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TRANSPORTATION, INFRASTRUCTURE  
ENERGY & ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

November 16, 2015

Secretary Pete Rahn  
Maryland Department of Transportation  
P.O. Box 548  
7201 Corporate Center Drive  
Hanover, MD 21076

Dear Secretary Rahn,

We write to you concerning serious safety issues on two state highways in communities that we represent: River Road (MD 190) and Massachusetts Avenue (MD 396).

As you know, Councilmember Berliner recently hosted a Day of Action—an event supported by the State Delegation representing the affected areas—focused on road safety on these two state roads in light of recent fatalities to beloved members of our community. Along with our County's Department of Transportation, Police, and Planning leadership, scores of community members participated, entreating drivers to be aware of both speed and distractions, and making suggestions for improvements.

We appreciated that you made two members of the State Highway Administration team, Christopher Bishop and Anyesha Mookherjee, available for that event. We hope that they have had an opportunity to convey to you the depth of feelings that they encountered.

Having listened to residents' concerns and the work that State Highway Administration is undertaking, we offer the following recommendations to enhance pedestrian and bicycle safety, both along the specific roads and within Montgomery County and Maryland more generally. We have identified five (5) solutions that can be implemented immediately, four (4) in the short-term, and three (3) through longer-term policy changes.

**IMMEDIATE SOLUTIONS**

- 1. Crosswalks** - As State Highway Administration has already committed to doing, all crosswalks on Massachusetts Avenue should be repainted to improve visibility and resident safety. The crosswalks at the intersection of River Road and Springfield Drive should be re-striped as ladder bar crosswalks in line with best practices and for ease of maintenance.
- 2. Pedestrian Improvements at River Road and Springfield Drive** - The southeast corner of the River Road-Springfield Drive intersection was reconstructed without a completed sidewalk and

curb cut to Springfield Drive. The "desire path" in the grass indicates the significant use of this incomplete segment. Previous to the project at River and Springfield, the sidewalk did extend all the way to Springfield Drive with ADA ramps. This segment of sidewalk should be reinstalled.

3. **Complete the installation of the new signals at River Road and Springfield Drive** - The new poles, with new APS push buttons to improve pedestrian safety, have been completed but have yet to be activated. This project should be completed at once.
4. **Install Traffic Light at River Road and Ogden Road** - Because of difficult sightlines at the intersection and the use of the intersection by Montgomery County Public Schools buses, the community believes a traffic light should be installed at Ogden Road.
5. **Other Improvements as Appropriate** - We request that SHA make use of their existing toolbox to install more advance pedestrian warning signs and other warning signs that alert drivers to pedestrians, bicyclists, and schools, as well as the need to reduce speeds ahead.

### **SHORT-TERM SOLUTIONS**

1. **Adoption and Installation of Innovative Pedestrian Safety Tools by State Highway** - SHA can and should install the next generation of innovative pedestrian safety tools. These new approaches are currently not included in Maryland's Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices but have been approved for use by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). Three tools particularly stand out: Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacons (RRFBs), Lead Pedestrian Intervals (LPIs), and HAWK signals. RRFBs allow pedestrians to push a button when they are ready to cross, activating bright, rapid-flashing LED lights on the pedestrian crossing sign that more effectively alert drivers to yield to the pedestrian. LPIs give pedestrians lead time to enter the crosswalk, improving their visibility to drivers and reducing conflicts with turning vehicles. HAWK signals, like the one on East Gude Drive, actually bring traffic to a red light stop when activated by pedestrians. All of these tools have been implemented successfully by the District of Columbia and many other locations throughout the nation. Sites on Massachusetts and River, as well as areas near schools, high incident areas, and bicycle-pedestrian priority areas, should serve as pilots for use of these tools that are now approved by FHWA and have demonstrated their value in reducing collisions in many other jurisdictions.
2. **Adoption and Installation of Radar Speed Signs to Reduce Travel Speeds** - Another useful tool that SHA should adopt is the use of radar speed signs. These signs are relatively inexpensive (\$5,000-\$12,000) and give a clear warning to drivers when they are traveling too fast.
3. **Installation of Pedestrian Refuges as Appropriate** - On stretches of road where other improvements are not advisable, even the installation of pedestrian refuges can improve pedestrian safety by reducing crossing distances. These should be installed more widely in our community within the existing right-of-way, especially at locations, like those on Massachusetts Avenue, with uncontrolled crossings with marked crosswalks.
4. **Protected Bike Lanes** - All the evidence shows that protected bicycle lanes improve bicycle safety, reduce conflicts among bicyclists, drivers, and pedestrians, and increase bicycling. Our county is moving forward with protected bicycle lanes in multiple locations, including state highways like Goldsboro Rd (MD 614). We need the state's support for these projects and for the state to pursue better bicycle infrastructure on their rights-of-way with us.

## LONG-TERM SOLUTIONS

- 1. Urban Road Design Guidelines** - SHA should adopt urban road guidelines that allow for more appropriate solutions in our dense urban environments where we want traffic to be slower and where we want more space for bicycles and pedestrians. Such guidelines have already been adopted by cities like Boston and Dallas, and Montgomery County passed its urban design standards in December 2014. Urban road design will allow SHA to treat communities with different needs in a manner appropriate for that area. This need is most acute in our County's Bicycle and Pedestrian Priority Areas. State guidelines must be established and adopted by SHA that reflect the priority of affording safe walking and biking facilities in these areas.
  
- 2. Setting Speeds in Urban and Residential Areas for Safety** - In line with changing our standards for designing state roads, SHA should take every effort to reduce speeds in dense urban and residential areas to improve safety for all users. If speeds are so high that pedestrians and bicyclists are put at risk, then speeds must be reduced through re-engineering and use of traffic calming measures, a key focus of our County's pedestrian safety program.
  
- 3. Join the Vision Zero Movement** - Our State should join with communities across the nation in setting a goal of 0 traffic deaths on our roads with a publicly committed date. Maryland has made tremendous progress in this regard. In 1968, 872 people died on our roads. Last year, in 2014, 442 people perished, the lowest on record. Unfortunately, pedestrian fatalities have not been reduced and now constitute a large share of our state's traffic fatalities. The progress made in vehicular traffic safety must continue and extend to pedestrians and bicyclists until all of these preventable deaths are averted.

While we commend these recommendations to you, we have not ignored the important role Montgomery County can play in improving safety. In that regard, we will be reaching out to the Montgomery County Department of Transportation (MCDOT) about finishing the sidewalk project on Springfield Drive that will connect to the River Road intersection. This segment is an important final connection that was left incomplete due to the cost and complexity of constructing in that section of road. We hope to work with MCDOT on creative and new solutions. We also encourage the Montgomery County Police Department (MCPD) to continue its distracted driving and pedestrian safety enforcement, and for it to consider strongly additional speed cameras in areas of concern, particularly along key stretches of Massachusetts Avenue and River Road.

Mr. Secretary, we thank you in advance for your consideration of these recommendations, and we look forward to working with you to implement these badly needed safety improvements as quickly as possible. It is important that officials at all level of government work together to put forth flexible and innovative solutions to solve some of our traffic and safety challenges.

Sincerely,



Roger Berliner  
Councilmember, District 1  
Chair, Transportation,  
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