



U.S. Department  
of Transportation  
**Federal Highway  
Administration**

Region 3  
Maryland Division

The Rotunda  
Suite 220  
711 West 40th Street  
Baltimore, Maryland 21211-2187

IN REPLY REFER TO:

November 7, 1997

Contract No. M 971-152-370 #3  
Montgomery and Prince Georges Counties

Mr. Parker F. Williams  
State Highway Administrator  
Maryland State Highway Administration  
707 North Calvert Street  
Baltimore, Maryland 21202

Dear Mr. Williams: *Parker*

I am writing this letter in response to actions taken on the proposed intercounty connector project in Montgomery and Prince Georges Counties by the Maryland State Highway Administration (SHA), Montgomery County Council and Montgomery County Planning Board and to letters recently written by various state and local officials including Montgomery County Council President Marilyn Praisner, Prince Georges County Executive Wayne Curry and Maryland State Senator Christopher McCabe. The purpose of this letter is twofold. First, as the lead Federal agency for this project, it is the Federal Highway Administration's (FHWA) responsibility to ensure that the project development process continues to provide for objective consideration of all reasonable alternatives and the no-build alternative. Second, based upon our understanding of the social, economic and natural environmental consequences of the Master Plan Alternative (MPA) through the Northwest Branch and Paint Branch Stream Valley Parks, we wish to convey our support of your decision to discontinue studies on this alignment.

Based upon the recognized regional need for this proposed project and varied recommendations from state and local officials and the public, we consider it imperative that SHA continue the project development and decision-making processes for the project. FHWA is committed to working with the SHA and the Federal, state and local agencies to complete the steps needed to make a timely decision on this project, including:

- ◆ Objective study of all reasonable alternatives and the no build alternative;
- ◆ Full disclosure of the environmental consequences of the alternatives as well as their ability to meet the identified need for the project;
- ◆ Examination and application of measures to avoid or reduce adverse impacts; and
- ◆ Continued public participation in the studies and the decision-making process.

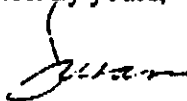
With respect to the evaluation of the MPA, FHWA has independently reviewed the information presented in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement/Section 4(f) Evaluation, supporting reports and the public and agency comments received to date on the project. The full justification

for our decision will be thoroughly documented in subsequent environmental documentation; however, based on the analyses to date, we fully support your decision to eliminate the portion of the MPA thru Northwest Branch and Paint Branch Parks from further study at this time. In making this decision on whether or not portions of the MPA could be eliminated from further study, FHWA considered the quantity and quality of social, economic and environmental impacts associated with the MPA through the Northwest Branch and Paint Branch Stream Valley Parks; whether mitigation options have been sufficiently explored; the ability of other agencies to permit the MPA under their regulations; and the existence of one or more alternatives that meets the purpose and need for the project with less impacts than the MPA.

Finally, FHWA is very conscious of numerous concerns raised by agencies, local officials and the public which remain unresolved and need to be investigated. These include concerns raised by the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission on the potential for impacts to the Patuxent River Watershed and the Patuxent Reservoir; secondary and cumulative impacts; consistency with master plans and community expectations; property values; impacts on Rock Creek Park; etc. Study and consideration of these issues needs to continue and the results should be a part of the future decision-making process. It is our collective role and responsibility to study and balance the social, economic and environmental impacts, transportation needs and the engineering design considerations.

We commend SHA's project development and documentation efforts to date and believe your efforts have resulted in informed, environmentally sound decision-making thus far on this project. FHWA strongly believes that it is in the public's best interest to continue project development and the decision-making process, and we encourage you to strive for a timely decision on this project. Again, FHWA is committed to working with you on the ICC project and should you have any questions, please call me at (410) 962-4440.

Sincerely yours,



Susan J. Binder  
Division Administrator

cc: Mr. David Winstead, Maryland Secretary of Transportation  
Mr. Douglas Duncan, Montgomery County Executive  
Mr. Wayne Curry, Prince Georges County Executive  
Ms. Marilyn J. Praisner, Montgomery County Council President  
Mr. William Hussmann, Chair, Montgomery County Planning Board  
Mr. Roy Denmark, EPA  
Mr. John Wolflin, USFWS  
Mr. Paul Wetlauffer, U.S. Army COE  
Mr. John Parsons, NPS