

My name is Rich Biedrzycki. I am a resident of downtown Bethesda and a member of Strong Towns DC, a local conversation whose goal is to see that Washington and the region become more resilient, both economically and as communities.

We are commenting on the Master Plan of Highways and Transitways (MPOHT) - 2025 Technical Update in support of the removal of the northern expansion of M-83. While we understand the desire to increase traffic flow, more highways is not the answer.

First, once a highway is built, it needs to be maintained to allow for safe and reliable travel. That maintenance requires constant upkeep and funds that could be better spent elsewhere. If the county wishes to improve connections near Clarksburg and Germantown, money spent on building and maintaining the highway could be spent on expanding RideOn service. Fellow members of Strong Towns have also brought up the fact that the county has been neglectful of road maintenance in other parts of the county. Rather than building more roads, it would be more prudent for the county to maintain what it has first.

Second, highways are harmful for the environment. By increasing the number of high-speed thoroughfares, residents will be encouraged and incentivized to live further from places of employment because they could just drive instead. More vehicle miles traveled means more air pollution and a worsened environment. Even electric vehicles would produce pollution through tire particulates. The midcounty expansion would also require destruction of existing forest. If the county were to expand RideOn service instead, residents would be encouraged to use this more environmentally friendly form of transportation rather than personal vehicle travel.

Third, highways are more beneficial to those with personal vehicles and thus are more likely to be wealthier than those without. Effectively, by expanding the highway, the county would be subsidizing the wealthier residents of the county at the expense of its less fortunate.

Fourth, highways bring increased traffic speeds and worsen street safety. On average, Montgomery County loses 1 person every week to traffic fatalities. Adding more high speed lanes will only make this problem worse. This expansion would also pass near Watkins Mill Elementary School, putting our children in harm's way. Watkins Mill Road, itself, is already dangerous enough, with a 61 year old man killed by a driver on May 14 of this year.

Thus, we hope that the council accept the changes proposed by the planning board to remove the M-83 highway expansion, for our financial health, our own health, our children's health, and our planet's health.

We also support the goals of identifying target speeds for roads across the county. In section 5.B.2, it is stated:

"As speed management is critical to achieving Vision Zero, all master-planned streets (freeways and some parkways excepted) are recommended to have a target speed. Currently, over half of the MPOHT street network does not have a master-planned target speed."

We endorse this approach and moving on from the dated standards of setting speed limits based on what speed people drive at. However, it must be stated that target speeds cannot be truly attained if the streets are not designed properly. Thus, we ask that the county install traffic calming measures to do this. Features such as raised crosswalks, speed bumps, narrower streets, and daylighting at intersections

will force drivers to subconsciously slow down as the design of the road forces them to drive more safely. Roads that are designed like highways will lead to drivers driving at highway speeds, even if they are in residential areas.

We are disappointed to see additional lanes added to many arterial roads, including but not limited to, Georgia Avenue, New Hampshire Avenue, Old Georgetown Road, University Boulevard, Wisconsin Avenue, and Rockville Pike. It has been shown time and time again that adding lanes to existing roads will not reduce the amount of traffic. While the increased number of lanes may temporarily improve traffic flow, in the long-run, more and more people will choose to drive on these roads through the process of induced demand. Because there are more lanes, drivers will choose to drive more on these roads, thinking that traffic will be faster. Over time, as more and more drivers come to this same conclusion, the road is full of traffic and the same issue of congestion rears its ugly head once more. Despite the millions of dollars of investment spent on building new lanes, no progress on addressing the problem will have been made. Because of this, we ask that the master plan be amended to remove these additional lanes. While we understand that many of these roads are state highways and thus not directly controlled by the county, it is important that the county works with the state to prevent these dangerous expansions. The money spent on expanding those roads could then be spent expanding RideOn and BRT service. By having fewer people in cars and more people in public transportation, congestion would truly decrease.

We support the expansion of BRT service as proposed through additional stations and transitways. This will improve connectivity, increase ridership, and reduce congestion. However, these benefits will only occur if the county completes these expansions on time. The majority of the FLASH network has been in the planning stages for years. It is essential that the county make the regulatory and bureaucratic changes necessary to ensure speedy completion of the project. A BRT network does no one good if it is not actually operational.

We support the creation of the Growth Corridor Boulevard street type. By creating this street type, we will better be able to create more compact, more complete, and safer neighborhoods through these corridors.

We are disappointed to see little information with regards to changes to expand and make a more complete bicycle network. If we want to have Complete Streets as stated by the county, we need to make sure that bicyclists are not just allowed but are safe to ride. By installing protected bike lanes, planting trees, and clever use of street parking, we could make it easier for bicyclists to get around and in the process reduce traffic congestion, reduce air pollution, and save lives.

We thank the council for listening to our comments. We would also like to thank the planning board for their work in trying to make our streets safer for everyone, not just drivers. We hope our suggestions will be taken into consideration.