



MONTGOMERY COUNTY COUNCIL
ROCKVILLE, MARYLAND

OFFICE OF COUNCILMEMBER
ROGER BERLINER

CHAIR, TRANSPORTATION,
INFRASTRUCTURE, ENERGY, &
ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

June 18, 2013

Dear Director Holmes,

Thank you and other members of the Administration for agreeing to host a meeting with developers, your staff, and state transportation officials to discuss the western workaround road network for the White Flint Sector Plan. A number of conversations over the past several months had led me to conclude that in too many instances, our county and other stakeholders invested in the success of the Sector Plan were talking past each other. Our meeting last week provided everyone with an opportunity to communicate directly – always a plus.

I want to share with you some of my take-aways from that meeting, including issues that I hope will be addressed in future meetings. First, let me say that I appreciate the movement that your department has made to recognize that creating urban nodes that are characterized by enlivened, green streetscapes, walkability, and bikability requires a different approach to our road network than we have used in the past. The 35% design drawings represent a positive step in this direction.

However, I am very concerned that the current design for Old Georgetown Road between the current Executive Boulevard alignment and Rockville Pike – the first and one of the most important areas being developed -- is inconsistent with the approved White Flint Sector Plan. As you know, the Sector Plan calls for *both* a shared use path and bike lanes along this stretch of road (p. 56). Regrettably, MCDOT's 35% design drawings include no bike lanes and only a 13 foot shared use path/sidewalk as opposed to a sidewalk and a shared use path. The combined facility would not be wide enough to allow for the desired café seating in front of the adjacent properties, customers exiting and entering retail establishments, and safe access for pedestrians and bicyclists. These functions simply cannot coexist in a 13 foot span directly adjacent to retail structures. The shared use path should be ten feet wide according to ASHTA standards.

Adding to these concerns is the fact that this segment of Old Georgetown Road is also supposed to accommodate the Recreation Loop called for in the approved Sector Plan (p. 59). In the current design you shared at the meeting on Monday, there is no Recreation Loop. If it will not be possible to accommodate this element, important to many - if not all - residents involved in the WF Sector Plan process, then I am interested in hearing what options are being considered as an alternative route.

MCDOT has stated that the current realignment for Old Georgetown Road is a temporary measure and that when the Plan meets its mode share goals and traffic has lessened, a second realignment of the road will be considered/constructed and that this realignment would include bike lanes. The problem with this approach is threefold:

- (1) MCDOT's statement is predicated on an assumption that bike lanes are only warranted where vehicular traffic meets a certain, but yet unspecified, level. This creates great uncertainty regarding the future of bike facilities, the shared use path, and recreation loop as called for in the Plan;
- (2) In order to meet the Plan's mode share goals, we should implement multi-modal, *complete streets on the front end*, not at the end stages of the Plan; and
- (3) It is costly and a potential waste of scarce tax dollars to reconstruct Old Georgetown twice as opposed to taking a long term approach and reconstructing it once, integrating multimodal elements into the design.

As you know, the White Flint Sector Plan calls for an extensive new street grid comprised of both public and private streets. When built out, this grid will provide greater transportation capacity and improve traffic flow and congestion in the White Flint area. Instead of waiting for the entire build-out of the grid to reconstruct Old Georgetown Road in keeping with the Master Plan, we can avoid a duplicative, costly construction project by doing one of two things: (1) Eliminate one of the left turn lanes currently being considered; or (2) forward fund Hoya Street which would provide an essential through-connection between Old Georgetown and Montrose Parkway. Opening up roadway capacity on Hoya would draw significant through traffic away from the heart of the retail district, thus allowing for more flexible design of Old Georgetown between Executive Blvd and Rockville Pike. Although I personally find the first option a viable option worth consideration, accelerating the build out of Hoya would provide the best long term solution, and save valuable tax dollars that would not need to be spent redesigning Old Georgetown Road at a later date. Let's do it right the first time, in keeping with the vision for White Flint our residents expect.

Thank you for all your work in implementing the White Flint Sector Plan. I am certain that by continuing to work with all stakeholder groups and maintaining our focus on the goals of the approved Plan, we will be able to make White Flint a wonderful place to live, work, and play for our residents. I look forward to hearing from you regarding the continued design work on Old Georgetown Road and Hoya.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Roger Berliner", with a stylized, flowing script.

Roger Berliner
Councilmember, District 1
Chair, Transportation, Infrastructure,
Energy and Environment Committee

cc: Isaiah Leggett
Tim Firestine
Francoise Carrier
Rose Krasnow
Nkosi Yearwood
Joy Nurmi
Dee Metz
Tom Street
Steve Farber
Glenn Orlin