

**REGULAR COUNCIL MEETING  
NOVEMBER 12, 2020**

The WILMAPCO Council meeting was held virtually via WebEx and conference call.

**1. CALL TO ORDER:** Mr. Sisson, Chair, opened the meeting at 10:00 a.m.

**2. ROLL CALL:**

**Members present:**

Marc Coté, representing DelDOT Acting Secretary of Transportation, Nicole Majeski Cohan  
Dave Edgell representing Connie Holland, Delaware Governor's Appointee  
Herb Inden, representing City of Wilmington Mayor, Michael S. Purzycki  
Heather Murphy, Maryland Governor's Appointee  
Eric Sennstrom, representing Cecil County Executive, Alan McCarthy  
John Sisson, representing Delaware Transit Corporation  
Michael Spencer, representing New Castle County Municipalities  
Andrea Trabelsi, representing New Castle County Executive, Matthew Meyer

**Members absent:**

Dave Warnick representing Cecil County Municipalities

**Guests, Observers:**

Ian Beam, MDOT  
Dee Durham, New Castle County Council  
Robert Hicks, Delaware River Port Authority  
Jessica Reed  
Tyson Byrne, MDOT

**Staff members:**

Dan Blevins, Principal Planner  
Heather Dunigan, Principal Planner  
Sharen T. Elcock, Executive Assistant  
Dave Gula, Principal Planner  
Randi Novakoff, Outreach Manager  
Bill Swiatek, Principal Planner  
Jacob Thompson, Transportation Planner  
Dawn Voss, Administrative Assistant  
Tigist Zegeye, Executive Director

Minutes prepared by Dawn Voss

**3. MINUTES:**

Mr. Marc Coté suggested the correction of a typographical error in the minutes. The meeting adjourned at 12:30 p.m., not a.m.

**ACTION:** On motion by Mr. Marc Coté seconded by Mr. Michael Spencer the Council approved the September 2020 Council Meeting Minutes with the correction.

Motion passed.

(11-12-20-01)

**4. PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD:**

None.

## **COUNCIL MEMBERS' AND DIRECTOR'S REPORT**

### **5. Chairperson's Report:**

Mr. John Sisson said on Wednesday, November 18<sup>th</sup> DART will be holding a virtual public hearing from 4 to 6 p.m. regarding the February Service Change, changes to how fares are collected, and the proposed changes to the fare structure. The service change is being done in February to coincide with the reconstruction on I-95 through Wilmington. There are a number of proposed changes to routes to move them off of I-95. The public is encouraged to participate. Information can be found at [www.dartfirststate.com](http://www.dartfirststate.com). There is also information about the changes to the fare structure, the elimination of the stored value cards, the implementation of seven and thirty-day passes, the reductions of fare zones from seven zones to three. The county lines will become the zones so what was a two-zone trip from Middletown to Wilmington becomes a one-zone trip, which is a benefit to the customers. The daily pass is being reduced from \$4.20 to \$4.00. These changes are meant to help their customers and speed up boarding. Thank you to everyone who has come out to Stuff the Bus. The twenty-third annual Stuff the Bus to collect non-perishable items is this week. They have been to Rodney Square, will be at the Brandywine Commons ShopRite tomorrow, and at the Four Seasons ShopRite on Saturday from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. They are collecting food for the Food Bank of Delaware. With COVID and people out of work, helping people this year is more important than ever. If anyone can come out and help, it would be greatly appreciated.

### **- Council Member's Reports:**

Ms. Andrea Trabelsi said next week New Castle County, as part of NCC@2050 planning process, will have their first public forum with a number activities that they will be doing in small groups. This will be 6-8 p.m. next Wednesday, November 18<sup>th</sup>. They hope everyone can help get the word out. People can register for this virtual event on Zoom to help shape the community vision as they move forward with the next steps in the planning process.

Mr. Michael Spencer said we have a new senator, Senator Mantzavino, who took Senator Delcollo's place. Senator Mantzavino asked to be included in the Newport Transportation Study emails as well as any others that may be of interest, but particularly the Newport Transportation Study. He was unable to call in on Tuesday. Mr. Spencer will find out if he has a State email address and will pass it on to Ms. Voss and WILMAPCO so he can be kept in the loop.

Mr. Mark Coté said there is an I-95 Virtual Workshop tonight from 6-8 p.m. The information about it is on their website. It is about the rehabilitation project.

Mr. Herb Inden said being home to the President-elect is exciting for the City of Wilmington. Also, they have been slowly implementing some of their comp plan recommendations through various rezoning.

### **6. Executive Director's Report – Ms. Zegeye shared the following information:**

- Staff is participating in the New Castle County 2050 Plan. On September 14<sup>th</sup>, staff presented on existing transportation conditions in New Castle County and served on the panel.
- Staff served on a webinar titled "Our Places and Spaces" on October 21<sup>st</sup>.
- The project team hosted the Churchman's Crossing Virtual Workshop with seventy-five attendees on September 26<sup>th</sup>.

- The Governor Printz Boulevard Study Public Workshop was held on September 21<sup>st</sup>. The presentations are available on YouTube. The survey was available until October 21<sup>st</sup>. A draft report is available for comment until the end of November.
- Staff attended the Southern New Castle County Master Plan Final Workshop on September 23<sup>rd</sup>.
- Staff attended the Maryland MPO Roundtable on September 25<sup>th</sup>.
- A second virtual workshop for the Newport Transportation Study was held on September 30<sup>th</sup> with twenty-five attendees. The project team refined recommendations and developed cost estimates, which were presented to the project management team yesterday. The follow up meeting with the advisory committee will be held later this month.
- A final Concord Pike Master Plan Draft Report was released to the public on September 28<sup>th</sup>. A final workshop was held on October 5<sup>th</sup> with one hundred and two attendees out of two-hundred and sixty-five registered. Comments were accepted until November 5<sup>th</sup>.
- Staff attended the Newark TID Public Workshop on October 14<sup>th</sup>.
- Staff attended the MDOT CTP Cecil Tour Meeting on October 16<sup>th</sup>.
- Staff held the City of New Castle Transportation Plan Management Committee meeting on October 21<sup>st</sup>.
- Staff participated in a University of Maryland Urban Design class as a guest lecturer on October 22<sup>nd</sup>.
- Staff participated and presented an overview of the 2019 Transportation Justice Plan at the AMPO Conference which was held between October 27<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup>.
- Staff is continuing to support the Healthy Communities Delaware grant projects along Route 9 and in Southbridge.
- Staff presented the Route 9 Master Plan and implementation efforts as a University of Delaware sociology course on the environment and human health on November 9<sup>th</sup>.
- Staff continues to collect survey responses on the Route 9 Paths Plan, is partnering with the Colonial School District to engage students on the corridor; and plans to collect sample responses from each neighborhood through a local community liaison.
- Staff will be presenting at the 2020 Northern Transportation and Air Quality Summit, which will be held next week.
- Interviews for WILMAPCO videos are being conducted for the transportation justice video. A draft Route 9 video was made. Work is being done on draft scripts for other videos with topics such as: who is WILMAPCO, nonmotorized transportation, and how an idea becomes a project.
- Staff is reviewing proposals for a week-long social justice outreach training to be held in March.
- Staff will be participating in the Every Day Counts Virtual Summit December 8<sup>th</sup> through December 10<sup>th</sup>.
- New Castle County Transportation Alternatives Program applications will be accepted through January 15<sup>th</sup>, 2021.

## **7. Public Advisory Committee (PAC) Report:**

Randi Novakoff said the Public Advisory Committee met on October 19<sup>th</sup>. There were no action items. Ms. Dunigan presented the Governor Printz Corridor Study and shared the design alternatives for Governor Printz. There were questions about the possibility of an Edgemoor Train Station, the cost of the alternatives, and the possibility of a TID in that area. There was some discussion of measures that could be taken to slow speeds on Governor Printz. Mr. Gula presented on the Newport Study. There were some comments on the success in outreach efforts that have been conducted so far. PAC members were pleased with the attendance at the workshops and outreach efforts there. There were

some concerns about how traffic impacts pedestrian safety in the area and a recommendation from a PAC member to look at how pedestrians can access Banning and Canby Parks. Mr. Swiatek presented on Urban Technology Deserts. There was discussion about the need for more high-speed internet service in the Stanton area and some complaints about various service providers.

**8. Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) Report:**

Ms. Heather Dunigan said the Technical Advisory Committee met on September 17<sup>th</sup>. There were no action items. There were presentations on the Newark Transportation Improvement District by Ms. Sarah Coakley from DelDOT and Mr. Mike Fortner from the City of Newark. Updates on Performance Measures were presented by Mr. Mike DuRoss of DelDOT. The CMAQ Mid-period Performance Review was presented by Mr. Bill Swiatek.

At the October 15th meeting, two TIP amendments, the I-95/Belvidere Road Interchange and Cecil County Transit, were recommended for adoption. The TAC also recommended approving the CMAQ Mid-period Performance Report as well as endorsement of the Concord Pike Master Plan. Ms. Jade Clayton of the Maryland Transit Administration presented on the Maryland Statewide Transit Plan. Mr. Bill Swiatek presented on Urban Technology Deserts.

**ACTION ITEMS:**

**9. To Amend the WILMAPCO FY 2020-2023 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), Cecil County Element.**

Ms. Heather Dunigan said the current TIP shows the name of the I-95 at Belvidere Road Interchange Project as a study. It is nearing the end of the NEFA phase of the study and moving into implementation, so the word “study” has been removed from the name and the description was updated to reflect the current status of the project. The funding has been updated to reflect the current engineering estimates.

**ACTION:** On motion by Ms. Heather Murphy seconded by Mr. Eric Sennstrom the Council approved the Resolution to Amend the WILMAPCO Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), Cecil County Element.

Motion passed. (11-12-20-02)

**10. To Amend the WILMAPCO FY 2020-2023 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), Cecil County Elements.**

Ms. Heather Dunigan said MDOT requested an amendment to the Small Urban Transit System Project. MDOT was awarded an Enhanced Mobility Pilot Program Grant for \$50,000. This will add those funds to the TIP.

**ACTION:** On motion by Mr. Eric Sennstrom seconded by Mr. Michael Spencer the Council approved the Resolution to Amend the WILMAPCO Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), Cecil County Elements.

Motion passed. (11-12-20-03)

**11. To Endorse the Concord Pike Master Plan.**

Mr. Dave Gula said the public outreach for the plan began in 2017 with stakeholder interviews. The first public outreach was on July 25, 2018, with two-hundred attendees. A community visioning session was attended by one hundred people on November 14, 2018. Stakeholder focus groups were held November 14-16, 2018. Wiki public map engagement was available from November 2018 to January 2019. Comments from the outreach were used to build goals and vision for the plan. Workshops were held March 20, 2019 and December 5, 2019. The first virtual workshop was April 1, 2020 with one hundred and twenty-five attendees. The final virtual workshop was October 5, 2020 with one hundred attendees. Live polling was used at both virtual workshops and online surveys were available after to gather as many comments as possible before the final report. Throughout the study, comments showed the need for a walkable environment. Bicycle and pedestrian crossings of Concord Pike are a challenge, so working to reduce speed and relieve heavy traffic has been recommended. Some potential intersection improvements are possible. Connecting trails from neighborhoods to commercial areas is needed.

Poll results from the April 1<sup>st</sup> workshop showed only 16% are uncomfortable and 30% somewhat uncomfortable with the proposed changes to zoning if impact to motor vehicle delay is similar. 80% are comfortable with a small amount of additional delay to make crossing safer for pedestrians. If the connections were low stress, 44% and 38% were likely or somewhat likely to walk to destinations along the corridor. 38% are likely, 29% somewhat likely, and 34% not likely to bike if connections were low stress and improved facilities were implemented. The online survey showed 50% prefer a low to medium density, mixed use land use scenario. The next largest percentage preferred no development at all. Because there are general plans with specifics that will need to be pursued through a corridor monitoring committee, the survey asked to rank potential options. New pedestrian and bicycle pathways and crosswalks were ranked highest with 3.98 out of 5. Access management was ranked second with 3.97 out of 5. A multi-way from Beaver Valley Road to Rocky Run Boulevard ranked 3.09. Additional vehicular connections ranked 2.81, and a multi-way from Silverside Road to Fairfax Boulevard was ranked 2.5. A small amount of additional delay for motorists is acceptable to provide more safe pedestrian crossings for 82% of respondents.

The draft report was posted to the WILMAPCO website for public to review from October 5<sup>th</sup> to November 5<sup>th</sup>. Twenty-five comments were received. Common themes include confusion on focus area options. The community does not want to see those options followed through in the recommendations. In the report those options were moved to an appendix and are not included as recommendations going forward. They were retained in the appendix, as the information may be useful to inform future planning, and because the plan was partially federally funded, the report must have the entire public outreach and master plan process documented. Two or three comments support multi-use and multi-family redevelopment of some vacant properties. Some commented that State Line Road needs a safer intersection, of which DelDOT is aware. There is support for traffic calming and boulevard/multi-way. Three people will not support this plan in any way. At least four comments were received about protecting private property as pathways and bike lanes are proposed. There was concern that work will divert traffic onto community streets. It was mentioned that the McDonalds drive-thru queue is unsafe. Five people unequivocally support the plan. More sidewalks and multi-use paths may be needed in other parts of the study area. Two of the people who commented thought the bike and pedestrian recommendations shown were roadways, so once that was explained, that resolved their concern. Two people complained that the online workshop moved too fast and they did not know how to participate in the polling, so the staff can look at that and improve as we continue to hold virtual workshops.

Focus Area Options were presented to the public on March 20, 2019 at the workshop. The community rejected them. Text was added to the report to state that these were rejected by the public. They are in the appendix with a disclaimer that these were presented but rejected. A corridor monitoring committee is in important recommendation and hopefully will be implemented in the spring. It will help execute the Master Plan through an ongoing process that will help prioritize projects. It will also provide a means of communication between the community and the agency staff to help build trust as we all work together. It will help with interagency coordination, and also with some of the smaller corrections and issues that come up.

Nonmotorized Transportation Working Group and PAC support the plan, though they did not take action on it. The TAC endorsed it. Staff recommends that this plan be endorsed by Council.

Ms. Andrea Trabelsi said thank you to the team for their best efforts at public engagement. It is challenging in regular conditions, then add the remote participation to a planning process like this, and it is exponentially challenging. It also underscores the importance of communication and building relationships with the public and the stakeholders in the planning process. Though it is disappointing that some of the results are watered down, there are some good concepts and principles that she hopes leads to incremental improvements in multimodal transportation elements and connectivity as well as integration of land use and transportation.

**ACTION:** On motion by Mr. Michael Spencer seconded by Ms. Andrea Trabelsi the Council approved the Resolution to Endorse the Concord Pike Master Plan.

Motion passed.

(11-12-20-04)

## **12. To Approve the Proposed Public Advisory Committee (PAC) Reappointments.**

Ms. Randi Novakoff said three PAC members are proposed for reappointment. Mr. Glenn Pusey, representing the Bear-Glasgow Council, has been a PAC member since 2008. Mr. Bill Lower, representing the Committee of 100, has been a member since 2014. Mr. Mark Blake, representing the Greater Hockessin Development Association, has been a member since 2017. All three members are in good standing and expressed willingness to serve another term.

Ms. Trabelsi has asked about diversity in the membership in the past, and she said the Public Participation Plan identifies good ways to improve that. Ms. Trabelsi made a suggestion related to the County's Comp Plan process. They initiated a youth planning board with twenty-two high-school aged youths who engage monthly with them through the comp plan process. That may be something for the PAC to explore, whether it is reaching out to University of Delaware students or folks that represent a younger age group. She also suggests reaching out to people of different backgrounds and gender. Ms. Novakoff said we have been striving to increase diversity on the PAC, and added one more African American member, but he has not attended any of the meetings. Ms. Novakoff said she appreciates the suggestion of reaching out to younger people. Ms. Trabelsi offered that as the youth board ends this May, perhaps some of them would be interested in becoming a member of the PAC.

**ACTION:** On motion by Mr. Marc Coté seconded by Ms. Andrea Trabelsi the Council approved the Resolution to Approve the Proposed Public Advisory Committee (PAC) Reappointments.

Motion passed.

(11-12-20-05)

## **PRESENTATION/DISCUSSION ITEMS:**

### **13. Churchman's Crossing Plan Update**

Mr. Dan Blevins said much has changed in area since the original plan was adopted in 1997. Also, NCC Land Use and DeIDOT have new tools like TIDs and CCEDs that can help shape the growth of this corridor. There was periodic monitoring until 2004, which left a lack of details on implementation and performance of the sixty-one recommendations that came from the plan.

Churchman's Crossing Current Conditions Report, created in 2019, compiled data of the historical information that normally would be collected during the monitoring effort to help bridge the gap in changes in transportation from 2004 to today. Twenty-five of the sixty-one transit, roadway, sidewalk, and bicycle recommendations were implemented, including the SEPTA station; bus service improvements; and intersection and interchange improvements. Many recommendations were not implemented, and some have already come and gone, such as some transit routes that were implemented, then removed or merged. The full report is available on the website at [www.wilmaco.org/Churchmans](http://www.wilmaco.org/Churchmans)

There has been growth in land use. This area is one of largest employment centers in Delaware. In 1997 there was about 9.6 million square feet of non-residential development with 3.7 million committed for development. Now, there is 14.4 million square feet existing, with 3.7 million committed. The vision for the plan keeps the same three goals as the old plan: enhancing quality of life, plan for sustainable growth, and provide transportation choices. The vision has not changed, but new questions ask if there are unfinished projects that are still viable; if new transportation technologies such as ITMS can help achieve these goals; and if current land use tools and policies can help achieve these goals. The project boundary is very similar to the boundary in the 1997 plan. We wanted something manageable but that fit the area. The hospital is in the center portion with areas up toward Kirkwood Highway to the north and toward SR 273 and Old Baltimore Pike to the south.

Public outreach began with a Community Information Session on September 16<sup>th</sup> with one hundred and thirteen people registered. That session covered the purpose of the plan and the current conditions from the 2019 report, which provided information for the public to put some numbers and visuals to the current conditions. The results of the listening tour with key stakeholders were also shared at this session. The public were asked what they find most valuable about the corridor today and what they want to see in the next twenty years. The response indicates importance of jobs, flexibility, and transit opportunities. In the future people want to see mixed use, clean water, green space, and better traffic flow. The listening tour was done prior to that meeting and included a cross section of stakeholders such as elected officials, community groups, and emergency services. So people could speak freely, specific comments were not ascribed to any individual, but they were asked questions about what they like about the area and what they would like to see in the future. Common themes were to support jobs with the hospital and Delaware Technical and Community College; limit sprawl in land use; preserve open space; and improve EMS response times. Related to transportation, safety was most important and dealing with existing traffic conditions related to north/south capacity. Flooding is a major concern as much of the area is less than one hundred feet above sea level and flat, and some wetlands weave in and out of the study area. Stakeholders want more bicycle and pedestrian connections and a low-stress bike network. They want to move transit away from the mall, and improved transit service, including the expansion of regional service such as bringing MARC service into the Fairplay Station.

At the workshop, the current conditions were reviewed. Churchman's Crossing is a fairly large job center, which has grown in the last fifteen years. The jobs are mostly in health and education, but also in finance, retail, leisure and hospitality, and financial services. Of those who work there, 96% commute into the area with 70% commuting from New Castle County. Others make a significant drive from Cecil, Kent, Chester, and Delaware Counties. The existing elements are that it is relatively flat, with wetlands and water embedded throughout. There is little open space. There are fifteen thousand households in the area. With the parking and impervious surface, most of the land is spoken for whether natural or a built-out feature. Between 1997 and now, the County has had a couple of comp plans and updates, with a new one underway now. The area has much Office/Commercial/Industrial Development Area (OCI), which could help guide mixed use, mobility-oriented growth within the area. It will be mainly redevelopment in these areas. There are a couple of different concepts that could happen with these areas as we get through the next comp plan update in parallel with this plan, some of the guidance within those areas may change.

Looking at hourly traffic speeds related to free flow speeds, the AM peak shows some slowing, but as we get to 5-6pm, there are slow downs. This information is available on an interactive map on the WILMAPCO website. There are a lot of high crash locations in study area. Information is now available about the multimodal network including level of traffic stress information, and a much more detailed GIS database of sidewalks, crosswalks, and footpaths in the area. Transit ridership is concentrated at the mall, but there is ridership in other portions of the study area. Bicycle level of traffic stress was not available in 1997. This will allow scoring the roadway network on suitability for bicycles and pedestrians. Also, we can identify bicycle islands, which show areas that are low stress, but require travel over a high-stress connection to get to another low-stress area.

More information was gathered at the recent Community Information Session. Three more workshops are being planned for winter, spring, and summer. A completed report should be presented to Council in the fall of 2021. The next step is scenario planning to evaluate transportation needs with future growth at varying levels. There are still transportation plans that were not completed from the 1997 plan including the Churchman's Road extension from Delaware Park to Kirkwood Highway and projects around the mall that may alleviate some of the current conditions. The team is looking at some land use options to test including the anticipated 3.7 million square feet of development and some residential developments that are underway, but also to evaluate the impact if there is more significant redevelopment. Shopping malls and other retail may look different in the future as a result of COVID. So, this is to try to anticipate how that will look in the future and test scenarios throughout the plan to see which projects best achieve the goals of the plan.

Ms. Andrea Trabelsi said the County is happy to be working in a partnership again with WILMAPCO and DelDOT to move forward with some integrated land use and transportation planning. The county-wide comprehensive plan is concurrent with this, so it is a good timing. Something to point out is the importance of how trends in new technology and changes in the commercial and retail landscape due to delivery, COVID, and regional economic factors influence some of these elements, but also how they might influence a vision among stakeholders, particularly a number of pretty significant institutions may have changed their vision since 1997. Mr. Blevins responded that we do not know what will come out of COVID. This area does have businesses that could see significant changes after COVID, like the mall, education, and JP Morgan. People will always need the hospital, but these other industries have



managed well through online shipping, online classes, and working from home. So, this area will likely see some impact just from COVID alone.

Mr. John Sisson said it is a much-needed update in the area and he will be interested to see outcome.

#### **14. Five Point Intersection Safety & Capacity Improvement Study**

Mr. Dave Gula reviewed a criteria matrix created by plotting the objectives of the project with the alternatives to see which alternative best met the objectives. The main feature of the study is a five-point intersection that functions poorly much of the time, so the goal was to make the five-point intersection at South Madison Street, Maryland Avenue, Monroe Street, and MLK Boulevard better.

All Alternatives will channel all traffic coming into the city on Maryland Avenue onto Adams Street, which would then make a right onto Martin Luther King Boulevard. Due to the increased traffic onto Adams Street, there will be an addition of a second turn lane on Adams Street onto Martin Luther King Boulevard, which has an impact on DTC's operations. In Alternative A, Monroe Street, which is one-way now, would have two-way operations. Monroe Street would be made to handle traffic coming in from I-95. This would make the 5 Point intersection function better by removing the Maryland Avenue connection. The street grid would be restored by adding a Chestnut Street extension tying into south Madison Street. This alternative impacts DTC's daily operations with bus circulation in and around the maintenance area for parking, fueling, and leaving for their routes.

Alternative B would make South Madison one-way, which many of the stakeholders thought would have a negative outcome, and there would still be a five-point intersection. Basically, this alternative did not solve the problems. This alternative would keep Monroe Street a one-way street, which allows buses coming out of the DTC facility to continue to turn onto Monroe Street to begin their routes.

Alternative C expands Maryland Avenue. It gives DTC one contiguous parcel for their parking and operations by eliminating Monroe Street between Maryland Avenue and MLK Boulevard. South Madison would be made one way, which stakeholders do not want. It does help restore the grid, but it does not take the five-point intersection away so the problem of traffic queuing on Martin Luther King Boulevard would continue.

Alternative D extends the ramp on I-95 to bring inbound traffic to a new intersection at Chestnut Street to enter Wilmington, and still ends up with two-way traffic on Monroe Street. It is very expensive and does not solve any of the problems.

At the completion of Phase I of the study, Alternative A was selected with the fewest negative impacts, but the two-way operation on Monroe Street has a significant impact on DTC's operations and parking. At this point, the team considered changing how DTC's operations were handled. A garage could centralize bus parking, so the team considered replacing the current DTC Maintenance & Operations Center, which is over forty years old and not fully adequate for their current operations. A separate Study phase was created to look at restructuring the operation so a two-way Monroe Street would not have such a large impact on DTC. The costs for all of the alternatives are in the range of \$7.6 million to \$8.4 million, except Alternative D, which was never really considered due to the cost and the amount of Federal collaboration that

would be needed to create a new interstate ramp. We ended phase one with Alternative A as the best choice, but with something else is needed to make it work well.

The Monroe Street DTC facility is where buses get fueled, washed, parked, and where the fare boxes are emptied. Bus parking is spread over lots on multiple blocks. Before the morning and afternoon routes, buses line up in the lot by the operations center, pull out onto Monroe Street, and head south. Buses make wide turns, which is why they may have trouble negotiating the turn with north bound traffic on a two-way Monroe Street. Factors that must be addressed are site circulation with a two-way Monroe Street; parking (preferably covered) for one hundred and twenty-five buses; access to fuel, washing, and the vault every day; maintenance; parking for employees and support vehicles; and parking for Delmarva employees. A decked structure could create enough parking and also help with circulation. With this potential construction the need for additional space for larger buses, tire storage, breakroom, locker areas, and offices was considered. Four concepts were developed, and construction phasing had to be considered as well.

Concept 1 puts a parking deck over a two-way Monroe Street with ramps that allow the buses to circulate through the operations center and parking areas without being on street level. Concept 2 puts decking over lot 6 and south over Delmarva's current property. This did not work at all and was not developed in detail. Concept 3 puts decking over lots owned by Delmarva and Reybold, west of Chestnut Street. Concept 4 builds a new maintenance building on lot 6. A proposed building program for the maintenance and operation center was developed, expanding it to 47,900 square feet on two floors, for all Concepts. The building would have the maintenance facilities, fuel, bus washing, offices, breakrooms, and locker rooms, but it is very expensive. Concept 1 where bus parking is on the top floor, could have buses covered with an ordinary roof or with solar panels, which would generate power to run the operations. Concept 1, with bus parking on top costs an estimated \$99,725,000. If parking for buses is moved to the bottom, there are more spaces for buses, but a number of DTC and Delmarva employee spaces are lost, and the estimated cost is still almost \$78 million. Concept 3 offers more parking for buses and employees. With bus parking on top, the cost is almost \$93 million, on the bottom \$74 million. Concept 4 is slightly less complicated and requires buses to move on surface streets. The cost is lower, at \$46 million, but it is short on employee and Delmarva's required parking, so adding a separate garage brings the cost up to \$63 million.

DTC does not have the money for this new facility at the present time. With traffic reduced due to COVID, DeIDOT and the City do not see the intersection as the safety concern it was a year ago. Also, none of these options are easily affordable. These Concepts were reviewed with the stakeholders last week, and they have concerns as to why the bus operations are still in this area. One stakeholder suggested finding space on the waterfront for bus operation, but the Riverfront Development Corporation is building up retail and residential uses, and may not want bus parking there. The project is not necessarily within DTC's budget as they are currently looking ahead and creating their budget. Concept 4 is the most affordable, but there are challenges in construction staging and the concerns about bus operations on surface streets are not mitigated. We want to finalize the study recommendations and work with DTC to see which, if any of these alternatives may be something that they could work with if the plan were to move forward in the future. A draft report will be completed and brought to Wilmington Initiatives (PMC) to have the frank discussion of where this project may be headed as we move forward. The funding for the roadway work has been programmed after FY 2024, but that work cannot be done without minimizing the impact to DTC's operations.

Mr. John Sisson said by the next ten years DTC needs to figure out a plan for that site. That will probably involve a bigger search for potential alternate locations for operations in the Wilmington Area. Along the riverfront where it has been developed is probably not the best place. It will be interesting to understand traffic flows once we get past COVID, now that the Margaret Rose Henry Bridge is in place and traffic can flow in and out of the Riverfront a little differently. Mr. Sisson expressed that more follow up needs to be done. Mr. Gula replied that if anything is going to move forward with this, it will be on DTC's schedule. Final study recommendations will be in the draft report, which will be presented to the Wilmington Initiatives stakeholders, and brought back to Council for review.

### **15. Urban Technology Deserts**

Mr. Bill Swiatek said this relates to the Transportation Justice Study from last year and the situation with the pandemic with the move to virtual public engagement. The Census has difficulty increasing responses in some lower socioeconomic neighborhoods. This year, the Census kept track of those who self-responded via the internet, which shows the digital divide in cities. In the Highlands neighborhood, 94% who completed the census as of September did it online. In the Lower Eastside only 44% of people who completed the census did it online.

A tech desert is a place with limited computer or internet access. Traditionally tech deserts are thought to be the result of a lack of infrastructure as seen in southern Delaware and other rural areas, where broadband connection does not exist. Another way to think of tech deserts is due to socioeconomic factors as seen in cities. National data from the Pew Center for Research shows factors that affect having a smartphone or broadband in the home. Age is a factor, as being sixty-five or older is a driver for not having smartphones or broadband in the home, so 60% of people who are seniors have home broadband compared to about 79% of younger people. Similar numbers are seen for those of limited education and limited income, so about half of those making less than \$30,000 per year have home broadband, compared to 92% of people in households making more than \$75,000.

Using American Community Survey data, Census tracts that have more than double regional average without a computer (19%) or access to the internet (about a third) were flagged as tech deserts. Such areas were found in much of the City of Wilmington except the Riverfront and downtown, as well as in Milltown and downtown Elkton. In looking at the overall averages, 40% of people in tech deserts have no internet compared to 16% in the region. Broadband is very similar indicating that for our region, those who have internet have broadband. In tech deserts 26% have no computer, including a smartphone as the census considers a smartphone a computer, compared to just 10% in the region. The census also shows that 16% of people in tech deserts only have a smartphone as opposed to 6% in the region. For example, in the Lower Eastside, 1000 households (65% of the total) had no internet or broadband, 680 (45%) had no computer, and 300 (20%) had a smartphone only.

To see what is driving this, we look at the tech deserts in Wilmington and overlay senior concentrations that were identified in our Transportation Justice Plan. There is not a lot of overlap indicating that age is not driving it. Concentrations of those living in poverty and affordable housing are found in the tech deserts in Wilmington, so it is those socioeconomic drivers that are creating tech deserts. Further examination of the numbers supports this. About a quarter of those in tech deserts live in poverty, compared to 7% in the region. Age is not the driver, in fact, the reverse is true. People in our tech deserts are younger than the region as a whole, with 12% of those in tech deserts over 65 years old compared to 16% in the region. There is a racial equity issue as well. The Black population makes up 53% of the population in

the tech deserts compared to 22% of the population in the region. Correspondingly, the white population makes up 62% of the region, but only 31% of the population in our tech deserts.

There are many implications to this. One of them being census participation, as this may be driving lower rates of participation. Education is another one with the move to remote learning. In some of the school districts, 20-30% of students could not make that transition despite the efforts to boost the tech both in their homes and through the school districts. Job access is another key area as applications move online. For us as planners, public engagement is the biggest factor here, as we look to do engagement and have online-only options, people may be left out. Our analysis is supporting some of this work. We had a meeting with the Department of Education and gave them all the data. We are working with the United Way, on grants to make improvements in coverage in those communities. It is also supporting COVID-19 outreach in New Castle County to inform what type of prevention outreach happens in the tech deserts.

A data report that coalesces all this information is being prepared to share with everyone. In the meantime, looking at these tech deserts and at some low-tech strategies would be helpful. Within some of the tech deserts, some groups are having telephone-only meetings. People are having outdoor events. Text messaging surveys is another way to try to cover this gap. This goes well with our transportation justice work in looking at places that need more and different outreach. The planners at WILMAPCO have access to an interactive map that shows where the tech deserts and other transportation justice groups are. This can be added to the mix of factors in our outreach program for the region or for some of those small area studies that may be in one of our urban tech deserts.

Mr. John Sisson asked Mr. Swiatek to clarify that when he says access, it is not the availability, it is the affordability of the service. Mr. Swiatek replied that is the main thing. At the PAC there were complaints that in some of the areas only one of the main providers is available, but this is about affordability.

Ms. Andrea Trabelsi said thank you for the presentation. This was enlightening as the County continues to try to reach people through the comprehensive plan process and other plan processes being limited to only computers. Ms. Trabelsi asked for a copy of it and Mr. Swiatek said he would email it to her. Ms. Trabelsi asked if access to the interactive map would be possible. Collectively, brain storming and problem-solving with this challenge about reaching people would be helpful for the County, Wilmington, WILMAPCO, and municipalities in the region. Mr. Swiatek said that he would send the map as well. The County has been doing great work with the comp plan as far as engaging stakeholders. The county has identified groups that have been in the past left out of planning processes, so he thinks that is positive, but we have to continue make sure that people in these communities are not left out.

Mr. Sisson said for the beginning part of this service change, they went out on the buses and sat in the transit centers trying to connect to as many people as they could knowing the challenges of virtual outreach. Mr. Swiatek said he knows DeIDOT put a lot of effort into trying to do a virtual session on the Route 9 corridor. They sent out over eight hundred flyers to get people to come out, but only one resident came. That is an example of trying to make this fit within a tech desert and it not being successful. We are following up to that with trying some telephone meetings or on the ground meetings to try and get some feedback for that project.

Mr. Sisson asked if anyone has heard any discussion on the national level with the FHWA or FTA or anyone else about best practices. Mr. Swiatek replied there has been some discussion about how to reach target demographic groups through Facebook and social media in a big

regional study. That is a promising practice, but Mr. Swiatek has not seen lower tech outreach and how to reach these communities.

**INFORMATION ITEMS:**

Mr. Robert Hicks asked if New Castle County's plan to make the Sheraton a shelter will change any existing plans that are active with respect to transportation. Ms. Trabelsi said she cannot speak to any of the transportation plans in the area. Mr. Sisson said there will be conversations between DART and New Castle County to talk about it. DART has a route that goes along Airport Road there through Route 37. There needs to be more dialog about that. There needs to be some conversations about the roads behind the Sheraton, but he does not know that there are any solutions yet. Mr. Sisson encouraged Mr. Hicks to feel free to share his thoughts.

**16. DeIDOT's Administrative Modification Request Letters**

**ADJOURNMENT:** Mr. Michael Spencer made a motion to adjourn, Ms. Andrea Trabelsi seconded the motion. The meeting adjourned at 11:52 a.m.

**ATTACHMENTS: (0)**