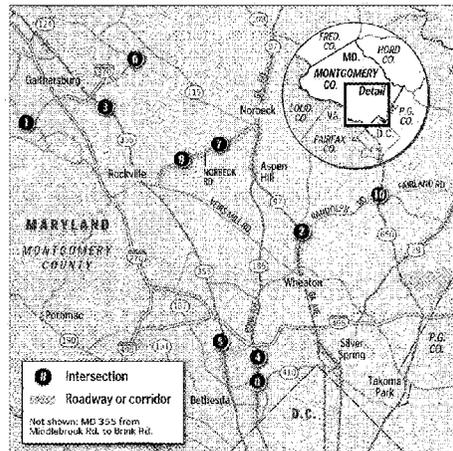


High-Traffic Areas in Montgomery

The Montgomery County Planning Board has released a report showing the most congested intersections, roadways and corridors in the county. Here are the 10 most congested intersections, ranked from the most to least congested.



- | | |
|--|---|
| 1 Great Seneca Highway (MD 119) at Muddy Branch Road | 6 Shady Grove Road at Midcounty Highway |
| 2 Georgia Avenue (MD 97) at Randolph Road | 7 Norbeck Road (MD 28) at Bel Pre Road |
| 3 Frederick Road (MD 355) at King Farm Boulevard | 8 Connecticut Avenue (MD 185) at East-West Highway (MD 410) |
| 4 Connecticut Avenue (MD 185) at Jones Bridge Road | 9 Norbeck Road (MD 28) at Avery Road |
| 5 Rockville Pike (MD 355) at West Cedar Lane | 10 New Hampshire Avenue (MD 650) at Randolph Road |

SOURCE: Montgomery Co. Planning Board

BY LARI KAPRIS AND N.Y. CARREIRA — THE WASHINGTON POST

Montgomery Traffic Fixes Are Ineffective, Study Says

By MIRANDA S. SPIVACK
Washington Post Staff Writer

If you drive on Great Seneca Highway near Muddy Branch Road in Gaithersburg, you have the dubious distinction of passing through Montgomery County's most clogged intersection. That is, if you can clear the light anytime soon.

No. 2 on the list is Georgia Avenue at Randolph Road, which joins the top-10 most crowded county intersections for the first time, according to a new report by county planners. No. 3 is Route 355 at King Farm Boulevard, which moved up

from eighth worst.

In fact, traffic congestion is so bad in some parts of Montgomery that the county's new rules to control it may already be obsolete, the report suggests.

Congestion is "at undesirable levels in many areas of the county," the report said. The Montgomery planning board is slated to discuss the findings tomorrow.

While the mid-county is clearly affected, some of the most severe jams are in the county's southern tier, where more development is planned and thou-

CONT.

Little Improvement Seen in Montgomery County Traffic Congestion

sands of new commuters will be heading for the expanded National Naval Medical Center in Bethesda in a few years. And although there are plans to blunt the impact of newcomers, the report suggests that more may be needed. Of the 422 intersections that were tested, 59 were considered failing, the report said.

Rockville Pike (Route 355) from downtown Bethesda to West Cedar Lane, which passes by the naval medical center and the campus of the National Institutes of Health, is also on the troubled list, as is Georgia Avenue from downtown Silver Spring to the Beltway.

Other problem areas are Norbeck Road (Route 28) from just north of Rockville Pike to Georgia Avenue, and Connecticut Avenue (Route 185) from Friendship Heights at the District line to the Beltway.

"One of the points we are trying to drive home is that it's not necessarily getting worse, but traffic is not significantly improving. We need to start to focus on making the system better," said Ronald Vaughn, who headed the study for the planning agency. The report proposes several possible fixes, from widening intersections to adding rapid buses with dedicated lanes to allow them to bypass traffic.

Across the county, one of seven intersections, or 14 percent, is more congested than recently enacted rules allow, the report said. The new tougher standards stem from the new growth policy, which a sharply divided county council spent almost all of last year trying to rework. The goal was to find a way to allow growth while ensuring that more development does not lead to more gridlock on the roads and more crowding in public

schools.

Despite its somewhat gloomy outlook, the report also contains at least a glimmer of hope for drivers and public transit users trying to navigate clogged streets. The report said that in some places, efforts to limit congestion are working. In others, help is on the way.

"Congestion levels were reduced as a result of improvements at those intersections," Vaughn said. "Where we have resources to make improvements, they are working."

Improvements, which have included changing the timing of lights and adding new lanes, resulted in better traffic flow on Georgia Avenue (MD 87) at Forest Glen Road and on Frederick Road (Route 355) at Ridge Road (Route 27), among others.

Some of the report data are based on projections about how new projects will

improve local traffic. The study used a model that included the intercounty connector, which is under construction, but did not include the proposed Purple Line transit route that would connect Bethesda and Silver Spring. The planners looked at projects that are in the county's capital budget through the 2012 fiscal year, which does not include the Purple Line, Vaughn said.

County Council member Nancy Floreen (D-At Large), who chairs the transportation committee, said the report is a useful tool for officials "to tell us where we should be focusing our resources. In most years we have made the standards tighter, so you flunk the test more frequently."

She said some residents expect that there will be smoothly flowing traffic on local roads. But that's not realistic, she said.

"Is it rational to expect that in an urban environment in a jurisdiction next to the center of the free world?" she asked.

Council member Marc Elrich (D-At Large), who has questioned the planning staff's methods of calculating traffic flow and delays, said other jurisdictions put more emphasis on calculating waiting time and backups than Montgomery does. That skews the results by understating how heavy traffic actually is, he said.

"Things are going to get worse before they get better. We have all this approved development that is going to get built under the old growth policy." He said that there are about 28,000 housing units that will be built under the old rules, which allowed more traffic and required less effort by developers and the county to reduce it.

"This is a real, real disaster," he said.