Date: August 24, 2021

Date of Meeting: August 4, 2021

Meeting Location: Video conference

Work Order Number: 32189-005

Project: Howard County Complete Streets

Meeting Description: Complete Streets Implementation Team Meeting #19 (Part 1)

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Introduction

The purpose of the meeting was to review Complete Streets Implementation Team (CSIT) comments on draft Chapter 1 (introduction), Chapter 3 (structures), Chapter 4 (adequate public facilities test requirements), and Chapter 5 (traffic studies, including growth rates). The schedule was also reviewed.
Members of the CSIT were provided with a copy of the draft minutes from the July 7 and 9 meeting in advance. Christiana Rigby made a motion to approve the minutes, and Larry Schoen seconded the motion. The CSIT approved the minutes unanimously.

Chris announced that Jessica Bellah is now the Columbia Association representative on the CSIT, and that David Ramsay has retired.

Jeff Riegner welcomed all attendees and reviewed the agenda. Jeff led the group through the materials attached to these minutes.

**Review of comments received on Chapter 1 (introduction)**

Jeff reviewed the changes made to Chapter 1, Introduction. Changes are specified in the attached meeting materials. Questions and comments from members of the CSIT on proposed changes are included in these minutes.

Jeff noted that the name of the Vulnerable Population Index (VPI) was changed to Equity Emphasis Area (EEA). There will be no change in process, just a change in the name. David Nitkin asked why EEA was capitalized and shown as an acronym. Jeff replied that VPI is the methodology used by the Baltimore Metropolitan Council (BMC), but County staff had concerns that the language was marginalizing. The phrase “Equity Emphasis Area” better reflects the intent of the metric and is similar language to metrics used in other jurisdictions.

Additional information is provided on the Community Engagement Plan (CEP), which will be updated and included as Chapter 1 appendix. Jennifer White acknowledged that the CEP only applies to transportation projects and asked how the CEP might inform public engagement across Howard County. Bruce Gartner suggested talking with Dr. Denise Boston, the Howard County Equity and Restorative Practices Manager, about how the CEP and Dr. Boston’s work could be integrated. Bruce noted that there is a new county office focused on issues of equitable engagement, which may be the appropriate place to advance this conversation. Bruce and Jennifer agreed to discuss. No changes to the Design Manual are necessary to address this comment.

Jeff noted there is a new section on pedestrian and bicycle master plans intended to address Larry Schoen’s comments. Larry appreciated the inclusion of pedestrian and bicycle master plans and provided positive feedback on the changes to Chapter 1. He noted that the sections do not explicitly reference master plan maps and asked that the section clarify that these plans include walking and bicycling network recommendations. He noted that Designers could use maps to identify gaps in the network. He asked that the language around implementation be strengthened, making clear the onus is on developers and designers. Christiana Rigby asked that the word “promote” be used instead of “ensure,” about the safety and convenience of multimodal networks.

Jeff noted that additional guidance on how to use the bullet points in the tradeoff section was provided, as well as a reference to the FHWA Road Diet Informational Guide. Larry noted that the preamble of the trade-off section currently states “it is best” to give priority to a mode of travel not currently accommodated, which is inconsistent with the Complete Streets policy language which stipulates priority “shall” be given. Jeff replied that this section will be checked against the policy.

Jeff noted that a reference to bicycle climbing lanes was added at Kris Jagarapu’s request. Christiana noted that she is not comfortable with the climbing lane option as phrased. Jeff replied that the option can be presented more clearly by noting that a climbing lane would never be used in place of a good low-stress facility. It would be only utilized in places where there is space for one bike lane or none at all. Christiana replied that it would also be good to notify drivers to be prepared to see a bike in their lane in the downhill direction. Chris replied that signage is normally used to alert drivers along with sharrows. Usually the County uses the “Bicycles May Use Full Lane” sign. Chris agreed that climbing lanes should only be used where there are space constraints.
Larry observed that the retrofit process will be challenging when there is limited right of way, and that this section cannot be overly prescriptive. He agreed that it requires “creativity on the part of the designer.” He shared that a ten-foot floor on lane width is not consistent with national guidelines provided by NACTO, which state that 9.5-foot lanes only result in traffic volumes decreasing by 4%. He argued that in certain cases lanes should go down to 9.5 or nine feet to show a commitment to accommodating multimodal facilities.

Tom Auyeung replied that nine feet is too narrow and does not allow for trucks to operate. Jennifer Biddle observed that public agencies only use nine or 9.5 foot lanes for construction zones where speeds are very slow. Jeff shared that in his experience, lanes narrower than ten feet in width should be used very sparingly. When there are two lanes in the same direction, nine foot lanes cause vehicles to stagger. Baltimore’s Complete Streets policy specifies nine feet as the default for local streets and they are encountering issues. Larry replied that the NACTO Urban Street Design Guide allows for nine foot lanes in select cases, which would be very limited. Ideally the County would get the right of way to create a wider facility. He noted that he is comfortable with qualifying language around the use of nine foot lanes but is not comfortable with a floor of ten feet.

John Seefried asked if a specific edit is being requested, and Larry responded that he is requesting the lane width floor be changed to nine feet with qualifying language. John noted that if the road needs to accommodate snow plows or trash trucks lanes that narrow would present a problem. Larry replied that if there is a buffered bike lane, the trucks would be able to intrude on the painted buffer.

Jessica Bellah noted that often where the right of way is constrained there may be opportunities to locate non-vehicular facilities outside of the right of way. If language is being provided about narrowing on-street facilities, language should also be provided about creating facilities outside the right of way that provide multi-modal service. John noted that the Department of Public Works (DPW) would prefer this option because it provides separation which is safer.

Carl asked that it be clear that alleys do not require curb and gutter but have a reverse crown. Jeff noted that a sentence could be added to Chapter 1 alley description that clarifies, unlike other street types, alleys drain to the center of the street. The issue will also be addressed in the Volume IV typical sections.

**Review of comments received on Chapter 3 (structures)**

Jeff shared that all comments received on Chapter 3 have been addressed, and graphics that have been provided in the most recent draft. There were no comments from the CSIT.

**Review of comments received on Chapter 4 (adequate public facilities test requirements)**

Jeff explained that Chapter 4 will remain essentially unchanged for now, and updates will be made in conjunction with updates made to the Subdivision and Land Development Regulations (SLDR) which will be done once the Design Manual draft is under consideration by Council. Currently, the only change being proposed is changing the width of a shared use path from eight feet to ten feet.

Larry expressed concern about inconsistencies among the Design Manual Chapters before the SLDR are updated, noting that the old language in Chapter 4 should not supersede new guidance where there are inconsistencies. He noted he would be comfortable leaving this chapter unmodified but only if there is a statement that other chapters apply first. Jeff noted that this is only a temporary circumstance of nine months to a year and suggested that a provision for the gap between the Design Manual approval and SLDR approval be included in Council legislation when the Design Manual is approved. Providing language in the Design Manual is a long-term solution to a short-term problem. Christiana asked if language would be included as part of the whereas clauses. Jeff replied that more research is necessary to determine where qualifying language would be most appropriate. Christiana replied that she is open to options and would prefer to include language clarifying the timeline for future improvements. Bruce agreed with the approach and offered to research options for how to handle the situation.
Larry shared that both comment 143 and 147 note that a plain reading of the current SLDR and the Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance (APFO) make clear that each document defers to the Design Manual. Jeff replied that it is important to understand the level of risks incurred by not incorporating a clause about which Chapter applies first in the Design Manual. There is a risk if there is a development or capital project that comes up in the 9-12 month period that creates a disconnect between the two provisions of the Design Manual of SLDR. Although there is a risk, it should not be a frequent occurrence. Larry replied that he prefers a robust solution, not just mitigating risk for the County.

**Review of comments received on Chapter 5 (traffic studies)**

Jeff provided an overview of Chapter 5, which has the most changes. The word “traffic” means different things to different people. There was an effort to emphasize that traffic refers to all users of the street in several locations throughout the chapter. In some instances, this was done by using the word “multimodal.” Where traffic is referring to a specific mode of travel a qualifying word is used, for example “vehicular traffic.”

Jennifer W. noted the Design Manual mentions growth rate, asking whether that applies to multimodal traffic or vehicular traffic. Jeff replied that section now includes “motor vehicle” as a modifier in that section for clarity. There are very few instances where bicycle and pedestrian facilities are categorized by volume. They are more often categorized by comfort. Volume and capacity are more common metrics for motor vehicle travel.

Jeff noted that when looking at future year conditions, changes in land use should be considered along with changing traffic demand. As currently calculated, growth rates only impact facilities for motor vehicles, however densifying areas will require increased facilities for people walking and bicycling. Jennifer W. added this illustrates the importance of keeping in mind the type of future the County wants. An auto-centric future is not ideal, and an ideal future is one with increased walking, bicycling, and transit. Although specific goals may not be appropriate content for the Design Manual, a vision for the County and mode shift goals should be informing changes to the Design Manual, especially in sections on traffic studies. These conversations should be had in conjunction with work on the General Plan. Christiana and Jessica agreed.

Jessica added that there may be new modes of transportation we have not yet thought of, and asked how new technology and modes should be handled such that the Design Manual does not need to be continually updated. She noted that the Design Manual should speak to the issue of micromobility.

Jeff replied that the Design Manual is not meant to create policy but to implement policy. The Complete Streets policy does not have mode shift goals, but it does require performance measures be tracked on an annual basis. He noted the performance measures could be reinforced in the Design Manual so that Designers using the manual have them as a frame of reference when scoping projects.

Jennifer W. agreed that work must be done within the framework provided by the Complete Streets policy, but it is still important to have a “north star” or guiding vision and goals, so that when conversations about APFO or the SLDR begin, changes are made that move the County closer to those goals. Chris agreed that higher level goals could drive design details and design guidance, but the County does not have mode shift or mode split goals established. David Cookson added that there are general policy goals articulated in the General Plan, but they are not tied to any numbers. Larry asked about trip reduction goals in Downtown Columbia. David replied that there have been traffic studies done within specific areas of Columbia that generate mode split figures, but they do not constitute a goal, instead providing an assumed number for mode split. Chris affirmed that those studies merely acknowledge that mode split is different in areas like Downtown Columbia.

Jennifer W. commented that setting goals about mode shift and mode split is another item on the CSIT to-do list after Design Manual updates are complete. She acknowledged there are different geographies across Howard County that have different levels of multimodal facilities, but it would still be helpful to set goals. Christiana agreed a larger conversation needs to be had if the County wants to achieve a mode shift goal which could also guide projects and the budget.
Bruce agreed that this visioning and goal setting process is critical, and that it is important to have those conversations with DPZ since they are in the midst of the General Plan process, with goals of adopting changes by February. He also noted that these conversations need to be had at the regional level with the BMC.

Larry agreed that mode shift is a regional issue that relates to land use planning and the broader transportation network. He noted that the Bikeway Design Guide is clear that on-road bike lanes and shoulders only support about 2% of the population. If the County is not satisfied with a mode shift of 2-3%, then goals for the bike network should be better than Level of Traffic Stress (LTS) 2.

Christiana clarified that although there are regional things that can and should be done, many destinations including libraries, parks, schools, grocery stores, and village centers are not regional destinations. There is work that can be done within the County that would impact how people access local destinations and which modes are most efficient for them to use. Bruce noted that focusing on the region opens other streams of funding, since the County does not have the financial resources to make all the necessary changes.

Jeff replied that mode shift goals would be useful, but they should be included in the General Plan rather than the Design Manual. Currently, the guiding principles for the CSIT are the performance measures that were included in the Complete Streets policy. Although the performance measures are not a goal, they establish a process of continued improvement to the multimodal network. It is important to note in the Design Manual that Designers should be making decisions that increase each performance measure.

Jeff noted that a one page document was distributed to CSIT members that provides an overview of the growth rate discussion to date. One option is to defer any changes to the growth rate to the SLDR updates. However, there was consensus around removing the 6% provision and there is value in removing that clause in this round of updates. Other elements of the growth rate can be addressed as part of this update or be done as part of the updates to the SLDR. The CSIT was provided with information about all the elements that go into a future traffic study as well as an analysis of background growth rates at about 60 locations in Howard County for the last eight years. That analysis showed a largest mean growth rate of 1.7%, but there was a lot of variability across locations. Some areas had growth far more than 1.7%, and some location showed a reduction in traffic over time. There is not one number that will encapsulate growth countywide.

The first option, proposed by Chad Edmondson, is continuing to use a 3% growth rate, removing the 6% growth rate that currently starts in year four, and seeing a floor of 1%. Developers could still submit a justification to use a lower growth rate.

Christiana referenced the widening of MD 108 in River Hill to five lanes, which presented a significant problem for people attempting to cross from River Hill Village Center to Parksville Commons. She asked what happens over 10-20 years from now with this type of growth rate assumption. Jeff replied that it depends on the location. One of the key points that Chad made is that one of two things typically happens for developer projects. If the developer runs their analysis using the 3% default growth rate and they find no offsite improvements or minimal offsite improvements are required, they submit the study. If the default growth rate does require offsite improvements, the developer generally would do the analysis to support a lower growth rate with the goal of minimizing the improvements needed. If the goals of the County are to make sure developers pay for every bit of roadway capacity that is needed to handle car traffic, a higher growth rate is a good idea. Christiana replied that the goal would be that developers pay into transit and improvements that would support other modes. Jeff agreed that making roads wider for motor vehicles would not support any mode shift goals.

Jessica asked when the County will begin to consider the negative impact growth rates have on the County’s ability to maintain infrastructure. If the County always assumes growth, but when there is decline in a given area, where does the County get the funds to maintain the facility? The County is taking on more roads and more maintenance for future generations to maintain. Other places across the country are taking streets offline because they cannot all be maintained.
Jeff replied that it is almost impossible to prove when growth rates are excessive. The obvious evidence is when a wide road is built that no one uses, but in reality, people just make different trip choices. For example, people will drive instead of using a different mode of travel, or travel during peak periods because there is no reason to shift a shopping trip to earlier or later in the day. Induced demand says that in many cases, when a road is built, people will use it.

Jessica replied that there must be adequate resources and land in the future to meet future need. As part of growth modeling is it possible to request set-asides to fund facilities if they prove necessary? A lot of things get built because there is not a model in place to do things differently, not because those facilities are needed.

Jeff replied that there is precedent for dedicating right of way for future improvements without building. The biggest issue is that if developers are not building facilities, then the County would need a sufficient fee in lieu to ensure more County resources will not be required at construction. If a developer pays into a fund and traffic volumes do not meet a certain level within a given point of time, those funds could automatically go into bicycle and pedestrian projects. True congestion creates issues for people walking and bicycling, and it is important there are enough funds in place to fix those issues.

Larry said ideally, a developer would build facilities that support mode shift, like putting in bicycle and pedestrian facilities or reducing vehicular trips. The goal isn’t to let the developer off the hook, but to shift their responsibility to multimodal facilities. In certain areas congestion can be a good thing, because it may support someone choosing to walk to a destination instead of driving.

Christiana replied that there are congestion taxes and other mitigation strategies that are options. If the current traffic studies look at peak times, the entire transportation network is being planned for those few hours a day. There are cultural shifts that need to happen. It is important the County does not get caught in the trap of doing what has always been done when there are better options.

Jeff noted these ideas would represent some very significant changes in policy for the County. To turn these ideas into reality, there first needs to be new policy that is reflected in the SLDR, and then the Design Manual will change to reflect the policies and meet new goals.

Bruce agreed that it is the responsibility of DPW and the Office of Transportation (OOT) to think about what these guiding documents should be. It is important to do it right and comprehensively. Right now it is important to focus on the Design Manual updates given the upcoming deadlines.

Chris observed that background growth rate is an APFO process. He expressed comfort with changing the background growth rate because the current rate is not accurate. The current proposed changes do not reflect a big policy or goal change outside the scope of this group.

Jeff returned to the growth rate options, noting that Option 1 which recommends maintaining the 3% growth rate as a default has a risk of cumulative impact over time that may impact mode shift goals. Option 2 suggests setting a cap of 1% for background growth. Having a growth rate closer to the low end instead of having a rate that will compound over the years may be better aligned with broader multimodal goals.

Jessica observed that much of the County’s greenfield development is built out, but infill development will lead to more people and cars. The degree to which development may densify is unknown because that is set by the General Plan. Setting a growth rate at zero may not reflect updates to how the County supports infill development.

Jennifer W. agreed there may be more people, but asked how the County should incentivize a greater use of other modes. She asked why the County is currently looking exclusively at peak hours. The growth rate could be adjusted to encourage people to use non-auto modes of transportation. Larry agreed, noting that the Downtown Plan notes that traffic studies in Columbia should assume a trip reduction of 15%. Roads should not be widened to support infill development; other modes should be supported.
Carl noted that the 1.7% growth rate presented by Jeff was evaluated based on 60 locations around the County, and it is a blended rate that does not dissect whether growth is from a new subdivision or existing developments. A typical Traffic Impact Study has to account for current peak hour traffic counts, calculated traffic from the development being studied, calculated traffic from other nearby development projects that are approved, as well as background growth. The County is mostly built out and needs a more accurate number to work with. Good points have been made but they are not about how to do traffic studies. Carl expressed support for Option 2, with a minimal percentage as a floor, 1% as a default.

Christiana noted that there is an underlying assumption that more people must mean more cars which is not accurate. Unfortunately, the County does not yet have alternate methods in place to address this concept. She expressed support for a lower growth rate, and would be comfortable with 1.7%, however, it is important to not lose money provided by the development community because that funding is critical. Although it would be better for the funding to go to different modes, that is part of the conversation that needs to be had around APFO.

Bruce commented that he has discussed this issue at length with other members of the CSIT, and expressed support for changing the growth rate while looking at broader issues as part of the General Plan update.

Schedule

Jeff shared the updated Design Manual schedule. He noted that the Complete Streets policy that was adopted in October 2019 specified completion of Design Manual updates in 24 months. There have been several discussions among staff, members of CSIT, and the County Administration about adjusting the deadline. This schedule proposes releasing a complete draft in October and prefiling with County Council in mid-December. This is still an assertive schedule that requires a quick turnaround by members of the CSIT providing comments and the project team making edits.

Chapter 2 will be provided to the CSIT on Friday. This Chapter is about 75 pages long and contains a lot of information that is important to the CSIT. Comments are due a week after the draft is distributed, which will be challenging, but allows for revisions in advance of the September CSIT meeting.

The goal is that the CSIT will be able to approve a complete draft by the second October CSIT meeting. That draft will be posted on the County website for review and comment by the public. Staff has begun to prepare for public outreach and is planning for two workshops. The first is scheduled for October 12 and will provide an overview of the Complete Streets policy and edits to the Design Manual for a general audience. The second workshop is scheduled for October 14 and intended for regular users of the Design Manual like developers, their engineers, and staff, although it will also be open to the general public. [Note: As of August 24, the workshops are now scheduled for October 14 and October 21.]

After receiving comments, the project team will address the edits. The CSIT will have a chance to see the comments and any changes. The Public Works Board, which has approval authority, will review the changes at their November and December meetings. The Multimodal Transportation Board will review the draft in November. Although they do not have a legal requirement to approve, they are able to endorse the updates.

Christiana noted that the actual prefile deadline for the January Council meeting is December 23. Bruce clarified that December 15 is an internal deadline so the document can be converted into the legislative format. A fiscal impact estimate is also required, as well as evaluation of legal sufficiency.

Bruce noted that the Planning Board has also expressed interest in receiving a briefing, clarifying they do not have decision making or endorsing authority. Jeff agreed it is good to have an inclusive process.

Larry shared his concern with providing comments within the scheduled time due to the volume of new materials to review. Jennifer noted that she is happy with the changes to the schedule which reflect a commitment to delivering a quality document. Christiana commented she would let her colleagues in Council know that this is not a delay, just additional time that will result in a better product.
**Next Steps**

Jeff noted the next priority is Chapter 2, which will be distributed to members of the CSIT by Friday, August 6.

Action items from this meeting include:

- Send any comments on chapters 1, 3, 4, and 5 by Monday, August 9.

The next CSIT meeting is scheduled for Friday, August 6 at 1:00 pm.

Leah Kacanda, AICP