

Memo

To: Mayor and City Council
From: Holly Simmons, Acting Director, Community & Economic Development
Date: September 8, 2023
Re: Blue/Orange/Silver Capacity & Reliability Study
Attachments: BOS Study Alternatives

The purpose of this memorandum is to provide the City Council with a summary of possible implications for the City of Hyattsville and recommendations related to the Blue/Orange/Silver Capacity & Reliability Study (BOS Study).

Project Background and Status

WMATA launched the Blue/Orange/Silver Capacity & Reliability Study (BOS Study) in early 2019 to identify solutions to long-standing issues and opportunities on the Blue, Orange, and Silver lines related to capacity, reliability, equity, and long-term sustainability. Specifically, the three lines run through one tunnel on a single set of tracks when crossing the Potomac between Washington DC and Rosslyn, which creates challenges along these lines. WMATA reports, "Population and jobs along the BOS lines are projected to grow more than 30% by 2040. But Metro cannot run enough trains to handle that growth as long as the three lines run through the same tunnel. This poses significant challenges for our capacity, reliability, and customer experience, as well as the region's goals for development, equity, and environmental sustainability."¹

Potential Alternatives

WMATA indicates they have performed data analysis, a comparative performance assessment (including impacts on ridership, capacity, reliability, and service levels), cost-benefit analysis, and engagement with local stakeholders within the study area to identify a range of potential infrastructure and operational

¹ <https://www.wmata.com/initiatives/plans/BOS-Capacity-Reliability-Study/About-BOS-Study.cfm>

improvements (or “Alternatives”) to ensure quality service and meet demand along the Blue, Orange, and Silver lines.

Alternatives include:

- Alternative 1: No-Build
- Alternative 2: Rail Optimization & Bus Service (Lower Capital Cost)
- Alternative 3: Blue Line to Greenbelt
- Alternative 4: Blue Line to National Harbor
- Alternative 5: Silver Line Express in VA
- Alternative 6: Silver Line to New Carrollton

Potential Implications for City of Hyattsville

Although the purpose of the BOS Study is to address needs along the Blue, Orange, and Silver lines (none of which currently serve the City of Hyattsville), two of the Alternatives under consideration (Alternatives 3 and 5) would impact the City more directly than others.

It must be noted that, at this stage, the Alternatives put forth in the BOS Study are high-level and conceptual. Details including specific alignments, station siting, and location of rails in relation to grade are not currently being evaluated.

With those caveats in mind, as currently presented, Alternatives 3 and 5 conceptually result in the addition of a new Metro station along Baltimore Ave/Route 1 in the City of Hyattsville and expansion of service by a Metro line (i.e., the Blue line or Silver line) which does not currently serve the City.

Alternatives

The below Alternatives have been identified by WMATA for further evaluation. Alternatives that would impact the City of Hyattsville are identified in bold. Images of Alternatives have been included in Council’s materials as a separate attachment.

Alternative 1: No-Build

Alternative 1, or the ‘No-Build Alternative’ contemplates the status quo. The No-Build Alternative serves as a baseline to which other alternatives are compared and is required by NEPA. This Alternative would not increase service to the City of Hyattsville.

Alternative 2: Rail Optimization & Bus Service (Lower Capital Cost) Alternative

Alternative 2 includes a variety of changes (some of which are already underway) that do not require building a new Metrorail line, including improvements to Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) and commuter bus service, adjusting seating within railcars to increase capacity, and re-vamping scheduling. This Alternative would not increase service to the City of Hyattsville.

Alternative 3: Blue Line to Greenbelt

Alternative 3 would realign the Blue Line north of Rosslyn in a separate tunnel, continuing through Washington, DC, with new stations including Georgetown and Union Market before heading north to Ivy City, Fort Lincoln, and Port Towns. Conceptually, it would include a new

station in Hyattsville near Baltimore Ave/Route 1, and continue to the College Park and Greenbelt stations.

Alternative 4: Blue Line to National Harbor

Alternative 4 would realign the Blue Line north of Rosslyn in a separate tunnel, continuing through Washington, DC, with new stations including Georgetown. The line would turn south at Union Station and include new stations at St. Elizabeth's, Bolling AFB, Oxon Hill, and National Harbor before crossing the Potomac to serve existing stations in Alexandria, Virginia. This Alternative would not increase service to the City of Hyattsville.

Alternative 5: Silver Line Express in VA

Alternative 5 is similar to Alternative 3. While Alternative 3 realign the Blue Line, Alternative 5 would realign the Silver Line north of Rosslyn in a separate tunnel, continuing through Washington, DC, with new stations including Georgetown and Capitol Hill before heading north to Ivy City, Fort Lincoln, and Port Towns. Conceptually, it would include a new station in Hyattsville near Baltimore Ave/Route 1, and continue to the College Park and Greenbelt stations. Limited express service would be provided in Virginia.

Alternative 6: Silver Line to New Carrollton

Alternative 6 would realign the Silver Line north of Rosslyn in a separate tunnel, continuing through Washington, DC, with new stations including Georgetown and Union Market before heading north and east to Ivy City, Fort Lincoln, Port Towns, and Landover Hills before terminating at the New Carrollton station. This Alternative would not increase service to the City of Hyattsville.

Conceptual Station Siting within City of Hyattsville

As noted, at this stage, the Alternatives put forth in the BOS Study are high-level and conceptual. Details including specific alignments, station siting, and location of rails in relation to grade are not currently being evaluated; however, a visual provided by WMATA depicts the conceptual siting of a Metro station at the eastern terminus of Hamilton Street, at a location known as The Spot, under Alternatives 3 and 5 (Figure 1). This would represent a significant expansion of transit service in an area of the City that is comparatively underserved by transit. Should this location continue to be considered as the BOS project develops, it will be in the City's interest to proactively engage in discussion with WMATA to ensure its interests are addressed.

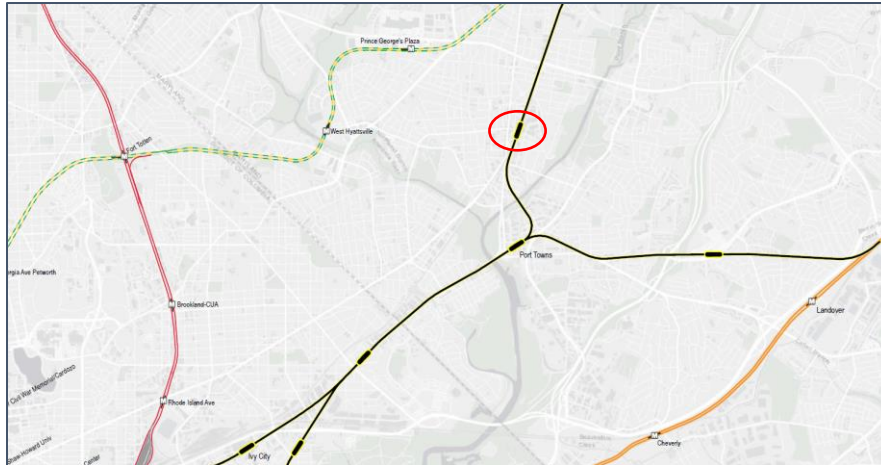


Figure 1. Conceptual siting of BOS Metro stations in Alternatives 3, 4, and 5; includes station along Route 1 in Hyattsville

Considerations

Equity and Sustainability

Expanded rail transit aligns with the City's values as pertains to sustainability and equity. WMATA notes, "Metro is a key player in helping the region attain its sustainability and climate goals. Transit has to be a core strategy for the region to reduce greenhouse gases and other emissions, and transit options need to be accessible, quick, and competitive enough to draw many more people away from driving solo. ... Public transit systems like Metro already play a vital role in providing sustainable transportation that keeps cars off the road. The BOS Study supports the Energy Action Plan and the region's goals to reduce emissions and improve air quality by identifying ways to make Metrorail more cost effective and energy efficient."² As noted in Greater Greater Washington, Cities with higher annual transit trips per capita are correlated with lower carbon emissions and traffic fatalities per capita.³

Additionally, rail transit is an equitable transportation option: "Metro also centers equity as a core mission. ...Metro is the region's connective tissue -- it gets people where they want go - work, school, medical care, social outings - when they want to travel at a far lower personal cost than driving or ridesharing. It crosses political boundaries and neighborhood lines, and offers people who can't afford cars (or choose not to drive!) access to jobs and other economic opportunities. By doing so Metro is essential to advancing the region's equity goals and helping to address systemic and historic inequality."⁴

Transit service; Increased density along Route 1

On Route 1 in Hyattsville, TheBus 17 and Metrobuses 83 run north/south along Route 1, somewhat approximating the service that would be provided by a new metro station as anticipated in Alternatives 3 and 5 of the BOS Study. TheBus 17 has 30-45 minute headways, while Metrobus 83 has approximately 20-30 minutes headways throughout the day on weekdays. Additionally, both lines terminate in Mount Rainier, while Alternatives 3 and 5 would provide service through Washington, DC, and on to northern

² <https://www.wmata.com/initiatives/plans/BOS-Capacity-Reliability-Study/About-BOS-Study.cfm>

³ <https://ggwash.org/view/90806/dcs-climate-and-safety-goals-will-ride-or-die-with-metrorail>

⁴ <https://www.wmata.com/initiatives/plans/BOS-Capacity-Reliability-Study/About-BOS-Study.cfm>

Virginia. Alternatives 3 and 5, while conceptual in nature, would result in a significant expansion in transit service for the eastern portion of Hyattsville.

In recent years, with the construction of the Palette Apartments and adjacent townhomes, density has increased along Route 1 in Hyattsville. In the near term, the Canvas Apartments development will add nearly 300 units in the immediate vicinity. Additional transit and transportation options would enhance walkability and accessibility of this part of the City.

Timeline

Immediate term

Through September 30, 2023, WMATA is collecting public comments on the potential alternatives to help Metro's Board of Directors select a locally-preferred alternative (LPA) prior to entering into the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process and project development. The focus is on the general Alternatives, as opposed to specific station siting.

On August 29, 2023, the Mayor sent a letter to WMATA expressing support for rail transit and requesting a 30-day extension of the comment period to allow sufficient time for Staff to advise City Council on providing comment. WMATA acknowledged receipt of the letter but no extension has been issued.

Long-term: 10-20 years

As referenced earlier, the current BOS Study has been ongoing since 2019 (Figure 2). According to materials available on the WMATA website, "Metro's selection of a preferred alternative is the first step of a 10- to 20-year process. There will be no commitment to build until there is a funding agreement."⁵ No funding sources have been identified.

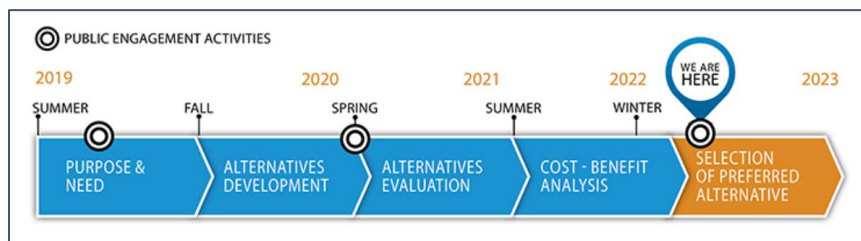


Figure 2. BOS Study timeline

Recommendation

Staff recommends City Council send a letter to the WMATA Board of Directors expressing general support for expanded rail transit in and around the City of Hyattsville and particular support for Alternatives 3 and 5 as WMATA identifies a Locally-Preferred Alternative (LPA) to inform the NEPA process for the Blue/Orange/Silver Study. Staff also recommends expressing interest in proactively engaging and collaborating with Metro as the project progresses through review and toward design, particularly should the option for a station within the City of Hyattsville along Route 1 continue to be considered.

⁵ <https://www.wmata.com/initiatives/plans/BOS-Capacity-Reliability-Study/>