

Downtown Columbia Transit Center – Location and Site Analysis Study

October 2017

Prepared by:

Howard County Office of Transportation



And:



Executive Summary

The Howard County Office of Transportation (OoT) initiated this Location and Site Analysis Study (Study) for the relocation, expansion, and reconfiguration of the existing Downtown Columbia Transit Center to serve as the central hub for future county and regional transit services. The purpose of this Study was to:

- Identify a preferred site, size and location for the new transit center;
- Estimate the number of bus bays that the transit center would need, including those to accommodate future BRT service;
- Develop site and transit center concepts to meet future needs;
- Provide estimates of improvement costs.

The existing Downtown Columbia Transit Center is located close to the Columbia Mall, in downtown Columbia on land owned by General Growth Properties (GGP). The transit center serves eight local Regional Transportation Agency (RTA) routes. The Maryland Transit Administration (MTA) operates six commuter and express routes at a separate location by the Mall's southwestern parking areas. The Columbia Transit Center has no commuter parking associated for RTA routes; however, the MTA has existing parking agreements with GGP for commuter customers.

Numerous studies, documents, and adjacent projects affect the future transit center including:

- Downtown Columbia Plan
- Development Rights and Responsibilities Agreement (DRRA)
- Downtown Columbia Development Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)
- Downtown Columbia Downtown Transit Center and Circulator Shuttle Feasibility Study
- Central Maryland Transit Development Plan
- US 29 Bus Rapid Transit
- Howard County Bikeshare Pilot Program
- Columbia Mall Redevelopment
- MTA Commuter Bus Growth and Investment Plan

The key implications of these past studies and other input into this Study for the transit center location and design are as follows:

- The Downtown Columbia Plan requires GGP¹ to provide a location for the transit center prior to issuance of a building permit for the 1.3 millionth square foot of development, which is expected by the end of 2017.
- The transit center needs to be in a central location, convenient to multiple transportation modes including local bus, regional bus, car, ridesharing services, biking, and walking.
- The center location, design, and layout need to consider future bus rapid transit.
- The transit center site will ultimately be developed by the Howard County Housing Commission as mixed use, mixed-income residential project. County Council expectations for the center are for it to be a part of a state-of-the art, well-designed, mixed-use development.
- The transit center portion of the project is intended to be funded from the Downtown Columbia property tax increment, not by the TIF. The residential component is intended to be funded by the

¹ References in the Downtown Plan to General Growth Properties now refer to Howard Hughes Corporation.

Housing Commission, utilizing Low Income Housing Tax Credits and other traditional sources of mixed income housing finance. A public parking component of the project is anticipated to be funded with TIF proceeds.

- Timing of the transit center needs to take into consideration longevity of the existing transit center, initiation of BRT service, Howard Hughes master development plans, Housing Commission interests and capacity, and availability of County funding.

The Study finds that the transit center will need the following accommodations to meet current and long-term needs:

- 14 bus bays
 - 8 bays for existing RTA routes
 - 2 bays for future RTA routes
 - 2 bays for MTA routes
 - 2 bays for BRT routes
- Sheltered waiting areas
- Bicycle parking facilities
- Transit information booth
- Break time accommodations for transit operators including restrooms
- Real-time service information (screens, audio)
- Commuter parking for MTA routes, as applicable

The Study included an alternatives analysis to determine the best location options for the transit center. The Study evaluated 10 sites using the following criteria: landowner; existing use; future use of location/surrounding land; location; parcel size; type of adjoining properties; proximity to activity centers; north/south of Little Patuxent Parkway; transit operating access to/from regional road network, including BRT; vehicular/pedestrian impacts; developer input.

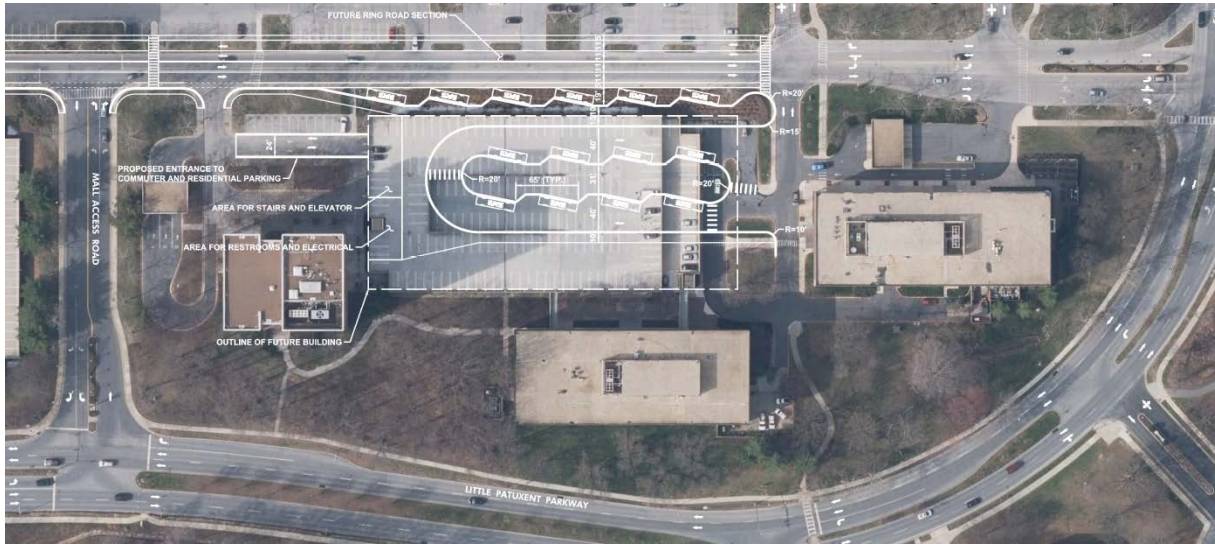
From the Alternatives Analysis, sites 3 and 5 were selected for further investigation with conceptual designs. Site 3 is on the south side of the Mall Ring Road along Little Patuxent Parkway (near Union Jacks pub/restaurant) and is the recommended long-term, permanent site. This recommendation is consistent with the DRRA and the MOU. Site 5, along the Mall ring road, is a potential shorter-term alternative should the need for a Transit Center become great before Site 3 becomes available.

Two design concept options were developed for Site 3. The area of land needed for the transit center would be approximately 87,500 square feet under Option A and approximately 58,100 square feet under Option B. Option C is a concept for Site 5.

Conceptual cost estimates were prepared for the options. Since the nature of the redevelopment of Site 3 is not known with specificity, assumptions were made in order to develop the estimates. Costs vary widely depending on the option and the assumptions but range from approximately \$2.4 million to \$10.2 million.

The figures on the following page show the conceptual designs- see the Study text for detailed descriptions. The transit center layouts are delineated in white lines.

Option A: Long-Term Alternative (Site 3), Preferred



Option B: Long-Term Alternative (Site 3)



Option C: Short-Term Alternative (Site 5)



This Study recognizes that, at this time, for Howard Hughes to provide a location for the transit center prior to issuance of a building permit for the 1.3 millionth square foot of development is not practical and would not advance transit center development planning.

Therefore, to satisfy CEPPA 14², prior to issuance of a building permit for the 1.3 millionth square foot of development, this Study recommends the following:

1. Adjust the timing for CEPPA 14 to be satisfied prior to issuance of a building permit for the 3,200,000th square feet of development.
2. Adjust CEPPA 14 to state that Site 3 in the October 2017 Downtown Columbia Transit Center – Location and Site Analysis Study is the agreed location for the transit center. The specific square footage and configuration shall be determined as part of the planning process for this part of Symphony Woods Overlook (FDP and SDP), and shall address the concepts and considerations in the Location and Site Analysis Study and as depicted in Figures 7 and 8 (Options A and B) for Site 3.
3. Adjust CEPPA 14 to state that should the County determine that a Transit Center is required prior to Site 3 being available or prior to the 10-year window set forth in the MOU, Howard Hughes shall provide a temporary Transit Center site, at a location mutually determined by Howard Hughes and the County (possibly Site 5), until Site 3 is available or an alternative site is provided under the MOU. Howard Hughes and the County shall mutually agree on terms for the County's continued use of the temporary Transit Center site until a permanent Transit Center has been constructed.

Triggers for the County's determination shall include one or more of the following: i) written notice from GGP that it needs the current transit center land by the Mall for redevelopment and therefore is terminating its arrangement with the County for use of such land, ii) lack of capacity at the current transit center to meet RTA transit needs beyond those anticipated in the County's 2017 Transit Development Plan, iii) need for additional land for a bus rapid transit station or iv) written notice from GGP that it needs the current transit center land used by the MTA for redevelopment and therefore is terminating its agreement with MTA for such land by the Mall's southwestern parking areas.

Howard Hughes shall make the temporary site available no more than one year after the County has determined a temporary location is needed.

Next Steps

The Office of Transportation should coordinate its transit center planning with the Howard County Housing Commission, and should also continue to coordinate with Howard Hughes Corporation.

Beginning in 2018 the Office of Transportation should coordinate preliminary engineering investigations for Site 5 (the Ring Road) as a short-term transit center.

The Office of Transportation should investigate a short term downtown station for BRT, possibly at Site 5, as part of the US 29 Bus Rapid Transit Study.

The Office of Transportation should continue to monitor the need for a temporary transit center and Howard Hughes' development plans for Symphony Overlook.

The County should investigate potential grant funding support for the transit center. One promising option is the federal Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) program

² Community Enhancement, Program and Public Amenity requirements.