

Hello Councilmembers,

My name is Sidharth Harishanker, and I am a Sophomore at Poolesville High School as well as the Eco MoCo Treasurer. I am here to speak because transportation is key. I take buses all the time, and they are an essential tool for students and adults. It is critical that we expand these programs and create new bus routes, especially in the Clarksburg cluster.

From a student's perspective, reliable transportation is not optional. It affects our ability to participate in extracurriculars, build friendships, and even hold jobs. Last year, I attempted to join Masti, a dance group based in Clarksburg. What should have been an 11 minute trip took an hour and 20 minutes by bus. That was unreasonable, and as a result, I had to drop the activity.

As a student in Poolesville's Global Ecology Program, I have classmates and friends from across the county, many of them in Clarksburg. Yet I often cannot make plans or attend events at their homes because the bus ride is so long. For students like me, this creates a barrier to opportunities and a sense of separation within our own county.

This issue is also about equity. Many students do not have access to a car, and without efficient buses, they are cut off from chances to explore extracurriculars, internships, and part-time jobs. Expanding bus routes would level the playing field and allow every student the same opportunities to grow outside the classroom.

The ecological impacts of buses are just as important. Public transportation has been proven to reduce carbon emissions. The Kansas City Area Transportation Authority found that households could reduce their carbon footprint by 30 percent if they used public transportation. But that is only possible if it is truly accessible and efficient for residents.

Montgomery County has always been a pioneer in environmental justice. Increasing funding for bus routes, particularly in underserved areas like Clarksburg, is the next step in advancing our climate goals and ensuring that all students and families are connected.

Thank you.