Citizen’s Guide to Community Engagement

This Community Engagement Plan provides guidance to County staff on how to collaborate and collect feedback from the public on transportation projects in Howard County.

You are an expert on your community because you use the streets around your home every time you leave the house. You have insights that transportation professionals don’t have, since you observe how your streets work at all times of the day throughout the year. Your insights will help the County design transportation facilities that work for you and your neighbors.

Any text below that is blue and underlined is a live link - just click it to travel to the linked website or document.

Frequently Asked Questions

I would like to know more about transportation projects across Howard County. How can I get involved?

Visit the Howard County Complete Streets Website:
• Bookmark the Howard County Complete Streets website:
  www.howardcountymd.gov/completestreets

Sign up for Complete Streets Email Updates:
• Sign up for the Howard County Office of Transportation Complete Streets listserv by visiting:
  www.howardcountymd.gov/completestreets
• Text to join is an option that should be explored for a future version of this plan.

Follow us on Social Media:
• Follow Howard County Office of Transportation’s social media pages:
  www.facebook.com/CommuteHoward
  www.twitter.com/commutehoward

Attend Public Meetings:
Upcoming meetings will be advertised on the Complete Streets website, via email, and via social media. There are multiple regularly occurring meetings that are open to the public where transportation projects are discussed.

Attend the BikeHoward and Complete Streets Open House, generally held every January. At the Open House, you will have the chance to talk to County Staff about current projects and offer feedback on which proposed improvements are important to you.

The Multimodal Transportation Board (MTB) holds meetings monthly and they are open to the public. Meetings are generally on the fourth Tuesday of the month at 7:00 p.m. in the George Howard Building, 3430 Court House Drive, Ellicott City, Maryland 21043, or virtually as appropriate. The MTB advises the County Executive and County Administration on transportation matters. Agendas, minutes, and meeting materials are available on the County website.

The Bicycle Advisory Group (BAG) advises the County Executive and County Administration on matters of bicycle transportation, particularly the implementation of the Bicycle Master Plan. The BAG meets at least quarterly, and two of its meetings are required by the Howard County Code to be joint meetings with the Transit and Pedestrian Advisory Group (see below). Agendas, minutes, and meeting materials are available on the County website.

I would like to know more about transportation projects happening in my neighborhood. What can I do to make sure I am notified? Is there a way to check the status of a particular project?

The Complete Streets website includes a form to sign up to receive notices about upcoming public meetings and events related to County transportation projects.

If I miss a public meeting, can I still provide input?
• We understand not everyone can attend a meeting at a specific time, and not everyone may be comfortable providing feedback in a public forum
• Materials from every meeting will be posted to the project website for review along with an online survey so you can provide feedback
• All feedback received from the public will be
taken into consideration, whether provided at a public meeting or via an online survey, email, or phone call.

Why doesn't the design of the project reflect my comments?

- Although public feedback impacts the project design, designers and engineers are required to follow the Howard County Design Manual and the Howard County Subdivision and Land Development regulations when designing a project. Sometimes public recommendations conflict with the guidance offered in those documents. Howard County staff and representatives will do their best to address public comments while still following the technical requirements. In instances where design guidance conflicts with a public comment, the County will do their best to explain why in a way that the public can understand.

- The greatest opportunity to impact the design of a project is during the beginning planning phase of a project before a lot of money, time, and resources are spent on developing a detailed plan. At the beginning of a project, designers have questions that members of the public can answer to inform the design of the project. As questions are answered based on public feedback and technical analysis, the design progresses, and becomes more difficult to change. By the final design phase, the purpose of public engagement is to inform the public about what the design will be and explain how public feedback was incorporated throughout the process.

How long does it take for a transportation project to move from a proposed transportation improvement to construction?

Capital transportation projects vary greatly in their size, scope, and complexity. There is no average amount of time it takes for a project to move from a proposed improvement to construction. The County will provide the public with an estimated timeline for the planning and design of every capital project and will notify the public if that schedule changes significantly. Oftentimes, the most unpredictable and time-consuming part of a transportation project is between design and construction, when issues of project funding, land ownership, utilities, and easements are being resolved. After those issues are worked out and funding is secured, the project can go to construction. The Department of Public Works provides the public with estimated timelines for the construction of capital projects and will notify the public if that schedule changes significantly.

It is even more difficult to provide an estimate on how much time a developer-led project will take, since timing is dictated by the private developer's schedule. The Department of Planning and Zoning will answer questions about the timing of a developer-led project on a case-by-case basis.
Some Howard County Transportation Terms You Should Know

Complete Streets

According to the National Complete Streets Coalition, “Complete Streets are streets for everyone. They are designed and operated to enable safe access for all users, including pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists and transit riders of all ages and abilities. Complete Streets make it easy to cross the street, walk to shops, and bicycle to work.”

Howard County Complete Streets Policy

The Howard County Council unanimously adopted the Complete Streets Resolution CR120-2019 on October 7, 2019. The vision of Howard County’s Complete Streets policy is “To ensure that Howard County is a place for individuals of all backgrounds to live and travel freely, safely, and comfortably, public and private roadways in Howard County shall be safe and convenient for residents of all ages and abilities who travel by foot, bicycle, public transportation or automobile, ensuring sustainable communities Countywide.”

Howard County Complete Streets Implementation Team (CSIT)

The CSIT is the group tasked by the County Executive with implementing Howard County’s Complete Streets policy. The CSIT has 14 members, seven of which are Howard County government representatives, and seven of which are external stakeholders. The CSIT is responsible for ensuring that the following things happen:

- Draft, adopt, and implement this Community Engagement Plan
- Draft, adopt, and implement the Transportation Improvement Prioritization System
- Update the Howard County Design Manual
- Produce a publicly available Annual Report that provides updates on all projects and the status of all Complete Streets performance measures

Howard County Design Manual

The Howard County Design Manual is the document that shows Howard County engineers and designers how public infrastructure should be designed and built. Volume III of the Design Manual focuses on roads and bridges, and includes criteria and standards for the design of safe, efficient, and coordinated road systems. It also includes criteria for planning, environmental, bicyclist, and pedestrian related issues. Both private developer led projects and County led capital projects must conform to the Design Manual.

The Complete Streets policy requires that the Design Manual be updated to more fully incorporate Complete Streets by October 2021.

Subdivision and Land Development Regulations

The Howard County Subdivision and Land Development regulations are intended to promote the health, safety, and general welfare of the residents of the County by assisting orderly, efficient, and integrated development of land and providing uniform procedures and standards for the processing of development plans. All private development in Howard County must confirm to the Subdivision and Land Development Regulations before it can be constructed.

Howard County Transportation Master Plans

Howard County transportation master plans provide guidance on where and how the County should invest in the transportation network, including walking and bicycling.

PlanHoward and HoCo By Design

PlanHoward is the current general plan for Howard County. It is a long-range, visionary document that guides land use decisions, including decisions about where to make investments in the transportation network. HoCo By Design is Howard County’s next general plan update, which is underway in 2020 and 2021.

A General Plan is required by Howard County Code. It includes demographic and population projections and assesses capacity to accommodate changes and growth. It evaluates demands on roads, schools, utilities, parks, housing, and other infrastructure and develops strategies to meet projected deficiencies. It anticipates how growth impacts community facilities and the environment and identifies areas where growth occurs. The State of Maryland provides a framework that suggests the following elements be included or addressed in General Plan policies: quality of life and sustainability, public participation, growth areas, community design, infrastructure, transportation, housing, economic development, environmental protection, resource conservation, stewardship, and implementation.

For more information, visit the HoCo By Design website.
**BikeHoward**

BikeHoward, the Howard County bicycle master plan, was adopted by the County Council in 2016. The plan provides guidance for improvements for transportation and recreational bicycling, both on-street and off-street. Recommendations are provided in the general areas of infrastructure improvements, policy and programs.

For more information, visit the [BikeHoward website](#).

**WalkHoward**

WalkHoward is Howard County’s pedestrian master plan and was adopted in February 2020 through Council Resolution 14-2020. This master plan addresses walking in all of its forms – whether you are trying to get somewhere or just taking a casual stroll somewhere you love.

For more information, visit the [WalkHoward website](#).
**Infrastructure Types**

*Bike Lane*
Pavement marking designating a portion of roadway for preferential use of bicycles.

*Buffered Bike Lane*
A type of bike lane with additional striped buffer zones to provide increased separation from faster moving traffic.

*Climbing Lane*
Used where existing road width will support addition of only one bike lane. Bike lane provided in uphill and shared lane marking on the downhill portion of the road.

*Separated Bike Lane (Cycletrack)*
A one or two-way bicycle facility that is physically separated from moving traffic and pedestrians to create a lower stress bicycling experience.

*Shared Roadway*
Generally used on rural roads and neighborhood streets where there is good sight distance and low traffic volumes. Shared lane markings (sometimes known as “sharrows”) are used where the speed limit is 35 mph or lower. Although shared roadways don’t count as bicycle facilities, in selected locations they may fill gaps in the bicycle network, indicating cyclists’ safest path of travel and reminding motorists of their obligation to share the road.

*Shared Use Pathway*
An off-street bicycle and pedestrian facility, physically separated from the road and motor vehicle traffic creates a lower stress experience for people walking and bicycling.

*Sidewalk*
An off-street facility for people to walk. In general, sidewalk bicycling is discouraged, except for children and those just learning to ride a bicycle. In Howard County many casual and recreational cyclists ride on sidewalks for short sections of their ride or even long distances, because conditions on the roadway are too uncomfortable. Sidewalk cycling is permitted by county code.

*Crosswalk*
A recommended location for pedestrians to cross a road where drivers are required by law to stop for crossing pedestrians. Crosswalks may be marked or unmarked. Crosswalks that are not at intersections are always marked.

*Pedestrian Refuge Island*
A small section of pavement or sidewalk in the middle of a roadway with a refuge area intended to help protect pedestrians who are crossing a multi-lane road.

*High-Intensity Activated Crosswalk (HAWK) Signal*
A pedestrian activated traffic control device used to stop road traffic to allow pedestrians to cross safely.

*Rapid Rectangular Flashing Beacon (RRFB)*
A pedestrian activated traffic control device used to increase driver yielding behavior at crosswalks to allow pedestrians to cross safely.