



March 9, 2022

Montgomery County Council
100 Maryland Avenue
Rockville Maryland

Re: FY 23-28 Capital Improvement Program

Montgomery County Council
100 Maryland Avenue
Rockville, MD 20850

Dear Council President Albornoz and Council Members,

The Montgomery County Group of the Maryland Sierra Club submits the following comments on the Fiscal Year 2023 Capital Budget and the FY 23-28 Capital Improvement Program proposed to the County Council by County Executive Marc Elrich. In addition, we previously joined the March 1, 2022 comments submitted by the Stormwater Partners Network of Montgomery County, and the March 7, 2022 comments submitted by the Montgomery County Better Buses coalition, and incorporate those comments by reference.

Full Upgrade of Existing Recycling Center Complex

We strongly support the request for \$8.45 million to complete the design of the updated Materials Recycling Center (MRF) at the Shady Grove Transfer Station. This budget request will enable the County to handle the large amounts of recycling our county produces. We currently export 40 percent of our recycling to Pennsylvania because the MRF does not have the capacity to handle the current volume of materials.

Transportation

We wish to emphasize the following matters, but again fully endorse the comments submitted by the Montgomery County Better Buses coalition.

The Sierra Club Maryland and many other organizations are opposed to the I-270/495 toll lane expansion project for number of reasons and believe there is no certainty about funding that would come to the county in the unlikely event the project was to proceed. As such we urge the council to seek alternate funding for items in the budget that are projected to be funded by the toll lane expansion project.

Bus Rapid Transit (BRT). We are pleased to see the MD 355 BRT Central Phase route and the Veirs Mill BRT route targeted for “near term” implementation but note that they are contingent on outside funding. These routes can help stimulate economic growth, and provide more



frequent, reliable service to some of the County's most racially and economically diverse communities. Creating bus-only/dedicated lanes will result in rapid travel that incentivizes drivers to leave their cars, circumvent congestion, and ride the FLASH!

MD 355 BRT Central Phase with completion in FY28 – This route focuses on the ten miles from Rockville to Germantown, providing mid-County with good access to jobs and healthcare, Metro stations, the MARC train, and two Montgomery College campuses. This Equity Focus Area has many households that do not have a vehicle and includes the highest existing Ride On ridership. Meanwhile, MCDOT will continue design for the MD 355 BRT South/North phase.

Veirs Mill Road BRT with completion in FY27 – This 7.6-mile corridor connects Wheaton and Rockville Metro stations and is an Equity Focus Area with the County's top Metrobus routes. The route will include transit signal priority, queue jumps and some dedicated lanes.

All BRT lines must run in 100% dedicated lanes. Without dedicated lanes these buses will not be rapid, and thus will not be effective in providing much improved service to those who must take the bus and will not be attractive enough to encourage automobile users to switch to the bus.

Zero-Emission Ride-On Fleet. We support replacement of 29 diesel-powered Ride On buses with zero emission electric buses in fiscal years 2023-24 to achieve full capacity of 70 electric buses at the Silver Spring Brookville bus depot solar microgrid.

Prioritize Construction of Capital Crescent Trail and Tunnel under Wisconsin Avenue. This high priority item has been delayed in the CIP. Construction of the trail and bike/pedestrian tunnel must be completed in time for the Purple Line opening in 2026.

BIPPA Projects. The County needs to provide safe “first and last mile” bike/pedestrian access to transit, and connectivity to schools, libraries, and community centers. More money should be provided to move these projects forward.

We appreciate the County Council's consideration of these comments, and the comments submitted by the Stormwater Partners Network of Montgomery County and the Montgomery County Better Buses coalition.

Sincerely,

Shruti Bhatnagar, Chair
Sierra Club Montgomery County Group
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