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## Will Montgomery County Fall Into the Zombie Highway Trap?

Posted By [Angie Schmitt](#) On August 9, 2013 @ 11:05 am In [Network Roundup](#) | [5 Comments](#)

There ought to be a statute of limitations on highway plans, because chances are, if a transportation project was conceived of at a time when rotary phones were the norm, it is just as outdated.

But these zombie highway projects from another era still hold a powerful allure over public officials, even in places where they really ought to know better.

Montgomery County, Maryland, has a reputation for being pretty forward thinking on transportation, but an undead highway is clawing its way out of the grave.

At [Greater Greater Washington](#) <sup>[2]</sup>, Kelly Blynn reports that local officials are under the spell of a 1960s vision called the Midcounty Highway Extended, or M83. Worst of all, they seem to be settling on the most costly intervention, fiscally and environmentally:

Last night, the Maryland Department of the Environment and the Army Corps of Engineers held a public hearing at Seneca Valley High School in Germantown regarding whether they should grant a joint permit to impact wetlands and streams in the highway's path. Dozens of highway opponents from the Transit Alternatives to the Midcounty Highway Extended (TAME) Coalition, many of whom have fought the project for years, turned out in force to testify against the project.

MCDOT originally evaluated 11 alternatives, and has since narrowed the field down to just 6, including a no-build option. Alternatives 4, 8, and 9 are the most controversial and involve the most new pavement and right-of-way through environmentally sensitive areas and existing neighborhoods. They also happen to be MCDOT's preferred alternatives. MCDOT estimates that Alternative 9 would cost \$350 million to build, though local activists say it could be double that.

Alternative 2, the cheapest option, would make improvements to Route 355 and use [transportation demand management \(TDM\)](#) <sup>[3]</sup> to give travelers other ways to get around, while alternative 5 involves widening it. MCDOT did not look at any transit alternatives. Their report contains a footnote saying that the community requested a transit alternative, but says that the [county's Bus Rapid Transit plan](#) <sup>[4]</sup> is still too nascent to be considered.

The county leaders will decide soon whether to include the money for this project in next year's budget. Blynn says, "It remains to be seen whether the County leaders will continue their progressive planning tradition by investing scarce local dollars in transit and smart growth, or whether they sink hundreds of millions into a 1960's-era sprawl highway."

Elsewhere on the Network today: [Mobilizing the Region](#) <sup>[5]</sup> sheds light on some of the perilous situations faced by pedestrians in south Jersey. [Cap'n Transit](#) <sup>[6]</sup> theorizes that two schools of thought on transit planning emerge from two difference conceptions of the city and suburbs. And [I Bike TO](#) <sup>[7]</sup> criticizes the Toronto police department's decision to stop tracking "dooring" crashes.



[1]

Residents protested a plan to build a 1960s-era highway project earlier this week in Montgomery County, Maryland. Image: [Greater Greater Washington](#) <sup>[2]</sup>

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[1] Image: <http://streetsblog.net/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/080930-1.jpg>

[2] Greater Greater Washington: <http://greatergreaterwashington.org/post/19790/will-montgomery-fund-a-new-sprawl-highway/>

[3] transportation demand management (TDM): <http://en.wikipedia.org>

**/wiki/Transportation\_demand\_management**

[4] county's Bus Rapid Transit plan: <http://greatergreaterwashington.org/post/16716/convert-existing-lanes-to-brt-say-montgomery-planners/>

[5] Mobilizing the Region: <http://blog.tstc.org/2013/08/08/the-trials-and-tribulations-of-walking-in-south-jersey/>

[6] Cap'n Transit: <http://capntransit.blogspot.com/search/label/Kotkin>

[7] I Bike TO: <http://www.ibiketo.ca/blog/counting-door-crashes-if-you-dont-count-it-you-cant-manage-it>

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