



Preface





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### Planning Context

#### *Planning and Project Development Process*

This Alternatives Analysis/Draft Environmental Impact Statement (AA/DEIS) conducted by the Maryland Transit Administration (MTA) was developed to support local decision-making on the need for transit investments in the Purple Line corridor, as well as the type and scale of those investments.

This study was conducted to meet the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA). This act requires consideration of the impacts to the natural and human environment of any federal action. NEPA requires a systematic interdisciplinary approach and requires certain statements, including the following:

- The environmental impacts of the action
- Adverse impacts that cannot be avoided
- Alternatives to the proposed action
- Consequences of the proposed action

In addition, consultation with federal agencies and public participation in the planning process are required.

This document is also an Alternatives Analysis, prepared for the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) in accordance with Congressional mandates. The requirements of the AA process are intended to allow for an objective, efficient, and fully informed evaluation and rating of the transit projects seeking funding under the Federal New Starts process. The FTA discretionary New Starts program is the federal government's primary financial resource for funding locally planned, implemented, and operated transit "guideway" capital investments.

#### *Washington Metropolitan Area Transportation Plan*

Construction of the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority Metrorail system began in 1967. The final leg of the original 103-mile rail network was completed in early 2001. Today, there are 86 Metro stations and five lines in the 106-mile network.

The Metro was designed to serve passengers traveling between Washington, DC and the suburbs. As travel patterns have changed, a result of an increase in jobs in the suburbs, suburb-to-suburb travel is increasing. The Purple Line would provide an east-west travel service and provide access to the radial Metro system. There are no other programmed high capacity transit projects that would provide such service in the Maryland portion of the Washington metropolitan area.

#### *Prior Studies of the Corridor*

This project arose out of several previous studies; most directly, the *Georgetown Branch Transitway/Trail Major Investment Study/Draft Environmental Impact Statement* in 1996 and the *Capital Beltway/Purple Line Corridor Transportation Study* completed in 2002. The former was a study to consider transit alternatives between Bethesda and Silver Spring on the Georgetown Branch right-of-way, an abandoned rail corridor purchased by Montgomery County for transportation uses in 1988. The latter was a joint study by the Maryland State Highway Administration and the MTA that identified the corridor as a priority for transit in the context of addressing congestion on the heavily used Capital Beltway corridor. An overview of the planning history of the Purple Line is presented in Chapter 1.

### Purpose of the AA/DEIS

#### *Decision At Hand*

The MTA has undertaken this AA/DEIS to study a range of means for addressing mobility and accessibility issues in the corridor between Bethesda and New Carrollton in Montgomery and Prince George's Counties, Maryland, just north of the District of Columbia boundary. The study is considering a range of alternatives to improve east-west transit mobility in the 16-mile corridor that connects several major activity centers at the Metrorail stations, Bethesda, Silver Spring (both on the Red Line), College Park (Green Line), and New Carrollton (Orange Line) as well as the Takoma Park/Langley Park area and the University of Maryland.

Changing land uses in the Washington metropolitan area have resulted in more suburb-to-suburb travel, while the existing transit system is oriented toward radial travel in and out of Washington, DC. The only transit service available for east-west travel is bus service, which is slow and unreliable because it operates on congested roadways between major activity centers in the corridor. There is no efficient, reliable, and high capacity transit for east-west travel in the corridor. The Purple Line would serve transit patrons whose journey is solely east-west in the corridor, as well as those who want to access the existing north-south Metrorail system. The Purple Line would also provide a direct link to the Brunswick, Camden, and Penn Lines of the MARC commuter rail system and to Amtrak's Northeast Corridor service at New Carrollton.

The Purple Line is intended to provide enhanced transportation choices and improved access for people in the corridor; support local plans for

economic development, community revitalization, and transit oriented development in the area; improve system efficiency and intermodal connectivity; and help address the region's air quality issues.

This study examines several different alternatives, from modest investments in shared-use roadways, to major investments in a dedicated guideway, grade-separated where necessary, to determine which alternative achieves the greatest mobility and related benefits, balanced against costs and impacts on communities and the environment. Two modes, bus transit rapid (BRT) and light rail transit (LRT), were identified during the public scoping process as the most appropriate for this project.

#### *How the AA/DEIS Supports Decision Making*

The objective of this planning process is to provide the public and decision-makers with appropriate and relevant information to make an informed decision on which alternative to select. This process is intended to provide all interested parties with the opportunity to contribute to the planning process and be informed about pertinent issues.

The public and agency scoping process for the Purple Line was initiated in September 2003. The goal of the scoping process and the continued public, agency, and stakeholder involvement process was to ensure that all reasonable and cost-effective alternatives that met the purpose and need of the project were studied.

The evaluation of the alternatives was an iterative process that included extensive coordination with public agencies, elected officials, stakeholders, and members of the public. Alternatives were evaluated for



environmental impacts, engineering constraints, transportation benefits, economic development opportunities, costs, and cost-effectiveness.

The final stage of the AA/DEIS process is the circulation of this document to the public and agencies. The document will be available for review at public locations, and online for 90 days at [www.purplelinemd.com](http://www.purplelinemd.com). Public hearings will be held to record public and agency comments on the proposed project. These comments will be included in the project records and will be responded to in the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS).

#### ***Selection of the LPA***

After consideration of comments received the State of Maryland will select a Locally Preferred Alternative in consultation with county and local jurisdiction officials and elected officials. The selection will be based on consideration of, and trade off among benefits, costs, environmental impacts, and affordability of the alternatives. The Locally Preferred Alternative could include project implementation phasing that involves an initial implementation phase, referred to as a minimum operable segment, and a plan and schedule for subsequent implementation phases.

#### ***Next Steps***

Once the Locally Preferred Alternative is selected, the MTA will prepare a New Starts Criteria Package and a Request for Permission to Enter Preliminary Engineering. This is part of the FTA New Starts process required for eligibility for federal funding under the *Final Rule for Major Capital Investment Projects* (2000). Once permission is granted, the MTA will begin the preliminary engineering needed for preparation of the FEIS. This process will include preliminary engineering on the selected alternative to approximately 30 percent of

design completion, the definition of the right-of-way requirements and environmental mitigation, and assessment of design options. Upon completion of the FEIS, the project would request a Record of Decision from the FTA.

#### **Organization of this AA/DEIS**

The **Signature Page** presents the signatures of the officials approving the findings contained in the AA/DEIS document, as recommended by the Council on Environmental Quality.

Also included are:

- The project description
- Lead agencies
- A list of locations where the AA/DEIS is available for public review
- Information on upcoming AA/DEIS Public Hearings and the public comment period
- Contact addresses for questions, comments, and requests for information on the Purple Line

The **Table of Contents** presents the overall organization of the AA/DEIS and directs the reader to the appropriate page numbers for various chapters and sections in the document.

The **Preface** summarizes the organization and the purpose of the AA/DEIS.

The **Executive Summary** briefly presents the major components and findings of the study.

**Chapter 1 – Purpose and Need** describes the purpose and need for transit improvements in the Purple Line corridor, and highlights the major transportation issues and related project goals and objectives.

**Chapter 2 – Alternatives Considered** summarizes the alternatives initially developed

and those alternatives later eliminated from further consideration (and the reasons why), and describes the No Build Alternative, the TSM Alternative, and the six Build Alternatives that have been assessed in detail in the AA/DEIS.

**Chapter 3 – Transportation and Traffic** describes the potential long-term impacts of the alternatives relative to public transportation, rail stations and parking, roadways, bicycle and pedestrian facilities.

**Chapter 4 – Environmental Resources, Impacts, and Mitigation** describes the potential long-term impacts of the alternatives on key resources of the natural and human environment.

Each section of Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 describes existing conditions, forecasts those conditions to 2030, both with and without the alternatives, and identifies the beneficial and adverse effects (if any) of the alternatives, and where appropriate, identifies possible mitigation measures.

**Chapter 5 – Costs and Funding** compares the capital, operating and maintenance costs for the TSM and Build Alternatives, presents potential strategies for financing those costs, and identifies potential funding shortfalls and implementation strategies.

**Chapter 6 – Evaluation of Alternatives** presents the results of the analyses described in the previous chapters. The relative merits and adverse impacts of the eight alternatives are compared. Chapter 6 uses the information presented in Chapters 3, 4, and 5 to discuss how well the alternatives would address the project purpose, needs, and goals. This chapter also describes key measures and how they could affect decision-making concerning the choice of a selected alternative.

Appended to this AA/DEIS are the following:

- **Glossary and Acronyms**
- **List of Recipients**
- **References**
- **List of Preparers**

#### **AA/DEIS Document**

Attached to the printed version of the AA/DEIS is a CD containing the AA/DEIS and the supporting Technical Reports, including methods and assumptions that provided the basis for the technical analyses and findings summarized in the AA/DEIS.

Printed copies of the AA/DEIS and supporting technical documentation are available for public review at selected locations (see List of Recipients) and (upon request) at the MTA offices located at 6 St. Paul Street, 9<sup>th</sup> Floor, Baltimore, Maryland 21202 or via the project website at [www.purplelinemd.com](http://www.purplelinemd.com). Any person with special needs, such as English language assistance or Braille, should contact the MTA for assistance.