January 10, 2013

To: Bill Austin,

Executive Director,

Morgantown Monongalia Metropolitan Planning Organization

Re: Proposed WVDOH project on US 19 (Monongahela Blvd) between WV 705 and Boyers Avenue in Morgantown

The West Virginia Division of Highways proposes to improve safety on 0.83 miles of Monongahela Blvd in Morgantown by widening it from a four-lane to a five-lane, Two Way Left Turn Lane (TWLTL) segment with narrowed shoulders that will allow for the width of a vehicle (for WVU event parking). The Morgantown Pedestrian Safety Board is pleased that the area has been targeted for safety improvements and see this as a significant opportunity to improve an important transportation corridor. However, we are concerned that the proposal will likely have a negative impact on pedestrian safety and that it was developed without regard to the multi-modal approach that county residents have demanded in our Long Range Transportation Plan and Morgantown and Star City comprehensive plans.

Data provided by the DOH indicate the stretch of road had a crash rate roughly 43% higher and an injury crash rate 45% *lower* than that of similar roads in WV in 2010-2012. Unfortunately *no pedestrian crash data or pedestrian usage rates* were presented in the scant details of the project justification. Redesigning the roadway in the absence of pedestrian-related data is not justifiable and does not meet residents’ needs. Redesigning to a TWLTL will likely have the following effects:

1. decrease rear-end crash rates by removing left-turn traffic from thru lanes while increasing left-turn crashes as it increases conflict points at intersections;
2. increase average vehicle speed;
3. increase crash severity due to likely higher rates of speed in left-turn, T-Bone crashes; and
4. increase potential for greater severity of pedestrian-related crashes due to narrowed shoulders and higher rates of vehicle speed.

This section of roadway serves multiple modes, including bus routes, pedestrian walkway, and de facto parking for WVU events at the Coliseum and sports fields. The area is primed for increased development with multiple vacant commercial spaces in close proximity with hundreds of residences, the Mon River rail-trail, new WVU soccer facility (and Big XII effect on athletics), and the quickly redeveloping Star City Riverfront. In short, this will likely be a mixed-use development area where non-motorized transportation will be in high demand.

The recommended TWLTL lacks a multi-modal focus and will, we believe decrease safety for all users. It allows for no legal crossing of Monongahela Blvd for pedestrians and creates a significant threat to people parking for WVU events and walking along the roadway in the narrow space between vehicles parked on the shoulder and 45MPH traffic. Further, lighting is terrible and many events are at night, exacerbating the problem. Therefore we ask the WVDOH to incorporate the following into the project:

1. Install sidewalks on both sides of Monongahela Blvd that connect to existing sidewalks at the WVU Coliseum and at Boyers Avenue (and place those sidewalks in such a way that the shoulders or vehicles parked in them act as a buffer)
2. Install at least one pedestrian-actuated, signalized crossing with median refuge to allow for a legal, safe method for pedestrians to cross
3. Install pedestrian scale lighting to ensure the safety of non-motorized users and improve the aesthetics of a major corridor into Morgantown
4. Create dedicated pull outs for bus shelters on both sides of the road
5. Design uphill lane as a climbing lane for cyclists in accordance with Bicycle Board recommendations

Unless the above considerations are made, we ask the MMMPO deny the WVDOH proposal to amend the TIP to add the proposed TWLTL project for its obvious lack of consideration for multi-modal uses and disregard for local transportation and comprehensive plans.

Sincerely,

Christiaan Abildso

Chair, Morgantown Pedestrian Safety Board

*Walk More, Safely*