

# CHAPTER 2

## STUDY AREA



## Site Context

The principal study area is roughly a half-mile circle around the West Baltimore MARC station. This distance was chosen because it represents approximately a 10-minute walk from the station to the furthest point, which is considered the longest time and furthest distance most people will walk to transit. The study area provides a guide for focusing planning efforts. However, it is recognized that community improvements are needed beyond this distance and that many neighborhoods – particularly east of the half mile circle identify the MARC Station and transit as a major focus of their revitalization potential. Even though the Strategy lays out land use alternatives for the study area, many of the recommended processes and implementation tools can and should be applied to other areas beyond the half mile radius.

## Neighborhoods Within the Focus Area

Baltimore is a city of neighborhoods, and within the focus area there are many neighborhoods:

- Harlem Park/Lafayette Square
- Midtown Edmondson
- Rosemont Homeowners/Tenants
- Evergreen Lawn
- Bridgeview/Greenlawn
- Mosher
- Station West (Penrose)
- Franklin Square
- Boyd-Booth
- Shipley Hill

Some neighborhoods are fully encompassed in the focus area; other neighborhoods have only pieces of their community within the focus area. All are in the West Baltimore Coalition's Communities of Neighborhoods. The success of the Strategy is dependent on the various groups coming together with a common vision for how to use the MARC station to spark West Baltimore's revitalization.

## Socioeconomic and Demographic Characteristics

In 2000 (according to the 2000 Census), the total population of the ten neighborhoods was approximately 25,000 people. Since the late 1950s Baltimore City as a whole experienced consistent population and household loss over time due to urban flight to the suburbs. Unlike many urban areas, neighborhoods in West Baltimore are mostly families rather than single people or childless couples. Nearly one-third of the total neighborhood population in 2000 was comprised of those 19 and younger as compared to 28 percent for the City.

West Baltimore contains nearly 12,290 housing units of which 75 percent are occupied, according to the 2000 U.S. Census. Note that this total housing unit count has changed due to some new development and housing demolition occurring since 2000. Of the total occupied housing units, 45 percent were owner-occupied, while 55 percent were renter-occupied. Boyd-Booth, Franklin Square, and Harlem Park/Lafayette Square had very high renter-occupied percentages – at least 70 percent. Evergreen and Rosemont had the lowest renter occupied percentage – 23 percent. The 1999 median household income for the ten neighborhoods was \$23,500, which was lower than Baltimore City's median income of \$30,000. Approximately 30 percent of West Baltimore residents were classified as being below the poverty line compared to 23 percent in Baltimore City.



▲ Existing Land Use

### Existing Land Use Characteristics

The existing land use within the study area is predominately medium-density residential with approximately 80 percent of the housing consisting of rowhouses. Some blocks have few or no vacant homes, while other blocks have a high number of vacant buildings. The majority of the nonresidential uses are industrial uses, especially southwest of the station and along the rail line.

LEGEND

-  **MARC** STATION
-  LOW DENSITY RESIDENTIAL
-  MED. DENSITY RESIDENTIAL
-  HIGH DENSITY RESIDENTIAL
-  GENERAL COMMERCIAL
-  PUBLIC / INSTITUTIONAL
-  PRIVATE / INSTITUTIONAL
-  INDUSTRIAL
-  UNDEVELOPED
-  PARKS / RECREATION
-  CEMETERY

## Significant Physical Assets and Liabilities

West Baltimore has a number of significant assets that it should use to leverage new development. The MARC station provides residents with access to job centers in BWI Airport and the District of Columbia and to future job growth areas such as at the expanding military bases at Fort Meade and Aberdeen Proving Ground. The MTA has a long-term vision to expand MARC service. The planned Red Line transit project could expand access to include quick connections to Baltimore's central business district, the Social Security Administration and Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, as well as to growing job centers on Baltimore's East side.

The Gwynns Falls and the newly opened trail following it provide recreational activities not before available. West Baltimore should look for ways to increase access to this significant natural resource.

The historic Ice House and strong, stable residential streets are other assets that should be built upon. Even the area's liabilities – the Highway to Nowhere (now to be called the Highway to Somewhere) and the vacant homes – provide exciting development opportunities.

## Institutional Players with Influence in the Area

West Baltimore has several nearby institutions that can serve as valuable partners for its revitalization. Large landowners within the study area include Coppin State University (Lutheran Hospital and Hebrew Orphanage: 28 acres northwest of the MARC station), Baltimore City (parking lots adjacent to the MARC station, Acme Industrial Complex, the Route 40 right-of-way ,a.k.a. "the Highway to Somewhere", and scattered neighborhood sites), and Bon Secours Hospital and Foundation (scattered neighborhood sites). Potential also exists to leverage nearby educational institutions for partnerships in development, workforce training, and job creation. Though the Maryland Transit Administration (MTA) does not own any land other than the MARC train platform, it will have significant influence on decisions made about MARC station improvements, the Red Line, and commuter parking.

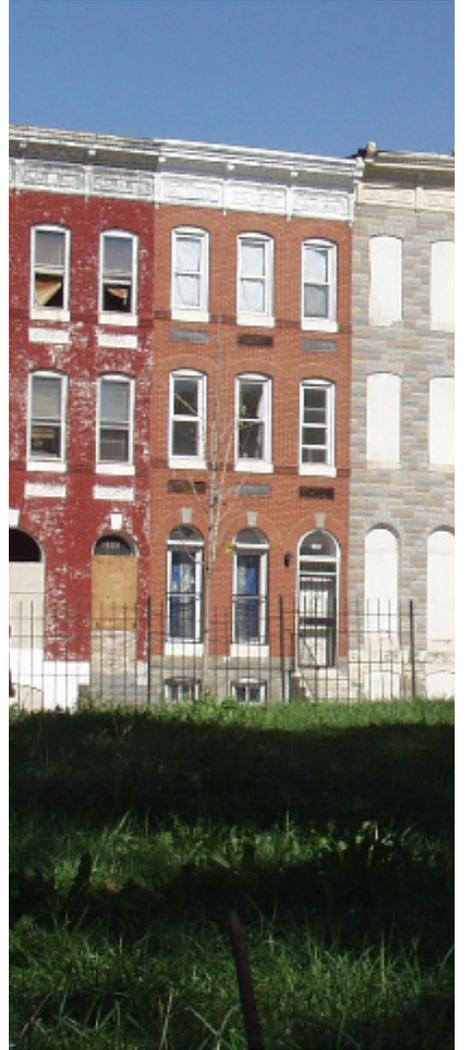


Existing Residential and Commercial Land Uses ▲

## Existing Market Conditions

The demographic profile of West Baltimore reveals a low-to-moderate income, working class neighborhood. Steady population and household loss and modest household incomes challenge the neighborhood's stability and quality of life. Current residential market conditions show a transitional urban environment that may benefit over time from the close proximity to Downtown Baltimore and the University of Maryland, including the BioPark. Rental rates for multi-family units and private rentals tend to be below citywide market rates, providing an affordable housing alternative.

West Baltimore's population is sufficiently large to support at least one modern supermarket in the short-term as well as affordably-priced family-oriented retail. Retailers selling comparison items or specialty goods require a higher density of households and a more diverse mix of incomes.



## PRINCIPLES

One of the most important products to come from the City and State’s collaboration with the WBC was the creation of explicit development principles. The principles are the “rules” that the community would like the City, State, WBC, and private developers to live by. The principles will guide the WBC in their discussions with the City, State, and private developers about what they – the residents of West Baltimore – want to have happen in their neighborhoods. The principles describe those issues that are most important to the community and form the foundation of this Strategy.

### HOUSING PRINCIPLES

The housing issues of primary concern to WBC members and various stakeholders are related to preventing resident displacement, maintaining affordability, expanding housing diversity, eliminating prevalent housing vacancy, and providing opportunities for new housing. There is excitement about the opportunities the MARC station and the future Red Line can bring, but there are also fears about the potential impacts they will have on neighborhood affordability. Community consensus centers on providing existing and new households with housing options that meet a variety of needs and lifestyles. The housing principles reflect these desires for West Baltimore and should serve as guidelines for future development. The Action Strategy at the end of this document identifies specific actions necessary to achieve these principles.

**Principle 1: Avoid Displacement** – Too many revitalizing communities face the threat of existing residents being priced out of their neighborhoods. West Baltimore is no exception. While new households should be embraced, the plan must protect the current residents’ ability to remain. Mechanisms such as property tax controls and increases in homestead exemptions for fixed-income residents can lessen the impact of property tax increases and rising home prices. The Action Strategy cites more tasks to be considered to prevent displacement.

**Principle 2: Maintain Housing Affordability** – Continuing to offer affordable housing options in West Baltimore is critical as the neighborhood revitalizes. Regulatory tools requiring new housing projects to include affordable units are key to ensuring an adequate supply of new moderately-priced housing. In addition, the City and State have several programs designed to assist qualified individuals financially with home purchases, home rehabilitation, and home repair (see Appendix A for specific information on housing tools and resources). Environmentally-friendly home improvements that improve energy efficiency can also decrease monthly housing costs, which can help residents to continue to afford housing.

**Principle 3: Increase Housing Diversity** – Neighborhoods with an assortment of housing types typically thrive because they meet the needs of a range of households with different lifestyles. While singles and childless couples may prefer condominiums for ease of maintenance and limited space needs, families with children may prefer larger single-family homes with private backyards. Seniors may favor multi-level apartments with convenient ground floor retail options. To maximize interest and feasibility of living in West Baltimore that could be generated by the MARC station and the future Red Line, the area should offer a variety of housing options. In addition, the ability to serve a mix of households with housing types of various densities and price points greatly contributes to a community’s stability. The Development Strategy presents several potential sites to introduce a diversity of housing choices within West Baltimore.

**Principle 4: Increase the Amount of Occupied Housing** – West Baltimore has a large amount of vacant and abandoned housing. Some of these units are clustered and others are isolated. Block-by-block rehabilitation of such structures is the best strategy to transform these units into viable housing stock. The rehabilitation of housing adjacent to transit, proximate to large-scale projects, or near thriving community clusters tends to have the greatest impact because of its ability to leverage development momentum and market strengths. The MARC station and the future Red Line can help West Baltimore attract the needed development momentum.

The West Baltimore MARC Transit-Centered Community Development Strategy identifies several sites suitable for block-by-block infill development or rehabilitation. Owners of these sites may be eligible for City and State rehabilitation programs (see Appendix A for specific information on housing tools and resources).

**Principle 5: Preserve the Character of Existing Viable Housing Stock** – West Baltimore has a rich fabric of historic rowhomes that give the community a unique identity and physical character. Maintaining the neighborhood’s housing integrity will contribute to the area’s emerging marketability and attractiveness. New infill development should be sensitive to West Baltimore’s existing healthy housing stock, respecting the historic architecture and helping to stabilize neighborhood blocks.

**Principle 6: Draw Early Investment to Opportunity-driven Places** – Typically when investing in a neighborhood, it is best to look for “areas of opportunity” with the greatest potential for feasible development. These “areas of opportunity” can be clusters of vacant lots or housing, sites near transit and good transportation access, contiguous parcels near flourishing community nodes, or sites with good visibility. The MARC station and the future Red Line stations are West Baltimore’s primary areas of opportunity. Sometimes these attributes are enough to spur redevelopment. Other times public sector incentives are necessary to encourage private investment.

### Housing Tools and Resources

Baltimore City and the State of Maryland offer various incentives for qualified individuals, property owners, and developers for home purchases, home repair, and property rehabilitation. Existing residents, new households, and infill housing providers should take advantage of these programs, which are described in Appendix A.



## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PRINCIPLES

Economic development – large-scale business creation and retention, small business development and entrepreneurship, job creation and workforce training – forms the basic foundation for neighborhood revitalization. The West Baltimore MARC station, the future Red Line, and the associated riders can help attract the large and small businesses needed to spark the neighborhood’s revitalization. The economic development principles for West Baltimore address all of these issues as well as the importance of education as a fundamental factor for entrepreneurship and enhancing employment. A key purpose of this study is also to identify key areas where these principles could be put into practice. The Action Strategy at the end of this plan identifies specific actions and partnerships necessary to achieve these principles.

**Principle 1: Cultivate Large-Scale Economic Development Opportunities** – West Baltimore suffers from a lack of services, jobs, and amenities for residents. New mixed-use development within the neighborhood would serve the current population and attract new households. Strategic focus on providing large-scale economic catalysts near the MARC station or along the future Red Line or on publicly-owned land could spur additional investment in other parts of the neighborhood, as the area population and retail spending grow. A marketing strategy for West Baltimore that highlights emerging positive trends could also encourage further revitalization.

The West Baltimore MARC Transit-Centered Community Development Strategy shows several areas as potential reinvestment opportunities, including the MARC station parking lots, the Ice House, and the Southwest Industrial Area (a.k.a. the Warwick Triangle). Their connection to the MARC station, the future Red Line and other points outward make them prime locations for large-scale economic development.

These sites vary in terms of their readiness for development. Because there are multiple property owners within the Warwick Triangle, development at this location would require extensive acquisition and assemblage of land. The MARC Station parking lots offer the advantage of available public land under sole ownership and could be developed sooner, although short-term accommodations for replacement commuter parking are necessary. The Ice House offers the advantage of single private ownership, adjacency to publicly-owned land, and the preservation of an historic façade. Weak market conditions coupled with the high cost of construction pose as challenges for all these sites.

There are many factors that determine whether a specific market area and site will attract private investment – ultimately determining development readiness. In order to attract private investment into a specific area there must be favorable market conditions, regulatory environment and community support. In addition to these area specific needs the site itself must be unencumbered by environment constraints, supported by adequate infrastructure and accessible for vehicles, public transportation and/or pedestrian access.

Developers always consider the degree of risk associated with a new project and evaluate its potential for success. To attract developers to West Baltimore, the community and the City must work together to encourage positive change and, thereby, reduce risks. Examples of positive change include infrastructure and streetscape improvements, beautification efforts, increased police presence, stricter property code enforcement, and evidence of population and household growth. In addition, facilitating development through public subsidy, faster project permitting, and effective public-private

coordination is also necessary to attract the expertise required to bring about new projects in West Baltimore. The Phasing Chapter of this report explains these issues and limitations in greater detail.

**Principle 2: Attract and Develop Businesses and Facilities to Serve the Local Population**

At the October 2007 workshop, the community provided a list of the goods and services desired for West Baltimore. While the ability to carry out these recommendations depends on various factors, this list is are important to consider as the community transitions.

**Business Services**

- Supermarket/farmers’ market
- Specialty health foods market
- Restaurants
- Café/coffee shop
- Entertainment options
- Bakery
- Pharmacy
- Tailor/seamstress
- Dry cleaner
- Pet store
- Hardware store
- Bookstore

**Public Services**

- Recreational facilities
- Workforce development center
- Police substation
- Youth and adult day care facilities
- Library
- Post office
- Medical clinics/dental facilities
- Playgrounds
- Charter school
- Community center
- Business incubator
- Fitness/health and wellness center



Example of library with housing above

Mulnomah County



Community-serving retail



Businesses on active mixed-use street fronts.

**Principle 3: Promote Small Business Development and Entrepreneurship** – In addition to large-scale economic development, small business development and entrepreneurship are critical for a healthy and stable local economy. Not only can small businesses support large-scale economic development, they also provide unique services and retail options to a community. Edmondson Avenue’s many empty storefronts offer opportunities for clusters of small businesses at certain intersections. The ability to leverage large-scale development at the MARC station site could create initial positive spillover northward onto Edmondson Avenue by attracting more pedestrians and new residents to patronize local stores. As with housing, an important strategy for small business infill is focused block-by-block improvements to buildings and streetscape.

West Baltimore is home to a multitude of talented individuals, some of whom may desire to start their own businesses within the neighborhood. The City and State offer many incentives and tools for budding entrepreneurs and existing business owners (see Appendix B for specific information on economic development tools and resources). These programs range from gap financing for facility improvements and operations to securing tax credits for job creation.

**Principle 4: Enhance Local Workforce, Employment Opportunities and Local Business Participation** – Neighborhood stability typically relies on residents’ economic health. Better jobs and better wages allow residents to invest more in their homes, while removing some of the impetus for crime. Attracting new businesses that create jobs for local residents will be important. Equally important is to ensure that local residents have the skills required for those new jobs. The neighborhood should foster partnerships with the Mayor’s Office of Employment Development (MOED), Baltimore City, local institutions, and area developers and contractors to assist unemployed, working-age youth and adults in obtaining viable skills and connecting with potential employers. The community is very committed to that residents receiving skill training and access to jobs generated by West Baltimore development as well as possible employment opportunities created elsewhere in the biotech industry, green technology manufacturing, and construction trades. Appendix B highlights some programs available to the local labor force.

In the long run, the neighborhood’s vitality will also depend on the ability of today’s children to compete for future jobs. Public education must help West Baltimore students gain the skills they need and challenge them to reach their full potential.

The participation of local businesses, particularly minority- and women-owned businesses, in West Baltimore’s revitalization is of particular importance to the community. The community and the City of Baltimore’s Minority- and -Women-Owned Business Development Office should work together to ensure that local businesses know about the benefits of minority certification and get registered. The WBC and the City of Baltimore should also work together to evaluate the City’s current minority- and women-owned procurement goals for publicly-owned sites and capital projects and determine how these goals can be enhanced for projects within West Baltimore. The City should continue to promote minority- and women-owned participation at all contracting levels.

Economic Development Tools and Resources  
Baltimore City and the State of Maryland offer various incentives for qualified individuals, business owners and companies to facilitate business creation and retention. Workforce development programs also exist for youth and adults who seek job training and placement. Interested parties should take advantage of these programs, which are listed in Appendix B.



## TRANSPORTATION PRINCIPLES

West Baltimore has a variety of transportation modes running through it – commuter trains, buses, local roads, highways, and, in the future, the Red Line. These assets, combined with its location, provide the area with many benefits, including quick and convenient access to job centers in downtown Baltimore, BWI Airport, and Washington, D.C. Indeed, the MTA has been studying parking improvements that might provide additional benefit to the community.

However, access can also bring negatives such as high speed traffic on local roads and commuter parking on residential streets. West Baltimore will thrive when it has taken advantage of the positive qualities its location makes available to it. Following the transportation principles listed below will help future development plans maximize the benefits and minimize the burdens that the current transportation infrastructure has brought to the area.

### **Principle 1: Use the MARC station and other transit to bring about community**

**improvement**– The West Baltimore MARC station and other transit infrastructure can provide West Baltimore with a competitive advantage for redevelopment and revitalization efforts. Currently the MARC station is underutilized as a community asset and mainly serves commuters who drive in from neighborhoods outside of the area. There are approximately 600 people who use the station each day, but only a small percentage of those people live in West Baltimore. The station draws people into West Baltimore, but captures very little value from them. Station upgrades would increase the station’s functionality and strengthen the community’s view of the station as an amenity. Both the West Baltimore MARC Station and the future Red Line could be important tools that draw people to the community and encourage them to utilize the resources available within the community, providing benefit to West Baltimore neighborhoods. Consequently, station upgrades are especially important because deteriorated transportation infrastructure sends a message to residents and those who travel through that nobody cares. Working to develop a sense of place around the station will make it easier to attract investment and bring improvements to the community. Additionally, partnering with the City, other agencies, and the private sector to develop the property around the station will provide community residents with the needed leverage to attract even more funding sources and development to West Baltimore and lay the framework for future private investment. As planning for the Red Line moves forward, designs should emphasize how the Red Line will support other principles and enhance the community.

In addition, the MTA has outlined an aggressive 28-year improvement plan for the MARC system. Ridership is at record levels, and the demand for service is partly driven by Baltimore City’s revitalization. The MARC Growth and Investment Plan’s goals are to increase passenger carrying capacity threefold and increase the share of trips made by MARC during rush hour. For the Penn Line, the line that serves the West Baltimore MARC station, proposed improvements include decreasing the amount of time between trains from 25 minutes to 15 minute headways during rush hour, decreasing the amount of time between trains from once an hour to every 30 minutes in non-rush hour times, and providing late evening and weekend service. MTA has also identified that the West Baltimore Station has exceeded its parking capacity and plans call for the construction of additional parking in future phases of investment. By 2035, the MTA would like MARC to provide “transit-like” service through Baltimore and to provide connections to the planned subway extension from Johns Hopkins Hospital to the vicinity of Morgan State University/Good Samaritan Hospital (the Green Line). In

addition, the MARC Growth and Investment Plan identifies the West Baltimore MARC Station as being under capacity for parking and has set 2010 as a milestone for parking expansion. This expansion will improve West Baltimore's access to various locations and make it a more attractive place for people to live and businesses to locate.

**Principle 2: Make walking and biking – especially to buses and trains – safer and more inviting and convenient** – An improved pedestrian, bicycle, and transit environment is an important component of a revitalized West Baltimore. Improvements that create a safe environment for pedestrians and cyclists would encourage MARC patrons who live in the neighborhood to walk or bike to the station rather than drive and park. This could reduce the need for additional MARC parking and make the area more desirable. Similarly, as the neighborhood redevelops, a safer pedestrian environment could encourage commuter parkers to venture beyond the parking lot and to go into the neighborhood to pick up dry cleaning, groceries, or dinner. Because West Baltimore's pedestrian environment is so important to the area's success, making the necessary improvements should be top priorities for the City, the State, and the communities of West Baltimore. Improving the area's safety is a critical step in promoting revitalization of the West Baltimore area. To help further this goal, there needs to be increased involvement and coordination by the police, security personnel, and residents in the development of strategies to increase neighborhood safety and security.

Buses play an important role in the neighborhood that should be respected and promoted. Approximately 60 percent of area residents do not have access to private vehicles, and many people take transit to get to and from jobs, shopping, and recreational activities. Upgrading bus stops with benches, shelters, trash receptacles, and additional lighting would enhance the travel experience for current patrons and could attract new riders. In recognition of Baltimore communities' reliance on bus transportation, the City and MTA must work cooperatively with communities to ensure strong connections between existing and proposed transit options. The MTA will need to work closely with neighborhood organizations on current and future bus service plans through West Baltimore and to plan for connectivity to the future Red Line and MARC. Finally, creating improved pedestrian and bicycle connections to important destinations in the community such as the Gwynns Falls Trail would also have a positive impact on the neighborhood. This natural resource is a valuable asset and improving its visibility and accessibility to West Baltimore could be a benefit to existing residents and an attractor to new ones.

**Principle 3: Be aware of, and sensitive to, existing community transportation plans –**

West Baltimore is made up of many neighborhoods. Some of these neighborhoods have created their own redevelopment plans or have identified priority improvements. In recognition of these efforts, it is important to support the individual desires recommended in these neighborhood plans. Individual neighborhoods could feel the impacts of redevelopment around the MARC and future Red Line stations differently and should retain the autonomy to make decisions that will be the most appropriate for their neighborhood while serving the overall goals of the West Baltimore area. For example, decisions about the need for residential parking permits could be made at a neighborhood level without adversely affecting the overall goals of the West Baltimore MARC Transit-Centered Community Development Strategy. Some neighborhoods involved in the WBC have created infrastructure upgrade, pedestrian, and bicycle plans and the Strategy is sensitive to these existing initiatives. The Strategy is not isolated from other planning efforts, and it is important that the planning process inform and be informed by other planning efforts that are occurring. This includes planning efforts for the Red Line, which propose a transit alignment from downtown Baltimore to the West Baltimore MARC station and beyond. In these instances, it is important for community members to clearly identify their priorities and use them as a guide for other plans, as applicable to their community.

**Principle 4: Design streets to tame traffic and make West Baltimore more livable** – Streets play many roles in a community. They create connections. They define the urban fabric of an area. And they serve as important common space. While the efficient flow of traffic is important, overly wide streets can encourage speeding, which can create dangerous and uncomfortable living conditions. Efforts to reduce speeds on neighborhood streets through the use of signal timing; stricter enforcement; and speed wagons, which make people aware of their speeds, will help reduce the dangers presented by speeding. In addition, roads should be designed or modified so that drivers are provided with visual cues about the purpose of a street. For example, neighborhood streets, which are primarily residential, should encourage slower traffic by narrowing the travel lanes, by widening the sidewalks or, in some cases by putting diagonal parking on one side of the street. Speed humps, curb bump outs, and other techniques can also be used to calm traffic on residential streets. On city and community connectors, which provide access to a wider area than the residential streets do, traffic should be managed and cars should not be allowed to dominate the feel of the area.

No matter a street's designation, roads should be inviting to a variety of travel modes. Streets can be designed with trees and landscaping; with medians that can serve as pedestrian refuges; with bike lanes and parking to provide access and also a buffer to pedestrians on the sidewalk. These features do not impede a roadway's ability to move automobiles, but they make the road more comfortable and livable to those next to it. Finally, basic infrastructure such as sidewalks and crosswalks strengthens a roadway's ability to provide multimodal connections. Especially since every bus rider is also a pedestrian.





## Community Transportation Priorities

### LEGEND

- Streets That Need Better Wider Sidewalks, Lighting + Amenities - Artwork, Benches Etc.
- Streets That Need Traffic Calming
- Green Streets With Landscaping, Trees, Etc. + Need Traffic Calming
- Reconnect Community Grid
- Pedestrian Crossing Improvements
- Marc Station
- Marc Line
- Potential Red Line Alignments

### NOTES

- |   |                                       |   |   |
|---|---------------------------------------|---|---|
| 1 | Extend Platform (Both Sides)          | 6 | Wider Sidewalks   |
| 2 | Improve Signage                       | 7 | Bike Improvements To Marc Station (Better Connections, Bike Racks, Signage) |
| 3 | Traffic Congestion, Needs Improvement | 8 | Need Handicap/ADA Access To Station   |
| 4 | Add Bike Connections To Trail         | 9 | Consider Taming   |
| 5 | Improve Traffic Signal Timing         |   |   |

