



## Testimony/Letter in support of the Pedestrian Master Plan

August 15, 2023

Montgomery County Sierra Club  
P.O. Box 4024  
Rockville, MD 20849

Members of Montgomery County Council  
100 Maryland Avenue  
Rockville, MD 20850

Dear President Glass and Members of the Montgomery County Council:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony. The Montgomery County Sierra Club would like to express our enthusiastic support for the Planning Board draft of the Pedestrian Master Plan, and also would like to suggest several amendments or measures that otherwise should be considered and adopted in the future. This multi-year planning effort is a fantastic achievement that will set Montgomery County on the path to be a national leader in pedestrian safety. We commend the planning staff for their hard work and dedication.

Many daily trips made are within walking distance, yet people still choose to drive due to unsafe pedestrian conditions. Through improved infrastructure and pedestrian-centered policies, Montgomery County can encourage more people to drive less and decrease greenhouse gas emissions from transportation. There is no way for Montgomery County to achieve net zero status without a significant change in the status quo around our transportation system.

We would especially like to express support for the following policies included in the Plan:

- Assuming county control of state highways.
- Pivoting the Annual Sidewalk Program from a reactive, request-driven process to an equitable, data-driven process.
- Making the Open Parkways that are currently operating along Beach Drive and Sligo Creek Parkway permanent.
- Price parking spaces in county-operated facilities at market rates and use net proceeds to fund pedestrian, bicycle, and safety projects in the surrounding community.
- Increasing the number of Automated Traffic Enforcement locations – noting that these should be equitably located throughout the county with locations driven by data and not disproportionately concentrated in high-poverty neighborhoods or communities of color.
- Reimagining public engagement processes to ensure improvements are not delayed.

We also, as a general matter, support the development of future policies that recognize the connection between transportation and land use planning.

With regard to additional specific measures we believe will strengthen the Plan and the County's pedestrian safety efforts, we recommend the following:

- Metrics – The County should adopt metrics to supplement the use of traffic injuries and fatalities. This may include speeding and other traffic violations; the condition and adequacy of roadway lighting, crosswalks, and other road markings; and the number of miles of complete streets.
- Micro-mobility equipment – The County should amend its memorandum of understanding with micro-mobility companies to include geofencing or parking requirements to avoid having scooters and other such devices being parked on sidewalks and interfering with pedestrian access.
- Lighting – The 28,000 streetlights owned by Pepco and leased to the County are obsolete and have been poorly maintained with repairs often taking weeks. The County should acquire these assets to better manage their operation and to expedite LED upgrades to maximize visibility, minimize the negative effects of light pollution, increase uptime, and reduce operating cost.
- Automated enforcement – Maryland is one of the few states that does not apply automated traffic enforcement to individuals driving rental vehicles, notwithstanding that their violations may endanger pedestrians as well as other drivers. The County should work with the General Assembly to repeal the exemption.
- Tree canopy – To better cool and shade our walkways, we must protect and expand the tree canopy. One tactic is to relocate high voltage lines (including neighborhood feeder lines) underground as opportunities arise. This can be aided by expediting the development of a functional utility plan as recommended by the adopted Complete Streets Design Guidelines.
- Streetscape – As a first step toward the County assuming control of state highways, the responsibility for streetscape design along state roads including lighting and trees should be transferred from MDOT SHA to Planning and MCDOT. This will ensure transparency, public engagement, and consistency with master plans and best practices.

Although Montgomery County has declared Vision Zero by 2030 the County's official goal, not much progress has been made. Pedestrians, who disproportionately are people of color and of lower incomes, die or are severely injured on roadways in Montgomery County. This is not an accident – it is due to roadways being intentionally engineered to prioritize cars and speed over people and pedestrian safety. We appreciate the work that the County has done since the establishment of Vision Zero, but there is still much more to be done. The Pedestrian Master Plan is an excellent blueprint for how we can reach both our Vision Zero and climate goals faster.

For all these reasons, we urge you to move the Plan forward with our suggested amendments and action items. Thank you.

Sincerely,



Darian Unger  
Chair, Montgomery County Sierra Club  
DWUnger@Howard.edu