



HOWARD COUNTY OFFICE OF TRANSPORTATION

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Memorandum

To: Lonnie Robbins, Chief Administrative Officer, Howard County Government

From: Bruce Gartner

Date: 8/28/19

Subject: Complete Streets Policy Council Resolution

cc: Jennifer Sager, Sameer Sidh, Angela Cabellon, Jim Irvin, Val Lazdins

The purpose of this memorandum is to provide background information and to express support for the Howard County Complete Streets Policy that is the subject of Council Resolution 120-2019, prefiled with the County Council on 8/23/19.

The Howard County Complete Streets Policy, as prefiled, will establish a philosophy of safety and equity as standard practice for our roads. It clarifies that our streets should safely accommodate multiple travel modes, including people walking, biking, taking transit and driving cars. Specifically, the policy directs that all decisions regarding the planning, design, construction, maintenance and operations of our streets shall be made with all road users in mind. In addition, it requires socioeconomic equity, as measured by the Vulnerable Population Index, to be an integral consideration in transportation project prioritization. This is a broader and more inclusive approach than the motor vehicle-focused process common in typical suburban street planning and design.

Some key process related items established by the Complete Streets Policy include:

- Requires transparent decision making and reporting and a reasonable exceptions process
- Provides for a data driven project selection process including priority for projects in communities with vulnerable populations
- Directs and enhances coordination among public and private agencies

The outcomes of implementing complete streets include increased safety, public health, local economic activity, job access, and air quality, as well as decreased congestion. These benefits fit seamlessly with Howard County values and contribute to improving quality of life for all.

A multi-agency Complete Streets Implementation Team, guided by a consultant with nationally recognized expertise in complete streets, drafted the Howard County Complete Streets Policy to follow best practices from around the country, drawing on guidance from the National Complete Streets Coalition and incorporating successful aspects from peer communities. Complete Streets Policies have become widespread in recent years, with over 1,500 complete streets policies adopted nationwide. The Office of Transportation, Department of Public Works and Department of Planning and Zoning have all been fully engaged in the development of this Complete Streets Policy and will continue to be key agencies in its implementation. All three agencies are strongly supportive of the policy and the Council Resolution.

CR35-2016 requires that the County develop a Complete Streets Design Manual to implement the Complete Streets Policy and provide the design details for practitioners. CR120-2019 states that this will be submitted to Council within 24 months of County Council's vote to approve the Complete Streets Policy. The Complete Streets Implementation Team will strive to deliver the updated design manual even more quickly and has already

taken steps to prioritize this work. We are committed to completing these tasks with efficiency, inclusivity and competency, in the same manner that recently earned two achievement awards from the National Association of Counties for community outreach and education programs. However, a comprehensive update of the Howard County Design Manual is a complex task that should not be rushed. We will strive to complete this in less time than the maximum stated timeframe of 24 months, but experiences in peer jurisdictions and the importance of balancing speed and inclusivity suggest that 24 months or slightly less is realistic.

Long term fiscal impacts of the Complete Streets Policy are expected to be manageable. In fact, when all benefits are considered a complete streets approach may have a net positive economic impact for Howard County, compared to the historic automobile-dominated approach. Independent research from the National Center for Transit Research¹ found that “Complete Streets projects, in many cases are showing economic benefits” and “there is a strong association between such projects and increased economic activity that often outpaces other areas.” Design and construction costs of most complete streets projects are expected to be minimal, since changes will be made incrementally as opportunities arise. Further, prioritization will allow projects to be implemented as funding and opportunities to couple them with related projects become available. And, any additional capital costs are expected to be offset by long term savings of postponing or avoiding some expensive road and intersection capacity improvements. Master planning documents, such as the Howard County Pedestrian Master Plan, Bicycle Plan and Transit Development Plan, are already in place to guide improvements and capital and operating budgets are already established for pedestrian and bicycle improvements. The Howard County General Plan (PlanHoward) currently recommends a Complete Streets Policy and the upcoming update will likely add guidance and recommendations to accommodate and further improve a multimodal approach to transportation.

In the short term, some funding will be required to take the next steps to update the Howard County Design Manual, developing the project prioritization process, creating public engagement procedures, and providing training on new policies and procedures. Preliminary estimates for this work are around \$700,000 and most of this funding will be requested in the FY21 capital budget.

County staff already engaged in the planning, design, construction, maintenance and operations of our streets will continue this same work with a mindset that ensures achieving complete streets. There may be some additional staff hours for tracking and reporting, but it will take some time to determine the extent and cost of this time.

Overall, the Howard County Complete Streets Policy represents a major step forward for safety, equity, and quality of life in Howard County and moves us in the direction of sustainable transportation for all. The Office of Transportation, Department of Public Works, and Department of Planning and Zoning are supportive of this Council Resolution and look forward to advancing the next steps and implementing Complete Streets in Howard County.

Sincerely,



Bruce Gartner, Administrator, Office of Transportation



Jim Irvin, Director, Department of Public Works



Val Lazdins, Director, Department of Planning and Zoning

1. Capturing the Benefits of Complete Streets, National Center for Transit Research, December 2015.