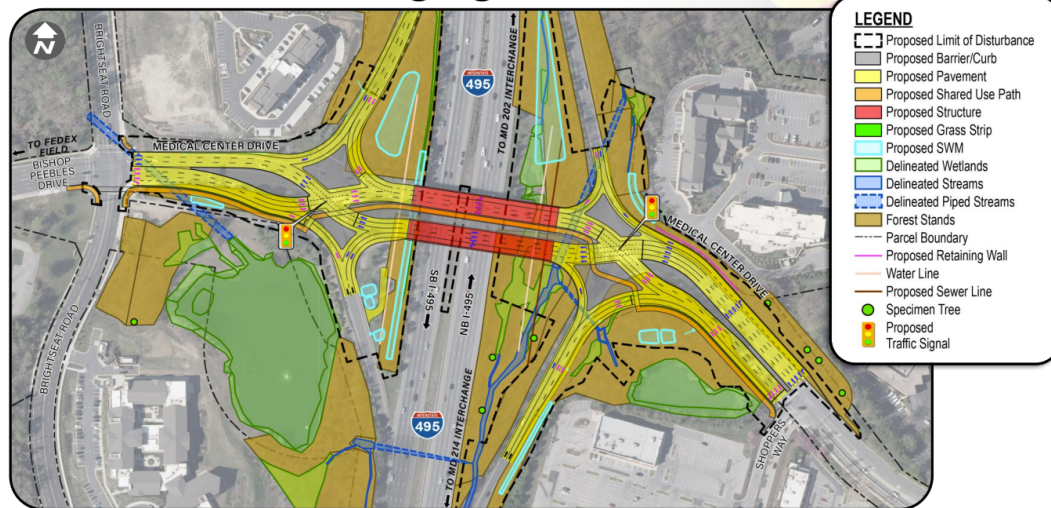


FACT SHEET

We can't save Downtown Largo by destroying it: Rethink the I-495/Medical Center Drive interchange project

Alternative 3 – Diverging Diamond



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Virtual Public Meeting – 05/18/2023

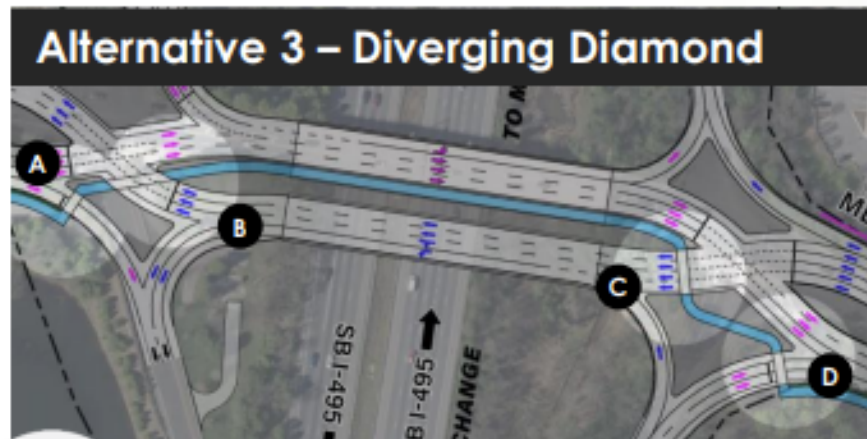
Pictured above: State Highway Administration's Alternative 3 - Diverging Diamond interchange design. Source: [MDSHA](https://www.mdsos.org/transportation/transportation-planning-and-design/interchange-design)

If we want a vibrant, walkable Downtown Largo, we must reject the Maryland State Highway Administration's (SHA) flawed I-495/Medical Center Drive (formerly Arena Drive) interchange project.

SHA's proposal for their computer modeling estimate of traffic 20 years from now would create a massive, complex, high-speed \$90+ million interchange. This proposal is completely at odds with a vibrant, walkable Downtown Largo. The proposal would virtually eliminate walk and bike access on the only I-495 crossing to Downtown Largo that even has a sidewalk or path. We can do so much better, urge officials to:

- Redistribute driving access to Largo to all three interchanges serving the area -- Landover Road (MD 202), Medical Center Drive and Central Ave (MD 214)
- Fund and expedite construction of the iconic bridge for the Central Avenue Connector Trail that would directly connect Largo to Morgan Boulevard Metro
- Add and enhance walk and bike access across all three I-495 crossings between Largo and Morgan Blvd Metro stations.

County Executive Alsobrooks has proposed a grand vision for Downtown Largo and the Blue Line corridor, urge her to invest in the transit-oriented community and multimodal connections it needs, not a massive third interchange that blocks walk and bicycle access.



Pictured: Alternative 3 - Diverging Diamond, A, B, C and D highlight the shared use path crossings. Source: [MDSHA](#) (Round 2 Design Assessments)

The proposed I-495/Medical Center interchange would increase the current number of travel lanes from five to either eight or eleven lanes, plus a shared use path on one side. People walking or biking would cross multiple lanes of high speed traffic entering and exiting the Capital Beltway. Consuming acres of land, a larger interchange would create a hot, miserable environment, and effectively cut off the only walk and bicycle access between the Largo and Morgan Boulevard Metro stations.

The project is not consistent with the County's vision to create vibrant walkable places around Metro stations, and a connected Blue line/Central Avenue Corridor to Morgan Boulevard Metro station and beyond. It would also set back the County's efforts to achieve Vision Zero traffic deaths and severe injuries on its roadways with more hazardous designs for those braving to walk or bicycle on this route. Plan 2035, the county's general land use plan, directs planners to expect more traffic congestion in vibrant, growing transit station areas where travel is to be by many modes - not only driving, but also riding the bus, Metro, walking and bicycling.

A Better Alternative

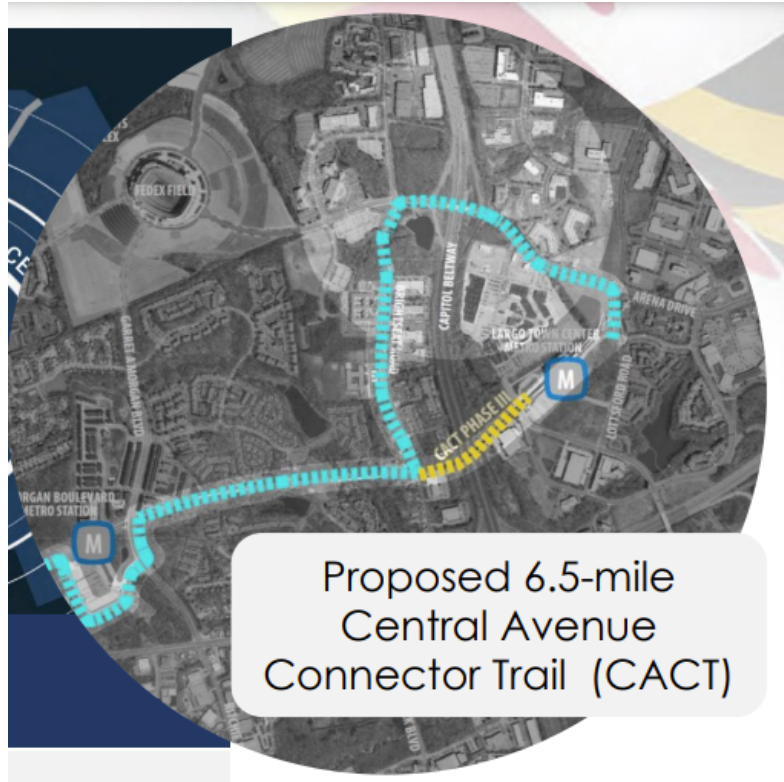
Downtown Largo is already served by three interchanges that cross the Capital Beltway -- at Central Avenue (MD 214) to the south, Landover Road (MD 202) to the north, and Medical Center Drive in the middle, providing options for drivers and dispersing vehicle traffic. Today, there are minimal to modest delays for drivers even during rush hour and on football game days.

At the same time, all three interchanges must be retrofitted with buffered sidewalks and protected bike paths. The Central Avenue and Landover Road interchanges currently have no sidewalks or bike paths. The Medical Center Drive crossing of the Beltway has a sidewalk on just one side.

Rather than greatly expanding vehicle access at Medical Center Drive and effectively cutting off walk and bicycle access across the Capital Beltway, we recommend dispersing vehicle trips among the three interchanges, along with adding enhanced walk and bicycle facilities to each interchange, and accelerating funding and construction of the Central Avenue Connector Trail and “iconic” bridge directly connecting Downtown Largo to Morgan Boulevard Metro stations. This connector trail and bridge project is part of County Executive Alsobrooks’ Blue Line Corridor Initiative for economic development and livability. This alternative could be accomplished for a fraction of the \$90+ million considered for the interchange options.



Caption: County Executive Alsobrooks [Economic Development strategy](#) calls for an “Iconic Bridge Connecting Largo and Morgan Boulevard” but this is considered Phase III, and funding for the facility has not been identified.



Caption: this image of two routes of the Central Avenue Connector Trail - blue line crosses the Beltway on Medical Center Drive between Downtown Largo, the stadium, and Morgan Boulevard Metro station. The Yellow line (labeled CACT Phase III) shows a direct route across the Beltway from Largo to Morgan Boulevard Metro stations. Source: [MDSHA](#)

Flawed goals and flawed traffic models lead to wide roads and undermine communities

According to the State Highway Administration, “the goals of the project are to address existing congestion and accommodate increasing traffic volumes associated with future growth, as well as to improve pedestrian and bicycle connectivity.” But this is an unduly narrow goal focused overwhelmingly on moving cars and excludes the transit-oriented economic development goals of the county. It’s also based on flawed traffic models.

SHA states that their traffic models predict that in 20 years (in 2045), at the two points of the intersection where vehicles are getting on and off the Beltway, the delay will fall to a level service F -- or stop and go traffic with potentially minutes of delay for drivers. We’ve worked with traffic modelers who note that the DC regional model overpredicts future car traffic volumes to levels that would not realistically happen, and officials then overbuild streets and intersections for these future predicted driving trips. The models do not adequately account for transit-oriented communities, and increased walking, biking, and transit use.

As a result, roads are designed to be overly-wide, with excess capacity based on future forecast traffic volumes, assuming everyone continues to drive more and more. Designing only for projected vehicle travel becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. The wider and faster the road, the

more driving it attracts (see CSG's [fact sheet on induced demand](#)) and the less inviting it is for people walking, biking or taking the bus. The higher speeds generated by wider roads also make them less safe for all road users, including drivers.

This approach is inconsistent with Plan 2035 and the County's planning department's transportation review standards which seek to create more walkable streets around mixed use transit centers. It also undermines the County's economic development objectives to create competitive and vibrant walkable places to attract the next generation workforce and new economy businesses.

Conclusion

Given the special importance of Downtown Largo as the anchor of a transit-oriented economic development strategy for the Blue Line Metro corridor, it's particularly important to revise the goals and design of this project. Rather than create a new barrier to walk/bike access to Downtown Largo so that it's virtually impossible to move on foot or bicycle between Largo and the stadium area and Morgan Boulevard Metro, we must create safer, people-friendly access that fosters sustainable and competitive, transit-oriented economic development.

Take action:

Tell County Executive Angela Alsobrooks that the giant interchange will undermine transit-oriented economic development at Downtown Largo and the Blue Line Corridor. Ask her to:

- Reject the massive interchange proposal and revise the County's request to the state that made the costly interchange a top funding priority.
- Add enhanced walk and bicycle access across all interchanges providing access to Downtown Largo at Medical Center Drive, MD 202 and MD 214;
- Reallocate funds to build the Central Ave. Connector Trail bridge from Downtown Largo to Morgan Boulevard (labeled "Phase III" shown in yellow);
- Develop and deploy a traffic management approach that distributes vehicle trips to all three of the interchanges that serve Downtown Largo and the stadium.

Urge Gov. Wes Moore and the Maryland Department of Transportation to support the County's new direction for access to a thriving, transit-oriented, walkable Downtown Largo, the stadium, and the Blue Line Corridor.