

**Testimony on Behalf of the County Executive Marc Elrich  
Amendment to the FY23-28 CIP and Special Appropriation #23-53 to FY23 for BRT: US  
29 Phase 2**

**November 15, 2022**

My name is Chris Conklin, and I am the Director of the Montgomery County Department of Transportation. I am here today to provide testimony on behalf of County Executive Marc Elrich regarding his special funding request for Phase 2 of the US 29 Flash Bus Rapid Transit project. This project is important to the County Executive and to the people of Montgomery County.

The County has made an initial investment in expanding transportation options available to our residents to provide means of travel other than more cars on the US 29 corridor in the East County. The US 29 Flash opened in October 2020, and, despite COVID, the reception from the community and riders has been overwhelmingly positive. Interest in seeing the Flash succeed in transforming the way people move and the County develops motivated efforts to explore additional improvements on the corridor. The US 29 Mobility and Reliability Study sought to identify additional investment for the US 29 corridor that would complement the current US 29 Flash, improve corridor travel time and reliability, and increase pedestrian and bicycle access and safety.

The County Executive recommended, and the County Council approved, funding to advance pedestrian and bicycle access improvements around Flash stations as part of the FY23- 28 capital budget. Expanding transit without addressing walking and biking will only get us part of the way to accomplishing our goals. While some access improvements were made as part of the initial US 29 Flash project, there are numerous upgrades needed to improve walking and biking to the Flash stations. Efforts are underway to advance those projects.

The additional study that County Council requested for a Median Bus Lane option for US 29 has concluded, and I am recommending that the Council approve a supplemental funding request to advance the Median Bus Lane to the preliminary engineering milestone. We cannot afford not to do anything to improve transit's ability to support growth and renewal in East County. The No Build Alternative does not address the longer-term growth and eventual return of congestion. We are all aware that expanding roadway capacity is not just infeasible on this corridor, but also not in alignment with the County's vision for how we should grow, move people, and support our climate commitments.

The Median Bus Lane will elevate public transportation in this corridor by giving the Flash and other express services a dedicated facility, separate from the impacts of traffic congestion. Median bus lanes will do more to allow buses to bypass the common areas of recurring congestion along US 29; they will also keep the buses isolated from congestion- creating events such as breakdowns and traffic crashes. These events can cause even greater disruption to the flow of traffic, and result in travelers having to build extra time into their schedules. An on-time arrival is critical to someone trying to access a job. The median bus lane will not only provide improved travel time but also reliability and consistency to that travel time. This corridor has been identified as an Equity Emphasis Area by the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments. It has been well established that shorter commute times due to faster public transit is a strong indicator of a person moving out of poverty due to improved access to opportunity.

The median bus lane will result in a better travel time for the Flash over its current situation and will offer significant travel time savings over driving, potentially influencing car drivers to use public transit in support of the County's climate goals. This can be accomplished with no significant change in travel time for drivers when compared to the No Build or the widening of the corridor.

The median bus lane is in alignment with the County's *Transit Corridors Functional Master Plan*, which seeks dedicated bus lanes along US 29 from MD 198 to the Silver Spring Transit Center. It also reinforces our investment and commitment to growth and renewal in East County. Advancing the median bus lane from Tech Road to Silver Spring will help link the vibrant downtown of Silver Spring to White Oak and Burtonsville – strengthening the connection so that people can access jobs in the East County from the rest of the region and allow residents of the East County improved access to jobs elsewhere. The median bus lane also has the potential to carry even more people than projected in the study as Flash service levels increase, ridership grows, the Flash network expands, and neighborhood connections are improved over the long term.

The County Executive does acknowledge that the Managed Lane concept studied also shows promising results through the analysis and modeling completed. This option could improve travel time for most users of the corridor and incentivize additional carpooling, reducing the number of single-occupant vehicles traveling the corridor during peak periods. However, this option also shows that the percentage of transit users in the corridor may decrease as carpoolers increase. This option also assumes that the questions around enforcement, shifts to carpool, and operations can be translated into actual practice. While there are some examples of arterial-running managed lanes that can be looked to for lessons learned and best practices, these are still significant questions. The long-term viability of this option and the need to modify the high occupancy vehicle policies to keep it operational are additional questions. However, this option does show the highest level of overall benefit for travel in this corridor by all vehicular modes and is worthy of some consideration by the County Council on this basis.

The County Executive is very excited about the opportunity to advance a median bus lane to further the benefits to the community already provided through the US 29 Flash. This project would provide the ability to do more with only small changes to the footprint of our existing infrastructure and prioritize transit in a corridor with a high level of usage. I urge you to approve the Executive's request to fund this project.