

MDOT State Highway Administration

Takoma Junction Vision Study (TJVS)

Stakeholder Advisory Group (SAG) Meeting #1 Notes – 2 April 2019

Attendees

- Matt Baker, MDOT SHA
- Darren Bean, MDOT SHA
- Samantha Biddle, MDOT SHA
- Kandese Holford, MDOT SHA
- Rick Kiegel, RK&K
- Monica Meade, RK&K
- Jessica Pilarski, MDOT SHA

- Rachel Anderson, SAG
- Daryl Braithwaite, SAG
- Jacqueline Davison, SAG
- Manela Isabel Diez, SAG
- Michael Houston, SAG
- David Koelsch, SAG
- Jessica Landman, SAG
- Richard Leonard, SAG
- Cynthia Mariel, SAG
- Lorraine Pearsall, SAG
- Emanuel Wagner, SAG

- Neal Cohen, Resident
- David Cookson, Resident
- Carter Dougherty, Resident/Revitalize Takoma Junction Now
- Christina FitzPatrick
- Jordie Hannum, Revitalize Takoma Junction Now
- Sally Kern, Resident and Parent within a block of Takoma Junction

Meeting Notes

1. Welcome and Study Team Introductions

- Maryland Department of Transportation State Highway Administration (MDOT SHA) staff welcomed attendees and encouraged a collaborative, comfortable setting for all to share perspectives.
- An explanation of MDOT SHA Office of Planning and Preliminary Engineering (OPPE) in Baltimore and MDOT SHA, District 3 in Greenbelt was provided.
- MDOT SHA was pleased to see an interest in the Stakeholder Advisory Group (SAG) with 108 applicants and looks forward to engaging SAG members and observers at these meetings moving forward.
- There will be additional opportunities for public comment and for others to be a part of efforts moving forward, including, but not limited to, a community-wide event in the summer.

2. SAG Introductions

- The SAG members provided brief introductions, including where they live, how long they've lived there, their connection to the junction and/or if they represent other communities or associations in the area. The SAG included residents, business owners, transit users, seniors, persons with disabilities, parents, those who walk, bike and use scooters in the junction area, and those who commute to Washington, D.C. to work.
- SAG members in attendance represented the following organizations and associations:
 - City of Takoma Park Department of Public Works
 - Victory Tower Senior Association
 - Old Takoma Business Association

- City of Takoma Safe Roads Committee
- Historic Takoma Inc.
- Community Vision for Takoma Park

3. SAG Overview and Guidelines

- MDOT SHA covered guidelines, roles, and responsibilities for SAG meetings to ensure that everyone feels welcome, comfortable talking and is taken seriously. The team explained that everybody will get a chance to share, understanding that there are lots of strong feelings about this neighborhood. The meeting facilitator's role is to help achieve this.
- The goal is to develop a vision statement based on agreed values and to develop short, mid and long-term goals-- not about solving each individual issue.
- SAG members were asked to share information with their neighbors and bring input back to the study team.
- It was emphasized that the SAG does not result in formal recommendations, as this is a vision study. The outcome of the SAG is to develop a vision that will help guide MDOT SHA in making future recommendations.
- SAG meeting schedule
 - SAG Meeting #2 is planned for April 16, 2019.
 - SAG Meeting #3 is tentatively planned for May 13, 2019.
 - A community engagement activity is expected in early June.
 - SAG Meeting #4 is tentatively planned for July 9, 2019.
 - A potential fifth SAG Meeting may be held if needed.
- If the SAG identifies other topics they want to discuss, MDOT SHA can bring in technical staff as needed. The SAG was encouraged to tell MDOT SHA what they want to learn, and meeting agendas can be flexible.

4. Study Overview and Public Engagement Process

- MDOT SHA explained that there have been previous studies on Takoma Junction in the last five to ten years, but not all were MDOT SHA studies. The purpose of the current vision study is to look at the junction with fresh eyes and a new perspective. The study area includes Carroll Avenue (MD 195) at Ethan Allen and Philadelphia Avenues (MD 410), with limits from Sycamore Avenue to Philadelphia Road (the core junction).
- MDOT SHA has been collecting up-to-date traffic data and is expanding east and west of the study area as needed to capture traffic patterns. The traffic limits include the bus stops west of Philadelphia Avenue, the bus stops along Philadelphia Avenue at Holt Place, and along Carroll Avenue just north of the intersection.
- A SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) survey relating to transportation is coming in the next few weeks. The SAG as well as the public at large will have the opportunity to take the survey.
- MDOT SHA is also planning innovative activities to engage the public in June. A fourth and possibly fifth SAG meeting will be held following the June event.

5. Map Activity and Discussion

- MDOT SHA introduced a map activity asking SAG members to highlight and explain their last three trips in the junction area and general observations about their experience. SAG member trips included:
 - From Manor Circle, walking to Ride On bus from bus stop opposite Co-op, and then walking to Metro.
 - From Manor Circle, biking on street, to Carroll Avenue into Washington, D.C.
 - From Victory Tower, driving north on Carroll Avenue to bakery with no parking available, so turned on Grant to Hancock to Lee. Parked in Co-op lot, visited Co-op, then went to Giant.
 - From Lincoln Avenue Ave, walking to Carroll Avenue southbound to crosswalk to Opal Daniels Park. Took Hancock to Takoma Park Elementary School to Grant Avenue.

- **General notes/observations about trips:**
 - There is not enough time to cross the crosswalk from bakery to the Co-op directly across Carroll Avenue.
 - Lots of kids from Sycamore area are dropped off at the 7221 lot, then kids use the crosswalk to go down Grant to school (some parents continue to Metro). (Note: Crossing guards say about 150 students cross in the morning. Kids generally don't have enough time to cross the street.)
 - Westbound Philadelphia Avenue motorists get very impatient with busses stopping at Sycamore, and often pull out around busses to beat light.
 - Parents teach kids to stand away from the curb at Carroll/Sycamore/Ethan Allen Avenues and Carroll/Philadelphia Avenues (cars, trucks rushing around corner and cutting it too close.)
 - At the Carroll Avenue crosswalk immediately south of fire house, poles get in the way of pedestrians, especially on the southwest corner. Fences get in the way, too.
 - No actual pedestrian light is located at Sycamore Avenue, so one must guess what cars are doing.
 - From Carroll Avenue (easier for scooter...technically a bike lane), one must navigate cars/busses at light. Carroll/Philadelphia Avenue intersection is very difficult on scooter (at the mercy of whoever is or is not looking). The bike lane may not be big enough due to potholes, and trash bins also get in the way.
- From daycare on Flower Avenue, bus all the way on Carroll Avenue to Metro.
- From Jackson Avenue (stop sign at MD 410) to Ethan Allen Avenue.
- From Park (walking) to Crescent
- **More general notes/observations about trips:**
 - Can't get out at MD 410, so folks get frustrated and block the intersection. Taking a left is perceived to be a dangerous maneuver, and taking a right is impossible because of backup at Carroll. It is easier to cross midblock before Carroll Avenue because of sight lines, and Carroll/Philadelphia Avenue is just dangerous from Co-op or Bakery or vice versa.
 - From Manor Circle to office at Carroll/Lee Avenues (driving). (Note: will travel through neighborhood rather than deal with left on southbound Carroll at Ethan Allen Avenues, also very difficult to get into traffic on southbound Carroll Avenue from Lee Avenue. Maple backs up during school drop/pick-up, so will use Philadelphia when school is in session.
 - Ambulances often use westbound Ethan Allen to northbound Carroll Avenue to hospital (may change with hospital changes).
 - No crosswalk at Lee/Carroll Avenue, so it is getting harder and harder for pedestrians to cross.
 - Ambulances sometimes use Lincoln Avenue or Boyd Avenue to avoid the junction (same for general traffic in AM peak).
 - Traffic restricted to exit-only into/out of Manor Cir to prevent cut-through traffic.
 - Traffic cuts through via Ethan Allen to Elm Avenue to Lincoln Avenue to Carroll Avenue to avoid the junction.

6. Vision Statement Word Bank exercise

- MDOT SHA asked the SAG to brainstorm buzzwords that they can keep in mind in developing a vision that are most meaningful to them and representative when thinking of the future of Takoma Junction. A word bank was created on a flip chart and included the following words:
 - Inclusion
 - Diversity
 - Safety
 - Connectivity
 - Mindfulness
 - Vibrance

- Human scale
- Coexist
- Balance
- Welcoming
- Walkability
- Bright (safe at night)
- Obstacle free
- Wide sidewalks
- Intuitive
- B.Y. Morrison Park - reuse
- Efficiency
- Charm
- Rush hour:
 - 7 am – am peak
 - 7 pm – pm peak
- Community/Community Building
- Outside of the box solutions
- Radical solutions
- Innovative
- Historic District

Additional comments from SAG members during and following the Word Bank exercise included:

- When asked what the SAG defined as rush hour, 7:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m. and 3:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. Backups are in different places at different times of day.
- There is a desire to see BY Morrison Park improved, as it never really became something lovely or desirable, and the landscaping is awful.
- The intersection is getting "louder" and at some point, pedestrians take over the street (school start and end). This is calming and it's a different sound – when you're waiting for the bus, you can start a conversation. It's a community-building experience that is very empowering.
- The bigger the roads get, the more divided communities become. SAG members were pleased to hear that MDOT SHA is re-envisioning how it does things, as it does not want the city to become more divided. SAG members want patterns that build, not slice the community.
- A lot of people drive because other options are more difficult and dangerous to use. Consider what little steps can be taken to make it a "little nicer" to walk to work.
- 7221 parking may help traffic.
- The historic district running up and down Carroll Avenue adds to the charm of the neighborhood. Preserving the historic district makes Takoma Park stand out. Some do not want to see street patterns change. It is important to preserve the history.
- Others felt that although the historic area adds charm, that resources should not be preserved if they are not functioning efficiently.
- Some don't want to see a "radical" solution because the junction is unique to Takoma Park and want "gentle" solutions. It was mentioned that the 7300 Carroll Avenue block is an "extraordinary" area with amazing history and is incredibly important to retain.
- Others added that if we protect things that we cannot use as a community, then Takoma Park cannot grow. History and creating balance are important, are difficult tradeoffs to negotiate. The two auto clinics across from each other, a parking lot, tenants (some empty with slumlords) are eyesores to some and creating a balance is difficult. Some expressed concern with drawing a hard line to protect things.
- Contact the Old Takoma Park Business Association to be a part of the conversation.
- It was noted that Montgomery County has translation services available.
- It was recommended to reach out to crossing guards.
- It was noted that the corner at BY Morrison is a "bus riders dream" with multiple route options.

7. Closing and Questions

- The next SAG meeting will be on April 16, 2019 from 6:30-8:30 p.m. at the same location.
- Notes from meeting should be posted within a week.
- Comments or questions from observers were welcomed at this time.

SAG Question and Answers (Q&A):

Questions were asked by SAG members throughout the meeting. A summary of these questions and responses is provided below:

It was asked if the purpose of this group was to be a voice to/from the community. Yes, SAG members will help spread the word before the June public engagement activity and were asked to act as community liaisons.

The SAG asked what the study limits are. MDOT SHA explained that the focus of the Takoma Junction Vision Study (TJVS) is where Carroll Avenue (MD 195) meets Ethan Allen and Philadelphia Avenues (MD 410), with limits from Sycamore Avenue to Philadelphia Road (the core junction). The traffic team uses a wider footprint to look at regional trends.

The SAG inquired about how far the traffic team's analysis goes. In order to help MDOT SHA make future recommendations, the study team looks at traffic in the study area as well as east and west of the study area as needed to capture traffic patterns. The traffic limits include the bus stops west of Philadelphia Avenue, the bus stops along Philadelphia Avenue at Holt Place, and along Carroll Avenue just north of the intersection. MDOT SHA will be sharing traffic data at future SAG meetings.

SAG members asked for clarification on the purpose of the TJVS. MDOT SHA explained that the purpose of the TJVS is to work together through a collaborative process to develop a vision and ultimately form a vision statement, which states what the community would like to see as the future of the junction.

It was questioned whether solutions for areas near New Hampshire Avenue (MD 650) (areas farther afield) might benefit the junction. The study team pointed out that, if New Hampshire Avenue is determined to be a significant issue and the traffic analysis merits it, potential recommendations could be discussed. There is a clear geographic focus on the junction, and the needs must be understood first. Then, the study team can figure out what can be done to address them. MDOT SHA staff will continue to work with the district office on this, taking these questions and comments on systematic improvements into consideration.

SAG members understood that the TJVS is bigger than the redevelopment but asked if it includes the redevelopment. The study team explained that this effort is about a transportation vision. It is a larger geographic study, but MDOT SHA understands that development is proposed and encourages the SAG to talk about different scenarios with different solutions.

The question came up as to what kind of decisions MDOT SHA will make based on this study. MDOT SHA will look at compatibility with the outcomes of this process, before evaluating future development proposals or making any recommendations. The vision study will be the guide.

The SAG asked if there will be a report in addition to the vision statement. MDOT SHA explained that there will be a report, but this is not a National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) document or a feasibility study, etc., and alternatives will not be a result. This is a larger-scale study. A report with a vision statement, a summary of the public engagement process, options/strategies and short- mid- and long-term possibilities will be the outcome.

SAG members asked for information covered at this meeting in writing. The SAG meeting notes will be posted roughly within a week of each meeting. MDOT SHA offered to do a one-pager prior to the next SAG meeting in two weeks to summarize information about the study for SAG members to share.

It was noted that Takoma Park is a multicultural community (Ethiopian, Hispanic, African, African American and Cuban American were mentioned). The SAG inquired about how MDOT SHA plans to get the (SWOT) survey out to seniors who may not use the internet and communities that speak different languages. MDOT SHA has translation available in Chinese, Spanish, Amharic and Vietnamese available and translation of materials can be requested in any language throughout the study. The study team encourages the SAG to share how they can best reach a wide variety of populations within the area. MDOT SHA will also continue to evaluate and follow up on additional ways to reach diverse communities.

SAG members stressed the importance of getting input from diverse communities, as Takoma Park includes renters, minorities, economically diverse populations and transit users who may not have other transportation options. They added that the businesses at the junction do represent people of color. The outcome of this study must be from a wide cross-section of community participation. MDOT SHA reiterated that it welcomes feedback on how best to reach these communities. With the large response to SAG application, MDOT SHA started to rethink outreach activities. The study team may need to come up with something new and different, such as different times of day, translation services, etc.

The SAG asked whose vision this is— the residents of Takoma Park? They noted that residents are sometimes at odds with regional through traffic, but cars still need to get from point A to point B. MDOT SHA pointed out that there will be discussions of tradeoffs throughout this process. As an agency, MDOT SHA has been challenged to look at areas like Takoma Park and the junction differently by looking at land use, density, “modal hierarchy” (automobile, pedestrian, transit, bicyclists/scooters) and how to address accessibility and mobility for a mix of users.

In relation to outreach to folks not in the room at the SAG meeting, members asked for ways to make information more widely available. A live broadcast with the City was mentioned. MDOT SHA will follow up on additional ways to disseminate information to all.

SAG members asked how radical of an approach MDOT SHA can take and inquired about what the limitations are. They asked if removing side streets that feed into the junction was an option (as in less connections through/to the junction). MDOT SHA is open to "out of the box" solutions. MDOT SHA encouraged all ideas.

It was questioned whether MDOT SHA is considering the future use of automobiles? (Purple Line implications on the junction traffic, especially to and from Silver Spring was mentioned by a SAG member). MDOT SHA considers mode share in its modelling efforts based on future outcomes.

–Observer Comments–

- One observer lives on Woodland Avenue and noted that there is no representation south of MD 410 and has experience with walking school buses. People cutting through on westbound Ethan Allen Avenue at Manor Circle were noted. Red-light cameras were recommended. Walk from Woodland Avenue to Beech Avenue to Sycamore Avenue was mentioned at the map. Everything southeast of Carroll Avenue must get toward the schools on Maple/Philadelphia Avenue. Crossing guard contact information was offered.
- Another observer meets school kids at Crescent Place near the junction and walks to the Co-op with son. There is hope that MDOT SHA uses this study as an opportunity to seek solutions, not rule them out.
- Takoma Park architect, Eric Saul, was mentioned as he has sketched out a concept for the junction that created BY Morrison as more of a plaza. The central problem with BY Morrison is that it is bounded by things that people do not want to cross.
- Another observer pointed out Columbia Avenue cut-through traffic is now dissipated due to the junction signal changes.

The meeting adjourned.