

MDOT State Highway Administration

Takoma Junction Vision Study (TJVS)

Stakeholder Advisory Group (SAG) Meeting #2 Notes – 16 April 2019

Attendees

- Matt Baker, MDOT SHA
- Samantha Biddle, MDOT SHA
- Scott Holcomb, on-site consultant, MDOT SHA
- Kandese Holford, MDOT SHA
- Rick Kiegel, RK&K
- Monica Meade, RK&K
- Joseph Moges, on-site consultant, MDOT SHA
- Jessica Pilarski, MDOT SHA

- 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
- Andrew Strongin, SAG
- Betsy Taylor, SAG
- Emanuel Wagner, SAG

- Robert Anderson, Resident
- Laura Barclay, Old Takoma Business Association
- David Cookson, Resident
- Kathryn Desmond, Resident
- Sandy Guarini, Resident/Crossing Guard
- Jingjing Liu, NDC
- Carolyn Pinkard
- Roger Schlegel, Resident
- Jim Sebastian, Resident
- Jan Stovall, Resident

Meeting Notes

1. SAG Member Introductions

- SAG members introduced themselves and were asked to give one word describing how they envision transportation at Takoma Junction. The following is a list of words shared:
 - Better
 - Equity
 - Safer (and for seniors with canes, wheelchairs, etc.) – SAG members mentioned the word “safe” more than any other word during their introductions
 - Integrated
 - Balanced
 - Connected

2. General Housekeeping Notes

- Follow-ups from SAG Meeting #1
- SAG members received binders to store information provided at meetings. All handouts will be available online. One of the handouts mentioned was an Information Sheet explaining the Takoma Junction Vision Study. SAG members asked for the handout, and it was distributed to both SAG members and observers at the meeting. SAG members were encouraged to take multiple copies as needed to distribute to their neighbors and associated organizations.
- Suggestions on the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats (SWOT) survey (that would be discussed later in the agenda) were received from SAG members regarding content and outreach methods.
- Reminder of our purpose—a Vision—not an alternatives analysis. The vision should be for all users of the roadway. It will be long-term vision with potential conceptual elements for short-, mid-, and long-term goals.
- Reminder to be mindful about time and schedules for the SAG meeting. MDOT SHA plans to stay on time.
- Comment cards were available to observers; SAG members could write questions and comments on provided table tents.

3. Traffic Overview – Observations and Existing Conditions

- MDOT SHA asked SAG members to hold questions if possible, as some of their questions may be answered in the next activity. Mr. Scott Holcomb, MDOT SHA Traffic Engineer, began his presentation of traffic information, explaining how traffic data can feed into discussion about needs and potential solutions. He noted that MDOT SHA has completed several site visits to the Junction, but it understands that SAG members are out there every day. It is important the MDOT SHA hears what the community observes.
- Traffic handouts (seven pages in binder) were distributed to SAG members and will be posted online for others.
 - Existing traffic conditions (see traffic handout) were shared, and it was noted that the data showed much of what SAG members have observed. (Transit routes, bicycle and pedestrian volumes, motor vehicle volumes, multi-modal users, bike markings, speed limits (25mph), crashes and safety, etc. were mentioned.)
 - The morning peak hour for motor vehicle traffic on weekdays is from 8:00-9:00 a.m., while the evening peak hour is from 5:45-6:45 p.m. However, other hours of the day/week are also noted to have relatively high volumes.
 - The traffic analysis study area included Carroll, Philadelphia, Ethan Allen, Sycamore and Grant Avenues. This area was large enough to consider the length of queues (delays).
 - Twenty-four (24)-hour traffic counts (which include bicycle, pedestrian, and motor vehicle traffic) and peak travel period observations were conducted in February for the study area after the resolution of the Federal agencies' shutdown (counts done on 2/13 and observations on 2/6). Bus routes/schedules were confirmed with WMATA and Montgomery County Ride-On staff.
- MDOT SHA explained the traffic handouts in detail both displayed on screen and in binders for SAG members. Mr. Holcomb covered field observations, crash data and operational characteristics for both the west and east intersections. A board describing Level of Service (LOS) was displayed and provided to SAG members as a handout. **Please refer to the traffic handouts provided to SAG members and online for specific traffic information shared.**
- A crash data map was shared summarizing trends.
- A traffic simulation video of the operational model being used for this study called "VISSIM" was shared to help attendees better understand the traffic data.

SAG members responded to the traffic information presented, asked questions, and provided comments as follows (Please note that all SAG comments noted from SAG members are opinions mentioned during the meeting. The purpose of the SAG meeting notes is to best capture those discussions)

It was asked how many days did MDOT SHA do traffic counts. Traffic data was based on midweek peak traffic on two days (not during government shutdown).

It was noted that bike counts might be higher in warmer months. MDOT SHA agreed.

A SAG member asked for a definition of "vehicular." MDOT SHA explained that "vehicular" means cars and busses.

Discussion followed regarding bus routing and movements across lanes.

- Busses 12, 13, 16, and F4 were discussed.
- It was discussed whether there may be an opportunity to move bus stops or restrict stops depending on movements.

A SAG member asked if there are traffic cameras. It was noted that there is one, but the City was not aware if it records or is used solely for observation of traffic flow.

A SAG member noted that there are no sidewalks eastbound from BY Morrison Park (on the north side of Ethan Allen Avenue) and if MDOT SHA has observed people crossing to the other side or walking in grass. The rough terrain was noted and "goat path" observed by SAG members.

SAG members asked if MDOT SHA considers how parking lots (e.g., Takoma Park Silver-Spring Co-op and City parking lot) affect movements/traffic? MDOT SHA explained that vehicles exiting and entering the TPSS Co-op causes additional delays and crashes, but the agency may want to check the numbers on that.

It was asked how much the increase of vehicles moving through the intersection over the last 30 years resulted in delays. In years past, turning into a parking lot didn't back up traffic, so it seems to be a result of the volumes.

There is a bus pull-off on northbound and southbound Carroll Avenue, by the parking lot adjacent BY Morrison which isn't often used. The City heard that Metro and Ride On now have a policy disallowing use of pull-offs due to the difficulty of re-entering traffic after dropping off passengers.

A SAG member noted that it seems like a very dangerous intersection because we see it every day, but is this significant compared to others in county? MDOT SHA explained that additional analysis would be necessary to make such a determination.

SAG members suggested that given the low speeds, the number of incidents may not be fully depicted in police reports. MDOT SHA agreed that because crash data reflects only those incidents filed in a police report, fender benders are often not part of calculations.

It was asked if eastbound Carroll Avenue traffic is the only non-failing movement because they already were delayed at Philadelphia. MDOT SHA responded that is very likely.

Clarification of the meaning of an "angle" crash was requested. MDOT SHA explained it is like a T-bone, for instance, where a car is hit from the side.

A SAG member noted that LOS is defined for vehicular traffic but asked if there are tools by which other modes can be measured (walking, cycling, public transit, etc.) versus single occupancy vehicles (SOVs)? MDOT SHA can do pedestrian and bicycle LOS, and travel time for various modes. It was suggested to keep in mind this is about existing conditions and that the next exercise will help the group work through various modes of travel.

It was asked how the VISSIM model is used as it seems to misrepresent widths and turn radii? MDOT SHA responded that it is not an end-all, be-all but helps us to understand current design and timing. MDOT SHA coordinates with District 3 Traffic and Montgomery County on signal timing, making adjustments, and trying to get as much flow while also providing safe bicycle and pedestrian passages. At this time, signal timing is largely maximized as is, so this is a challenge of the TJVS.

A SAG member summarized the LOS information as a bad "report card," "still failing" with signal timing and adjustments maximized. Another SAG member asked what an acceptable time for a delay is in this area. MDOT SHA has not assigned what an acceptable delay time would be.

It was asked if traffic data goes as far as Columbia Avenue. MDOT SHA can look at crash data there as well.

4. SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) Survey

- The SWOT Survey will be available online as early as next week, and hard copies will be provided as necessary. Once posted, the SWOT Survey will be open for two weeks.
- SAG members were encouraged to help spread the word. A flyer with information about the SWOT Survey will be emailed. This can be shared electronically or can be posted throughout the community.
- MDOT SHA noted that the survey will be available translated into five languages. The study team would like recommendations from the team as to where they should leave postage-paid hard copies.
- A summary of survey results will be shared at May SAG Meeting.

5. SWOT Activity and Group Discussion

- SAG members were invited to gather around the provided map and visit each of the four flip chart stations to list the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) for Takoma Junction. Items listed that corresponded with specific locations were labeled on the map with color coded stickers.
- Discussion of what was emerging on the map and flipcharts took place during the exercise. The four flip charts, each representing strengths, weaknesses, opportunities or threats, included the following:

Strengths

1. Desirable shopping destinations (e.g. bakery, post office, etc.)
2. Historic district
3. Confluence of historic paths
4. Geographic center/community meeting place
5. Links all corners of the city
6. Diversity of residents/ users
7. Fire station signal pre-emption
8. All-red/ scramble for pedestrian crossing
 - a. Makes you talk to each other
9. Lots of multimodal opportunities
10. Available parking
11. Bikeshare
12. Bus stops – Many routes, destinations serve Takoma Junction well
13. Walkability- positive when it comes to climate change
14. Dialed-In, engaged, progressive community
15. Vibrant and growing commercial area
16. Businesses close to Metro, transit options and residential
17. Community gathering space; convergence of people

Weaknesses

1. Poorly defined pedestrian/ bike areas
2. Attractiveness of route to through traffic
3. Not ADA accessible/ senior friendly (crosswalk timing)
4. Unexpected vehicle movements for peds. No pedestrian signal at Sycamore Avenue
 - a. Dangerous for vehicle & pedestrians
 - b. Co-op entrance
5. Residential/ Business/ Traffic interact in tight environment/ varying interests
6. Poor enforcements of lane usage and signage.
7. No traffic cameras to deter traffic violations
8. Signal timing
9. Left turn from city lot is dangerous
10. Auto service centers not appropriate for unique environment
11. Frustrations lead to bad behaviors by drivers

Opportunities

1. Bike lanes
2. Shelters at bus stops
3. Sidewalks – wider, safer
 - a. Philadelphia and Carroll Avenues (poles in sidewalk)
 - b. Obsolete curb cuts
 - c. Add sidewalk north side of Ethan Allen Avenue
4. Bike lane (2-way) on Park Avenue
5. More efficient vehicle movements on Carroll Avenue and MD 410
6. Incentivize transit use
7. Senior friendly crosswalks (longer signal for pedestrians)
8. Woodland Avenue at Ethan Allen and Holt at Philadelphia: enforcement of intersection blocking
9. Additional parking
10. Cars can wait
11. Consider changing side sheets to one-way
12. Photo enforcement
13. Outdoor seating for business
14. Public space (gatherings)
15. Decrease vehicular traffic
16. De-emphasize parking
17. Vision Zero community
18. Encourage/support local businesses
19. Reduce complex of intersection/ junction and sidewalks
20. Making junction accessible for children, elderly, disabled
21. Reflect Takoma's values
 - a. Climate change
 - b. Respect all the equal rights of all road users

Threats

1. Congestion
2. Accidents/ Crashes/ Safety
3. Backup on Ethan Allen Avenue
 - a. Vehicles jumping queue near where pedestrians walk (front of co-op)
4. Air quality
5. Proposed development/ parking of trucks/ lay-by delivery/ waste/ recycling
6. Number of cars coming out of city parking lot turning left
7. Kids/schools: safety is threatened
8. Elimination of all red lights or existing crosswalks (parking is on one side and majority of businesses on the other)
9. Noise car honking due to congestion impacts to residents- Manor Circle/ Sherman/ Carroll Ave
10. Congestion impacts businesses by discouraging customers
11. Fire station/ Emergency services response time
12. Induced demand
13. Inability to attract new businesses and impact existing businesses
14. Lost parking
15. Changing configurations harms historic district
16. If 410 is widened additional traffic will impact TJ
17. Inability of agencies to cooperate- NEED teamwork
18. Proposed changes to traffic configuration may worsen traffic or induce demand
19. Potential to disturb the historic uniqueness of Takoma Junction
20. Dividing neighborhood further
21. If we are too focused on keeping existing infrastructure, we will not think outside the box

SAG members asked questions and provided comments following the SWOT Survey Activity:

SAG members asked if MDOT SHA is testing the survey with a diverse group of people (age, education, language) in advance of sending out the survey to ensure that they understand the questions being posed. There was also a concern that people will see "transportation" and think only cars. MDOT SHA will ensure due diligence so that the survey is written in a reader-friendly, non-technical language.

It was noted that the City Clerk's office keeps list of all the listservs in the community and that this could be used to distribute information about the survey.

A SAG member asked if the survey link will be passed on to others? MDOT SHA responded that the link will be provided on both electronic and hard copies and that MDOT SHA encourages SAG members to share the link and any requests for hard copy surveys.

SAG members reiterated that those who speak different languages may not easily understand SWOT concepts and asked that MDOT SHA uses more inclusive or more expansive language that is easily understood by all.

6. Closing and Questions

- The next SAG meeting will be on Monday, May 13, 2019, from 6:30 p.m.-8:30 p.m. at the same location. The May SAG Meeting will include preparations for the June public event and a visioning activity with community planning facilitator.
- In the meantime, the MDOT SHA team will be meeting to plan the June public engagement activity.
- Notes from this meeting should be posted within a week.
- Writing any remaining comments and questions on the back of SAG name tents and on provided comment cards was encouraged.

The meeting adjourned.