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Ms Anna Chamberlin  
Manager, Project Review  
District Department of Transportation  
55 M Street SE, Suite 400  
Washington DC 20003-3515

## **Re: Comments on Environmental Impact Statement for the Long Bridge Project**

Ms. Chamberlin,

I am pleased to submit comments on behalf of Rails-to-Trails Conservancy and our 3,390 members and supporters in Arlington County and Washington, D.C. The Long Bridge Project provides a once-in-a-century opportunity to expand and improve non-motorized access across the Potomac River, close gaps in our region's world-class trail network, and to develop a bicycle and pedestrian bridge that could join the ranks of burgeoning and iconic multi-modal river crossings in the U.S. We are grateful for the opportunity to provide these thoughts and suggestions for your consideration.

With a grassroots community more than 1 million strong, Rails-to-Trails Conservancy serves as the national voice for 31,000 miles of rail-trails and multi-use trails, and more than 8,000 miles of potential trails waiting to be built, with a goal of creating more walkable, bikeable communities in America. As a co-founding member of the Capital Trails Coalition, we work together with local agencies, organizations and private citizens working to complete a regional trail network of more than 685 miles. Imperative to the Coalition's vision for a safe, interconnected trail network is a complete bicycle and pedestrian connection from D.C. to Arlington County's Long Bridge Park esplanade. We are concerned that the current design alternatives do not fully realize this critical connection.

The Washington Area Bicyclist Association (WABA) submitted detailed comments that underscore the importance of this project's inclusion of a seamless bicycle and pedestrian connection from the Anacostia Riverwalk Trail on the D.C. side to Long Bridge Park on the Arlington County side. We wholeheartedly agree with their comments and recommendations. In summary:

- Make the Long Bridge bicycle and pedestrian connection continue across the George Washington Memorial Parkway to connect to Long Bridge Park,
- Make the Long Bridge bicycle and pedestrian trail connect directly to Maine Avenue, instead of requiring an indirect, congested connection across the Washington Channel,
- Leave space for a future trail connection across Maine Ave. to Maryland Ave. and Hancock Park, and
- Build the bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure simultaneously with the rail span, not as a separate project.

WABA also outlines planning documents and efforts that support these recommendations and/or connecting elements, including the MoveDC Plan (2014), Arlington County Capital Improvements Plan (2017-2026), National Park Service Paved Trails Plan (2016), the Anacostia Waterfront Initiative. Each of these approved plans or major initiatives support an integrated bicycle-pedestrian crossing as part of the Long Bridge Project. A streamlined and coordinated approach to planning and development of a trail component will not only

bring these various plans to life, it will also bring cost savings and help prevent environmental harm from a second construction mobilization in and along the river.

As part of our organization's vision and mission, we advocate for the co-use of active railroad corridors with multi-use trails and refer to these facilities as "rails-with-trails". There are more than 300 rails-with-trails across the country, including D.C.'s own Met Branch Trail which runs immediately adjacent to another heavily used CSX, Amtrak and MARC commuter rail corridor. Additionally, there are several successful examples of bridges combining major freight rail lines with bicycle and pedestrian trails, and two that rival the scale of a future Long Bridge: the Steel Bridge in Portland, OR and the Harahan Bridge/Big River Crossing in Memphis, TN (photos attached).

The Steel Bridge, built in 1912, is one of the most multi-modal bridges in the U.S., containing facilities for freight rail (Union Pacific), light rail, cars, bicyclists and pedestrians. In 2001, the rail-with-trail portion of the bridge – a 220-foot long and 8-foot wide cantilevered walkway was constructed as part of a larger riverfront development initiative. A 2014 report published by the City of Portland revealed that the Steel Bridge received more than 1.6 million bicycle trips annually.

Originally known as "the Great Bridge" and built in the late 1800s as the first crossing of the Mississippi River south of Ohio, the Harahan Bridge was later redeveloped for rail use in 1917. In cooperation with Union Pacific Railroad, a walkway was recently completed in 2016 within a former roadway section of the nearly 5,000-foot long bridge. Now called "the Big River Crossing", this rail-with-trail bridge is the longest pedestrian crossing on the Mississippi River and a crown jewel of the greater Memphis region. ([www.bigrivercrossing.com](http://www.bigrivercrossing.com)).

These examples highlight the successful incorporation of non-motorized facilities adjacent – and attached – to historic rail bridges at expansive river crossings. Incorporating a rail-with-trail on the Long Bridge is, like the Steel Bridge and Big River Crossing, a once-in-a-century opportunity, one that we implore you to plan for and implement. The Long Bridge could easily become a nexus of our regional trail network, connecting commercial districts like the Wharf, historic landmarks on the Mall, active transportation and recreation opportunities along the Anacostia and Potomac Rivers, and regional park systems. A seamless, complete rail-with-trail connection as part of the Long Bridge Project is a chance to create the best, most connected Potomac River crossing for millions of our region's residents and tourists.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment and for your consideration of these recommendations.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Keith Laughlin". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name and title.

Keith Laughlin  
President, Rails-to-Trails Conservancy



Steel River Bridge, Portland, OR



Big River Crossing, Memphis, TN