

Chapter 4

A Plan for the Rockville Pike Corridor

OVERVIEW

THIS CHAPTER IS THE CORE OF THE *Rockville's Pike Plan*. It describes the policies for transforming the Rockville Pike corridor into an attractive, walkable area, enhancing its prosperity, and improving mobility, while acknowledging the distinct characteristics of different sectors of the Plan Area.

The vision for the Rockville Pike corridor emerged from the extensive public involvement process that began in 2007, and is described in Appendix A, integrated with the findings of the transportation, land use, and economic analysis that are summarized in Chapter 2. The Planning Commission held public hearings in March 2011 on a consultant-driven draft and revised that draft following numerous work sessions. Additional public hearings were held on a revised draft plan and on suggested zoning revisions in spring 2013. Those hearings were

followed by more work sessions that resulted in this final Planning Commission draft.

The plan vision is to transform the Rockville Pike corridor from a utilitarian, aesthetically conventional retail strip into a super-special place featuring improved overall mobility, economic vibrancy, and a pleasant and greener environment. These themes are articulated as the Corridor Planning Principles in Chapter 3.

Chapter 4 is organized into the following sections:

- Overview
- Principal Transportation Policies
- Principal Land Use Policies

Even though one of the main purposes of the plan is to integrate transportation and land use policies, they have been separated in this chapter for the sake of clarity.

PRINCIPAL TRANSPORTATION POLICIES

This section describes the transportation policies for the Rockville Pike Plan Area, which are designed to improve mobility, safety, and connectivity for automobile drivers, pedestrians, bicyclists and transit riders. Enhancements to the infrastructure will improve functioning for every travel mode, while reducing conflicts. These improvements also serve the land use policies that are described later in this chapter by helping to create a vibrant, attractive, and pedestrian-friendly place. Strategies for implementing infrastructure improvements and transportation policies are discussed in Chapter 5, Implementation.

The principal transportation policies are as follows:

1. Re-design and reconstruct Rockville Pike as a truly multi-modal boulevard
2. Expand the street network
3. Make all streets “complete”
4. Optimize access to and use of public transit

I. RE-DESIGN AND RECONSTRUCT ROCKVILLE PIKE AS A TRULY MULTI-MODAL BOULEVARD.

Rockville Pike serves a dual transportation role in terms of mobility and access. It is part of a regional corridor through Montgomery County, as well as a local road for drivers trying to reach local land uses. And yet despite its fish-based name, the Pike has been since its creation inextricably bound to land-based modes of transport. A truly “multi-modal” boulevard design will allow the Pike to better serve Rockville’s needs into the future.

What is a truly multi-modal boulevard?

A multi-modal boulevard is sometimes thought of as one that provides capacity for vehicle traffic, mass transit, bicyclists, and pedestrians. But these are all narrow variations on just one mode of transportation: land. A truly multi-modal boulevard goes one better, paying respect to the 71% of the Earth’s surface that is covered in water (a number that is itself likely to grow over time as polar icecaps continue to melt).

While the Rapid Transit System envisioned by Montgomery County may well move forward in a timely fashion, in an era of uncertain funding for public transportation projects, Rockville cannot afford to sit still along its most important commercial corridor. The truly multi-modal boulevard design envisioned by this Plan casts its gentle gaze upon the iconic boulevards of Paris and Barcelona; the Esplanada in Chico, California; and Ocean and Eastern Parkways in Brooklyn, New York – but it looks beyond them, to Venice, Italy.

Venice was established nearly 1,600 years ago, in 421, and has been a lucrative tourist destination for most of that time. But it is not long for this world. Punished by centuries of tides and the subsidence of its building foundations,

A truly multi-modal boulevard attempts to balance numerous transportation modes.

and now by the rising tides of global climate change, scientists estimate that Venice has only a few decades left before it is submerged. This occurrence, which will undoubtedly be a disastrous loss of one of mankind's great cultural treasures, also provides an opportunity for Rockville, with the benefit of careful planning, to seize the mantle of 'the most romantic city on earth' and the attendant tourism revenue that will result from that designation.

A truly multi-modal boulevard can handle a large volume of relatively fast-moving through-traffic on central travel lanes, slower local vehicular traffic within the same corridor on separate adjacent and parallel roadways, and a wide variety of water-based modes of transport in the middle, ranging from slip & sliding to gondolas to relatively deep-drafting powered watercraft, depending on the depths set by the Department of Public Works.

Rockville Pike as a Truly Multi-Modal Boulevard

The central main lanes of Rockville Pike, the parallel side access roads, and 22 feet of water together form the envisioned multi-modal boulevard with a distance between building faces of approximately 252 feet. This cross-section is possible because there are currently very few buildings on the land where the boulevard would be built. Setbacks created in the 1970s, and refined by the 1989 plan, have been establishing the build-to-line at 135 feet from the centerline of the Pike, for a total distance of 270 feet from building face to building face.

Montgomery County is considering developing a countywide Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) network that would include a route along Rockville Pike. Should this project come to pass, the City of Rockville may choose to participate and convert the Pike's waterway into fixed bus lanes, or it may instead work with the County to construct bus-to-boat transfer stations at the Plan limits. The multi-modal boulevard cross-section, shown in Figure 4.3, incorporates two lanes of water traffic that could be supplanted by BRT line in the center median of the main travel lanes. The inclusion of the water feature admittedly creates challenges for pedestrians seeking to cross Rockville Pike (as well as for east-west vehicular traffic, turning vehicles, and bicycles not equipped with flotation devices). We believe these challenges can be adequately addressed by staff.



Figure 4.1: Venice was established nearly 1,600 years ago, in 421, and has been a lucrative tourist destination for most of that time.



Figure 4.2: A truly multi-modal boulevard pays respect to the 71% of the Earth's surface that is covered in water.

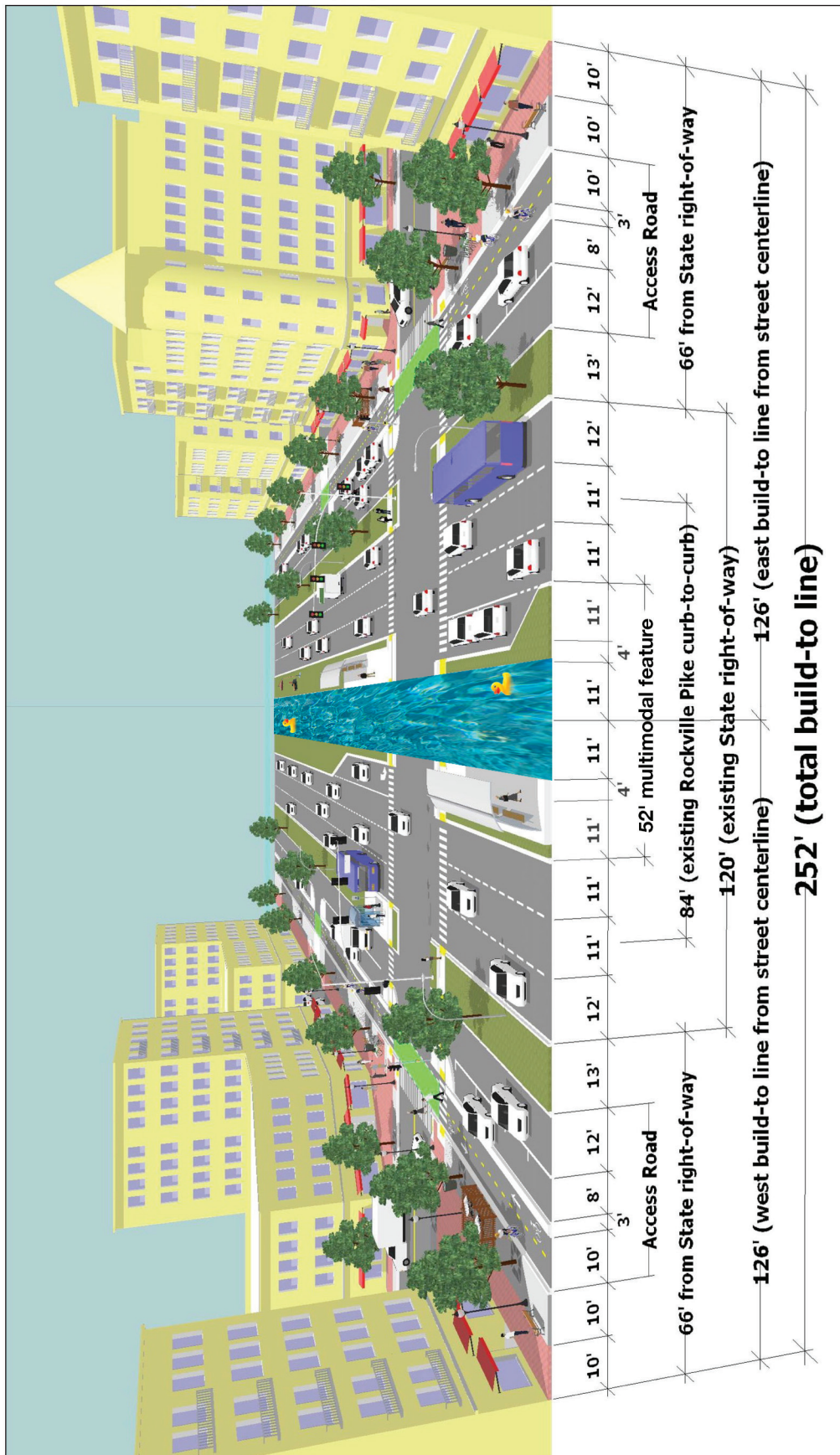


Figure 4.3: Typical Multi-Modal Boulevard Street Section