

June 16, 2025

TO: Council President Stewart, Council Vice-President Jawando  
CC: County Council, County Executive Marc Elrich

RE: Master Plan of Highways and Transitways (MPOHT) - 2025 Technical Update

Dear County Council Members:

UCAB takes in feedback from Upcounty residents and community organizations through our meetings and other discussions to assist it in advising the County Council and Executive on matters of concern to these stakeholders. Over the past two decades the UCAB's has been steadfast in its belief that the northern extension of Mid-County Highway from Montgomery Village Avenue to Ridge Road – M-83 – should be built in conjunction with the County's approval of new development in the Clarksburg-Germantown corridor. Our letter dated January 6, 2025 opposed the removal of M-83 from the *Master Plan of Highways and Transitways (MPOHT)*, which has been recommended by the Planning Board in the *2025 Technical Update* to the *MPOHT*.

We oppose this recommendation for the following reasons:

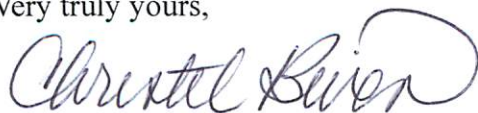
1. With continuing development in the Upcounty, the County should be preserving all potential transportation assets, including the right-of-way laboriously assembled years ago for M-83.
2. Traffic congestion in the Clarksburg-Rockville travel corridor is a chronic problem, especially along I-270 and MD 355. This corridor needs alternative routes to access Mid- and Downcounty job centers such as the many life sciences business and higher education institutions that have located around Shady Grove and County offices and other facilities in Rockville; alternatively, the County should do more to entice businesses to bring jobs to the Upcounty region.
3. In the absence of M-83, traffic from Clarksburg communities travel on rural roads and neighborhood streets to get around I-270 and MD 355 bottlenecks. By removing the M-83 right-of-way from the *MPOHT*, the County will undermine its own goals to provide safer streets.
4. I-270 in its current configuration is already congested and clearly not sufficient to meet the area's long-term travel needs. Adding significant capacity to I-270 is unlikely in the foreseeable future.
5. Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) service is not a viable alternative to M-83 at present. BRT construction is planned to end at Montgomery College Germantown, leaving the communities M-83 would serve in northern Germantown, Clarksburg, Damascus, and the Ag Reserve without any access to BRT until possibly well into the next decade. Despite requesting and receiving a lengthy update on BRT along MD 355 from MCDOT just last

month, the UCAB has not seen any regional travel analyses that indicate that BRT would do anything to alleviate traffic congestion in the MD 355 corridor or on other roads to the east of MD 355 if M-83 is not built. The rationale for introducing BRT service must be much more robust than the mere belief that if the County builds it, residents will use it.

6. The current road infrastructure north of MD 27 seems unlikely to support BRT, as MD 355 in Clarksburg is only a two-lane road. The County should explore potential transportation uses for the M-83 right-of-way, including public transit service.
7. The Planning Board has recommended a study of Upcounty transportation needs, such as in the Clarksburg-Shady Grove travel corridor. Any study should be conducted before abandoning a transportation asset like M-83 right-of-way.
8. It concerns us that there seems to be a disconnect between the County's concern about the environmental impacts of building M-83, but not about growing traffic congestion and idling vehicle emissions on and runoff from over-taxed rural roads and community streets due to the failure to build M-83. We have spoken to community groups with diverse perspectives on how to meet the county's goals of reducing emissions and addressing the traffic congestion issues including Transit Alternatives to Mid-County Highway Extended (TAME). One area of consensus is that development growth should be commensurate with appropriate infrastructure.
9. The Planning Board believes that building M-83 would negatively impact the environment. However, it has shown a willingness to make adjustments to the alignment of Observation Drive to move the roadway away from environmentally sensitive areas and residential neighborhoods. This suggests that similar adjustments could be made to lessen any adverse environmental impacts of M-83 without removing it.
10. Removing I-270 Exit 17 from the *MPOHT* will further cause congestion without M-83.
11. Removing M-83 without alternatives and without plans from the County on what the right of way will be used for is concerning to many Upcounty residents. These residents need better connectivity to Mid-County transit assets such as Shady Grove Metro Station if the County is to realize its own transit ridership goals. To be in alignment with Thrive 2050, we need connectivity – without M-83 the Upcounty Region can't thrive.

In summary, do not remove M-83 from the Master Plan of Highways and Transitways. If you are inclined to conduct a comprehensive transportation study, as the Planning Board has recommended, the study should happen *before* M-83 is removed from the *Master Plan*.

Very truly yours,



Christel Bivens, Chairperson  
Upcounty Citizens Advisory Board

Cc: Ruben Rosario, Director of Upcounty Regional Services Center