

FRIENDS OF HARFORD

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November 3, 2009

County Executive David R. Craig
220 South Main Street
Bel Air, MD 21014

Dear Mr. Craig,

Friends of Harford welcomes the expansion of the Transportation Element Plan (TEP) in the areas of public transit and pedestrian/bicycle accommodation. However, we feel there is still entirely too much emphasis, and money wasted, on roads that only increase Harford's current addiction to single-occupancy autos. Building and widening roads does not reduce congestion or time spent in traffic. Instead, this induces more travel and encourages development sprawl. The solution is an effective public transportation system.

Harford requires a long range, strategic transportation vision of what the county should look like in the future. The TEP's primary goal must be to have an adequate public transit system by 2035, and it should require a detailed study be funded to define that system and then determine the best way to achieve it. Considerable public input must be at the heart of this study. The result will then become the basis not only for local planning, but also for state and regional planning such as Transportation Outlook 2035.

In the short term, the Harford County Transportation Development Plan, June 2008, contains detailed analyses and recommendations for improving our bus transit system at little or no cost. The TEP should state that implementing this report is a top priority.



The TEP should also set specific goals for further bus transit improvements, such as increased hours, more frequent service, coordination with APG and MARC, and supporting projects (providing bus stops, route maps, etc.) Added funding for these improvements should be obtained by reducing funding for roads.

It is our understanding that you recently hired Mr. James Ports, Jr., former Deputy Secretary of the Maryland Department of Transportation, and assigned him responsibility for Harford's bus transit system. Since our current small bus system is well managed by county employees such as Mr. Hannan, we welcome Mr. Ports as representing your strong personal commitment to developing an effective public transit system for the workers, students, businesses and families of Harford.

Good public transit is convenient, cost effective, safe, reduces air pollution, increases national security, and improves quality of life and the environment. It will not happen overnight, but we must start now.

Attached are our detailed comments on the Transportation Element Plan to help Harford achieve these goals. They were emailed to Ms. Janet Gleisner on October 30.

Thank you for your consideration. We look forward to working with your staff on these important issues.

Sincerely yours,

Morita Bruce, President
Friends of Harford, Inc.

Friends of Harford's additional comments on Harford's draft Transportation Element Plan, 2009

Note: FOH comments are in blue. Quotations from the Plan look like this.

In the 2000 plan, Growth Management goals were to “preserve (Harford County's) character by providing adequate locations for publicly-served development within a defined envelope., thereby protecting the integrity and economic vitality of both the area with this Development Envelope and the rural area outside of the Development Envelope.” This goal is missing in 2009 and should be included.

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With few exceptions, funding for state roads outside of Priority Funding Areas is limited to maintenance, with new construction funds being targeted to needed facilities within the PFA boundaries.

Harford should follow these same rules.

Widening of Routes 152, 147, 543, and a portion of 22 are all outside the PFA.

Table 2 page 21, 22 - Routes 7, 755 and 715 are medium priority even though they are within the development envelope, while Rt 22 outside the envelope from 543 to I-95 is high priority.

Page 7 – Base Realignment and Closure(BRAC)

Impacts are anticipated along I-95, US40, and MD Routes 7, 22, 24, 543, 715, and 755 as these roads serve as the primary routes through the County to Aberdeen Proving Ground (APG). BRAC related reports have identified transportation needs and offer recommendations for highway, intersection, and transit needs.

BRAC impacted roads (primary access roads to APG) are I-95, US 40, MD Rts 7, 24, 715, 755 and 132 which are entirely within the development envelope, and Route 543 which is largely within the envelope. FOH supports improvements to these roads where needed.

Route 22 is largely outside the development envelope. FOH only supports expansion of those specific portions of Route 22 that are within the envelope, with emphasis on handling traffic between from I-95 to the APG gate. (Note that road widening isn't the only solution here either; approaches like buses, park-and-rides, an HOV-dedicated lane, etc. should be investigated.)

Routes 152 and 147 are not primary routes and are outside the envelope, yet are slated for widening (although low priority). However, Route 132, an important access route, is not listed for any improvements and should be at least medium priority. We believe that intersection improvements alone will be insufficient to handle BRAC traffic, especially if maximum use of bus and train transit does not occur.

"As operations at Aberdeen Proving Ground switch from predominately a military mission to civilian contractors, there will be a need for improved transit, rail, and commuting services. Currently, MARC service is available between Perryville and Baltimore and Washington D.C. with two stops in Harford County – Aberdeen and Edgewood. Service is limited to the early morning and evening commutes.

There is no weekend service. Lack of service to Delaware, combined with limited service availability between the peak commute hours all impact the effectiveness of the MARC system."

The County should make a major effort to convince state and federal agencies to properly fund the MARC growth plan, which would enable the kind of frequent and convenient service that is needed to serve the needs of BRAC and the 48% of Harford's workforce who work outside the County. Using the estimated \$1.6 billion cost of building I-95 Section 200 instead for rail improvements could bring MARC services to Harford County residents to the level planned for the year 2020, move huge numbers of commuters from cars to rail, and remove the need for such massive additions to I-95.

We appreciate the County's efforts to improve rail transit services and facilities, and recognize the difficulties involved in dealing with agencies and companies over which the County has little control. Therefore, we place maximum priority on acquiring an effective county-controlled bus transit system, properly integrated with pedestrian, bicycle and automobile transportation.

Page 13 - TRANSPORTATION NETWORK AND AIR QUALITY Section

The overall goal of this plan is to reduce the number of vehicle miles traveled and establish measures that will contribute to improving air quality. In the following section, information about existing conditions of various transportation components is provided. Goals, policies and implementation strategies have been established for highways, bicycle, pedestrian and trail networks, transit, commuter rail, transportation demand management programs, aviation based transportation, and air quality.

Widening roads is counterproductive to this #1 stated goal. Widening roads induces travel according to several traffic studies.

"Based on planned development, the existing and programmed highway network serving the Development Envelope is adequate. However, with the projected trip generation associated with BRAC, the existing highway network between growth areas may be stressed."

This is a handy excuse to widen roads outside the envelope such as 152 and 22. The proper solution is an effective, efficient, safe public transit system.

"... this is a suburban pattern going from rural to growth areas." and "a cross-country pattern, such as from Fallston to ...APG."

These two statements are trying to avoid the PFA maintenance limit and have the State fund widening. This is contrary to Smart Growth, which supports residential and community development near major work centers such as APG. If people decide to live further away from work, they should not expect other taxpayers to shorten their commute.

Page 14 - Level of Service

Harford County does not require that developers evaluate or consider Level of Service (LOS) of roads, only intersections. Developers can be required to improve intersections, but are never required to contribute to upgrading roads even when they are responsible for reducing them to unacceptable levels of service. Developers should be responsible for road improvements necessitated by their development, especially roads along their borders.

Table 1 - Highway Functional Classifications

It is not appropriate to use the Federal Highway classification map for county-controlled roads. County roads should be classified based upon whether or not they are within the county's development envelope. Urban roads are those inside it; rural roads are outside the envelope. Classifying two-thirds of the county as "rural" strains credulity and is a disservice to Harford County residents.

Table 2 - Priority Highway Improvements

It is quite disturbing to see that the county apparently considers every well-travelled road in Harford a "highway". If it is not the county's intent to make all these roads into highways, then a separate "Priority Road Improvements" table should be prepared.

Request the Administration identify the rationale for their "High" priorities in Table 2. Suggest adding a column to the table with short notes like "BRAC", "safety", "expected traffic load", "reduce emissions"... For example, why is a new "Henderson Avenue" road a high priority?

Include a table showing the priorities for bikeways/walkways/sidewalks.

All upgrades to roads classified as Urban should include walkways/sidewalks.

The following changes are proposed to Table 2 of the Transportation Element Plan. The FOH transportation committee concentrated on items designated as High Priority, with lesser attention to Medium priority and none to Low Priority, believing that the likelihood of funding for projects other than High Priority is negligible:

I-95 (Section 200) from Baltimore Co Line to MD 24, add 2 Express Toll Lanes (ETLs) in each direction. Cost: \$700. Priority: High

I-95 (Section 200) from MD 24 to MD 543, add 2 Express Toll Lanes (ETLs) in each direction. Cost: \$500. Priority: High

I-95 (Section 200) from MD 543 to MD 22, widen from 6 to 8 lanes. Cost: \$400. Priority: High

- The entire I-95 Sections 200 and 300 should be dropped (or rated Low Priority) until results are in for Section 100. If ETLs are later determined to be needed, they should be done in a way that minimizes the loss of land and "takings" of Rights of Way. Both the wasteful design of the ETLs themselves and the extra ramps for ETL interchanges destroy huge amounts of land.
- All I-95 ETL (toll) lanes (including Section 100 currently under construction) should be free for HOVs (i.e. buses, vanpools and carpools).

MD 22 from MD 543 to I-95, expand from 2 to 4 lanes. Cost: \$67.4. Priority: High

- Reduce priority to LOW.
- It is outside the Development Envelope (DE), encourages development of rural areas, will damage current communities and businesses along the road, and will be extremely expensive. It is contrary to Smart Growth.
- Construction cost alone is shown as \$67,400,000 and does NOT include the high cost of purchasing ROWs (Rights of Way). What is the estimated procurement cost for ROWs?

Perryman Access Road (1) from Michaelsville Road to MD 715, expand from 0 to 2 lanes. Cost not estimated. Priority: High

MD 159 relocation from it's present terminus to US 40, improve the intersection and relocate part of the 2-lane road. Cost: \$1.5. Priority: High

- These two projects are strongly supported by FOH and should remain High priority. However, Perryman Access Road (2) and Perryman Access Road (3) - bridge should remain medium priority or lower.

Pleasantville Road from High Point Road to Baltimore Co. Line ,2 to 2 lanes upgrade. Cost: \$1.515
Priority: High

We agree with the Administration's deletion of Pleasantville Road from this list.

Carrs Mill Road from MD 152 to Grafton Shop Road , 2 to 2 lanes upgrade .
Cost: \$2.295 Priority: Medium

- Should be DELETED.
- It will serve only to increase development outside the development envelope.

It should be noted that improvements to Rt 24/I-95 interchange should lessen traffic on Rt 152 and Singer Road. That interchange has been a bottleneck backing traffic to the Rt 152 interchange for many years. Eliminating the interchange bottleneck and widening MD24 eliminates the need change MD152. Furthermore, MD152 is entirely outside the development envelope and any expansion would encourage development contrary to Smart Growth policies.

Page 27 - Highway Safety

"From 1998 to 2005, the number of collisions in the County had been trending upward. However, there was a slight decrease in 2006 and 2007, and in 2007 there were fewer reported collisions than [sic] in the past four years."

Some traffic studies have attributed decreases in collisions as a side effect of congestion. Fuller roads decrease speeds and heighten driver awareness.

"To help ensure that Harford County's highway system is maintained at a level that supports County needs, the 2004 Land Use Element Plan called for the creation of additional funding mechanisms to balance the impact of new development on public resources. The establishment of new revenue sources, however, must be balanced with efficient planning and engineering that is accomplished in an environmentally sound manner."

We agree there should be equitable and cost effective improvements, and the means for doing this is to link land use and transportation. All property owners (not renters) pay highway fees on their real estate taxes. Anything other than that would amount to a toll. What other mechanisms is the county considering?

Page 31 - Highway Policy 1, Implementation Strategies

"Continue to ensure that land use and transportation decisions are linked so that land uses are supported by the appropriate types, levels, and timing of transportation improvements."

This is backward. Transportation decisions should encourage and support land use patterns that, in turn, enable efficient, cost-effective transit systems to be provided while discouraging wasteful sprawl.

The following should be added: 6. Incorporate roads and highways into an overall, integrated transportation plan that includes transportation by bus, rail, walking, bicycling, and

carpooling.

Page 31 -Highway Policy 2, Roads suit the character of the community.

In addition to keeping roads unpaved and providing traffic calming, levels of roads could be limited by the zoning category through which they travel, e.g., no road shall be greater than 2 lanes when it travels through AG or RR zoned land.

Page 32 - Highway Policy 3: Improve safety on County's roads.

#3 identifies "design to meet ADA requirements" as an implementation strategy to improve safety. The focus of ADA is on providing equal access for persons with disabilities; it does not necessarily relate to safety.

Page 32 - Highway Policy 4: Ensure that roadways provide multimodal opportunities where appropriate.

The qualifier 'where appropriate' should be removed.

- All new residential and mixed use developments should be required to provide multimodal opportunities for bike and pedestrian usage. Transit oriented development should be rewarded.
- FOH interprets - and insists that - road "upgrades" include sidewalks when the road is within the development envelope.
- "Widening roads serve to mitigate new projects, they do little to reduce overall volume of traffic" True. By "mitigation of new project", one realizes an improvement for existing drivers that is short term at best. All strategies in this policy are good, if not normally attained and never legislated.
- Of the projects listed in Table 2, or the committed and proposed projects identified in Figures 5 and 6, which ones reflect a 'Complete Streets' approach? Which projects include bicycle or pedestrian facilities? Which projects include facilities to improve transit access and circulation? Please identify.

Highway Policy 5: Provide a transportation system that is designed to be sensitive to the quality of the environment and natural, historic, and cultural resources.

We agree. Let's go beyond "minimizing impact on these resources", let's protect them. We need some real teeth for this section. If the land is wet, leave it alone. Steep, slopes, endangered habitat? Leave it alone. Minimizing impacts means having impact.

Our transportation "system" affects all of the Chesapeake Bay, yet there is no mention of the Chesapeake Bay here. It should be.

Air quality fails in this policy. Leaving natural vegetation "to the maximum extent possible" along roads translates to not much protection of air quality. Nor does "encouraging alternate transportation" offer much in the way of real strategies.

Bicycle Network

Goal: Implement a network of bicycle facilities in the County to enhance and promote non-motorized transportation.

We agree. It is not perception but the reality the roads are dangerous. This is not so much the fact that the roadways are heavily traveled that causes the dangerous condition but rather the lack of adequate design to accommodate vehicles, bicycles and pedestrians (a 'Complete Street').

General Comment: Specific funds, as a percent of Transportation funds, should be set aside to improve and expand bus, pedestrian and/or bicycle transportation.

Page 47 - Trails Network

Goal: Continue to support the development of trail networks as part of the County's transportation network. While trails and greenways are predominately used for recreation, they can also be part of the transportation network. Harford County has several popular trail systems (Figure 12). The Department of Parks and Recreation oversees 17 trails, but most of these are small local trails that are designed for recreational purposes. Others such as the Ma & Pa Heritage Corridor connect different areas of the County and have the potential to be utilized as part of the County's transportation network.

While some of the trail sections mentioned are probably being used for transportation, their main use is recreation (which is why they are managed by P&R rather than DPW). We would support the use of transportation funds for a trail only where a third or more users are expected to use it for actual transportation purposes as opposed to recreational use.

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Transit, Commuter Rail and Alternative Transportation Options

FOH strongly supports this section of the Plan, and wishes to see more emphasis placed on these transportation modes rather than on highways and roads.

For bus transit, immediate implementation of the 5-year plan contained in the 2008 Harford Transit Development Plan must be a top priority.

As part of this, we would like to emphasize that a good bus system is needed to serve Harford Community College commuters, including reliable and timely buses that tie into local "town-go-round" buses and park-and-ride lots.

The MARC Growth and Investment Plan should be followed, especially when determining the County's response to BRAC transportation needs. This will need to be coordinated with public transit into APG also.

Page 59 - Aviation

Goal: Support efforts to make air travel a safe, attractive, efficient, and competitive mode of transportation for the citizens and business communities of Harford County.

"Harford County aviation facilities include small airparks, a seaplane base and a larger military owned air base (Figure 16). Except for the military facility, all of the airparks are privately owned but available for public use. These airports are used primarily for recreational and instructional flying. Most of the aircraft are small privately owned planes."

The county has no transportation interest in Army-owned or private airparks and thus should not establish TEP goals for them. The Army has valid security reasons for maintaining its airfield for military purposes only. As for the airparks, It is inappropriate for the County to spend tax money to promote three private businesses serving a small number of individuals who have other transportation options.

Section II Implementation Chart on pages 65 - 77:

Page 68, Strategy #1 under Bicycle Policy #1 – why is this a Priority 2? A more effective strategy would be to incorporate bicycle accommodations into the planning, design and construction of all improvements to collector and larger roads within the Development Envelope.

Page 69, Strategy #4 under Bicycle Policy #2 – why is this a Priority 2? The County should apply for State and Federal grants to create and upgrade bicycle facilities immediately. Harford should be taking full advantage of every State and Federal grant program to improve bicycle facilities on an ongoing basis.

Page 71, Strategy #2 under Trail Policy #1 – A more effective strategy would be to incorporate construction of trail crossings into all roadway improvements.

Page 72, Strategy #3 under Trail Policy #2 - Diversion of Open Space funds is inappropriate; these funds should be reserved for parks and recreational facilities within walking distance of the neighborhoods from which the money was taken "in lieu of" providing these facilities to the families living there.

Page 73, Strategies #2 and #3 under Transit and Commuter Rail Policy #3 – These should be Priority 1 not Priority 2. Accomplishing these strategies in the next 6 years will do little to accommodate the increased traffic associated with BRAC employment that is expected within the next 2 years.

The plan provides a comprehensive list (Table 2) of priority highway improvements as well as maps that identify committed and proposed roadway projects. There is no similar information presented for rail, bicycle or pedestrian facilities or for buses. Specifically, what capital investments are planned or programmed by the county for these alternative transportation modes?