

Good afternoon,

My name is Barkha Bishnoi, and I'm a student at Richard Montgomery High School. I am the president of Richard Montgomery's Climate Club and an intern for the TAME coalition. As a youth environmental advocate, I speak on behalf of many of my fellow students in stating that the proposed M-83 highway jeopardizes the future that we all hope to inherit: one that is livable, equitable, and sustainable.

At school, I've worked with peers to push for greener school buildings statewide, and I hope to carry these experiences into a future in environmental law to protect communities and ecosystems.

But right now, my generation is growing up watching climate change occur in front of us, and this has made issues such as the M83 highway all the more critical. As a former Clarksburg resident, I understand the frustration surrounding long commute times. However, the data makes it clear: this 1 billion dollar construction offers mere minutes of improvement in travel time. That is an enormous investment for minimal return.

But more importantly to us students, M-83 goes against the environmental values that Montgomery County embraces. We say that we are stewards of our parklands. Yet, this highway would destroy **100 acres**. Meanwhile, the transportation sector is the largest source of direct greenhouse gas emissions in our country, and expanding highways contribute exponentially to this issue. Montgomery County has been well regarded as a climate leader, and we students ask that we do not let this set us back.

Just a few weeks ago, I hiked with other students right along the proposed corridor for M-83. As we walked, we witnessed the habitats, animals, and native plants that would all be wiped out.

But we also saw the potential impact on people—this park is a place for communities to gather. For some, this is their very own backyard. The highway would come within 20 yards of where children play and neighbors gather.

Sustainable and practical solutions exist. I have advocated for electrifying the MCPS bus fleet, but beyond electric buses, we also require more buses in general to serve up-county residents. Car ownership is out of reach for many families and other youth, elders, and people with disabilities lack the option of driving. Many county residents rely on the Ride On bus systems including in the up-county. We can expand the bus transit network instead of constructing a highway that will harm the land, health, and future of the Montgomery County people.

Today, I urge you to approve the Planning Board's recommendation to remove the proposed 5-mile M83 northern section from the master plan. The students of Montgomery County care, and we're asking you to choose the smarter and more sustainable path forward.

Thank you for your time.