

SUBDIVISION STAGING POLICY

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) about Transportation

1. What is the Subdivision Staging Policy (SSP)?

The SSP is a set of policy tools that provides guidance for the timely delivery of public facilities to serve existing and future development in the County. The tools provide a common approach for use by the Planning Board, Executive Branch agencies (e.g., the Department of Permitting Services and the Department of Transportation), Montgomery County Public Schools, and developers in reviewing development plans.

2. How often is the SSP reviewed or changed?

Technically, the SSP can be revised at any time by the County Council. The County Code requires the SSP to be reviewed and adopted every four years at a minimum.

3. When does the new revised SSP go into effect?

The new SSP will apply to any development application (preliminary plan) accepted as “complete” by the Planning Department on or after January 1, 2017.

4. What are some of the most significant changes related to transportation that were approved by Council as part of this latest review of the SSP?

For development applications submitted prior to January 1, 2017, there are two “tests” to determine if adequate transportation facilities are either in place or funded to serve future development. One is an areawide test (Transportation Policy Area Review – or “TPAR”). The other is a local area test (Local Area Transportation Review – or “LATR”).

TPAR provides a measurement of how peak hour travel time compares to uncongested travel time on specific arterial roadway corridors within each policy area and how extensive local bus service is within each policy area. Critics of TPAR thought it was overly complicated, placed too much emphasis on auto travel time and level of service, and could be influenced by traffic generated outside of the policy area, among other things. Mitigation under TPAR consisted of a surcharge to the transportation impact tax. The resulting change in this latest review of the SSP was to eliminate the policy area test altogether. There is no more “TPAR”, although transportation impact tax rates have been increased to account for the fiscal effects of eliminating TPAR.

LATR currently provides a measure of the level of service at signalized intersections. In the case of LATR, the interest of most stakeholders was in making the evaluation consider more than intersection capacity for auto travel (additional discussion on this aspect of the SSP review is provided below). The method to be used in determining intersection level of service has changed however and that is discussed below.

5. What are the major changes with the local area test?

The biggest change is that intersection level of service will be determined using the Highway Capacity Manual (HCM) methodology in the more developed areas of the County - instead of the current method of relying solely (in most instances) on an estimate of the Critical Lane Volume (CLV). HCM measures vehicle delay and is more representative of a driver's actual experience. CLV methodology focuses more on theoretical intersection capacity.

Intersection analysis using CLV retains limited applicability in less developed areas to be used primarily as a screening tool to determine the need for an HCM analysis.

6. When is a developer required to do this analysis – whether it be HCM or CLV?

Another important change in the updated SSP involves the threshold that triggers the need for a Transportation Study that includes an analysis of the level of service for the applicable intersection(s) associated with the project application. Currently, projects that will generate more than 30 weekday peak hour (either am or pm) vehicle trips must submit a Transportation Study. The revised SSP changes the threshold to 50 person trips. The revised SSP also includes updated and/or new trip generation rates for vehicle trips (expressed as a percentage adjustment to Institute of Transportation Engineer (ITE) Manual rates) and default values provided by the Planning Department for transit and non-motorized mode share (bike, walking, etc.) by policy area.

7. Is a developer required to analyze transit, pedestrian, and bike facility level of service in the project vicinity?

Yes. There are scoping thresholds that trigger a look at transit, pedestrian, and bicyclist level of service (LOS). There are also LOS adequacy standards for transit, pedestrian and bike travel. Please see the response to question #14 for a description of these thresholds.

8. What parts of the County will trigger an HCM analysis?

The updated SSP includes four policy area categories or groupings - Red, Orange, Yellow, and Green (see Figure 1).

The Red Group includes the CBD's of Bethesda, Silver Spring, and Wheaton, as well as the remaining Metro Station Policy areas (other defined areas that have a Metrorail Station).

The Orange Group includes areas that are not as developed as the Red Group but are more representative of activity centers where adopted plans provide the potential in some cases (but not all) for more development eventually supported by new infrastructure (e.g., the Purple Line, CCT, or new Metrorail station entrances).

A HCM analysis will now be required for any development application for a project located in the Red or Orange groups.

The Yellow Group includes policy areas that less developed and more likely to have intersections that are spaced further apart than you would typically find along corridors in the Red and Orange groups.

The Green Group consists of the Damascus, Rural East, and Rural West Policy Areas that are less developed than the Yellow Group.

9. What parts of the County will a CLV analysis suffice without having to do a HCM analysis?

Development applications for projects located in policy areas in the Yellow and Green groups will not be required to develop a HCM analysis for intersections scoped for the Transportation Study if it can be demonstrated that the intersection has a total future peak hour (am and pm) CLV below 1350. If the CLV is 1350 or higher (i.e., worse) a HCM analysis must be prepared.

10. What are the standards associated with the HCM analysis?

The standards vary by policy area and are expressed as average vehicle delay (i.e., seconds per vehicle) at the intersection in question. The actual numbers vary from 41 seconds for the Rural East and West Policy Areas to 120 seconds for the ten policy areas in the Red Group¹.

11. When is a developer required to mitigate the project's impact in response to the HCM analysis?

The project applicant is required to mitigate trips generated by the project that add to the existing average vehicle delay for the intersection(s) included in the Transportation Study when the delay exceeds the policy area standard. As an example, if a project generates enough trips to increase the average vehicle delay from 85 seconds to 90 seconds in a policy area where the standard is 80 seconds the trips that need to be mitigated are those that contribute (or cause) the 5 second increase in the average delay – all other input variables held constant. If the same project were instead located in a policy area where the standard is 120 seconds no mitigation would be required because the policy area standard is not being exceeded.

12. What type of mitigation is required?

The applicant must demonstrate that the trips can be mitigated through (in priority order) (1) Transportation Demand Management (TDM) approaches, (2) pedestrian or bicycle facility improvements, (3) transit facility or service improvements, (4) intersection operational improvements, and/or (5) roadway capacity improvements.

13. What kind of assumptions and parameters are included in a Transportation Study?

The scoping of the Transportation Study is important and requires agreement among the major stakeholders (e.g., the applicant, Planning Department, County Department of Transportation, and State Highway Administration). The scope must also be consistent with the Board's LATR Guidelines.

¹ Properties within the White Flint Special Taxing District are exempt from LATR.

As previously noted, there are now updated ITE vehicle trip adjustment factors and mode choice default values to be used in the Transportation Study. There is also guidance on the number of intersections to be analyzed and the extent to which multiple intersections must be evaluated as a network as opposed to a series of isolated or individual intersections. There is guidance on how to evaluate pedestrian, bicycle, and transit system adequacy for applications large enough to trigger quantitative analysis for those modes.

14. What type of mitigation is required to address the level of service thresholds or standards for pedestrians, transit and bike riders?

Any site that generates more than 50 pedestrian peak hour trips must either fix or fund ADA non-compliance issues within a 500' radius of the site boundary and ensure a minimum level of service (LOS D) for pedestrian delay at LATR intersections within 500' of the site boundary or within a Road Code Urban Area / Bicycle Pedestrian Priority Area.

Transit adequacy for LATR is defined as providing a peak load of LOS D (less than 1.25 transit riders per seat during the peak period in the peak direction). For developments generating at least 50 peak hour transit riders and where the LOS at bus stops within 1,000 of the site exceeds (or is worse than) the standard, the applicant must provide or fund improvements that would mitigate the trips exceeding the standard that are attributable to the development.

Bicycle system adequacy is defined as a low level of traffic stress. Any proposed development generating 50 or more peak hour non-motorized trips and located within 0.25 miles of an existing educational institution or existing/planned bikeshare station must make improvements needed to provide a low Level of Traffic Stress to any existing similar facility within 750 feet of the development's boundary. An alternative is to provide a master planned improvement that provides an equivalent improvement in the level of traffic stress for cyclists. A low level of traffic stress as considered here is a facility that has some type of physical separation between the facility for the cyclists and the adjacent or nearby roadway. Examples include separated bike lanes or a shared use path (or side path). It does not include bike lanes next to travel lanes separated by pavement markings of some type.

15. What is an Urban Mobility Program and how would it eventually replace LATR?

The proposal to over time develop Urban Mobility Programs (UMPs) for specific areas within the County was advanced during work sessions and discussions held as part of the SSP review. The idea is to apply the White Oak model now under consideration as an eventual replacement to LATR for specific small areas countywide. In its simplest form, the White Oak model involves the development of (1) travel forecasts for a sub-area and (2) the capital costs necessary to fund the supporting infrastructure over the same time. Determining exactly what supporting infrastructure will be needed could be based on any number of things (e.g., an acceptable level of intersection delay, assumptions related to capital funds from other sources, etc.). Given that information, a cost per trip is identified and applied to proposed development within the area in question.

The development of UMPs will take some time. Initial discussions have focused on developing UMPs over the next 1-3 years for the Red Areas first and then follow with appropriately defined portions of the Orange and

Yellow areas in that order. UMPs would result in a more predictable mitigation (a fee) and avoid the current situation with LATR where the cost burden falls on the latest applicant (as opposed to those earlier applicants that may have avoided any mitigation when the applicable standards were not exceeded).

16. What are the changes to the Transportation Impact Tax?

The rate structure established in 2007 includes three main categories; (1) Metro Station Policy Areas and CBD's (now referred to as the Red Areas) (2) a General District Rate, and (3) a rate for Clarksburg.

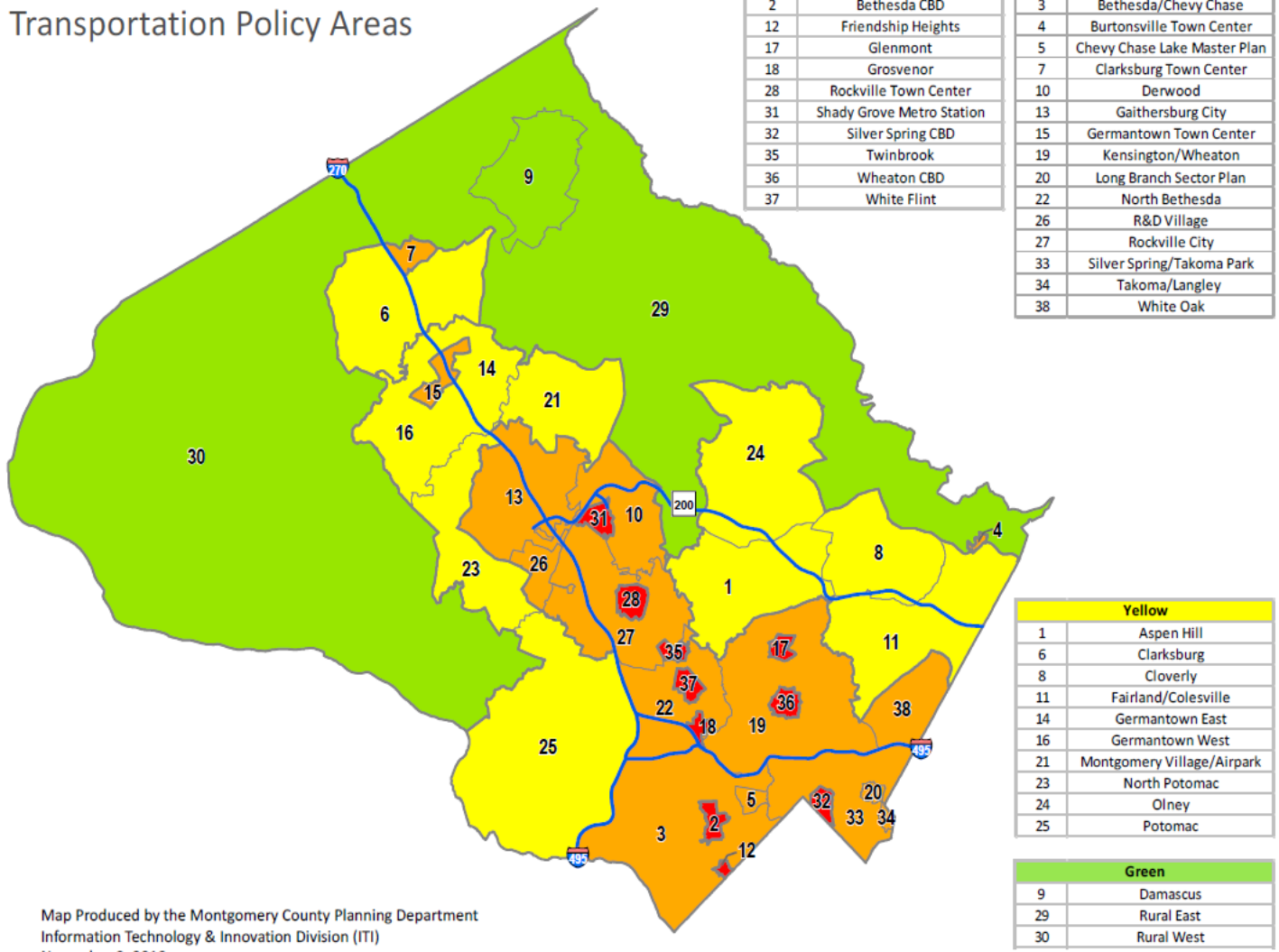
The rate structure adopted in November 2016 as Bill 37-16 includes rates for land uses in each of the policy area groupings (Red, Orange, Yellow, and Green).

The rates in the Red Areas are equal to the current rates applied in the Metro Station Policy Areas. The rates in the other Groups have been increased relative to their prior amounts to account in part for revenue loss associated with the elimination of the TPAR or areawide test.

17. What percentage of the total cost of all transportation projects in the County CIP is covered by the Transportation Impact Tax?

The Transportation Impact Tax estimated revenue amounted to about 4% of the total estimated cost of all projects included in the FY 2015-2020 County CIP.

Montgomery County Transportation Policy Areas



Map Produced by the Montgomery County Planning Department
Information Technology & Innovation Division (ITI)
November 9, 2016

Figure 1: SSP Policy Area Categorizations