



Amendments to FY21-26 Capital Improvements Program (CIP) - February 9, 2021 Hearing

My name is Peter Gray and I am here representing the Washington Area Bicyclist Association, its 1500 members in Montgomery County and the thousands of other WABA supporters who live, work, and travel by bike here.

We are pleased to note that funding for many street safety initiatives remain in place in the proposed CIP. Over the next few years, pedestrian and bicycle projects in the various BiPPA's will make improvements to Bethesda, Wheaton, Grosvenor, Glenmont, and the Purple Line corridor. We also celebrate the work the Council has done over the past several years to get the Purple Line built and the Capital Crescent Trail extended from downtown Bethesda to Silver Spring.

Last May, the Council voted unanimously to fully fund the construction of the Capital Crescent Trail Tunnel under Wisconsin Avenue for completion in FY 2027. We were therefore distressed to see on January 15, 2021 in the FY 21 Recommended Revised Spending Plan that the County Executive in effect vetoed the decision of the whole Council and pushed the entirety of the funding for construction of the CCT Tunnel beyond FY 26. This means the Tunnel would not even begin construction until FY 2027, nor finish construction until FY 2029, a full five years after completion of the Purple Line rail project and the new Trail from Bethesda to downtown Silver Spring. This will leave a huge gap for this crucial transportation and recreation facility connecting the Silver Spring and Bethesda CBDs, as well as a gap in the region's most important route for cycling and walking.

In addition, the planning and design of the Fenton Street Cycletrack has progressed and now has an estimated cost of \$8 million. The January 15, 2021 Spending Plan maintains the \$4.145 in funding Council gave this project in 2020, with completion of the project in FY 2023. This leaves a deficit of around \$4 million to complete this important Bicycle Master Plan project which will greatly enhance safety for people who bike and walk in the Silver Spring CBD.

Also, the Planning Board on January 21, 2021 approved and referred to the Council T&E Committee the latest concept plans for the Amherst Avenue Bikeway connecting the Forest Glen area with the Wheaton CBD. The estimated cost of this Master Plan project is around \$3 million. There is sufficient funding in the Bicycle-Pedestrian Priority Area Improvements - Wheaton line item, but with construction not beginning until FY 25 for this two year construction period.

Therefore WABA urges the Council to fund the following priorities:

1. Fund the construction of the Capital Crescent Trail Tunnel under Wisconsin Avenue for completion in FY 2027. When the trail opens, Wisconsin Ave will be the only at-grade crossing of a state highway for the county's most-used trail. No amount of engineering or design, education or enforcement can eliminate the risk of three thousand+ walkers, bicyclists and kids crossing Wisconsin's six lanes and 40 thousand daily cars and trucks. This tunnel is not optional for this regional transportation and public health treasure.
2. Add \$4 million in FYs 22-3 to insure completion of the Fenton Street Cycletrack. This project has had the funding support of the Council for several years and should not be delayed further.
3. Accelerate the funding for the Amherst Avenue Cycletrack to allow completion of this Vision Zero enhancement for the Wheaton CBD and prioritize biking and walking safety for those on the Eastern side of the County.
4. Even in these very challenging times, budget-wise, we urge the Council to continue to make investments in the Bicycle Master Plan. Every bike project is a Vision Zero project and making these investments will help the County achieve its safety, mobility and climate goals.