



THE PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY GOVERNMENT

Derrick Leon Davis

Council Member, District 6

JUN 13 2017

Pete K. Rahn, Secretary
Maryland Department of Transportation
7201 Corporate Center Drive
P. O. Box 548
Hanover, Maryland 21076

Dear Secretary Rahn:

I write on behalf of the Prince George's County Council with respect to your meeting with representatives of Prince George's and Charles counties on March 23, 2017 at the Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) headquarters in Hanover to discuss the results of the Southern Maryland Rapid Transit (SMRT) Study and next steps for the project. Based on the results of the meeting, we understand that there were several follow-up points that you and your staff were asked to review and address.

We request that the Final Report and Recommendations of the SMRT Study reflect the findings and conclusions of the experts on the consultant team, and the members of the technical and steering committees, who have spent the past three years engaged in the following tasks, at a cost of more than \$3 million in public funds:

- Updated ridership forecasts
- Engineering of the detailed alignment and transit station locations
- Projected economic impact of the project
- Updated cost estimates
- Evaluation of the pros and cons of the two mode options, Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) or Light Rail Transit (LRT).

This is the fifth study that has been completed in the last 29 years on proposed rapid transit service in the MD 5/U.S. 301 corridor from the Branch Avenue Metrorail Station, through Prince George's County to Waldorf and White Plains in Charles County, since the elected county officials and state legislators of the Southern Maryland region made their first joint request for State action on this priority to Governor William Donald Schaefer in 1988.

In the Prince George's County Priority Projects List for the FY 2017-2022 State Consolidated Transportation Program (CTP), the County ranked SMRT as the fifth priority for transit projects in the County and has consistently supported the project since at least 2001. We hope and expect that the final recommendations of this new Study will be consistent with the findings of the experts who were commissioned by the State to carry out this comprehensive analysis.

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At the conclusion of the SMRT Study, it became evident to the project team that the transit ridership forecasts, and projections of economic impact, favored light rail transit (LRT) as the most responsive and suitable mode for delivering high-capacity, fixed-route transit service in this corridor, and the only mode capable of addressing the long-term growth in ridership that is expected after the system becomes operational.

We understand that there are concerns regarding the higher estimated capital cost of LRT over BRT. However, we would point out that the annual operating costs of BRT as shown in the Study results are 30 percent higher than LRT. The draft SMRT report states that by 2040, the design year of the system, BRT would need to operate in 3-bus platoons with 6-minute headways to handle the projected ridership in peak periods, at annual operating costs as much as 50 percent higher than LRT.

LRT is also the transit mode preferred by the elected officials of Prince George's and Charles counties, and by the residents of the corridor, as expressed in numerous meetings and in comments on the draft Report received by the Maryland Transit Administration (MTA), during the public forum and comment period. A report summarizing the public comments the State has received should be made available to our representatives on the Study team and appended to the SMRT Final Report.

For these reasons, we encourage that LRT be recommended as the preferred transit mode in the Final Report of the SMRT Study. In addition, we understand from the March 23rd meeting with our representatives that Alignment Alternative 4, and Beltway (I-495) Crossing Option 8A, will be recommended in the Final Report, which we support. This will ensure the most cost-effective Beltway crossing and access to the Branch Avenue Metrorail Station, and will provide for the location of a transit station near the main gate of Joint Base Andrews, a key commuter destination, employment and activity center, and one of the focal points for future transit-oriented development on the proposed 18.7-mile SMRT alignment.

We are very concerned that MDOT's new Consolidated Transportation Program (CTP) proposes that further work on this project be suspended for six years, until FY 2023. After nearly 30 years of successive studies have proven the feasibility and benefit of implementing this project, progress toward implementation has been repeatedly halted, until local and regional political pressure compelled further State action—in the form of another study.

Rapid transit needs in this congested and rapidly growing highway corridor are steadily increasing, so it is vitally important that a 70-foot, grade-separated transit way for future high-capacity, fixed-route transit service be preserved and integrated with improvements being planned by the State Highway Administration. SHA has been waiting for the results of the SMRT Study before finalizing their own recommendations for MD 5. Waiting six years to begin the formal "Project Planning/NEPA" phase of the SMRT project could delay action by the State to preserve the transit way, with dire consequences. Without prompt State action, additional growth and development in the corridor could foreclose the opportunity to make the SMRT project a reality—forever.

We strongly urge you to respect the integrity of this three-year Study and reconsider your decision to alter its findings and conclusions regarding mode selection. The Final Report of the SMRT Study should accurately reflect the experts' finding that in view of future peak-period ridership forecasts, it is likely that BRT operations will fall short of the level of service required. LRT will be the transit mode most capable of meeting the needs and expectations of our citizens in this corridor, beyond the design year and into the future. And according to the Study, light rail will deliver a significantly higher economic return on investment, more jobs, and more revenue to the State and local governments—enough to pay for the cost of building the transit system itself.

We also strongly urge you to reconsider your decision to put this project on hold until FY 2023. A six-year delay in starting the next phase of formal project planning could jeopardize the State's timely preservation and acquisition of the transit right-of-way in the MD 5 corridor needed for future implementation of the SMRT project. And without the successful implementation of this project, the creation of a truly comprehensive, integrated, multi-modal transportation strategy for the MD 5/U.S. 301 corridor, so essential to the future prosperity of our region of the State, will be at risk.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Derrick Leon Davis', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Derrick Leon Davis
Chairman
Prince George's County Council

cc: Governor Larry Hogan, Jr.
Paul Comfort, MTA Administrator
Gregory Slater, SHA Administrator
Hon. Thomas V. Mike Miller, Senate President
Hon. Michael Busch, House Speaker
Hon. James Rosapepe, Chair, Prince George's County Senate Delegation
Hon. Jay Walker, Chair, Prince George's County House Delegation
Hon. Rushern L. Baker, III, County Executive
Prince George's County Council
Charles County Commissioners
Darrell Mobley, Director, Prince George's County Department of Public Works & Transportation