

Hi, my name is Noam Kovacs.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. Despite being a busy

high school senior, I've dedicated countless hours researching this plan, studying traffic patterns, engaging with neighbors, and analyzing data. As a cyclist, pedestrian, and driver, I am familiar with these roads.

I come today with two main concerns.

First: the University Boulevard bus lanes.

MCDOT is currently running a pilot bus lane program from Dennis Avenue to Amherst Avenue. When the pilot was launched in 2023, we were promised public engagement and community input. Yet, the November 2024 evaluation included no public feedback. This stands in stark contrast to the Georgia Avenue bus lanes, where the County conducted surveys and held an evaluation event, with full community input, before making any permanent changes.

I urge the County Council to call for a University Boulevard Bus Lane Pilot Evaluation Event, hosted by MCDOT and SHA, **with full community input** before any final decisions are made.

Second: the proposed removal of the merge lane from Arcola Avenue to University Boulevard and making blanket decisions.

Arcola Avenue is one of only two roads providing access into and out of Kemp Mill. It serves as a lifeline, supporting efficient traffic flow for residents, public transportation, and emergency services. Removing the merge, even more so, today, with traffic back to pre-pandemic levels, would create severe congestion, with spillover impacts along Arcola and the surrounding corridor.

The current draft plan retains the turn lane but proposes eliminating the merge. **That is not enough. Even with a turn lane, without the merge, traffic will choke. The merge must be preserved to keep the intersection safe and functional.**

At Councilmember Natalie Fani-González's town hall on this plan, where hundreds of residents showed up, there was an overwhelming consensus: **the merge is not optional. It is a necessity.** Residents understand from lived experience just how essential it is for the University Boulevard Corridor and Kemp Mill community.

We are open to creative safety solutions, such as better pavement markings, updated signage, enhanced crosswalks, or even a mountable curb, **but these should supplement, not replace, the merge.** The County has already shown this balance is possible, at the very busy intersection of Fernwood Road and Democracy Boulevard, where MCDOT significantly improved safety and functionality, **while still preserving the critical merge.**

As Councilmember Jawando beautifully stated regarding this plan, “*decisions should be made on a case-by-case basis.*” However, that is **not** the case right now. Although the plan’s boundaries cover many diverse communities, roads, and intersections, the plan is still written as one-size-fits-all. For example: no turn on red everywhere, no merges anywhere, 20 MPH on all side streets. This approach is completely inappropriate. There needs to be true case-by-case considerations which work toward solutions the community actually supports, not blanket rules.

Therefore, I am urging the County Council, especially Councilmember Fani-González, in which district the merge is located, **to ensure that explicit language is added to the University Boulevard Corridor Plan, guaranteeing that the Arcola Avenue merge will be retained and that decisions for roads and intersections will be made on a case-by-case basis.** Without this clarity, our communities risk future uncertainty that could once again threaten this vital access point.

I look forward to seeing the County Council advocate for what is in the best interest of the people who reside in their districts.

Thank you!