

ANALYSIS OF THE PROPOSED TAKOMA DC ALIGNMENTS OF THE METROPOLITAN BRANCH TRAIL

This analysis by Historic Takoma, Inc. (HTI) is focused on the four remaining alignments within the DC historic district: Eastern Alignments B and C, and Western Alignments D and E, all of which are shown in Map 1 on HTI's web site (Figure 1 of the DDOT report). Variations of some of these alignments are also discussed in this analysis. The HTI analysis is based upon study of the DDOT report and supporting information, a working meeting with Mr. Chris Holben of DDOT to answer questions and clarify the report, and a walking tour of the portion of the alignments that lie in our DC historic district. The following three basic criteria were applied to each of the alignments, and they define HTI's mission:

- Preservation of our historic resources and the character of our historic neighborhoods
- Revitalization of businesses within our historic district
- No condemnation of private property within our historic district

A total of four alignments (two eastern and two western) were found to meet these three criteria. This analysis provides a discussion of these options but does not single out any one possibility.

Eastern Alignments

The eastern alignments that satisfy the three points above are Eastern Alignment B, shown in Map 1, and Eastern Alignment B with a modification, shown on Map 2.

The segment of Eastern Alignment B that passes in front of the Cady-Lee Mansion is narrow, approximately 16 feet in width. The use of this segment would involve either narrowing existing traffic lanes further from their current width, or designing a "yield zone" for a very short and visible stretch in front of the Cady-Lee Mansion and the apartments buildings, until the Metro property is reached and the bike trail can be wider. However, under no circumstances would encroaching on the front of the Cady Lee property and its historic stone walls and trees be acceptable.

The modification of Alignment B would involve turning west down Cedar Avenue/Street rather than east down Carroll Street, passing under the bridge and joining up with the 4th Street commercial district.¹

¹ During a recent walkabout of possible alignments, a concept was developed that potentially resolves objections to the at-grade crossing of Cedar Street between Blair Road and the Metro overpass, and should receive further study:

Traveling south from the southern end of Spring Street, the Trail could divide, with a spur debouching at Cedar Street immediately west of the station entrance. The other portion would proceed to a ramp or graded approach leading to a bridge over Cedar Street, cantilevered from the existing overpass. From there it would run south, east of S & S Liquors and the China Royal Restaurant. From the edge of the bank above Blair Road, south of the restaurant, a bridge would pass over Blair Road, running west toward the Triangle Park at the northeast corner of the Barac Building. The bridge would ramp down, switch back, and complete its descent at the southeast corner of the park.

From the park, the MBT could continue southward on Blair Road or Fourth Street, and would provide convenient access to the historic commercial district and adjacent neighborhoods.

This modified alignment would have no negative impact on historic resources or the character of the neighborhood, and would not involve condemnation of private property within the historic district. A routing through 4th Street would have the benefit of spurring revitalization of an historic commercial area. Neither Eastern Alignment B or the modification would involve cutting across the National Park Service land on the northern side of Piney Branch at the corner of Eastern Avenue (across from the Cady Lee), and neither route would cause the loss of trees and concomitant negative change in the character of this important gateway area.

Eastern Alignment B and its modification could also be designed to remain on-road on Eastern only a short distance and then cut across Metro property, thus eliminating part of Eastern and Cedar from the route. The future configuration of the Metro property site at this time is unclear.

In contrast, Eastern Alignment C (see Map 1) would pass behind the Cady Lee Mansion and create another development impact on this important resource, and it would involve the taking of private land within our historic district for the creation of a thoroughfare—a dangerous precedent. Alignment C also will not pass by 4th Street, and thus will not assist in its revitalization. This alignment would adversely impact trees and the visual character of the gateway park area at the corner of Eastern and Piney Branch. It would also require a flyway (caged) bridge on the same side (eastern) as the Cady-Lee Mansion, which could possibly have a negative visual impact on the mansion itself. Eastern Alignment C therefore fails each of the three criteria above.

In Defense of the Cady Lee National Landmark Property

HTI remains concerned about placement of such a major, heavily traveled thoroughfare as the MBT behind the Cady Lee Mansion, the 1887 Queen Anne-style house designed by Leon Dessez (who also designed the Vice President's residence). This National Historic Landmark, the only such structure in all of Ward 4, has managed to survive many development assaults over time and remains one of the most important gateways to our community. It first faced the wrecking ball in 1974, when a developer wanted to buy the property to turn it into apartments. It was saved by the efforts of community preservationists who placed it on the National Register, and by Sandra and Jerry Kurtinitis, who purchased the property and began an extensive restoration at that time. By 2000, the house again faced the need for major repair and stabilization, and this expensive undertaking was accomplished through the dedicated efforts of Frances Phipps. The landmark is currently at equilibrium with its surroundings, which must not be disturbed by more development. The house is now owned and used in a very gentle way by the Forum for Youth Investment, which has ensured the preservation of its interior features and floor plan. Because of this gentle use, it is also possible that this landmark could revert to residential use in the future, if necessary; and all options that will ensure the Cady Lee Mansion's continued survival should be kept open.

There is a limit to how much development such a resource can endure before the long-term future of that resource is jeopardized. The Cady-Lee has been greatly impacted since the 1970s. This landmark has endured the loss of other stately homes along Eastern Avenue, and thus its historic context has been drastically damaged. The property that was once connected to the landmark has also been reduced over time by

development. A very busy Piney Branch Road has been put in and enlarged since the landmark was built. The Metro has increased the number of rails behind the house, taken more of the Cady-Lee's land, and isolated it from other homes on Chestnut Street by removing the at-grade railroad crossing that existed in this area prior to Metro. There are few if any other existing historic structures of similar stature in this area that have undergone so many directly adverse changes. One cannot lessen the effect of these development impacts by creating yet another one.

The Cady-Lee Mansion is more than a National Landmark property; it is a symbol of the tenacity of the Takoma community, which defied all odds in rescuing the property from development in the past.

Western Alignments

Western Alignment E, shown in Map 1 and a modification of Western Alignment E, shown in Map 3, would be consistent with HTI's three criteria.

The modification shown on Map 3 would involve a ramp on the northern side of Piney Branch that would attach to the western side of the railroad bridge crossing Piney Branch, and remain as close to the tracks as possible on Park Service property (not diagonally as in the Alignment Study suggestion shown in Map 1) until it comes to the beginning of Chestnut Street. It would then be an on-street trail down Chestnut, through Spring Place, past the Cedar Crossings development and down 4th Street. Both western alignment E and its modification have the advantage of bringing the MBT through two commercial areas within the Takoma historic district that are in great need of revitalization—Spring Place and 4th Street. These alignments would also assist the neighborhood in ultimately securing a western connection to the Takoma Metro Station, thus strengthening the revitalization on the western side, which is sorely needed. Neither of the two western alignments as shown will negatively impact the trees on the National Park Service land at the corner of Eastern and Piney Branch (a gateway area), which is a positive.

Both versions of western alignment E will require structures such as a ramp or terraced switchbacks. These structures should be designed to be attractive and of materials that complement the surrounding historic neighborhood.

In contrast, Western Alignment D, shown in Map 1, would place the MBT extremely close to the side of an historic home at 7131 Chestnut Street, and that could be detrimental to the long-term viability of this home. This alignment as shown also does not pass by 4th Street or Spring Place, which is a disadvantage from the standpoint of revitalization. For these reasons, Western Alignment D does not meet the defined criteria.

Conclusion

Four alignments can be found—Eastern Alignment B, Eastern Alignment B with a modification, Western Alignment E, and a modification of Western Alignment E—that meet the three criteria of preservation, revitalization, and no condemnation of private

land within the historic district. None of these alignments involves passing behind the Cady-Lee landmark property or the adjacent apartment buildings. These four alignments, discussed above, represent viable possibilities for the Takoma DC section of the MBT. There may be other viable alternatives not yet considered that also meet the three criteria.