

August 18, 2023

Council President Evan Glass
Transportation & Environment Committee
Council Office Building
100 Maryland Ave, 6th Floor
Rockville, MD 20850

Comments Re: Support for Pedestrian Master Plan

The Coalition for Smarter Growth strongly supports the Planning Board draft of the Pedestrian Master Plan. Its comprehensive approach to pedestrian safety and accessibility will advance our county's climate and equity goals, help us reach Vision Zero, and establish Montgomery County as a model for other jurisdictions to follow.

The actions recommended in the Pedestrian Master Plan are visionary and ambitious—as we must be when tackling issues with the weight and urgency of climate change and increasing pedestrian injuries and fatalities.

We urge the Transportation & Environment Committee to support the Pedestrian Master Plan in full, and advance this visionary plan for a safer and more equitable Montgomery County.

Specific Recommendations

The strength of the Pedestrian Master Plan is in its wide-ranging, holistic recommendations, which reflect the “all-of-the-above” strategy required to effectively address the interconnected issues of transportation choice, land use, safety, and equity.

For this reason, we strongly recommend that the Transportation & Environment committee consider each individual recommendation in the Pedestrian Master Plan as an integral part of its successful implementation.

When discussing well-established practices to protect vulnerable road users and reduce emissions from transportation—the number one source of greenhouse gas emissions—half-measures are not enough, and no measure is “optional.”

Thus, we encourage the Transportation & Environment committee to carefully consider how any proposed revisions or omissions may impact the effectiveness of the Pedestrian Master Plan.

Additionally, we would like to express our strong support for the following items (“Key Actions”) in particular, which we believe to be the most visionary and urgent of the plans’ recommendations.

Each Key Action is listed in the order in which it appears in the Pedestrian Master Plan.

B-1a: Pivot the Annual Sidewalk Program from a reactive, request-driven process to an equitable, data-driven process. *and*

B-1b: Reimagine public engagement for sidewalk construction to ensure that community members can share valuable local perspectives while pedestrian safety and connectivity improvements are not delayed.

B-1a and **B-1b**: These Key Actions are essential to redress existing equity concerns with the current sidewalk construction process. Sidewalk construction should be prioritized and actively pursued in locations with the greatest need and with known safety risks, and should not be contingent on residents' ability to initiate a request or participate in public meetings.

B-1e: Explore use of temporary materials to create dedicated pedestrian spaces where sidewalks are not feasible.

B-1e: We support this action, which would allow for flexibility to avoid delays in implementing safety improvements.

We recommend a slight revision to strengthen this Key Action: **Use temporary materials to create dedicated pedestrian spaces where sidewalks are not feasible.**

B-1f: Amend Montgomery County's Residential Permit Parking Guidelines to allow MCDOT to remove residential permit parking areas in support of another transportation purpose. *and*

and

B-1g: Affirm that the county can remove curbside electric vehicle (EV) charging to allow a transportation facility to be constructed.

B-1f and **B-1g**: We strongly support these Key Actions. Alternate uses like bike lanes, retail parking, and wider sidewalks may be greater priorities than residential permit parking. Curbside EV charging/parking can be problematic, as it can create priority for vehicle parking over other potential uses.

For the same reasons, we also support Key Action B-11: Address curbside management to prioritize pedestrian safety and rethink how curb space is used.

B-1h: Document deviations from Complete Streets Design Guide streetscape default widths where applicable.

B-1h: We support this measure, and suggest two revisions to strengthen it:

- 1) establish maximum rather than minimum travel lane widths of 10' (inside lanes) & 11' (for bus routes).
- 2) Strengthen reporting of deviations with clear justifications as to why the standard cannot be met in a specific situation, documentation, mitigation measures (e.g. other means to address walk/bike safety), and quarterly reporting to Council committee and highly visible public information postings.

B-4: Build more walkable places.

B-4: We strongly support each of the Key Actions that comprise item **B-4**. These Key Actions identify how we can change our approach to our built environment to prioritize safety and encourage sustainable modes of transportation over dependence on cars.

In particular, we would like to highlight the importance of **B-4b** and **B-4c**, which would provide safer routes to school by prioritizing location of schools in walkable places (for the same reason, we support the recommendations in **P-5**)

While **B-4d**, **B-4e**, and **B-4i** each identify the critical relationship between road design (including target speed, location of driveways/alleys/crossings, and alignment standards) and road safety, we also encourage the Transportation & Environment Committee to consider the **size/number of lanes** of roads as an important determining factor of road safety. Road diets may be appropriate in some locations, and can offer significant safety and environmental benefits.

B-6: Reduce pedestrian pathway temperatures.

B-6: Adequate tree canopy is essential to a safe, healthy, and comfortable urban environment suitable for walking, and should be prioritized in Equity Focus Areas (EFAs) as this section recommends.

B-7a: Increase funding for the Annual Sidewalk Program and other related Capital Improvement Program efforts, including the Bus Stop Improvement capital funding program, to address missing, broken, or substandard sidewalks and other infrastructure.

B-7a: We support this Key Action and in particular increasing funding for the Bus Stop Improvement capital funding program. Many bus riders arrive to bus stops on foot, and bus riders are disproportionately likely to be from low-income households. Safe crossings to bus stops and well-maintained stops are thus essential to providing equitable, safe, and comfortable access to transportation, as well as making the bus a truly convenient alternative to driving for those who have the choice.

B-7e: Update development standards to require or incentivize new developments to connect to nearby sidewalks and trails that exist or may be built in the future.

B-7e: We support this but recommend a slight revision to strengthen it: removing “or incentivize.” This is an important goal and should be a requirement.

B-7g: Fund off-site pedestrian and bicycle access improvements to transit stations as part of the main capital project or through a parallel effort.

B-7g: See B-7a; encouraging mode shift from private vehicles to public transit is critical to meeting climate goals, and transit is disproportionately used by low-income riders. Prioritizing ped/bike access to transit over car access is both an important climate and equity measure.

B-8c: Write Forest Conservation Plans to allow accessible pedestrian pathways to make important connections and rewrite existing Forest Conservation Plans to allow pathways where it would be beneficial for pedestrian connectivity.

B-8c: Urban forest planning should support increased walk/bike access to make land uses & transportation work together to reduce vehicle miles traveled (VMT), auto emissions, and vehicle traffic.

B-8e: Prioritize construction of all required sidewalks and bikeways to standard dimensions for development projects in areas with impervious surface caps or other similar limitations.

B-8e: Sidewalks & bikeways with standard dimensions should be a priority even when conflicting with stormwater management goals because walk/bike trips are critical to support reduced VMT/emissions, and increase accessibility. Alternative stormwater management approaches should be used to compensate for impervious sidewalks and bikeways.

B-9b: Use potential pedestrian demand instead of observed pedestrian volumes to decide whether or where to install pedestrian connectivity improvements.

B-9b: This Key Action is essential to achieving the full potential of this plan. It's important to plan for potential pedestrian trips & promote these trips through better facilities and land uses, rather than only serve the status quo.

B-10: Assume county control of state highways.

B-10: We strongly support this recommendation, which would make it faster and easier to make

critical safety improvements to some of our County’s most dangerous arterials. The acute danger to pedestrians on these roadways is too urgent a problem for solutions to be held up by bureaucratic obstacles.

The County can respond to safety issues, and realize multimodal transportation goals, in a more direct and timely manner than can be easily achieved by working through state agencies.

P-1: Reduce impacts of vehicle design and operation on pedestrian safety.

P-1: The multiple Key Actions in this section are some of the boldest recommendations of the Pedestrian Master Plan with the greatest potential to set a model for other jurisdictions, and have a significant positive effect on pedestrian safety.

High speeds and increased vehicle size are more dangerous—and too often, deadly—for pedestrians and other vulnerable road users (**P-1a** and **P-1c**). Additionally, adapting emergency vehicles to safe, narrower streets—rather than maintaining the status quo of wider, dangerous roads—is a practical and productive step to accommodate both these essential public services and the safety of road users (**P-1b**).

For these reasons, we also support Key Action **F-1c**.

P-2: Improve and expand protected crossings.

P-2: These Key Actions are necessary and common-sense solutions that will make crossings far safer and more comfortable for pedestrians.

In particular we want to emphasize the importance of prioritizing safe crossings to bus stops (**P-2a** and **P-2b**) for encouraging use of transit and providing equitable access to transit, and of changes to road design that systematically make the roads safer and more predictable for pedestrians and motorists alike (**P-2c-g**).

With regards to **P-2f**, the County should also consider recommending road diets where appropriate to reduce the number of lanes and the width of crossing distances.

With regards to **P-2g**, the committee should consider strengthening this measure to require that the County retrofit or remove existing slip lanes, and bar new ones. Only high level exceptions should be allowed with full scrutiny from the public and Council. Channelized right turn lanes (high speed right turn lanes) are easy to correct by installing a barrier.

P-8a: Increase the number of Automated Traffic Enforcement (ATE) locations.

P-8a: We support this measure and agree that equity must be an important consideration in all traffic enforcement, including automatic traffic enforcement. ATE is potentially an important tool to reduce traffic stops and should be evaluated as to its effectiveness at improving racial equity in traffic enforcement.

P-9a: Support state legislation to allow jurisdiction-wide speed limit reduction.

and

P-9b: Ensure that speed limits and observed speeds along county roads are in line with target speeds identified in the CSDG.

P-9a and P-9b: Speed is an important, and too often deadly, factor in many crashes. In addition to posted speed limits (target speed), road design has a significant impact on the actual speed at which drivers travel (observed speed).

Both of these key actions are essential shifts in our way of approaching road design that will help to address the significant contribution of speed and road design to roadway injuries and fatalities.

F-1a: 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.

F-1a: We support this measure, and would add that pricing of parking in county-operated facilities should be coordinated with the pricing of on-street parking.

F-1c: Consider potential legislation to tie vehicle registration fees to safe vehicle design.

F-1c: See comments on **P-1**. Vehicle weight and design can be a significant contributor to deadly crashes.

Thank you for considering these recommendations.

Sincerely,
Carrie Kisicki



Montgomery County Advocacy Manager
Coalition for Smarter Growth