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SECRET PLAN WOULD WIDEN BELTWAY

Montgomery Bureaucrats Seek to Divert Pedestrian Money for Highway Project

A secret Beltway-widening plan promoted by the Montgomery County Dept. of Transportation has been uncovered in a [document obtained under the Freedom of Information Act](#). County officials seek to divert funding meant to improve pedestrian access to the Medical Center Metro station, and use it instead to build the first phase of a larger highway project that would add lanes to the Beltway. County officials refuse to release the plans for their project, pointing to a dubious claim of "confidential business information."

Over the last two years, a committee of public officials and neighborhood representatives has worked to solve the transportation problems caused by the relocation of Walter Reed Hospital to the Bethesda Naval Hospital campus. Part of the solution, clearly, is better transit, and in consultation with the committee WMATA [studied five ways to improve access](#) to the Metro from the Naval Hospital. The best of these options -- ACT believes -- is a new entrance to the Metro station on the Naval Hospital side of Rockville Pike, served by a bank of high speed elevators.

While these alternatives were before the public, Montgomery County transportation officials were secretly promoting an entirely different plan developed by a major highway contractor, Clark Construction. County officials insist on keeping this plan secret, making the [questionable assertion](#) that it is confidential business information. After the navy rejected Clark's plan once, the county came back a second time and presented a scaled-back version to state and Navy officials at a July 8, 2009 meeting.

Without any warning to the public or the advisory committee, the county in September applied for matching funds to build a four-lane automobile underpass beneath Rockville Pike with the money designated for Metro access. When pressed, [MCDOT explained](#) that the tunnel was part of Clark's July 8 plan. The county still [refuses to release any specifics](#) of the plan. MCDOT's justification for diverting transit funding to road-building is that the plan is not a highway but an innovative "multimodal transportation facility" that will benefit pedestrians -- because there is a sidewalk next to the road.

The specifics of the plan remain secret, but a FOIA request from ACT to the Navy has now unmasked MCDOT's objectives. The attached [letter](#) from the Navy to Clark about the July 8 meeting has the subject line "355 & 270/495 Roadway Designs." This reveals that Clark's full plan includes roadway construction along the Beltway, adding lanes (at a minimum) along [the two-mile stretch between I-270 and the Bethesda Naval campus](#).

The county has called a [public meeting](#) on Tuesday, Jan. 19 at 6:30 pm to discuss the project. The meeting will be held at the Bethesda Chevy Chase Regional Services Center, 4805 Edgemoor Lane, Bethesda, one block from the Bethesda Metro.

"The public has been carjacked by rogue [Robert Moses](#) wannabes in the Department of Transportation who are left over from the previous Duncan administration." said Richard Hoyer, chair of ACT's pedestrian and bicycle committee. "MCDOT's highway-building mania threatens destruction to neighborhoods along the Beltway. Transit money should be used for WMATA's plan to build a bank of high speed elevators on the Naval Hospital side of 355 to the Metrorail Station, which would make Metro trips to the Naval Hospital faster, improve the inadequate safety features of the Metro station, and encourage greater ridership."

"MCDOT's secrecy is an insult to the taxpaying public," added ACT president Ben Ross. "The plans must be made public -- all of them -- without delay. Backroom deals with contractors have no place in Montgomery County."

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