

MEMORANDUM

TO: County Council

FROM: Glenn Orlin, ^{CO}Deputy Council Administrator

SUBJECT: **Introduction**—US 29 Mobility and Reliability Study

Background. Four Corners resident and CAC member Sean Emerson developed a concept last spring that would create a dedicated Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) lane between New Hampshire Avenue and Sligo Creek Parkway. His proposal relies on reducing the width of the existing general-use lanes to 10' (11" on the outside curb), leaving 22' in the middle for a dedicated 12'-wide bus lane (two lanes at Four Corners) as well as an 8'-wide median, and a 2'-wide painted strip between the BRT lane and the adjacent travel lane. Where there is a station, the 22' would be used for the BRT lane and a one-sided platform. South of Sligo Creek Parkway the BRT would appropriate one of the four peak-direction lanes. North of New Hampshire Avenue the lanes would either be in the existing median or, similar to the Executive's proposal, on the outside shoulders, where they exist.

At that time Council staff noted that this concept would be improved if the BRT buses were to be in a mechanically-guided busway. The buses would be outfitted with guide wheels that would have them run between two curbs—a bus driver would not even be using the steering wheel—allowing much closer tolerances. The width of a guided bus lane is typically 8½' wide, not 12'. Furthermore, the bus would automatically steer right up against the platform, and not have to rely on a driver's skills to do so. Boarding and alighting would be a bit quicker, and always simpler for wheelchair-bound patrons. The extra 3½' of width could be utilized for a wider platform or median.

At Four Corners Mr. Emerson proposes that the inside traffic lane in each direction on US 29 be repurposed to make room for two BRT lanes; the concept is that buses running north and south on the dedicated lane could bypass each other there. The concept also includes "Michigan Lefts" for drivers from University Boulevard wanting to turn left to go north or south on US 29; rather than allowing a simple left turn, a Michigan Left would have these drivers pass directly across US 29, go around the loop at the far side of the intersection, return to US 29 and make a right turn. Michigan Lefts are part of this proposal because removing a lane in each direction would reduce the area where vehicles could stack on US 29 between the two University Boulevard intersections.

An alternative would be having just one BRT lane through Four Corners. The vehicular demand on US 29 is very uneven: it is much heavier southbound in the morning rush and northbound in the evening rush. Buses running in the off-peak direction would receive very little travel time advantage from a dedicated lane. If only one BRT lane passed through Four Corners, no more than one traffic lane

would need to be removed, reducing the need for a Michigan Left for eastbound-to-northbound traffic or westbound-to-southbound traffic, not both.

Another issue is where left-turns would be permitted into neighborhoods between Burnt Mills and Sligo Creek Parkway. If a 10'-wide pocket were created for left-turn lane, some of that width could be taken from the remaining median. But there would also need to be a sufficiently wide pedestrian refuge area. Thus, at these spots the right-of-way would have to be widened by a few feet. These left-turn neighborhood entry points would have to be signalized, and would be the places where pedestrians would be allowed to cross US 29. The related issue is which streets into the neighborhood should be designated as the entry points. These are issues that would need considerably more study, and would need input from the neighborhoods abutting US 29 in this area.

Many on the Council expressed the belief that Mr. Emerson's general concept shows great promise for creating what the master plan calls for: a dedicated lane along most of US 29. The State Highway Administration reportedly is open to the idea that the US 29 lane widths could be reduced to 10'. A design with 10'-wide lanes would also result in drivers reducing their speeds (when the speed isn't already reduced by congestion) in this area where residences, businesses, and pedestrians are close to the roadway. Furthermore, the elements of the recently approved US 29 BRT project could be incorporated into Mr. Emerson's concept:

Study funding request. On May 15, 2018 the Council requested the Department of Transportation (DOT) to prepare, by September 2017, a scope of work—and that the County Executive request an appropriation for—a study to evaluate Mr. Emerson's proposal and other operational improvements that would create an exclusive guideway for buses on all or much of US 29 between White Oak and downtown Silver Spring. Three months after the deadline, six Councilmembers wrote DOT requesting that it find funds within its existing capital budget for this study (©1-2). At the January 19 Transportation, Infrastructure, Energy, and Environment (T&E) Committee worksession on the FY18 Savings Plan, the DOT Director affirmed that the study could be funded within a surplus of already approved funds under the FY17-22 CIP's Facility Planning-Transportation, the project that funds feasibility studies such as this one. The Committee then voted unanimously to recommend amending the Facility Planning-Transportation project to explicitly include this study, the scope of work for which is on ©3-10.

After several civic leaders in the Four Corners area claimed there had been insufficient notice to consider conducting this study, on January 30 the Council decided that a new amendment to the Facility Planning-Transportation be introduced that would specifically address this study. The new project description form is on ©11-13; the only change is noting that the US 29 Mobility and reliability Study would be a Mass Transit study that would start in FY18 (see ©13).

The public hearing on this amendment is tentatively scheduled for the evening of February 27, 2018.