



ARLINGTON COUNTY, VIRGINIA

County Board Agenda Item Meeting of May 14, 2011

DATE: May 5, 2011

SUBJECT: Amendments to the Master Transportation Plan (MTP) Goals and Policies and Pedestrian elements concerning the MTP amendment process, street typology, street design modifications and sidewalk widths

C. M. RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Adopt amendments to the County Comprehensive Plan's MTP Goals and Policies Summary to add a section entitled "MTP Plan Amendments" and to amend provisions concerning street typology and street design modifications.
2. Adopt an amendment to the County Comprehensive Plan's MTP Pedestrian Element concerning sidewalk width.

ISSUES: The proposed MTP amendments will address County Board comments as expressed at the February 12, 2011 meeting and create consistency amongst MTP elements. The proposal to amend the Pedestrian Element to allow for narrower sidewalks has raised concerns, by the Disabilities Advisory Commission, about the adequacy of sidewalk width for persons in wheelchairs.

SUMMARY: The request is to adopt several amendments to the MTP Goals and Policies document and the MTP Pedestrian Element. The amendments were discussed by the County Board during the adoption of the MTP Streets Element on February 12, 2011.

BACKGROUND: During the adoption of the MTP Streets Element on February 12, 2011, several issues were raised in the meeting that led the County Board to request the County Manager to develop future amendments for the MTP Goals and Policies document and the MTP Pedestrian Element. The Goals and Policies is proposed to be amended to add a new Section IV (see Attachment 1) and to renumber from IV to V the Summary Conclusion section that provides a description of when and how amendments to the MTP may be considered, in addition to the process required by law. Because two of the MTP Streets Policies statements were amended by the County Board at the time of the Streets Element adoption in February, 2011, the proposed amendments to the MTP Goals and Policies document are needed for consistency purposes. The

County Manager:

BMD/GA

County Attorney:

BAK *GA*

Staff: Richard Viola, DES Transportation Planning

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County Board also requested that the Pedestrian Element be amended to address community concerns about the potential impacts of five-foot wide sidewalks upon on-street parking.

DISCUSSION: The proposed MTP amendments were discussed by the County Board during the adoption of the MTP Streets Element at their February 12, 2011 meeting. The attached amendments have been proposed following the County Board request to the County staff, after consideration of concerns raised by several citizens and the Neighborhood Conservation Advisory Commission (NCAC) to the County Board.

Streets Policy #1 in the MTP Goals and Policies document is proposed to be amended to specifically include local streets in the County's streets typology. Streets Policy #5 is proposed to be amended to specifically mention parking as one of the streets modifications, during the design of which, local residents and neighbors should be involved. Both proposed changes to the Streets Policy statements have already been made in the adopted Streets Element. The proposed amendments to the Goals and Policies Summary are to make the document consistent with the Streets Element. The other amendment to the MTP Goals and Policies Summary adds a description on when and how the MTP should be amended, in addition to the process required by law.

At the February 12, 2011 County Board meeting, a concern was raised by the NCAC that construction of five-foot wide sidewalks as part of street improvement projects may necessitate the removal of on-street parking from some streets. The Board proposed an amendment to the MTP Pedestrian Element to allow four-foot wide sidewalks to be built when installing a five-foot wide sidewalk would require elimination of existing parking on a street. At its April 18, 2011 meeting, the Arlington Disability Advisory Commission reviewed the proposed amendment and expressed concern that the proposed change to the Pedestrian Element (Sidewalk Design section) would result in narrower sidewalks that are less suitable for travel by persons using wheelchairs or with other mobility disabilities.

The proposed amendments were reviewed by the Transportation Commission and the Planning Commission at their meetings on April 28 and May 2, respectively. Both commissions discussed sidewalk widths, community character, and accommodations in street design to preserve on-street parking. The Transportation and Planning commissions each voted unanimously to support the proposed amendments with some minor text changes. Both commissions chose to revise the last sentence of the proposed MTP Plan Amendments text, although they differed in the exact language that they approved. The Transportation Commission's recommendation is: "Proposed amendments may be considered by the Transportation Commission, and in neighborhood conservation areas, by the Neighborhood Conservation Advisory Commission, using a thorough and open public participation process." The Planning Commission's recommendation is for "In addition, proposed amendments may be considered by other advisory groups when appropriate, using a thorough and open public participation process." County staff recommends that the language read: "In addition, proposed amendments may be considered by the Transportation Commission, and other advisory groups when appropriate, using a thorough and open public participation process." This reflects a portion of each recommendation.

Similarly, both commissions also chose slightly different revisions to the last sentence of the proposed Pedestrian Element, Sidewalk Design, amendments regarding clear zones. Essentially, the commissions each recommended that sidewalk width may be reduced to less than five feet when a five-foot sidewalk would eliminate parking spaces. The Transportation Commission's recommendation is for "Sidewalks may be reduced to a width of four to five feet: when there is insufficient right-of-way; when installing a five-foot sidewalk would require eliminating existing parking; or to minimize impacts to existing trees, slopes or structures." The Planning Commission's recommendation is for "sidewalks may be reduced to a width of less than five feet, but not less than four feet: when there is insufficient right-of-way; when installing a five-foot wide sidewalk would require eliminating existing parking; or to minimize impacts to existing trees, slopes or structures." County staff favors the Planning Commission's recommended language.

The proposed amendments, as revised to incorporate the staff recommended revisions, are attached to the Board Report as Attachment 1.

FISCAL IMPACT: Adopting the amendments to the Master Transportation Plan will impose no immediate financial commitments on the County. However, many of the proposed implementation actions in the document call for the establishment, operation and maintenance of higher levels of public facilities and services. Implementation of the MTP will require the County to determine to what extent, to what purposes, and on what schedule, it will commit its own revenues as well as those non-local funds that it may control. Such decisions will be made by the County Board as part of future operating and capital budget deliberations.

Attachment 1:

Part A: Proposed Amendments to the MTP Goals and Policies Document Previously Adopted by the County Board on November 13, 2007

Streets Policies:

1. Utilize the plans typology of arterial and local streets to guide street planning, management, design and construction/reconstruction. The typology identifies categories of ~~arterial~~ streets which are primarily assigned with relation to the types of land use found along them. Each street type should support the general policies of complete streets and the compatibility of transportation design with adjacent land uses.
5. Design neighborhood streets to control travel speeds. Permit those streets with relatively low traffic volumes (under 1,500 vehicles per day) and single family development to be narrowed and operate as "yield streets". Implement additional neighborhood traffic calming, sometimes including street narrowing on streets with defined speeding problems. Involve local residents and neighbors in the design of street modifications (including, but not limited to, parking).

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IV. MTP Plan Amendments

The need or a desire to amend or further refine portions of the MTP may arise periodically. The MTP should endeavor to reflect evolving transportation needs, goals and recommendations. Between times of comprehensive plan reviews, plan amendments may be appropriate. As County transportation objectives change, as the functions of individual transportation facilities change, as relevant transportation principles or guidelines evolve, ~~and or~~ as specific facility proposals require adjustment, this plan may be amended. Proposed amendments to this plan must follow the legally required processes of notification and public hearings by the Planning Commission and County Board. In addition, ~~where appropriate, proposed amendments may be considered by the County Transportation Commission, and in neighborhood conservation areas, by the Neighborhood Conservation Advisory Commission~~ other advisory groups, when appropriate, using a thorough and open public participation process.

IV. V. Summary Conclusion

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Part B: Proposed Amendment to the MTP Pedestrian Element Previously Adopted by the County Board on July 22, 2008

Sidewalk Design

Clear Zones

Whenever feasible, sidewalks in low-density residential areas should be at least five feet wide to better accommodate two people walking side-by-side or people traveling in opposite directions to safely pass each other. Sidewalks ~~may~~ can be reduced to a width of less than five feet, but not less than four feet ~~in width~~, when there is insufficient right-of-way; when installing a five-foot wide sidewalk would require eliminating existing parking; or to minimize impacts to existing trees, slopes or structures.