

(MWCOG), the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA), and the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC).

The EIS will evaluate transportation improvements in the corridor between the central business districts (CBDs) in Bethesda and Silver Spring, Maryland. In particular, the focus will be on the former CSX Railroad Georgetown Branch right-of-way (ROW) which has been purchased by Montgomery County. Additionally, the corridor will connect the Bethesda and Silver Spring Metrorail stations located in the respective CBDs. In addition to a proposed transitway, which may be either a busway or light rail transit in conjunction with a parallel hiker/biker trail, the EIS will evaluate the No-Build and the Transportation System Management (TSM) alternatives and any new alternatives generated through the scoping process. Scoping will be accomplished through correspondence with interested persons, organizations, and federal, state, and local agencies, and through a public meeting. See SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION below for details.

DATES: Comment Due Date: Written comments on the scope of alternatives and impacts to be considered should be sent to the MTA by October 26, 1994. See ADDRESSES below.

Scoping Meeting: The public scoping meeting will be held on Wednesday, October 5, 1994, between 3 p.m. and 9 p.m. at the Armory Place. See ADDRESSES below. People with special needs should contact Lisa Colletti or Diane Melia at the MTA at the address below or by calling (410) 333-3376 or (410) 333-3389. A TDD number is also available: (410) 539-3497. The building is accessible to people with disabilities. It is located within two (2) blocks of the Silver Spring Metrorail station and is served by major Metrobus and Ride-On bus routes.

The meeting will be held in an "open-house" format and project representatives will be available to discuss the project throughout the time period given. Informational displays and written materials will also be available throughout the time period given. In addition to written comments which may be made at the meeting or as described below, a stenographer will be available at the meeting to record comments.

ADDRESSES: Written comments on project scope should be sent to Mr. Ernest Baisden, Project Manager, Maryland Mass Transit Administration, 300 West Lexington Street, Baltimore.

MD 21201. The Scoping meeting will be held at the following location: Armory Place, 925 Wayne Avenue, Silver Spring, MD 20910.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Mr. John T. Garrity, Jr., Transportation Program Specialist, Federal Transit Administration, Region III, (215) 658-6900.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

I. Scoping

FTA and the MTA invite interested individuals, organizations, and federal, state, and local agencies to participate in defining the alternatives to be evaluated in the EIS and identifying any significant social, economic, or environmental issues related to the alternatives. Scoping comments may be made at the public scoping meeting or in writing. See DATES and ADDRESSES sections above for locations and times. During scoping, comments should focus on identifying specific social, economic, or environmental impacts to be evaluated and suggesting alternatives which are more cost effective or have less environmental impact while achieving similar transit objectives.

Scoping materials will be available at the meeting or in advance of the meeting by contacting Lisa Colletti or Diane Melia at the MTA as indicated above.

II. Description of Study Area and Project Need

The study area and corridor is wholly within Montgomery County. It is approximately 4½ miles long and connects the CBDs of Bethesda and Silver Spring. The corridor also connects two heavily used Metro stations and two major employment centers.

Existing transit service in the study area is provided by Ride-On and Metrobus. Existing traffic is primarily carried by East-West Highway (MD 410) with high traffic volumes and poor level-of-service at many of the signalized intersections.

The proposed transitway is intended to provide a high quality connection between the two branches of the Metro Red Line; to support economic viability of the Bethesda and Silver Spring CBDs through greater transit accessibility; contribute to higher transit modal splits for work trips to the CBDs and employment centers; improve cross-county movement by public transportation to help achieve regional clean air goals; and improve travel time in the Bethesda-Silver Spring corridor including improved access to the

Federal Transit Administration

Environmental Impact Statement for the Georgetown Branch Transitway and Trail, Montgomery County, MD

AGENCY: Federal Transit Administration, DOT.

ACTION: Notice of intent to prepare an environmental impact statement (EIS).

SUMMARY: The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) and the Maryland Mass Transit Administration (MTA) intend to undertake an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). MTA will ensure that the EIS also satisfies the requirements of the Maryland Environmental Policy Act (MEPA).

This effort will be performed in cooperation with the Montgomery County Department of Transportation (MCDOT). Other key supporting agencies include the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments

Bethesda and Silver Spring Metrorail stations.

III. Alternatives

The alternatives proposed for evaluation include: No-Build which involves no change to transportation services or facilities in the corridor beyond those improvements currently programmed; the TSM alternative which focuses on operational and low-cost capital improvements to transit routes and services in the corridor; the light rail transit (LRT) alternative which consists of providing light rail service along the 4.4 mile right-of-way, primarily using single-track with double-track passing sections, with a parallel hiker/biker trail; and the busway alternative which consists of providing bus service along the 4.4 mile right-of-way with a parallel hiker/biker trail. Five stations are proposed for both the light rail transit and busway alternatives: Bethesda, Connecticut Avenue, Lyttonsville, Spring Street, and Silver Spring, with future stations to be studied for operational feasibility.

IV. Probable Effects

FTA and MTA plan to evaluate in the EIS all significant social, economic, and environmental impacts of the alternatives. Among the primary issues are the expected increase in transit ridership, the expected increase in mobility for the corridor's transit dependent, the support of the region's air quality goals, the capital outlays needed to construct the project, the cost of operating and maintaining the facilities created by the project, and the financial impacts on the funding agencies. Environmental and social impacts proposed for analysis include land use and neighborhood impacts, traffic and parking impacts near stations, health and safety impacts, impacts on wetland and parkland areas, and noise and vibration impacts. Impacts on natural areas, rare and endangered species, and air and water quality, will also be covered. The impacts will be evaluated both for the construction period and for the long term period of operations. Measures to mitigate adverse impacts will be identified.

V. FTA Procedures

In accordance with federal transportation planning regulations (23 CFR Part 450), the draft EIS will be prepared in conjunction with a major transportation investment study and document the results of that study, including an evaluation of the social, economic, and environmental impacts of the alternatives. Upon completion of the MIS/DEIS, and on the basis of the comments received, the MTA Administrator in concert with the Secretary of the Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) and in consultation with Montgomery County, MWWOG, and other affected agencies, will select a locally preferred alternative. Then MTA, as lead agency, will seek to continue with further preliminary engineering and preparation of the Final EIS.

Issued on: September 15, 1994.

Sheldon A. Kimber,

Regional Administrator.

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