

# National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board

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Item 7

## MEMORANDUM

February 19, 2008

**TO:** Transportation Planning Board

**FROM:** Ronald F. Kirby  
Director of Transportation Planning

**SUBJECT:** Review of Comments Received and Recommended Responses on Project Submissions for Inclusion in the Air Quality Conformity Assessment for the 2008 CLRP and FY 2009-2014 TIP

### Background

At the January 16 meeting, the Board was briefed on the major projects submitted for inclusion in the air quality conformity assessment for the 2008 CLRP and FY 2009-2014 TIP, and released the project submissions for public comment and agency review. This public comment period closed on at 5 pm on February 15.

Public comments submitted by individuals, organizations, and business were posted as they are received on the COG web site at <http://www.mwcog.org/transportation/public/comments.asp>. This memorandum provides recommended responses to comments received through the close of the public comment period at 5 pm on February 15.

The Board will be briefed on the comments received and recommended responses at the February 20 meeting.

### Comments and Responses

Comments received through the close of the public comment period and recommended responses are presented below:

#### **1. Comments on Northern Virginia Projects**

Comment: Of the six projects presented as revisions to the CLRP, we find at least three of them quite reasonable: the Fairfax City Rt 50 upgrade for an express shuttle bus, the Columbia Pike transit and the additional Fairfax Connector buses. You should look for more projects of this type.

Conversely, the addition of the dual auxiliary lanes on the Beltway is uncalled for and should be rejected. These lanes are essentially an entire new set of general purpose lanes however you choose to label them. They have not been part of the EIS or any other information that has previously been presented to the public. They are an additional expense to serve more low-occupancy vehicles with the attendant congestion on connecting roads and emissions. We urge you to reject this project.

Response: One additional general purpose auxiliary lane on the Beltway from Georgetown Pike to Hemming Avenue underpass will be added in each direction to connect the on-ramps and off-ramps between interchanges. As stated in the CLRP form for this project, the auxiliary lanes are included in the federally approved EIS, with a Record of Decision on June 29, 2006. The FHWA approved a refinement of the project scope on May 9, 2007. The EIS documents are available at [http://www.virginiadot.org/projects/HOT\\_495.asp](http://www.virginiadot.org/projects/HOT_495.asp)

## **2. Comments on a Study In the District of Columbia**

### Comments:

1. Has DDOT considered a study on building a bypass from the Chain Bridge to the Loughboro or Macomb Street, so the flux from Virginia and the Canal Road can move easily in that direction?
2. Has it considered improving the access from Arizona Ave to the Capital Crescent Trail for bike and pedestrian?
3. Has it considered using the old capital trolley path to build a special way for light transportation such as bikes, electric bikes, and scooters?

Response: DDOT has provided the following response:

1. DDOT has never made a study on building a bypass from the Chain Bridge to Loughboro or Macomb Street. There has never been a request for such a review and the impacts on the neighborhood would prove detrimental. For more information on our Ward 3 planning efforts, please contact Jeff Jennings at (202) 671-2730
2. Yes, the DDOT is interested in improving this access, but the terrain is very steep and some of the land is owned by the National Park Service.
3. DDOT has looked at this corridor during the development of the District's 2005 Bicycle Master Plan, but determined that a trail here was not a priority due to existing nearby trails and neighborhood impact. For more information on our trail plans, please contact

Heather Deutsch at (202) 671-2561.

### **3. Comments on the Purple Line Study in Montgomery County and Prince George's County**

Comments: All of the Maryland Transit Administration (MTA) Purple Line Study proposals are seriously flawed and pose major problems for the involved areas.

1. MTA Purple Line Study has ignored the impact upon Montgomery County of next year's closing of Walter Reed Hospital in Washington DC and the subsequent growth of personnel at National Institutes of Health and the Bethesda Medical Center.
2. The Purple Line, as currently envisioned, will have no effect on the numbers of workers arriving and departing those destinations. What needs to be under discussion, rather, is how the Purple Line can positively impact these changes without destroying neighborhoods, trees, and the Crescent Trail.
3. Loop the Purple Line from College Park alongside the Beltway past University Boulevard, Colesville Road, Georgia Avenue, Connecticut Avenue, with a stop at NIH and another at Grosvenor along Rockville Pike, where a link could be made to the Metro Red Line.
4. Plan for future growth and links to Montgomery Mall, White Oak, and possibly Virginia. Faster and more sensible transit were designed that would convey passengers more rapidly and without causing massive traffic snarls along roads sharing the route with either light transit or buses.

Response: The MTA has provided the following response:

Thank you for the e-mail regarding the proposed Purple Line that you sent to Governor Martin O'Malley. The Purple Line study is being carried out at the State level by the Maryland Transit Administration. As the MTA's Project Manager for the Purple Line, I am responding to your comments that were submitted to Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (MWCOC) Transportation Planning Board.

First, we strongly disagree with your statement that all of the MTA's proposals for the Purple Line are flawed. The ongoing study is an Alternatives Analysis/Draft Environmental Impact Statement (AA/DEIS), which is an extremely comprehensive study process that is being carried out in conformance with all Federal, State and local planning and environmental requirements and guidelines for proposed New Starts transit projects. The study process also has involved extensive public outreach throughout the entire planning and study process, including public meetings, meetings with numerous community and civic groups

along the 16-mile corridor, distribution of project newsletters to a mailing list of over 60,000, access to a project website ([purplelinemd.com](http://purplelinemd.com)), meetings with eight different Community Focus Groups, regular meetings with a Project Team that consists of local and regional jurisdictional staff, as well as briefings to elected officials and interested organizations.

Secondly, the MTA has not ignored the potential impact of the transfer of employees from Walter Reed Army Hospital to the National Naval Medical Center (NNMC) in Bethesda as part of the Defense Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) process. The MTA is very much aware and involved in the analysis of impacts resulting from the expected addition of 2,200 jobs and an increase in hospital visitors as noted in the NNMC Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS). The Purple Line AA/DEIS used the MWCOG Round 7.0 2030 land use forecasts for employment, households and population in the analysis. The assumed growth for these items was based on normal growth assumptions for each zone in the region.

A concern regarding the implications of changes in our long-term growth assumptions for the Purple Line has been raised and considered as part of the ongoing study process for the Purple Line. In response to this concern, the MTA has carefully studied issues and changes that would result from BRAC. Technical analysis has identified that approximately 60 peak hour transit trips could be added on the Purple Line as a result of jobs changing from Walter Reed to the NNMC based on home location of current employees of the Walter Reed facility. Our analysis reveals that based on the scale of the expected growth excluding the BRAC changes, analysis of the changing trip patterns for the 2030 horizon year indicates that the effects of BRAC in terms of the Purple Line will be negligible.

Additional work travel will be carried by the surrounding roadway network, Metrorail system, and local bus network. Some have suggested that this shift in jobs may make a Purple Line alignment serving the NNMC directly, such as represented by the Low bus rapid transit (BRT) Alternative under consideration, which would run along Jones Bridge Road, the more appropriate alternative in response to BRAC. However, the Bethesda area already exists today and will continue in the future as a major employment and population center, exclusive of BRAC changes. By way of comparison, combined employment around the existing Medical Center Metrorail Station (located at National Institutes of Health) is expected to grow by over 6,000 jobs by 2030 and population is projected to grow by approximately 700 in that same timeframe. Whereas, the Bethesda Central Business District is expected to grow by 5,000 jobs and show a population increase of over 12,000 residences in that same period. Therefore, the BRAC changes, while large, are a small percentage of the expected 72,000 jobs in the Bethesda Central Business District/Medical Center area in 2030.

In addition, the congested traffic conditions expected along Jones Bridge Road as a result of BRAC contribute travel delay to trips arriving from the east. Therefore, travel to the NNMC via the Master Plan alignment (the former Georgetown Branch railroad right-of-way) is estimated to be comparable, or even faster, than travel time for the Low BRT Alternative (that uses Jones Bridge Road) to the common end point. Further, the attractiveness of travel to and from the Bethesda Central Business District for those traveling from the east would be expected to be significantly affected by the substantial travel delay associated with travel along Jones Bridge Road.

The Metro Loop proposal mentioned in your correspondence has been previously studied by both the MTA as part of the current Purple Line study, as well as by Montgomery County. Both the MTA and Montgomery County have recommended against carrying the Metro Loop proposal further into the detailed study for the Purple Line. As proposed by former Montgomery County Executive Doug Duncan, the Metro Loop would be a continuance of the Metrorail Red Line from the existing Medical Center station, extending in a tunnel north and passing under the Capital Beltway before continuing along the north side of the Beltway primarily on aerial structure, and crossing back over the beltway and continuing south along the CSX corridor either in a retained cut or in tunnel to the Silver Spring Transit Center. The MTA's evaluation of the Metro Loop determined that this option would not effectively meet the purpose and need established for the Purple Line, since it would not provide for the enhanced level of transit connectivity, efficiency, and convenient service needed for the 16-mile corridor. Additionally, this option would require significant underground and aerial construction that would result in much higher costs than the other alternatives under consideration for the Purple Line. Therefore, the Metro Loop proposal would be a less cost effective alternative, a key consideration since the Purple Line must be cost effective in order to compete with transit projects on a national basis for limited Federal funds. Also, because of requiring additional right-of-way along the Capital Beltway, the Metro Loop would have serious environmental impacts to Rock Creek Park, compared to the alternatives already under evaluation.

In addition, the Montgomery County Planning Board, at the request of the Montgomery County Council, also assessed and considered the Metro Loop proposal in 2003. Based on the planning staff report, the Planning Board recommended that although the Metro Loop would provide redundancy and flexibility enhancements for Metrorail operations, this option should not be carried forward for further study. The Planning Board's recommendation was accepted by the Montgomery County Council. The decision to drop the Metro Loop option from the detailed study for the Purple Line was reaffirmed by the Planning Board at a recent presentation on the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning

Commission's Functional Master Plan.

Thank you again for your interest in the Purple Line study. Please contact me should you have any further comments or questions at 410-767-3694 or at [mmadden@mtamaryland.com](mailto:mmadden@mtamaryland.com).