

**Date:** July 8, 2025

**Public Hearing Testimony:** Master Plan of Highways and Transitways – 2025, Technical Update

**From:** Roberta G (rg) Steinman, Silver Spring, MD 20910

Dear Councilmembers,

**Please remove the proposed M83/Midcounty Highway Extended, in its entirety, from the Master Plan of Highways and Transitways.**

**The Bigger Picture:** We are now in an age of multiple environmental crises, which will only intensify in the coming years. Fossil fuels have enabled us to grow beyond the ecological limits of Planet Earth, resulting in what scientists call “overshoot.” Overshoot occurs when “humanity uses resources at a faster pace than ecosystems can renew and generates waste at a faster pace than ecosystems can absorb.”

This is exactly what we have been doing with our natural areas in Montgomery County, as well as globally. We have been cutting down our forested ecosystems, destroying natural habitats and losing biodiversity. Biodiversity – all the living things that make up the Web of Life – the ecological foundation upon which life depends.

The combination of deforestation, loss of biodiversity, and rising temperatures is a dangerous and unsustainable path. Yet this is exactly the path we would follow if M-83 were to be built.

The proposed 5-mile northern extension of Mid-County Highway (M-83) entails a sweeping scale of deforestation and habitat loss, including stream valley riparian areas, wetlands, woodlands and thickets, suburban parks and backyards.

- **M-83 would result in a huge loss of forests as the road cuts through five parks**, including two M-NCPPC stream valley parks, Great Seneca SVP and North Germantown Greenway SVP. The other parks that the road would impact include South Valley Park (Montgomery Village Foundation), Blohm Park (City of Gaithersburg) and Wildcat Branch SVP (M-NCPPC).
- **M-83 would sever the most significant natural link remaining for ecological connectivity** between the 300-acre North Germantown Greenway Stream Valley Park and the expansive Great Seneca Park. Wildlife connectivity is a lifeline for the migration of both flora and fauna (mammals, reptiles, amphibians). M-83 would sever this ecological connectivity that is critical for maintaining healthy populations and for sustaining ecosystems. Connectivity allows wildlife to exchange genes and reproduce, which promotes biological diversity, and it helps species respond to environmental changes and climate change by giving them room to move and migrate.
- **Cutting down these forests would exacerbate climate warming and undermine County climate goals to reduce CO2 emissions.** Forests are our first line of defense in removing the heat-trapping greenhouse gases, CO2 and methane, from the atmosphere. Trees act as a carbon sink by storing carbon in their leaves, roots, trunks, and in the soil, and this mitigates rising planetary temperature. Building roads where the forests are means eliminating the capacity of two of our three natural carbon sinks – forests and soil (and oceans) – to absorb greenhouse gases.
- **The forested parcels that remain would be fragmented** and would no longer be suitable forest interior habitat for wildlife that require large unbroken tracts of forest to maintain viable populations (birds, mammals, amphibians).
- **M-83 would severely and permanently degrade six streams** that it crosses over its 5-mile course (listed from north to south: Wildcat Branch, Dayspring Creek, Brandermill Tributary, Great Seneca Creek, Whetstone Run and Watkins Run), and it would degrade and destroy numerous wetlands along the stream valley floodplains including Dayspring Creek, Wildcat Branch, Great Seneca Creek and Whetstone Run.
- **Cutting down the forests to build M-83 would disrupt the water cycle, degrade the water quality and reduce water availability in the area, ultimately affecting the local climate.** Forests are the best land use for water

quality, and they are integral to the water cycle. Trees infiltrate water into the soil, reduce surface runoff and prevent erosion. This, in turn, feeds the local aquifer and maintains stream health and the good water quality necessary to support sensitive aquatic species. Cutting down forests to build roads disrupts the water cycle by significantly reducing the amount of water that is absorbed and released back into the atmosphere through transpiration, leading to decreased rainfall, increased polluted surface runoff from the roads into the streams, soil erosion, and potential flooding. **In this way, destruction of forests destroys the summer storms so vital to the regional water cycles.**

In short, building M-83 would cause massive ecological devastation to this large and contiguous forest ecosystem. The natural world is the basis of our existence. We cannot benefit from the destruction of our life support systems. The most important thing to do right now is to preserve the last remaining natural areas -- everywhere. It's up to you to take the sustainable, longer-term view. **Stop this road from ever being built.** Conserve and restore natural systems rather than further degrading them. Give future generations a reason to thank you.

*What's left is not enough, but it's all we've got, and nothing less than all of it will do.* - Robert Michael Pyle

**END**