tony Hausner, Jonathan Jay, Byrne Kelly, Caleb Kriesberg, Bill Mellema, Anne Martin, Ted Power, Todd Solomon, Karen Roper, Harry Sanders, Karen FitzGerald, Ed Asher, Judy Tso, Fred Schultz, Laurie Kelly, Chris Richardson, Peter Gray, Pam Browning (Alt. - Mier Wolf), Rob Rosenberg, and Sue Knapp

Absent Members: Marcy Fisher, Clay Harris, Rob Lanza, Eric DeVaris, Andy O’Hare, Mike Marsh, Joe Rodriguez, Phil Alperson, David Saltzman, and Gigi Godwin

Others: Tom Autrey (Staff), Katherine Holt (Staff), and Michele Cornwell

1. Meeting Began

Tom Autrey began the meeting at 7:15 pm.

2. Discussion – Purple Line Now letter on MPAG agenda and email response of MPAG members of March 27, 2008

As most of you are aware, “Purple Line Now” forwarded a letter to Chairman Hanson suggesting that the MPAG refocus our agendas to issues of most concern to the County Council. More specifically, the organization is concerned that too much time has been spent on issues related to the Georgetown Branch and not enough time on issues related to Silver Spring and eastern Montgomery County. In addition, the organization would like to see a stronger educational component for MPAG members. The staff received the letter on March 14, 2008 and was notified in advance that the letter was being sent.

On March 27, 2008, an email and accompanying response to the Purple Line Now letter was sent by eleven members of the MPAG. The responses were sent to Chairman Hanson as well. The response included a copy of the Purple Line Now letter. There response essentially stated that any concern by a MPA member related to the MPAG agenda should first be discussed with the MPAG. The response also explicitly acknowledged the advisory nature of

the MPAG in response to a statement in the Purple Line Now letter than some MPAG members may incorrectly assume that the MPAG has some level of policy making authority. The response letter also stated that the Purple Line Now letter served to undermine the staff work.

The staff had intended by now to draft a response for the Chairman's consideration as a means of addressing the concerns expressed in both letters. The Chairman's response (when drafted) will be to the MPAG with copies provided the other parties copies on the two original letters. In discussing the concerns internally with Transportation Planning staff (and given the delay in drafting the response), the staff felt it would be beneficial to take some time at the April meeting to discuss the concerns raised by the two letters and then draft a response for the Chairman's consideration.

It is the staff's intention that the discussion last no more than 15-20 minutes and that it lead into the next (somewhat related) agenda item on the schedule and focus going forward. Staff is under the impression that each member has a copy of both letters. Additional copies are available if needed.

Harry Sanders addressed the group regarding the Purple Line Now letter.

Harry noted that the Purple Line Now letter was written by several people over a week. These people represented various organizations that are part of the Purple Line Now organization. The letter was signed by Harry Sanders because he is the President of the Purple Line Now Coalition and not because he is a member of the Advisory Committee. The Purple Line Now Coalition did not respond to Rob Rosenberg's letter that was sent after the Purple Line Now letter because the coalition thought it was best to move forward with the Purple Line planning process. The letter was written primarily because the Purple Line Now organization believes that sections of the alignment from Silver Spring east need more attention. The MPAG needs to address good design, other issues, and accomplish more than what has been done to date – rather than spend valuable time on a segment that is in an adopted Master Plan. The letter was not intended as a critique of the staff's effort to date.

Karen Roper addressed the group regarding the letter that was signed by eleven members of the MPAG and was forwarded via Rob Rosenberg's e-mail address.

Karen first noted that the letter was intended to emphasize that the MPAG was established by the Planning Board with the objective to provide input to the staff and Planning Board so that the Board could then develop recommendations for County Council to consider. Another purpose of the letter was to emphasize that a number of MPAG members feel that program or

agenda issues should be discussed internally prior to bringing other parties into the discussion.

Caleb Kriesberg (who signed the letter responding to the Purple Line Now letter) also noted that there are members of the MPAG that believe there are still unfinished issues with respect to the Bethesda and Georgetown Branch, for example.

Another member of the MPAG (an individual that signed the letter responding to the Purple Line Now letter) noted that he did not have a problem with some of the points raised in the Purple Line Now letter. He said that he did not believe that there had been any undue emphasis on any segment of the line, and that even some of those who reside in the Bethesda and Chevy Chase communities near the Georgetown Branch might feel that there had not been adequate and structured discussion of what they believe to be basic issues with that segment of the proposed line. This member thought that most discussion of particular segments of the line had been incidental to broader topical issues that staff had raised. He thought that the general topical issues that deserved to be raised as part of the education of MPAG members, but that now it was time to be systematic in our approach – perhaps going from one end of the alignment to the other addressing each segment in detail, noting all the issues and concerns raised about each of these segments.

In response to a question about how the staff interpreted the letters, Tom indicated that he did not believe the letter from Purple Line Now served to undermine the staff – due in part to the manner in which it was presented (i.e., it was hand delivered and in doing so, the point was made that the focus of the letter was to address the need to look at issues east of Silver Spring and not spend so much time on the trail and other issues that are included in the previously adopted master plan amendment). In response to another question, Tom acknowledged that the focus of the agendas to this point had been on a number of transportation related issues that will be included in the DEIS/AA but that environmental and land use planning had not been a focus of the agenda. Going forward, there is a need to incorporate more background and discussion of these areas of interest in advance of the publication of the DEIS/AA.

One member noted that the last DEIS/AA and plan for the Capital Crescent Trail was completed in 1990 and as a result, there is a need to re-examine some of the issues as some things have changed in the last 18 years.

Another member noted that the trail discussion should include input from some of the County's trail experts to give us their input on design.

There was also a more general discussion about the need to learn more about what the specific federal regulations and guidance is with respect to both the content of the DEIS/AA and the methodology used in the analysis that goes into the DEIS/AA. Of particular concern are the focus areas that we have not to date covered in depth – issues like environment and land use. This discussion led to a more detailed discussion of the next agenda item – the work program (see below).

3. The Work Program Going Forward

Ted Power has contacted the staff and suggested that consideration might be given a more focused agenda built around specific components of what is actually in the DEIS/AA document. The staff believes this idea has some merit – especially given the delay in the availability of the DEIS/AA.

This approach would not preclude additional on-going review of issues specific to the Purple Line like Wayne Avenue, the CCT, funding/phasing, potential field trips or other issues, including those presented in the Purple Line Now letter. It would, however, possibly afford us an opportunity to examine potential impacts with a little more background on the subject and to do so in smaller groups where the participants have either an active interest or an expertise that might be of benefit. In discussing the MPAG agenda going forward, it may be useful to distinguish between the issues of topics related to the more immediate DEIS/AA and the less immediate (for now anyway) Functional Master Plan.

Typical sections of a DEIS/AA include:

Purpose and Need

Alternatives Considered Summary of Transportation/Mobility Impacts

Summary of Environmental Impacts

- Socioeconomics
- Natural Environment
- Air Quality
- Noise and Vibration

Summary of Costs and Financial Analysis

- Operating and Maintenance Costs
- Financial Analysis
- Cost Effectiveness

We have spent time reviewing various aspects of four of the five major categories above. Our background on the environmental impact categories is not as great. The discussion for this agenda item is intended to focus on the merits of establishing sub-groups that would be willing to become a little more familiar with the one or more of the above categories (especially the environmental categories) with the objective of eventually developing an initial short review of that specific element of the DEIS/AA for staff to consider in advance of the staff draft memo being developed.

Somewhat related to this agenda item is the need to take a look at the schedule in June and July to see if we can reach agreement on how many meetings of the whole group we actually will need.

Ted Power then provided a brief statement outlining his suggested approach for considering various focus areas or “areas of interest”.

Key questions to consider include the following:

With the planned release of the DEIS/AA in August, what is MPAG doing in our monthly meetings to pursue our individual or group interests and concerns with the proposed Purple Line?

With the possible exception of pending specific questions, e.g., Wayne Ave design and tunnel proposals, how does the MPAG group move forward in our role to provide the Planning Board with community input on MTA’s proposals for the PL and help in the completion of the Master Plan?

Can MPAG, as a practical matter, continue to discuss and debate issues related to the Purple Line without objective data to confirm or refute specific aspects of the proposed public transit system?

Does everyone agree that the DEIS/AA is the practical source to analyze specific concerns (or confirm proposed design, cost and gains to be made by a Purple Line, etc.)? If so, how do we prepare for reviewing the DEIS/AA?

One suggestion would be for the group to spend the next couple of meetings developing specific “areas of interest,” which the group would analyze in the DEIS/AA. This master list would be developed by the group and consist of issues and questions to pursue in the DEIS/AA to confirm that the MTA has conducted adequate analysis to the myriad of impacts created by this proposed transit system.

In addition to developing the “areas of interest” members would have to develop the set of questions that would form the basis of what to look for in reviewing the DEIS/AA.

Some examples of specific “areas of interest or focus include”:

Park impacts- has MTA adequately studied environmental protection and limiting park impacts? What mitigation have they proposed?

What mitigation has MTA offered to address Purple Line impacts on Interim Capital Crescent Trail? Is it reasonable? If not, why? What additional factors should be taken into consideration in reducing the impacts?

Are MTA’s ridership projections supportable? If not, why not?

Wayne Ave at grade proposal (all sorts of questions could be developed for this issue.)

Once the list is developed and refined, then the MPAG could begin to prepare for its work. Tom could provide training through an overview on the DEIS/AA reports, organization, format, etc.

There may be advance research or other orientation needed to prepare for analyzing specific issues, ex., how to measure environmental impacts and appropriate mitigation to accommodate a transit system like the Purple Line. Experts could be brought in to provide additional technical knowledge. Finally, considering the level of interest in particular issues and challenges, or the size and length of the master list, some of the “areas of interest” could be broken up and assigned to sub-groups.

The following is a representative list of the comments made by MPAG on this topic.

- *There is a need to brainstorm ideas with a list of areas of interest and move forward to make sure everyone understands the issues. This process should lead to a better understanding of the issues to be addressed in the DEIS that we may not have covered up to this point.*
- *In developing our list, we should also not forget to focus some attention on how other cities to understand how transit communities handled environmental, land use, and other issues.*
- *A group should be used to identify every issue now via email and pick priorities of issues within this list to address between now and August with expert speakers coming to address the MPAG.*
- *One issue that needs to be considered is the economy and community impacts resulting from changes in the overall economy*
- *There is a need to try and see if we can identify best practices that have been used in other areas when faced with the same issue – how to review and evaluate information presented in a DEIS/AA. We want to be educated consumers. Given that, we need to know how the information or data was collected and analyzed. The DEIS/AA is a large document with an unfamiliar structure. It would be helpful to educate the MPAG on the structure of the DEIS/AA and help people become more familiar with the document.*
- *Someone from Portland would be a good expert to discuss a light rail system. The DEIS/AA address impacts and identifies how mitigation can be accomplished. Portland is known for some innovative approaches to making light rail work and we could benefit from knowing more about how the folks in Portland have addressed some of these issues.*
- *There is some question as to how break out groups would help the process. It is unclear how it would lead to any consensus.*

- *If small groups were used, it would have to be in a way that the entire group was briefed on the findings.*
- *Ted's recommendations are very good. There are lots of practical issues and those can be addressed in small groups and discussed with the group and Planning Board. Perhaps we should develop a list of concerns and create a schedule for the rest of the time before the DEIS is released to determine how and when the concerns can be addressed. One of the questions, of course, is can we address all of the questions before the DEIS/AA is available?*
- *One member of the MPAG reminded the Advisory Group that most in the room have personal and/or business interests to protect over and above the role they play in the MAG, most have been very open about those interest, and the group should refrain from making statements that imply otherwise.*

What is the 90-day review period? Is that different from the circulation period?

One member stated that he thought that realistically speaking there would only be about three weeks from the time the AA/DEIS came out until the time that the MPAG would need to decide on what it would advise the staff so they could include the MPAG's recommendations and comments in a report to the Planning Board. He was concerned that this did not leave very much time for effective input in the process.

The review period is the time that begins with the availability of the DEIA/AA and ends (90 days later) with the closing of the period for comments from the public. It is the same as the circulation period.

Another member wanted to know if the MPAG come to a consensus about the DEIS/AA and present those findings to the Planning Board? What is staff's involvement is that report to the Planning Board? Will the MPAG input go into the staff's report?

We need to try and develop a list of things (even if they are very general) where there is some broad consensus as that was one of the requests from the Planning Board. The staff will develop its review of the DEIS/AA and present it in a draft format for the MPAG to review and comment upon. It is the staff's intention at this point that the MPAG comments will be included as part of the staff report in a manner similar to what was done for the Purpose and Outreach Strategy Report.

One member of the MPAG noted that it would be ideal to have a small group meet with staff to develop a work plan to circulate before the next meeting to guide everyone through the process. A member of the group also noted that if a list were developed, it would need to be relatively short given the complexity of the issues and the short period of time that we have to conduct the review.

Another member noted that the MPAG needs to list where there is unity and common agreement. This is very difficult thing to accomplish given the issues and it would help to have an external facilitator.

Tom noted he will discuss with Katherine how to proceed with identifying issues and the format or organization of any additional pre DEIS/AA review. Once that is completed, Tom will send out an e-mail to let everyone know about the format and how we will solicit input on which issues will be examined between now and the availability of the DEIS/AA.

4. Philadelphia SEPTA Visit Discussion

Four members of the MPAG visited the Philadelphia SEPTA 69th Street Station on March 25, 2008. Tony Hausner has distributed some photos that you should already have received. We will take some time to review the trip, afford those that made the trip an opportunity to give their impression of the applicability to the Purple Line and some of our issues – including the extent to which it might be beneficial to take the whole group up to Philadelphia.

Tom presented a summary of the trip using photos taken while given the tour of three different SEPTA suburban light rail lines by SEPTA personnel. The presentation will be available on the Planning Department's Purple Line project web site.

Tom indicated that he thought certain aspects of the lines were applicable to a surface running alignment in an established suburban neighborhood. Some members of the group that visited the SEPTA service thought it was useful to visit but questioned whether it was necessary for the whole group to make the trip – given that we have the photos. Other individuals that made the trip thought it would be worthwhile but that it would be even better to spend the time and any money on getting someone in from Portland to speak of their experience.

One member of the MPAG noted that the Purple Line is intended to connect suburban areas to one another.

Another MPAG member that made the trip noted the SEPTA people did think that it was unusual for the Purple Line to go from suburb to suburb.

One member noted that the difference between the Purple Line and the SEPTA system is that the development followed the railroad in Philadelphia and here the development already exists. The Elmwood Avenue photos are closer to a Wayne Avenue pavement width and traffic volumes.

One MPAG member noted that (according to the SEPTA staff) the difference between light rail and a bus along Elmwood Avenue is that the light rail is more reliable in the snow than a bus.

One member noted that a video of Portland's system would be great. Peter Gray noted that he has a video from Portland that shows multi-modal transportation with a focus on bicycles. He will look through the video to see it is relevant for the MPAG viewing.

In general there was little expressed support for incurring the time and expense of a second trip. The lack of support for a second visit by the entire group was (in the staff's opinion) largely due to a feeling that while certain aspects of the lines were applicable to the Purple Line, the overall applicability could be open to interpretation. In addition, the trip yielded a good set of photos to reference for any specific issue that is likely to come up with regard to the lines visited in Philadelphia.

The staff opened and closed this agenda item by acknowledging the extent our SPETA hosts went to make sure we had complete access to virtually every aspect of the relevant parts of the three lines. In addition to providing a running narrative as we went along each line, the staff responded to numerous questions we had about light rail operations, benefits, and potential impacts in general.

5. MTA – Silver Spring Presentation

The staff presented a brief summary of the MTA's presentation to the Seven Oaks/Evanswood Civic Association and Park Hills officers and Purple Line Task Force members. It was noted that the MTA is checking the cost estimates it provided related to the tunnel on Wayne Avenue.

It was also noted that the MTA will have the East Silver Spring focus group and the Silver Spring Central Business District group meeting at the Roundhouse Theater on April 28, 2008.

6. Looking Ahead

May 2008

Operating Profiles
Other Systems' Experience
MTA Open House
Outreach – Rock Creek Hills Citizen Association

June 2008

Design Considerations
Review of MTA Open House Material

7. Upcoming Meetings

As a reminder, the tentative upcoming meeting dates are:

May 20, 2008
June 3, 2008
June 17, 2008
July 8, 2008
July 22, 2008

The above dates were originally established under the assumption that the DEIS/AA would be available next month (in May) and that there could be a need to meet more frequently once the document is available. The DEIS/AA will not be available until August. In addition, there will be another series of MTA Purple Line open houses in May. Finally, as noted above there was a discussion at this April 15, 2008 meeting of some of the topics to be covered by the MPAG between now and the availability of the DEIS/AA. It is therefore very likely that the above dates for full group meetings will be reduced in number for the summer so please make a point of reviewing the next schedule of meetings dates.