FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

• What are the options under consideration for Rivers Edge Road Intersection?

The Maryland State Highway Administration (SHA) is currently evaluating four different alternatives at the intersection of US 29 and Rivers Edge Road. The design alternatives are at grade intersection and they include:

Option 1 – No Build

Option 2 – Maintain the existing signalized “T” intersection, but restrict motorists heading northbound on US 29 from crossing over to the exit to MD 32 eastbound. Drivers whose destination is MD 32 eastbound would need to go south on US 29 to the Johns Hopkins Road Interchange; make a left and then use the loop ramp to get back onto US 29 northbound.

Option 3 – Modify the signalized intersection to left-in only. Rivers Edge Road Entrance would be right-in, right-out only. Drivers whose destination is US 29 northbound would need to go south on US 29 to the Johns Hopkins Road Interchange; make a left and then use the loop ramp to get back onto US 29 northbound.

Option 4 – Eliminate the signal and making Rivers Edge Road right-in/right-out only. Drivers from the Rivers Edge Road communities wishing to go north on US 29 would need to use the Johns Hopkins Road interchange. Drivers heading northbound on US 29 and want to enter Rivers Edge Road would need to use the MD 32 interchange.

• Has SHA identified funding for construction of this project?

No, this project is currently funded only for design. However, it was noted that this project is a priority for Howard County, and the fact that it is funded for design indicates that the State and County both consider this an important project, as few projects are being funded now based on reduced transportation revenues.

• Will SHA only purchase property for this project from willing sellers?

SHA will make every effort to minimize impacts to personal property and generally prefers to acquire property needed for a project from willing sellers. However, when private property is absolutely necessary for construction of a project and the property owner is not willing to sell, there is a legal process that SHA can follow to acquire the
property through eminent domain, which requires that the property owner be paid fair market value and certain damages to the remainder of the land. Both federal and Maryland relocation assistance programs may also provide for certain costs associated with moving and finding a new home where residents must be totally displaced as a result of the right-of-way acquisition.

- **Is there a specific distance away from a house where the impacts of the road construction would warrant taking the entire property?**

  Whether the proximity of impacts to a house would warrant taking the entire house depends both on the types of impacts and the surrounding environment. For example, it is common in urban settings for houses to be very close to roads with significant traffic volumes. This same situation may not be acceptable in a more suburban or rural location. In any case, SHA strives to avoid impacting any residences, and where it is unavoidable, every effort is made to minimize those impacts.

- **What project information will be available on the SHA web site?**

  The approved FONSI with the original alignment is posted on the SHA website. Studies and designs that are in development, are generally not posted as this is an iterative and ongoing process. Generally SHA does not post pre-decisional studies, but uses the web site to provide information to the public as decisions are reached and to provide updates regarding the progress of the project.

- **Is there a definitive date that SHA will reach a decision regarding the Old Columbia Road Access?**

  Not at this time. Because this project is funded for design, SHA will need to reach a decision sooner rather than later, in order for the design to progress. Before any decision is reached, however, SHA will ensure that all options and impacts have been thoroughly evaluated, and that all potentially impacted communities and individuals have had an opportunity to provide input into the process.

- **In making the decision how much does money vs. environmental impacts weigh into the decision process?**

  All factors weigh into the decision – how heavily depends on the factors involved. Obviously, SHA must consider the most economically viable options to meet the needs of the project. However, SHA must also consider environmental impacts, community impacts, and impacts to historic or cultural resources. SHA must also receive permits and approvals from a variety of external agencies, therefore, cannot make decisions in a vacuum. There is no specific threshold or formula to reach a decision. Every situation
and project must be evaluated individually to make the decision that best balances all of the project impacts and stakeholder requests.

- **Did the addition of the noise barrier factor into the decision to remove the access of Old Columbia Road to US Rte. 29?**

  No. The access from Old Columbia Road to US 29 was considered well before the addition of the noise barrier and was included in the 1987 FONSI to improve safety.

- **Does SHA just strive to “meet” the environmental laws or does it go further than the regulatory agencies require?**

  SHA always strives to go above and beyond what the minimum environmental regulations require, and looks at opportunities to mitigate well beyond the project site and impacts.

- **Will the public have a chance to comment on the Environmental Reassessment?**

  The environmental reassessment does not require a formal public hearing, however, coordination with the public and providing the public an opportunity to comment on design changes that vary significantly from the approved environmental document is required. To that end, SHA will be holding several public meetings in over the next month, will update project related information on SHA’s web site (www.marylandroads.com), and will continue to communicate regularly with the public as the project progresses through design. SHA encourages public comment throughout the process, and will receive comments not only at meetings, but through the SHA web site, through email, and by written letters to the administration.

- **What is the purpose of a reevaluation?**

  Reevaluations should be thought of as a continuation of the NEPA project development process and are necessary at certain key points in the overall process to establish whether or not the NEPA document, determination or final project decision remains valid for the subsequent federal action. During a reevaluation, attention is given to determining what changes have occurred in the project and the study including changes in the design or scope of a project, new or modified laws and regulations, circumstances or project area changes or new information in general. The finding or conclusion of a reevaluation is that the NEPA decision or documentation is valid or that additional analysis is required. A reevaluation provides evidence for the FHWA in determining whether or not the preparation of a new CE, EA or supplemental EIS is necessary in order to advance the project to the next stage. [23 CFR § 771.129(c)]

- **When should a reevaluation be conducted?**
The reevaluation of an approved NEPA document or decision is required prior to the request for FHWA action (i.e. final design, ROW, PS&E), generally when there has been a time lag or changes related to the study have occurred between the previous NEPA approval and the request for action.

Any project with an approved NEPA decision will be reevaluated prior to the request for FHWA action or approval to advance the project (i.e. final design, ROW, PS&E). The reevaluation will generally be concluded through consultation between the project sponsor (State DOT) and the FHWA regarding changes and other facts of the project, study and decision. This reevaluation takes place after the CE, FONSI, EIS or ROD has been approved and prior to advancement to the next project stage. Any change to the proposed project, new circumstances, new information (environmental, traffic, standards, etc.), final design or scope modifications, new or revised environmental laws, regulations, and/or policies which have occurred since the CE, FONSI or EIS/ROD was signed are considered and should be discussed. The project files must document that consultation occurred and what or how changes occurred and include an assessment of the validity of the original NEPA decision. A written reevaluation may or may not be necessary as determined through the consultation between the FHWA and project sponsor.

- **Is a reevaluation part of the NEPA process?**

  No, reevaluations are not required under the National Environmental Policy Act (42 USC 4321) or Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) Regulations (40 CFR 1500-1508). They are, however, required by the FHWA/FTA regulations, (23 CFR 771.129) and have been upheld in court as an appropriate mechanism for determining whether or not a supplemental EIS is necessary.

- **Could a reevaluation substitute for a NEPA Document (i.e. Supplemental EIS)?**

  The purpose of a reevaluation is to determine the validity of previous NEPA documents, decisions, or determinations. A reevaluation is the mechanism to determine and document (generally in the project file) whether or not the NEPA decision remains valid for the requested action or if additional analysis and/or documentation is necessary.

  The regulations and guidance related to reevaluations are provided below:


- **What are the options under consideration for Old Columbia Road**
SHA has evaluated and studied various alternatives. The following are the options under consideration:

Option 1 – No Build
Option 2 – The FONSI alignment
Option 3 – Acquire the three residences along Old Columbia Road
Option 4 – Revised FONSI alignment through Columbia Association open space connecting to Wandering Way
Option 5 – Connecting Old Columbia Road near the existing US 29 access to Wandering Way through Single Residence at 9536 Wandering Way
Option 6 – Connecting Old Columbia Road to Twin Knolls Road to the North of the stream and floodplain
Option 7 – Modify the existing entrance at Old Columbia Road to a right-in Right-out movement

• What are the options under consideration for Gales Lane?

The following are the options under consideration:

Option 1 – No Build
Option 2 – The FONSI alignment
Option 3 – Acquire the three residences along Gales Lane
Option 4 – Modify the existing entrance at Gales Lane, widening US 29 to provide acceleration/deceleration lanes.