

Fairfax Road Community Association

Robert H. Waldman, Chair
Annapolis Planning Commission
(by email) rhwaldman@rhwaldman.com

June 27, 2018

re: The Forest Drive/Eastport Sector Study, May 31, 2018 Draft #2

Dear Chairman Waldman:

I am writing to provide the Annapolis Planning Commission comments on the May 31, 2018 draft of the Forest Drive/Eastport Sector Study (hereinafter "Draft"), and to respectfully request changes in the next draft before a final version is prepared for publication and public comment.

I represent the Fairfax Road Community Association. This association represents approximately 50 residences located on or near Fairfax Road in the City of Annapolis. As you may know, there is only one way in and out of our neighborhood via the intersection of Fairfax Road with Forest Drive near Chinquapin Round.

As the Draft concludes, the traffic in the area of this intersection is currently operating at 100% capacity utilization. The current traffic situation at that intersection is at times intolerable. The current state of the traffic adversely affects the quality of life, safety and property values for the members of our association. Based on information contained in the Draft, it is a certainty the presently difficult traffic situation is going to deteriorate markedly without some near term improvements to the roadways.

The traffic backs up on southbound Chinquapin Round at various times of the day, but particularly during the evening/PM peak period. As the Draft notes on page C-9, the Existing Condition as of 2017 is that during the evening/PM peak travel eastbound/EB Aris T Allen, southbound/SB Chinquapin Round and the overall intersection at Chinquapin Round and Forest drive all operate today at level of service "F". Our most used intersections are therefore failed as of 2017 with nothing new being built!

Equally disturbing is the conclusion in the Draft that even if all the proposed roadway improvements for this area are installed, southbound/SB Chinquapin will still operate at a level of service rating of "F". This outcome is shown in the "Improved Condition" results on page C-30. Unfortunately, as of today, there is no certainty what, if any, of the proposed infrastructure improvements listed on pages C-28 and C-29 will ever materialize.

It is important to note that both the Existing Condition results on page C-9 and the Improved Condition results shown on page C-30 show a snapshot in time as of 2017. These traffic conditions do not reflect the future traffic impacts of any of the already approved developments, or the pipeline of potential projects shown on Appendix A to the Draft. The residents in the Fairfax Road community are rightfully fearful that the traffic conditions will deteriorate markedly in the near term based on already approved growth. Some examples of already approved developments which are nearby to our community include the following:

1750 Forest Drive: This building is the office of the former Maryland Automobile Insurance Fund. The office has been closed for some time and traffic generated by this facility is not reflected in the Existing Conditions. A developer has purchased the building and a major renovation and expansion to 125,000 square feet is underway. This facility will bring a very large number of new employees and customers. The increased traffic will impact morning/AM and evening/PM traffic as well as midday traffic for errands and dining.

Parkside Preserve: This new housing development will bring approximately 132 new residences to the corridor. Based on conclusions in the Draft, a safe assumption is that 80% of these residents will drive off the corridor to work.

Rocky Gorge: An approved project of 46 residences who will enter and exit their neighborhood either from Bywater or by way of Arris T. Allen. Either way it will impact traffic at our local intersections.

671 residences: 671 high end apartments and townhomes bordering the City limits are in the process of being built or inhabited. These new area residents will surely drive into and out of the City via Aris T. Allen Blvd and will add more traffic to the Forest Drive corridor for work and other daily activities.

Lidl grocery store: A new 36,710 square foot grocery store on the eastern end of the Forest Drive corridor. Just like Trader Joes, this will likely bring onto the corridor many new destination shoppers.

Though the project hasn't yet filed an application, the Fairfax Road community is very concerned about a possible development on Godspeed Road. To access Godspeed Rd., vehicles would make a U-turn at Aris T. Allen Blvd at Chinguapin Rd., adding to the congestion at an already failed intersection and encouraging unsafe driving practices.

The list of already approved and ongoing projects noted above will adversely impact the western edge of the sector study area. Regrettably, the degree of this impact isn't shown in the Draft. Notably missing from the Draft is a model run showing the traffic situation if all the projects in the pipeline in Appendix A are built. Such a model should include impacts from the projects approved by the County as well. The table at C-9 shows existing 2017 conditions, not predicted future conditions with Appendix A's planned and potential growth.

Our community and the general public are also entitled to know the prediction for the level of service of future intersections with the realization of all planned and potential growth if all the roadway improvements are implemented. The table at page C-30 only shows how new roadway improvements changes the existing 2017 situation, not what the sector will look like if all planned and potential growth is realized. It may be that even with all the improvements installed much of the sector area will continue to see failing levels of service. We wonder if upon learning that these intersections will fail even with improvements, the County and State will choose to not fund a hopelessly failing road.

With this backdrop I am sure you appreciate our concerns about the Draft. Our experience with the City's prior plans not always being adhered to only increases our concern.

The failing levels of service and 100% capacity utilization our neighborhood faces today is not a surprise. As was predicted in the 2009 Annapolis Comprehensive Plan, "Without a decisive course correction in transportation policy, by 2030, traffic congestion will impede the flow of goods and services, choke the quality of life in the city and its environs, and dim the ambience that attracts millions of yearly visitors." *The Annapolis Comprehensive Plan, page 42.*

There was also a prediction that "...by 2030 all major radial and cross-town routes will experience severe congestion including significant sections of Forest Drive, Hilltop Lane, Bay Ridge Road, Spa Road, Taylor Avenue, West Street, and Rowe Boulevard." *The Annapolis Comprehensive Plan, page 44.*

This western gateway into the sector has long been known as a chokepoint that needed attention. In light of the predictions for Annapolis' traffic generally, and the area in our neighborhood in particular, the 2009 Annapolis Comprehensive Plan laid out a specific Policy regarding Forest Drive and the Chinquapin Round area. That policy is attached to this letter in its entirety for your ease of reference. The most important components of this Policy relating to our recommendations for changes to the Draft are as follows:

"The City must keep a broad set of options available for dealing with this congestion in the future. If problems grow as forecasted, these options will become increasingly important in engineering an overall solution."

"Aggressively lobby the State and the County to begin and complete the study of the 665/ForestDrive/Chinquapin intersection within the next year." (i.e., 2010)

The problems have grown as forecasted, and a need obviously arrived some time ago to engineer an overall solution. Yet, to our knowledge, none of the proposed infrastructure improvements on pages C-28 and C-29 have been engineered or even been the subject of a feasibility study.

If there has been work by the City on its own, or coordination with the County and State whose roads are involved with many of the proposed solutions, specific efforts should be described in the Draft. A table should be inserted to summarize the improvements proposed and the status of preparation of a feasibility study and engineering. The table should note suggested timeframes for completion of the feasibility work and construction. Absent this level of detail, the proposed list of infrastructure fixes is not something to give the public comfort in this planning document. Many possible roadway projects get listed in planning documents and never advanced.

The mandate in the 2009 Comprehensive Plan to "aggressively lobby the State and the County to begin and complete the study of the 665/ForestDrive/Chinquapin intersection" by 2010 was to our knowledge never commenced or completed. This failure, whether or not intentional, is certainly part of the reason the area has progressed to current failing levels of service as of 2017 and over 100% capacity utilization which may never be capable of improvement.

As this is a planning document, we expected acknowledgment of the unacceptable situation that exists today, and a commitment to an accelerated schedule of the necessary improvements before major new growth makes it worse. Instead, the Draft makes the following observations and recommendations that we find unacceptable:

Page C-27: “Improvements to the network should be planned over the next eighteen years to improve the ability for traffic to leave the peninsula during AM peak periods and incidents, to mitigate the current AM traffic metering or bottleneck effect in the corridor, and to increase the network’s overall capacity to adequately accommodate existing and projected flows.” This delay in implementing infrastructure fixes is unacceptable. This says these projects should be “planned” and is not even clear if this means all constructed. Many of the proposals will never be constructed, and the ones that are unrealistic need to be eliminated as soon as possible. Considering the existing failing service and near term development projects, feasibility studies on each proposed project need to be completed in the next two years.

Page 61, Section 5.2 Mid-Term Actions: 3 to 6 Years (2021 to 2024): “Work with SHA and the County to plan for future capacity improvements to the Aris T Allen Boulevard, Chinguapin Round Road, Bywater Road, and the Fairfax Road area.” Stated differently, work to be completed “aggressively” for completion in 2010 is now once again put off well into the future. This feasibility work needs to be completed within a year. It seems this work is being postponed based on the assessment that the “pain” at the western edge of the corridor is the “gain” for everyone to the east. This observation is born out by the next items of concern in the Draft.

Page C-26: “Traffic flow throughout the rest of the corridor is expected to flow relatively smoothly because of the constrained conditions at the west end of the corridor.” Page C-29: The recommendation is for “Retaining the existing bottleneck by electing not to make improvements that move queues further down the corridor.” It is disturbing that such a conclusion and recommendation is being made, particularly since the current failing situation may have been avoided if planners had done what they were supposed to do in 2009, that is, “to aggressively lobby the State and the County to begin and complete the study of the 665/ForestDrive/Chinguapin intersection within the next year.” The businesses and residents of all portions of the sector study area are entitled to the same efforts to maintain and improve their quality of life.

Page C-26: “Peak hourly traffic volumes at the west end of the corridor will not worsen, because this portion of the corridor, which is the limiting portion of the corridor, is already operating at capacity.” This is a ludicrous conclusion. Even if the roadway is at 100% capacity utilization or level of service “F”, the lengths of delays can grow significantly with just the known growth, much less the pipeline growth. Growing delays and queues adversely impact safety, property values and quality of life.

We trust that the City will be able to plan growth and necessary road improvements that will improve our quality of life. The Draft leaves our community with concerns about future congestion of intersections and safety of roads. We respectfully ask for the following changes to the Draft:

- 1) As a follow-on to the model on page C-9, include a model run showing levels of service with the full build-out of all approved and pipeline developments in the City and County that impact the sector study area.
- 2) As a follow-on to the model on page C-30, include a model run showing levels of service with full build-out of all approved and pipeline developments in the City and County that impact the sector study area, and the changes to levels of service that will be realized by all the proposed infrastructure improvements. If this shows that a large number of movements remain at failing levels of service, then include a discussion of how this might affect future growth and project approvals.
- 3) As regards the proposed infrastructure improvements affecting County and State roadways, include comments and observations from those jurisdictions on these proposals because those jurisdictions own some of these roads and their funding is critical. The public is entitled to understand the support or lack thereof by neighboring jurisdictions for these proposed projects.
- 4) Mandate that the plan to “Work with SHA and the County to plan for future capacity improvements to the Aris T Allen Boulevard, Chinquapin Round Road, Bywater Road, and the Fairfax Road area” specifically include feasibility studies to be completed within a year. If the residents in our neighborhood and others such as utilizing Bywater are to forever suffer the current levels of service, they are entitled to know that sooner rather than later. We note that this is equally true for businesses in our area that are adversely affected by the failing levels of service.
- 5) On page C-26, correct the statement that “Peak hourly traffic volumes at the west end of the corridor will not worsen, because this portion of the corridor, which is the limiting portion of the corridor, is already operating at capacity.” Maybe capacity utilization cannot go above the current 100%, but surely delays and inconvenience can and will increase. There should instead be a discussion of how much worse things can get after looking at the model requested in item 1. This discussion might include how much longer delays might get, how much longer queues might get, and how that adversely impacts traffic, etc.

Thank you for consideration of our comments.

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Attachment:

Annapolis Comprehensive Plan: Chapter 4 – Transportation, page 55

Policy 5. In light of the continuing growth of congestion in the Forest Drive corridor, preserve and enhance the array of solutions currently at the City's disposal.

The 1998 Comprehensive Plan and other studies recommended a parallel service road running on the south side of Forest Drive (MD 665) – the Forest Drive Relief/Service Route. To that end, as land has been annexed into the city, a future road right of way has been reserved. The proposed route, however, has some important environmental concerns and potential capacity limitations that may reduce its desirability and usefulness. The City must keep a broad set of options available for dealing with this congestion in the future. If problems grow as forecasted, these options will become increasingly important in engineering an overall solution. For now, Anne Arundel County is widening Forest Drive from Aris T. Allen (MD 665) to Hilltop Lane, adding a lane in each direction. These are first steps in a phased improvement to the corridor.

To adequately address congestion in the Forest Drive corridor it will be necessary to update the prior studies in order to recommend a comprehensive set of improvements which will document and weigh the potential impacts of a parallel service road and provide a set of improvements to access and circulation within the Forest Drive corridor and the Forest Drive Opportunity Area (see Ch. 3 - Land Use & Economic Development). Based on the new studies, it may be determined that a parallel service road is inappropriate. The goals of the improvements in the Forest Drive Corridor are to:

- ▶ reduce peak-period congestion,
- ▶ provide some measure of redundancy in the arrangement of streets by expanding connectivity in the existing road system and between neighboring grids, thus enabling short trips to be made without accessing Forest Drive (MD 665),
- ▶ advance the City's commitment to alternative forms of transportation and reduced dependence on the automobile. In determining the future use of the Forest Drive parallel service route, priority should be given to alternative forms of transportation – transit, bicycles, pedestrians.

Furthermore, the City should:

▶ Aggressively lobby the State and the County to begin and complete the study of the 665/Forest Drive/Chinquapin intersection within the next year; and

- ▶ Request that the County consider the use of traffic circles in lieu of traffic signals on Forest Drive.