

Corridor Forward: The I-270 Transit Plan Scope of Work

I. Introduction

The *Corridor Forward* Plan will provide county decisionmakers with an opportunity to assess and prioritize transit options for the I-270 corridor through the forthcoming General Plan's vision. This Scope of Work defines the context and purpose of Montgomery County's *Corridor Forward* Plan and highlights the planning process and timeline proposed by Planning Department staff.

Over the past few decades, communities along the I-270 corridor, such as Germantown, Clarksburg, and the Life Sciences Center in Great Seneca, have transformed into vibrant county activity centers. Neighboring jurisdictions to the north and south have also grown. Tysons, in Fairfax Virginia, has continued to advance as a regional employment center, and residential development has followed suit. To the north, the City of Frederick and Urbana in Frederick County have also enjoyed population gains.

Regional success is not without its challenges and opportunities. To meet the transportation demand generated by growth, several transit solutions have been proposed to sustainably move people within and beyond the county. Transit remains a compelling option to improve the region's accessibility. Despite futurists' projections about a clean, autonomous future, transit will likely keep pace as a less energy-intensive mode of travel. Additionally, transit can provide mobility options for those who cannot afford a personal vehicle or expensive point-to-point ride-sharing services. Finally, transit infrastructure investment sends an important signal to major employers that the county can and will support the needs of future employees. In short, transit aligns with the three broad outcomes of the *Thrive Montgomery 2050* Plan: environmental resilience, community equity, and economic health.

II. Planning Context

The *Corridor Forward* planning effort was added to the Planning Department's work program during the Department's 2019 Spring Semi-Annual Update to the County Council. The rationale for the addition was to better understand what transit options are available along the corridor and which could best benefit the county, particularly as funding opportunities materialize.

The Maryland Department of Transportation's State Highway Administration (SHA) is currently conducting National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and Pre-NEPA efforts for two separate managed lanes projects on I-495 and I-270. These projects are intended to improve accessibility for automobile users between points in Frederick, MD, and the Virginia state line by providing managed lanes where users can elect to carpool or pay for shorter travel times. These highway expansion projects will generate revenue that will be used to support transit, but the county currently does not have a strategy to prioritize how the newly generated resources are directed.

The county has several Council-approved plans that recommend high-quality transit along the I-270 corridor, including Bus Rapid Transit service along MD 355, the Corridor Cities Transitway and the North Bethesda Transitway; a third rail for the MARC Brunswick Line; and new MARC stations in White Flint and Shady Grove. Transit advocates have also proposed other solutions, such as a monorail system, an extension of the Purple Line into Northern Virginia and an extension of WMATA's Red Line north from Shady Grove.

The county cannot realistically fund and operate all of these transit opportunities, and no plan to date strategically prioritizes which options have the most merit. This plan will prioritize transit opportunities to ensure resources are directed to the projects that best satisfy the county's strategic environmental, equity, and economic goals.

The different transit opportunities to be studied by the effort include:

- Transit service along I-270, including express bus, bus rapid transit, rail, and monorail;
- Transit service from Bethesda to Tysons, including a potential extension of the Purple Line, the North Bethesda Transitway, and/or other BRT alignments;
- Transit service serving the Corridor Cities Transitway communities;
- Enhanced transit service along the existing MARC rail line; and
- Extension of WMATA's Red Line.

III. Geographic Scope

This project defines the "I-270 Corridor" as the transportation network extending through Montgomery County between the City of Frederick in Frederick County, MD, and Tysons in Fairfax County, VA. It encompasses 40 major centers of activity including Clarksburg, Germantown, the Great Seneca Life Sciences Center, White Flint, and Bethesda. Because many of our region's residents and employees commute into and out of the county, the I-270 Corridor includes jurisdictions beyond Montgomery County's boundaries. The project's geographic scope includes the 40 activity centers and the existing and potential transportation links connecting them. While the study area extends beyond the county, the project will only make recommendations for Montgomery County. Figure 1 below depicts the proposed geographic focus area for the plan.

IV. Purpose

Montgomery Planning's first transit-focused plan for the I-270 corridor (the county's main north-south corridor) will help the County understand the costs and benefits of potential transit investments between the City of Frederick in Frederick County, Maryland and Tysons in Northern Virginia. The plan will involve community engagement and a detailed evaluation of potential projects, resulting in a prioritized list of transit projects that could be funded by toll revenue from the state's I-495 & I-270 Managed Lanes project or other sources.

V. Task Schedule & Description

The *Corridor Forward* Plan will include thirteen tasks:

Task 1. Outreach & Engagement

- Planning staff will meet with jurisdictional and agency partners to inform them about the scope and tasks to be performed and solicit feedback on the planning approach. Staff will work to build a rapport with these groups to ultimately gain their support for the project's final deliverables.
- Staff will host one kick-off meeting (format to be determined, based on needs related to the COVID-19 pandemic). Advertising for the meeting will be tailored to the meeting format and current affairs. Targeted advertising will occur in communities with limited or poor access to online platforms.
- Staff will update various representative citizen groups throughout the planning process, including the Upcounty Citizens Advisory Board, the Western Montgomery County Citizens Advisory Board,

the Mid-County Citizens Advisory Board, the Downtown Bethesda Transportation Management District, the North Bethesda Transportation Management District, and the Greater Shady Grove Transportation Management District. Staff will provide other citizen groups with meeting/virtual meeting updates at their request.

- Staff will update various advocacy groups throughout the planning process, including the Action Committee for Transit, the Sierra Club, the Coalition for Smarter Growth, and the Transit Alternatives to Mid-County Highway Extended Coalition.
- Staff will update various regional stakeholder groups in the business/economic sector throughout the planning process. These updates may be meetings, teleconferences, phone calls, etc. and will be tailored to the needs of the stakeholder group. These will include the Montgomery County Economic Development Corporation, the Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce, the Maryland Technology Council, and local university partners such as The Universities at Shady Grove and Johns Hopkins University, among other groups.
- Staff will develop an educational content series, including case studies and videos, which will be available online and advertised via social media, eLetters, meetings, and paid media. Advertisement methods will be considered to reach targeted communities with limited or poor access to online platforms, and additional educational material may be necessary to reach these communities.
- Staff will develop an online survey to solicit feedback on the trade-offs associated with different aspects of transit service. For example, the survey will consider the trade-off between increased access (more stops) and faster operations (fewer stops). The survey will both educate and inform the effort, particularly during the development of metrics and methodologies, to include—but may not necessarily be limited to—commuter rail, Diesel Multiple Unit (DMU), Electric Multiple Unit (EMU), Metrorail, light rail, bus rapid transit (BRT), mixed traffic express bus service, and monorail. Among many metrics, measures of comparison will include metrics related to speed, efficiency, sustainable operations, cost of implementation, passenger capacity, and economic development potential.

Task 2. Approve Scope of Work

- The Planning Board will review and approve a Scope of Work for the Plan.

Task 3. Compare Modes

- Planning staff will develop a briefing for the Board that compares the advantages and disadvantages of transit modes at a planning-level, to include—but may not necessarily be limited to—commuter rail, Diesel Multiple Unit (DMU), Electric Multiple Unit (EMU), Metrorail, light rail, bus rapid transit (BRT), mixed traffic express bus service, and monorail. Among many metrics, measures of comparison will include metrics related to speed, efficiency, sustainable operations, cost of implementation, passenger capacity, and economic development potential.

Task 4. Develop Transit Alternatives for Study

- Staff will develop up to fifteen transit alternatives for study. Study alignments will be based on factors such as existing and future origin and destination patterns, planning-level route feasibility, existing approved plans, the potential to serve underserved populations, avoidance of important historic and environmental features, and economic development potential, among other factors.

Task 5. Assess Potential Stops and Stop Typologies for Study Alternatives

- For the developed alternatives, staff will create a methodology to determine the potential locations of stops (at a planning level). The rationale for locating stops will factor in land use, operational

efficiency, potential ridership, potential transfers, and station access. Stop typologies will also be developed (i.e. “park-and-ride” vs. “local stops” vs. “intermodal transfers” etc.).

Task 6. Develop Evaluation Metrics

- Staff will develop metrics to evaluate the Plan’s goals for the purposes of comparing and prioritizing transit alternatives (see Task 9). Because the transit alternatives to be assessed differ in geography and magnitude, some metrics may need to be “normalized” for the purposes of comparison.

Task 7. Develop an Evaluation Methodology to Assess Metric Outputs

- Staff will develop an evaluation methodology to assess the outputs for each proposed metric. The methodological approach may include travel demand modeling, research, and scenario-planning. The approach may also include “pre-screening” to reduce the number of study alternatives and reduce project costs.

Task 8. Execute the Evaluation Methodology

- Staff will execute the methodology described in Task 6.

Task 9. Develop a Prioritization Methodology

- Staff will develop a method to prioritize the studied alternatives. Prioritization will be based on the metrics developed in Task 6, and will be informed by the project stakeholders, including the general public, advocacy groups, and partner agencies and jurisdictions. Potential approaches could weigh some outputs based on their level of importance or could seek to balance the Plan values captured by the Plan purpose.

Task 10. Execute the Prioritization Methodology & Draft Recommendations

- Staff will execute the strategy developed in Task 9 and will use it to inform recommendations to the Planning Board.

Task 11. Develop a General Implementation Plan for Priority Alternatives

- Following the Planning Board’s concurrence with the preliminary recommendations, staff will develop a General Implementation Plan that will detail the major steps necessary to realize the highest-priority alternative(s). Ideally, the General Implementation Plan will provide high-level order of magnitude cost estimates and will discuss coordination and funding efforts necessary to advance the recommended project(s).

Task 12. Planning Board Review and Transmittal

- Staff will present the Working Draft *Corridor Forward* Plan to the Planning Board for its review and subsequent approval. The Public Hearing Draft will then be published for stakeholder review and a subsequent public hearing. Work sessions will follow, allowing the Board to make revisions based on stakeholder testimony. Following revision and approval, a Planning Board Draft will be transmitted to the County Council and the County Executive.

Task 13. Council Review and Approval

- After receiving the Planning Board Draft, the County Executive will have 60 days to review the draft and prepare a fiscal impact assessment report. This report will be transmitted to the County Council. In anticipation of receiving the fiscal impact assessment, the County Council will set a date to hold a public hearing after the 60-day comment period, and a public hearing will be held shortly after the comment period.

- The Council’s Transportation and Environment Committee (T&E) will hold subsequent work sessions and forward the draft, including recommended revisions, to the full Council. The full Council will then hold work sessions and approve the revised plan. Following Council approval, the Montgomery County Planning Board and full Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission will then adopt the Council-approved plan.

Figure 1 – Geographic Focus Area



