

Montgomery County Planning Board's

**TRANSPORTATION
POLICY REPORT**

January 15, 2002

INTRODUCTION

TPR II is an effort to establish a framework for future Master Plans and to help set priorities for future infrastructure. This is the start of a process designed to address land use and transportation issues on a more integrated basis than has been done in the past. It will be subject to further evaluation and debate and must be implemented through Master Plans and other actions by the County Council. It has been developed with a goal of getting consensus on a future course of action that would address the severe short- and long-term congestion problems (transportation uses) facing the county.

This report constitutes the Montgomery County Planning Board's recommendations to the Montgomery County Council, taking into account the recommendations of the TPR II Task Force, Planning staff analysis, two full sessions of public testimony, and two inches of correspondence. TPR II introduced an unprecedented level of public outreach. The cornerstone of this public outreach effort was the work undertaken by the citizen-led TPR II Task Force, whose report is forthcoming under separate cover. The Planning Board wishes to acknowledge the enormous efforts of the Task Force, but ultimately the Board takes responsibility for the recommendations contained herein.

This report proposes a land-use direction and a transportation network including supportive public policies to carry out the vision of the General Plan. An important feature of the proposed network is the coordinated planning of road and transit service with land use to maximize the benefits of serving and coordinating development with public investments in transportation.

Existing Reality

Montgomery County is the success story of Maryland and a model for much of the country. We have attracted a highly educated resident work force that provides for a strong economy at the leading edge of technology, particularly biotechnology research. We have the second highest median income in the state and the seventh highest median household income in the country. We have a rail and bus system that has provided for high levels of transit use. In the last 20 years, we have grown more than any other county in the state and we are now the largest county in the state.

Our success is the result of a package of amenities which residents and businesses have found appealing. We have high quality schools, cultural resources, significant park land and open space, recreational facilities and natural assets that people find attractive. We have a mix of land uses that runs the gamut from urban to rural that can accommodate diverse lifestyles. We have the land supply for housing and business opportunities at a full range of densities. We also have had a transportation network sufficient to attract people and businesses to the county.

If the county is to maintain our quality of life, we must be ready and able to embrace and anticipate change, while preserving the core values that have led to our success.

- We are in an expanding regional economy. While we were once the outer reaches of the region, we are now an inner suburb, with outer suburbs beyond our boundaries.
- In many ways, we are a maturing county. As our housing stock and commercial buildings age, so does the infrastructure that supports them. As baby boomers age, the median age of the county residents increases as well. As people age, they are less likely to change their residence even if they change jobs.
- We have natural environmental assets and a park land network which adds to our quality of life
- We are no longer merely a bedroom community to downtown Washington, D.C. While Washington, D.C. remains one of the most important job centers to our residents, we have become a significant jobs center to both the region and the state.
- Burgeoning electronic communication options allow business functions to locate almost anywhere. It makes knowledge-based employers highly mobile. It also blurs the lines between work and home.
- Advances in all types of technology make for efficiencies in every aspect of our lives and makes our lives longer.
- We are increasingly racially diverse. We have been the beneficiaries of new immigrants to the country as well increasing racial minorities.
- We are economically diverse but the ability to shelter households at the lower end of the economic spectrum is an increasing challenge.

Our ability to identify a probable range of future conditions is critical to maintaining Montgomery County's exceptional quality of life and our global competitive edge. However it is important to be realistic about our ability to foresee the future. In transportation planning, we examine existing land use and travel behavior and apply these relationships to future land use and transportation facilities. Revolutionary changes or single large-scale events can significantly affect the future. Predicting these important events and their outcome is beyond the scope of this project. For example, emergency preparedness is now at the top of many agendas, but the TPR II Task Force never discussed this issue. The history of transportation is one of technological innovation, from ships and canals to trains, cars and aircraft. The close of 2001 saw the motorized gyro-balanced scooter touted as the future of transportation. *This report does not assume any leaps in transportation technology or the replacement of existing travel demand by electronic communication.*

Problem Statement

One of the greatest challenges to our quality of life is maintaining a balance between our environmental, social and land use needs, and the supply and choice of transportation facilities. In the absence of any changes to existing policies, we are headed toward decreased accessibility between housing and job opportunities and slower speeds on our roadways. That increase in time devoted to travel will negatively affect our quality of life for current residents in our established communities and our ability to attract residents and businesses. In the words of TPR I, we are headed toward a place that we do not want to go.

Existing trends point toward a future that will make today's traffic problem worse. The land use patterns in the region are creating increased demands for circumferential travel at a faster rate than north-south travel. This is not to say that the east-west travel will eventually exceed north-south travel. However, there are more right-of-way options for increased north-south transportation facilities than there are for facilities going east-west. As congestion gets worse, families will find fewer housing options within a "reasonable" commuting time from work, particularly those whose residences and jobs are on different sides of Rock Creek Park.

The challenge is to match land use, public policies and transportation facilities in a manner that serves our vision of the future. A wide variety of public policies create the background economic and physical realities that affect locational choice for homes and business. Public policies also create incentives and disincentives for modes of travel. There is a continuing need to make sure that those policies are aligned with our land use and transportation vision.

There are three components to the need for transportation infrastructure: 1) provide for internal circulation within communities and centers, 2) provide for connections between those areas, and 3) connections on a regional scale. Each of these must serve and protect our communities.

Providing for new transportation infrastructure is always challenging:

- Funding commitment to transportation is challenged by the need for schools and other high priority infrastructure.
- With less vacant land in the county, there are higher financial and social costs for each new facility.
- In existing neighborhoods, rights-of-way may be extremely constricted, and retrofitting expanded or new transportation facilities may present serious design issues.
- Tighter environmental laws and regulations have made some planned transportation projects either extremely costly or infeasible.

- The goal of protecting our air, water, and land may conflict with the goal of increasing accessibility and mobility.
- As each project goes through the approval process on its own merits, it is difficult to appreciate the need for a network of solutions that maintain the county's policy balance between roads and transit.
- The expanding regional economy has brought prosperity, but the increase in congestion and vehicle miles traveled has strained the region's ability to meet federal clean air standards.

Goals

The General Plan refinement land use goal is "Achieve a wide variety of land use and development densities consistent with the Wedges and Corridors pattern." The Transportation goal is to "Enhance mobility by providing a safe and efficient transportation system offering a wide range of alternatives that serve the environmental, social and land use needs of the county and provide a framework for development." The Planning Board believes there are five major concepts which are goals for land use and transportation. These are essentially the same as the goals for the TPR Task Force:

- Support balanced and orderly growth.
- Provide a transportation system that efficiently and reliably moves people, goods, and services locally, countywide, and regionally, and offers a broader range of travel choices.
- Protect the natural environment from the negative impacts of growth and transportation.
- Ensure the cost-effectiveness of public investment in transportation.
- Improve pedestrian and traffic safety.

If there were one solution that maximized all of these goals and concepts, this would be a far easier problem to solve. Who would not desire a future with reduced congestion, protected environmental resources, and safer travel, all at low cost? The problem is that these goals are often mutually exclusive. None of the facility networks and land uses evaluated in TPR II satisfy all of these goals simultaneously.

Going out to the year 2050, all of the alternatives tested showed countywide forecasted congestion above current levels. Mobility could be improved with our current Master Plan assumptions, including the Intercounty Connector (ICC) but congestion levels would be higher and speeds lower than today. Forecasted travel speeds can be improved by building more highways, but only with significant environmental impacts. We can reduce environmental impacts with more transit options and fewer roads, but congestion levels will be higher and overall accessibility lower. Significant time savings are only achieved at high cost. All of the evaluation criteria noted are important but each

person defines and weighs those criteria differently in the evaluation of future alternatives.

The recommendations made in this report take all the goals into account and adopt a balanced approach toward meeting them. This is done knowing that far more detailed facility planning studies will look toward maximizing benefits and minimizing negative impacts.

In reaching the goals and concepts stated above, it is important to recognize the needs of special groups such as the elderly, the disabled, and those with lower incomes. Some in these groups lack the ability to own or drive a car and sometimes they also lack the economic resources to live in highly accessible locations. There needs to be continued focus on programs that provide vital mobility and proactive land use incentives for these special populations. The details of such programs are beyond the scope of this effort. We also want to be conscious of the need to avoid disproportionate negative impacts or a denial of transportation benefits to minority and low-income areas.

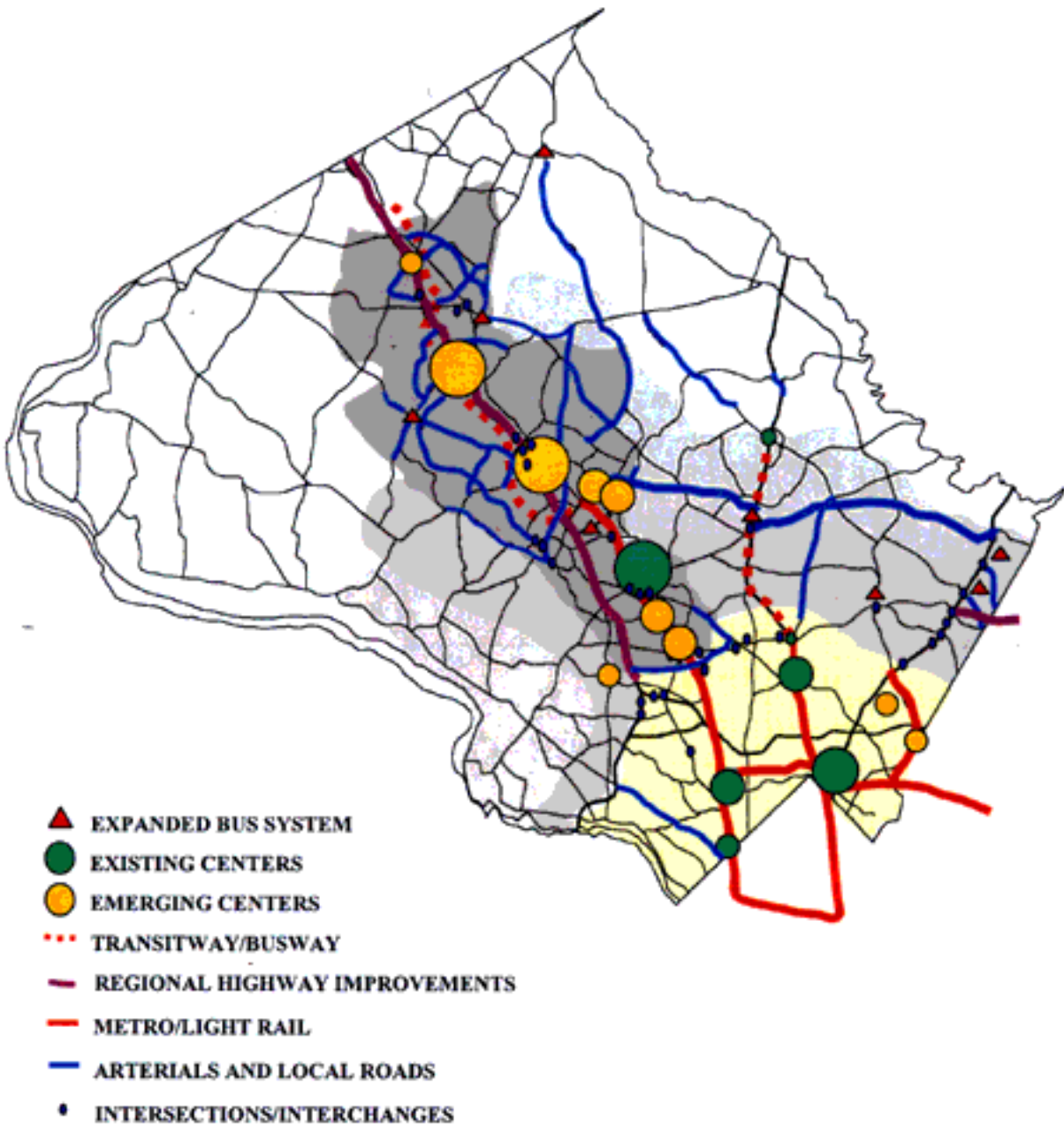
A comprehensive view of orderly growth would include issues surrounding the Annual Growth Policy. We recognize that it is critical to maintain a timely balance between development and adequate infrastructure. The complexities of this issue are not addressed in this report but will be handled in the Planning Board's comprehensive review of the AGP, already planned.

Summary of Recommendations

The following map (Figure 1) indicates where focused planning efforts are warranted, the transportation facilities recommended, and their relationship to the geographic components of the general plan. Figure 1 cannot show every project recommended due to the scale. It is a demonstration that transportation is integrated with and not independent from land use concepts even though they are described in separate recommendations and chapters of this report. (Figure 2 on page 18 shows all recommended projects.)

Establishing and maintaining vibrant communities and business centers is the focus of the land use recommendations in the Transportation Policy Report II. Unique land use characteristics and development patterns will reduce demand on the transportation system. Our desire for new development must be matched by our tolerance and commitment to additional transportation capacity or our tolerance range for congestion. To the extent that master-planned transportation facilities are deleted, our master-planned land use must be correspondingly reduced or new facilities added. The following land use recommendations will improve mobility, provide greater opportunity for transit-oriented life styles, and recognize the existing transportation system.

RECOMMENDED TRANSPORTATION FACILITIES AND FOCUSED LAND USE PLANNING EFFORTS



- **Balance Jobs and Housing:** Having enough jobs for the resident work force within sub-areas of the county provides greater opportunities for people to live near where they work. The challenge of land use and transportation planning is to work toward theoretical balance within four major sub areas of the county. That means supporting employment center growth at the White Oak/US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) site in the eastern part of the county and also increasing housing units for the I-270 Corridor where much of the job growth is planned to occur. There is also a need to maintain the existing affordable housing stock in areas near adjacent to the I-270 Corridor.

- **Guide Development to Metrorail Station Areas and Activity Centers:** Montgomery County's experience to date has directed almost 70 percent of job growth to areas served by existing or planned transit stations. On the residential side, only 24 percent of approvals are served by existing or planned transit. Clearly, we must continue to guide and shape livable mixed-use communities within close proximity of
 - Shady Grove Metrorail Station
 - Montgomery County Public Schools/Montgomery College (proposed new station)
 - Twinbrook Metrorail Station
 - Fortune Parc
 - Wheaton Metrorail Station
 - White Oak/FDA Metrorail Station
 - Langley Park
 - White Flint Metrorail Station

- **Create a Long-Term Vision for Arterials:** The visual and functional qualities of arterial roadways such as Rockville Pike (MD 355) and Georgia Avenue (MD 97) suffer from neglect. Planning on the corridor level in the near term must be expanded during upcoming Master Plan revisions.

Transportation Recommendations

As a general principle, the existing master-planned network is the fundamental basis for the network recommended by this report. It required convincing evidence to either remove a project or add a project to that network. These recommendations are more aggressive in recommending more interchanges and increased bus service than existing plans. This report also stresses transportation demand management policies. It recommends expanding the transit network but does not make new freeway recommendations beyond the existing Master Plan of Highways. The recommendations expand the existing transitway network, creating a future network that serves areas where residents and workers will be able to walk to transit service. This report leaves, for future analysis in the state and federal process, additional lanes for HOV on I-495, widening the I-270 spurs, and building the master-planned ICC. These projects were shown to have significant transportation benefits and warrant further consideration for construction if environmental and community impacts can be resolved.

Recommended Bus System Improvements

1. Initiate a study to evaluate a bus routing system that better interconnects activity centers and has more frequent service, greater penetration into residential and employment areas, and extended hours. Provide many safe and convenient transfer nodes, preferably at retail and other activity centers.
2. Put in final form, approve, and implement guidelines for bus stops put forth by DPWT.
3. Encourage WMATA to purchase buses that are more comfortable and user-friendly, generate real-time bus information for customers, and are similar in quality, but not necessarily the same size, as the ones that are being purchased by the County for Ride-On.
4. Expand the County's marketing and promotional efforts to better inform potential bus users about the service features of the region's bus system in order to overcome socioeconomic stereotypes of buses, and improve customer service.
5. Construct bus priority lanes on existing and proposed roads. Pursue opportunities to construct queue jumpers and to allow real-time adjustments to traffic signals in order to provide buses a time advantage over general purpose traffic.

Recommended Transportation Demand Management and Bus Policies

1. Intensify the County's efforts to encourage more employers to offer employees a transit fare benefit.
2. Initiate county efforts to encourage employers to provide cash to employees who elect to forego drive alone parking privileges (parking cash-out).
3. Set an example by offering stronger traffic mitigation programs to County government employees.
4. Make real-time bus information available at major bus stops and also to bus customers through the Internet to computers, pagers, and cell phones.
5. Open more Commuter Stores.
6. Put greater emphasis on installing protected bus shelters with adequate space for lighting, wheelchairs and, wherever possible, accessible by sidewalks.
7. Accelerate the schedule for improving walking and bicycle access to transit stops and other destinations.

8. Put greater emphasis in outreach efforts on encouraging employers to establish telecommuting programs as an alternative to travel.
9. Create an updated information booklet showing all TDM opportunities and incentives available to people and businesses in Montgomery County.
10. Initiate a study to determine the feasibility of establishing parking impact taxes in the County. Study, at a minimum, the following two options:
 - a. Establish an annual parking impact tax at all existing and new office and industrial properties.
 - b. Establish a one-time parking impact tax on new office and industrial properties.

Recommended Major Transit Projects

<p>Inner Purple Line</p> <p>FDA/White Oak Branch Line</p> <p>Corridor Cities Transitway</p> <p>Georgia Avenue Busway</p>	<p>Bethesda to Langley Park to New Carrollton (including the master-planned Georgetown Branch)</p> <p>Langley Park to White Oak</p> <p>Shady Grove Metrorail to Clarksburg</p> <p>Glenmont to Olney</p>
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Recommended Major Roadway Projects (over \$50 million in capital costs)

<p>I-270 widening and HOV lanes</p> <p>New I-270 Interchanges</p> <p>Western Connector or M-83 extended</p> <p>Eastern Connector</p> <p>Montrose Parkway</p> <p>Chapman Avenue extended</p> <p>Clopper Road (MD 117) widening</p> <p>Germantown Road (MD 118) widening</p> <p>Muddy Branch Road widening</p> <p>Newcut Road extended</p> <p>Ridge Road (MD 27)</p> <p>Woodfield Road (MD 124)</p> <p>Norbeck/Spencerville (MD 28/198) widening</p>	<p>From Montgomery Village Avenue (MD 124) north</p> <p>Newcut Road and Watkins Mill Road</p> <p>Shady Grove Road to Norbeck Road (MD 28)</p> <p>Columbia Pike (US 29) to US 1</p> <p>I-270 to Veirs Mill Road (MD 586) with a widened Veirs Mill Road (MD 586)</p> <p>Only four lanes through Seneca Park</p> <p>Clopper Road (MD 117) to Seneca Creek</p> <p>West Diamond Ave. to Darnestown Road (MD 28)</p> <p>Frederick Road (MD 355) to Midcounty Highway</p> <p>Midcounty Highway to Ridge Road (MD 27)</p> <p>Four lanes from Georgia Ave. (MD 97) to Columbia Pike (US 29)</p>
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Recommended Interchanges

Columbia Pike (US 29) at	Spencerville Road (MD 198) Briggs Chaney Road New Eastern Connector Fairland Road Randolph Road Greencastle Road Musgrove Road Tech Road Stewart Lane
Rockville Pike (MD 355) at	Cedar Lane Nicholson Lane Montrose Road Rockville Town Center Gude Drive Montgomery Village Avenue (MD 124) Ridge Road (MD 27)
Randolph Road at	Georgia Avenue (MD 97) Connecticut Avenue (MD 185) Veirs Mill Road (MD 586) New Hampshire Avenue (MD 650)
Georgia Ave (MD 97) at	Norbeck Road (MD 28)
Great Seneca Highway (MD 119) at	Sam Eig Highway
Great Seneca Highway (MD 119) at	Key West Avenue (MD 28)