

# Quarterly newsletter of the Wilmington Area Planning Council **TRANSPORTER**

**WILMAPCO**

## I-95 Construction Traffic Impacts to Begin February 2021

**I**t's almost here! Construction work on I-95, from the I-495 split to U.S. 202 (Concord Pike), is set to begin in February 2021.

This three-year project — with two years of significant lane impacts — is necessary to extend the life of the roadway for another 30 years and ensure the more than 50-year-old road and bridges through the city are as safe as possible.

This complicated construction work cannot simply be done during off-peak hours or without long-term lane closures and short-term ramp closures. Delaying the project will result in more costly and traffic-disrupting repairs in the future. I-95 will remain open during the project and access into and out of the city will always be maintained. However, there will be periodic ramp closures and a



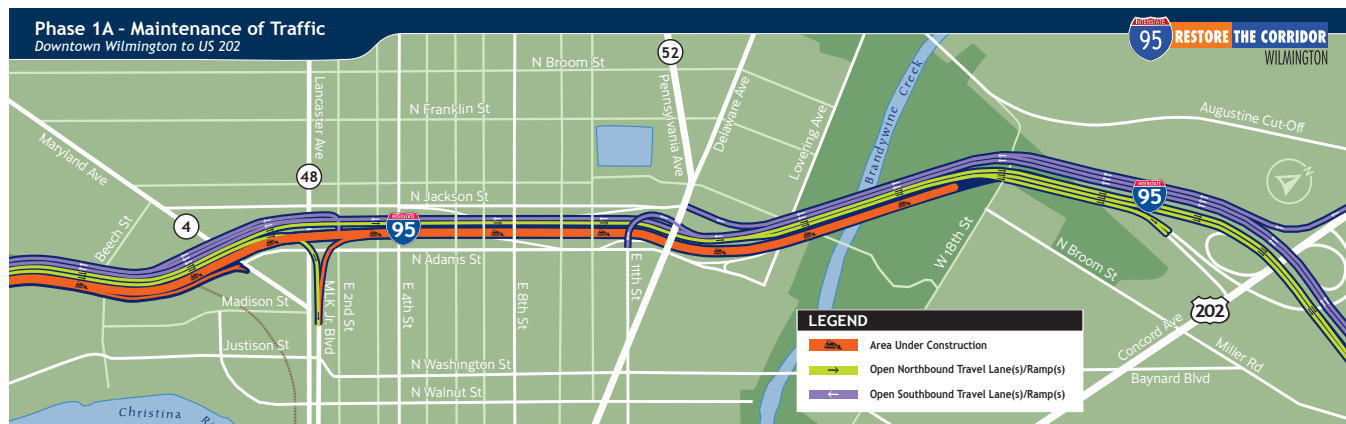
reduced number of travel lanes available.

The construction will be done in multiple phases, the first starting in February 2021. This phase includes closing all lanes of northbound I-95 and shifting both northbound and southbound traffic to the current

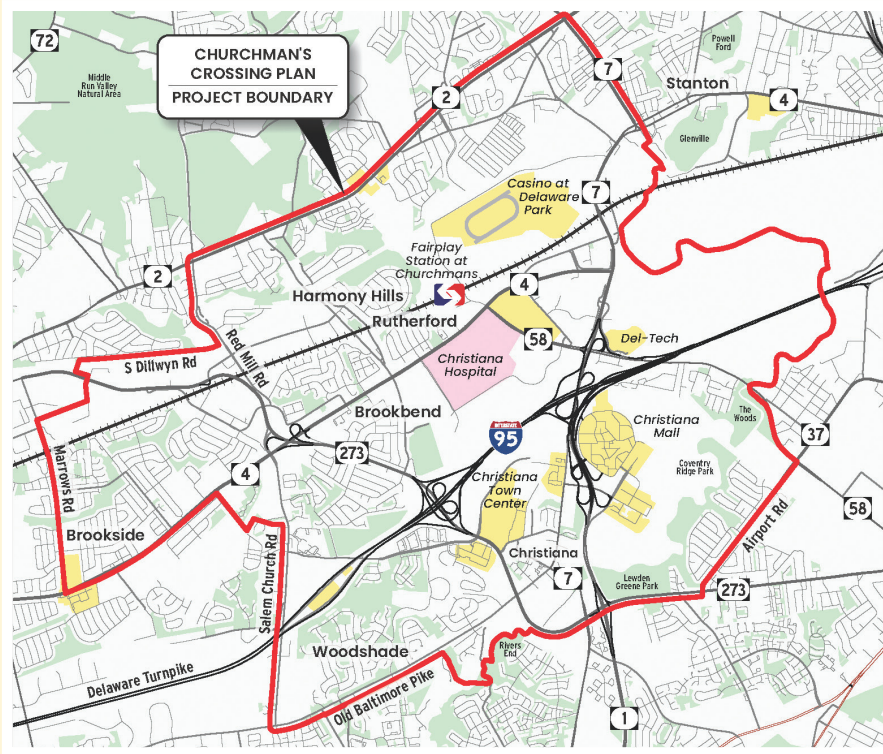
southbound lanes, with a lane reduction in both directions. Access into and out of the city will be maintained.

This article was provided by RideShare Delaware and DelDOT.

To learn more, please visit [www.restorethecorridor.com](http://www.restorethecorridor.com).



# Churchman's Crossing Plan Gets an Update



evening peak travel periods. There has also been a rise in auto crashes, and six of the intersections in the study area are ranked among the top 20 least safe statewide.

An objective of this new planning effort is to develop a comprehensive evaluation of the recommendations of the previous plan. The new plan will also develop revised short- and long-term (20 years) transportation and land use solutions and policies that match the changing land use and transportation landscape. To effectively plan for the future, the project team will conduct extensive outreach with stakeholders and the community. This will be accomplished through a facilitated outreach process that will include several public meetings and interactive workshops. Consensus building and establishment of support for the plan will be key elements in this process.

There are many factors to be considered when planning 20 years into the future for an area as important to New Castle County as Churchman's Crossing, and we can't do it without you.

To learn more about this project, or to sign up for updates and alerts of opportunities to participate and influence the outcome, please visit [www.wilmapco.org/churchmans](http://www.wilmapco.org/churchmans).

The 1997 Churchman's Crossing Transportation and Land Use Plan — a joint effort undertaken by WILMAPCO, the Delaware Department of Transportation (DelDOT), and New Castle County — sought to develop a vision for this economically important area.

Sixty-one study recommendations were made by the 1997 plan, such as:

- expanding transit service and improving transit infrastructure;
- launching numerous intersection and bicycle and pedestrian improvements; and
- implementing traffic management and new roadway connections.

Since then, 25 of these projects have been implemented, including the opening of the Fairplay Train Station to SEPTA service in 2000.

There have been many changes

to the residential and commercial development patterns in Churchman's Crossing, altering the landscape of the area in ways that were not anticipated by the 1997 plan. These changes include expansions at the Christiana Hospital, Delaware Park & Casino, J.P. Morgan Chase & Co., and numerous changes at the Christiana Mall. As a result, there is a need to evaluate the current conditions and to project future growth and transportation needs for this area, which serves as a significant employment center for New Castle County, with approximately 35,000 jobs.

This new growth has created traffic congestion, despite the projects that have been completed. Even with the expansion of the pedestrian network, improvements to the bus system, and the addition of SEPTA train service, the area continues to be auto-centric. There is heavy traffic during the morning and



# The Newport Transportation Study: Making Newport Safer, More Walkable

In 2011, the Town of Newport, Delaware approached WILMAPCO with an interest in re-opening the Newport Train Station for commuter rail service. The town wants to promote economic growth in a walkable, transit-oriented environment and recognized the need for passenger rail service to feed this growth.

DelDOT, the Delaware Transit Corporation (DTC), and WILMAPCO partnered with the town to determine the feasibility of this project via the Newport Train Station Feasibility Study, which was completed in June 2013.

Development of the Newport Train Station has not yet commenced, and the town has continued to work with DelDOT, DTC, and state legislators to advance the project while more recent development projects continue to move the town toward its goal. A 400,000-square-foot mixed-use development with residential, retail, and dining has been proposed for the downtown area. The former General Motors Boxwood Assembly Plant, located just over a mile from the downtown, is planned for redevelopment as a regional logistics center providing 2,200 new jobs. A new riverfront trail is being planned to connect the town to the Jack Markell Trail along the Christina River. With these plans underway, the Town of Newport requested that DelDOT, DTC, and WILMAPCO undertake a new transportation study to prepare for the impacts that these developments will bring and to develop a safer environment for those walking, biking, taking public transit, and driving in the area.

The first step for the study was

to hold a Community Visioning Workshop on January 27, 2020. A short presentation to describe the study was followed by small group breakout sessions that allowed the attendees to voice their opinions on strengths and weaknesses of the study area, specific concerns for different transportation modes, and specific improvements needed to create a safer transportation network for the future that is envisioned by the community.

The project team then developed a series of 20 recommended transportation improvement projects. These projects include intersection and sidewalk improvements to Downtown Newport, the proposed train station, and Christina Riverfront via a new trail connection to the Jack Markell Trail. Recommendations also include pedestrian improvements along Boxwood Road as well as sidewalk and crosswalk improvements for Latimer Place, Middleboro Road, and Banning Park, among many others.

Another focus of the study is consideration of bus transit needs. New connections between Downtown Newport, the proposed train station, and the Prices Corner Park & Ride are proposed, as well

as transit stop improvements in the area. These recommendations have been proposed for inclusion in future service-change and bus-stop-improvement programs. When matched with proposed pedestrian and bicycle improvements, this will prepare Newport (and the surrounding area) to be a safer and more walkable community with better connections to the proposed train station when it opens.

The proposed recommendations were presented to the public during a Virtual Public Workshop held on September 30. After being reviewed by the Project Management Committee and Advisory Committee, they were presented at a final Virtual Public Workshop that was held on December 16. Based on feedback provided by the Advisory Committee and public meetings, the study boundaries were expanded to include recommendations for the greater Newport area. Public comments on the study were accepted through January 11 and WILMAPCO's Council adopted the study on January 14.

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To review proposed projects, please visit [www.wilmapco.org/newport-transportation-plan](http://www.wilmapco.org/newport-transportation-plan).



# WILMAPCO Identifies Urban Technology Deserts

Many places lack reliable access to computer and internet (broadband) technology. This is almost always framed as an issue impacting rural communities, but such places can be found in urban areas too.

Even in cases where solid broadband infrastructure exists, population characteristics — such as concentrated poverty and/or places with clusters of residents over 65 years old — can generate what we term as “urban technology deserts.”

These tech deserts produce a spatial digital divide across neighborhoods. Consider participation results from the 2020 Census. In Wilmington’s Lower East Side (a tech desert where only one in three households has internet access), fewer than half (46%) of those self-responding to the census did so via internet. In Wilmington’s more affluent western neighborhoods, by contrast, nearly everyone (93%) did.

WILMAPCO recently developed a methodology for identifying tech deserts, gathered statistics about them, and considered their implications to public outreach processes. As shown in the map to the right, we tagged census tracts as tech deserts if they had more than double the regional average of households with no access to a computer (including smartphone) and/or household internet access.

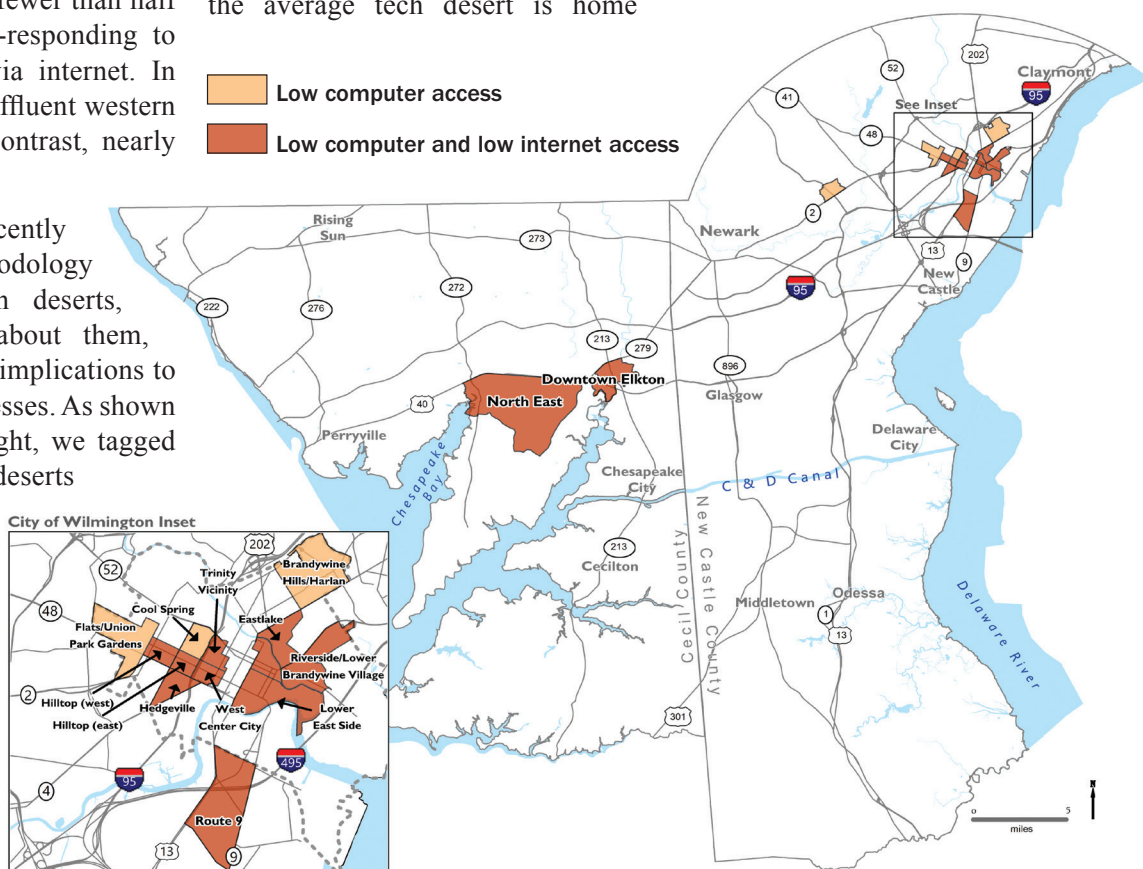
In the average tech desert, about four in 10 households lack internet (broadband) access and a quarter have no computer (including a smartphone). A quarter live in poverty, and tech deserts are, generally, minority-majority places. Non-Hispanic Blacks make up over half of the 53,000 tech desert residents.

According to national data, older age and low household income are among the key factors correlated with low technology adoption among U.S. adults. We found that the presence of poverty clusters was a likely key driver in producing all but two of the WILMAPCO region’s tech deserts. Apart from two lower-poverty-level tech deserts, where senior clusters were the likely driver, the average tech desert is home

to fewer seniors than the regional average (12% vs. 15%).

There has been a hard shift to virtual-only activities during the pandemic. While many have acclimated to this shift, others have struggled. If access gaps persist, disparities in access to education, public input opportunities, and more may widen existing economic and racial inequities. With all this in mind, WILMAPCO will be supplementing its high-tech public engagement strategies with low-tech strategies both for regional plans and for local area plans within tech deserts.

To view a copy of the Urban Technology Desert Data Report, please visit [www.wilmapco.org/data-reports](http://www.wilmapco.org/data-reports).





# WILMAPCO Receives Federal Grant to Conduct Better Public Outreach

This year, WILMAPCO has updated its Public Participation Plan (PPP), which serves as a guide for residents in the region to navigate the public involvement and transportation planning process.

The 2020 PPP now includes recommendations from our 2019 Transportation Justice Report, which identified racial and socioeconomic inequities in our region's transportation system. Examples include:

- Neighborhoods with high concentrations of African American residents were found to be chronically underfunded with transportation dollars and experience increased traffic and higher pedestrian crash rates; and
- Low-income communities are much less likely to be aware of WILMAPCO, and thus participate in the planning process.

To begin to correct the inequities we uncovered, WILMAPCO is seeking to enhance its public outreach to communities that experience inequity in the transportation planning process. As an initial step in developing effective public outreach programs sensitive to the unique needs of those in the communities we serve, WILMAPCO has partnered with the University of Delaware, Dover/Kent Metropolitan Planning Organization, and the Delaware Chapter of the American Planning Association (APA) to arrange a social justice public outreach training. WILMAPCO's member agencies, including DelDOT, the Maryland Department of Transportation, New Castle and Cecil Counties, and state and local planning agency staff will also be invited to



*City of Wilmington Councilwoman Rysheema Dixon being interviewed for a new WILMAPCO video.*

participate in the week-long training, to be held this spring.

WILMAPCO is also seeking to enhance its public outreach by creating a series of videos explaining the transportation planning process and local area master-plan recommendations. The video series will have the potential to reach a broad audience and attract those who would not otherwise participate in the planning process. The series of five videos will highlight our Transportation Improvement Program, Regional Transportation

Plan, and local area master plans. It will also help to translate complex concepts into a format that is easy for viewers to understand.

To fund both of these outreach efforts, WILMAPCO has received a grant from the Federal Highway Administration's State Transportation Innovation Council (STIC) Incentive Program.

To learn more about the WILMAPCO's public outreach process, please visit [www.wilmapco.org/public-outreach](http://www.wilmapco.org/public-outreach).

## IMPORTANT News!

WILMAPCO will be converting its printed newsletter to a digital version, starting with the **Summer 2021** issue coming out in July.

**MAKE SURE WE HAVE YOUR EMAIL,** so we can keep providing you with critical planning information from WILMAPCO.

Send your email to Dawn Voss at [dvoss@wilmapco.org](mailto:dvoss@wilmapco.org) or call Dawn at (302) 737-6205, ext. 110.

WILMAPCO will continue to mail printed copies upon request. Please call or email Dawn Voss to confirm your request for a printed copy.

**Don't be left out of the planning process.**

# Pace of Improvement Project for Key Wilmington Intersection Slows Amid Pandemic

Before the COVID-19 pandemic drastically reduced traffic and eliminated many morning commutes into the City of Wilmington, the intersection of Maryland Avenue and Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard had heavy traffic and created major safety problems for drivers and pedestrians.

Frequent congestion of the intersection during the morning commute often caused backups onto the Maryland Avenue I-95 exit ramp, extending into the highway travel lanes. DART's Operations and Maintenance Center is also located in this area, on Monroe Street, with bus parking at four adjacent lots. DART buses enter the center daily, as all bus maintenance is performed on this site and all bus routes that serve Wilmington and northern New Castle County start and end here.

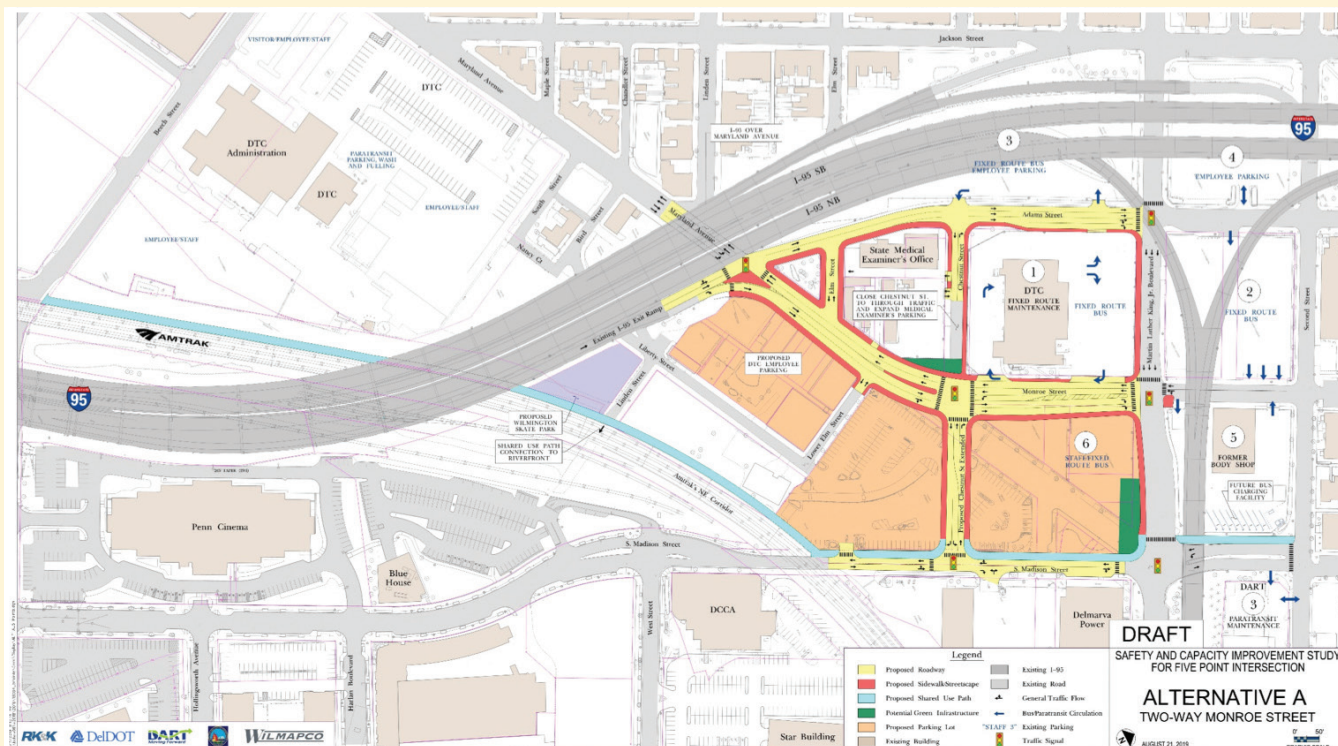
More than 10 years ago, the Wilmington Initiatives Partners (City of Wilmington, DelDOT, DTC, and WILMAPCO) began developing concepts to improve access to Wilmington's Central Business District from the I-95 exit ramp at Maryland Avenue. The existing intersection is a conversion of five roadway segments and a key gateway into Wilmington's Riverfront area.

In 2018, WILMAPCO led another study that picked up where previous studies left off in developing new solutions. The first tasks included collecting traffic data and assessing street conditions, and then reviewing previous recommendations. After these tasks were completed, the project team moved forward with a new set of four alternatives to improve the street grid and traffic, while also making the area more

bicycle and pedestrian friendly. After focus groups and public meetings in spring 2019, a matrix of criteria was developed to compare and analyze alternatives. The analysis and comments from stakeholders and the public led to an alternative being chosen as the preferred concept, with an estimated cost of \$7.6 million.

A second phase of the study was funded through WILMAPCO to consider potential structured parking solutions that could maintain DART's operations after the new roadways are constructed. This phase of the study included a design and analysis to develop a parking garage that would create a "bridge" over public streets to allow DART buses to access their parking areas and the new DART Operations and Maintenance Center.

Numerous meetings were held with DART's management to fine-tune





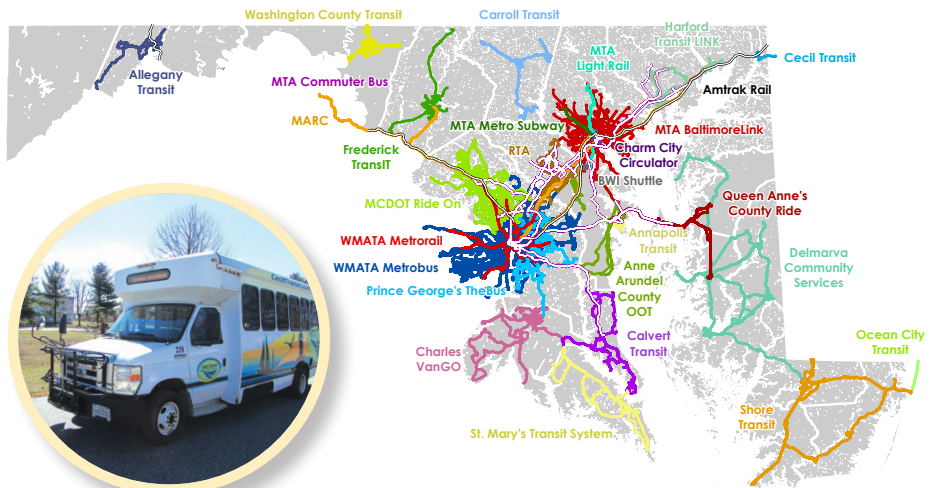
# Maryland Statewide Transit Plan to Provide Coordinated Vision of Transit Future

the work and develop an option that did not include a costly parking garage. The estimated range of options for costs was \$45.9 million (no garage) to \$99.7 million (with garage). While having a parking garage was seen as the best operational solution, the cost is prohibitive. Though the non-garage option could be a functional solution, DART is not yet able to make the financial commitment to replace the existing operations center, which would be necessary for any option chosen.

Traffic numbers have not yet returned to normal levels, and the immediate need for this project has been reduced. I-95 is also undergoing a major rehabilitation project beginning in February 2021 (see page 1 of this newsletter) and lasting at least two years, with significant lane reductions planned. This will further alter commuting patterns in this area, so we may not see a return to the previous congestion levels until late in 2023.

Based on these impacts, the Wilmington Initiatives Partners agreed that this project should not move forward until the results of these changes can be assessed. The project team will move forward to complete the current phase of the study and distribute a draft final report for public review.

To learn more and review alternatives evaluated, please visit [www.wilmapco.org/maryland-monroe-mlk](http://www.wilmapco.org/maryland-monroe-mlk).



The Maryland Department of Transportation Maryland Transit Administration (MDOT MTA) is developing a new Statewide Transit Plan (STP). The STP will provide a 50-year vision of coordinated interstate, inter-regional, and inter-city transit in Maryland, building from existing state, regional, and local plans.

Since June, MDOT MTA has been gathering input from a broad range of partners, including other state agencies, local and regional governments, public and private transit providers, business and non-governmental organizations, and the public. A public survey was available this past fall, and public involvement will continue throughout the development plan.

A draft of the STP will be available for public comment in the summer of 2021, and a final plan will be published in the fall. This plan will define public transportation goals and strategies for Maryland's rural, suburban, and urban regions, with a vision toward increasingly coordinated, equitable, and innovative mobility. The 50-year vision will create a framework of coordinated transit and a dignified customer experience through the following plan elements:

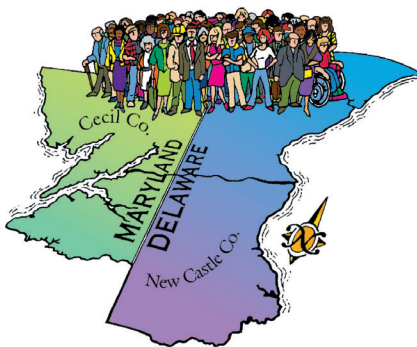
- Describing the availability and service levels of public and private transit options;
- Addressing relationships between transit, land use, and economic opportunity;
- Conveying the benefits of public transportation;
- Identifying transit-supportive technology, policy, and partnerships; and
- Defining desired performance and customer experience outcomes;
- Creating an implementation plan supported by interagency and public input.

For more information, or to request a briefing, go to [mta.maryland.gov/statewide-plan](http://mta.maryland.gov/statewide-plan) or e-mail the project team at [mtastp@mta.maryland.gov](mailto:mtastp@mta.maryland.gov).

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