

# Joint Comments from the Fairfax Healthy Communities Network on the ActiveFairfax Transportation Plan Vision, Goals and Objectives

September 27, 2021

Coalition for Smarter Growth • Audubon Naturalist Society •  
Faith Alliance for Climate Solutions • Fairfax Alliance for Better Bicycling •  
Washington Area Bicyclist Association • South County Task Force

Dear Chairman McKay and Members of the Board of Supervisors:

The above named organizations, as part of the Fairfax Healthy Communities (FHC) Network, write to express our support for the County's ActiveFairfax Transportation Plan Vision, Goals and Objectives, while also offering a few suggestions to strengthen the plan.

Our network partners envision a Fairfax County where people can live, work, and play in connected communities that are healthy, sustainable, and inclusive. Having safe and comfortable ways to walk, bike and get to the places we need to go without relying on driving is integral to making our communities more sustainable and healthier, and contributing to a vibrant local economy.

As you are well aware, Fairfax County continues to experience high rates of fatalities and serious injuries to vulnerable road users, with ten people killed already this year. In a region built around the automobile, anyone trying to get around on foot, by bike or other active modes are faced with a lack of safe and connected sidewalks and trails, and are often cut off by fast moving roads without adequate lighting and safe crossings. This is especially problematic along arterials and collector roads in the County.

The Goals and Objectives laid out in the ActiveFairfax plan provide a good framework that could help turn that around. Our comments and recommendations are below.

## **Goal 1 - Access and Connectivity**

We fully support the goal to provide a safe and convenient multi-modal network of sidewalks, bikeways, trails, and complete streets in the county for convenient access to the widest range of destinations.

*Recommendation:* Include as an objective to provide safe and convenient active transportation connections to bus stops and metro stations.

We appreciate the specific objective calling for the prioritization of active transportation funding since the lack of funding for active modes has been a significant challenge. Shifting funding away from road expansion projects to better balance the need of sustainable transportation like walking, biking and using transit will be critical to realize as soon as possible the full benefits of a safe and connected active transportation network.

*Recommendation:* Since funding for maintenance and safety improvements has been an ongoing issue, a helpful addition to the objectives would be to identify funding for maintaining current facilities and for needed safety improvements, not just funding for new infrastructure.

## **Goal 2 - Increase active transportation user safety and comfort**

This goal, and more specifically the objective to develop and implement a program to minimize traffic injuries and fatalities gets at the heart of solving the unsafe roads vulnerable road users face. Establishing an objective to minimize traffic injuries and fatalities is a huge step in the right direction. However, it's important to note that traffic deaths are preventable and the County should do more than minimize injuries and fatalities.

*Recommendation:* The County should set a more lofty objective to eliminate traffic fatalities so everyone who lives, works or visits Fairfax gets to where they need to go safely.

*Recommendation:* Include as an objective to address access, safety and comfort for people walking, biking and accessing transit on arterial roads, collector roads, and high crash areas.

The additional objectives of reducing vehicle trips and travel speeds, creating safer roads by design, providing safety education, and ensuring regular maintenance of the active transportation network will all be critical to making it safer to get around on foot, by bike or other active modes. We look forward to working with the County to develop a strong Safe Streets for All Policy that we hope will create a more actionable plan to realize these important objectives.

## **Goal 3 - Livability and Health**

We couldn't agree more with the goal to advance public health, sustainability and quality of life by providing an inviting active transportation network. It is central to the mission of our FHC network and what Fairfax County should strive to provide.

Providing active transportation options that are comfortable and inviting is important to encourage more people to choose walking, biking and other active modes. Shade trees and native plantings along sidewalks, bikeways, and trails not only provide comfort to people using the infrastructure, there are also environmental benefits including reducing heat island impacts, providing carbon capture, and wildlife habitat.

*Recommendation:* Include as an objective to include shade trees, native plantings, and additional amenities as an integral part of complete streets and active transportation network.

Environmentally sensitive areas and habitats should be avoided when considering facility placement. However, we recognize that is not always possible. We therefore appreciate inclusion of Objective 3.2 incorporating environmental best practices into the design and construction of facilities in environmentally sensitive areas and habitats.

*Recommendation:* We encourage a modification of the language to also acknowledge the importance of avoidance of impacts first before the use of best practices to minimize remaining impacts.

The Countywide Energy and Climate Action Plan (CECAP) calls for reaching carbon neutrality by 2050, including a strategy to support active transportation to reduce vehicle miles traveled. It further sets a sector specific goal to increase transit and non-motorized commuting to 30% by 2030.

*Recommendation:* Include an objective to support Fairfax County's CECAP and help reduce climate emissions from transportation by advancing active transportation to reduce vehicle miles traveled.

#### **Goal 4 - Equity and Social Justice**

We appreciate inclusion of a stand-alone goal to address equity and social justice, in particular adhering to One Fairfax, as part of the ActiveFairfax plan. Lower income communities and communities of color have historically been underserved with a lack of investment in safe walking and biking infrastructure, and are often encumbered by busy, dangerous roads that cut through their neighborhoods. The legacy of this disinvestment continues today and must be intentionally overcome.

The county should engage directly and meaningfully with these communities to determine their needs for safe, comfortable, and connected active transportation and then address those needs.

*Recommendation:* Create an objective to prioritize safe and convenient active transportation investments which serve the interests of communities of color, underserved communities, and equity emphasis areas.

#### **In Conclusion:**

The Vision, Goals, and Objectives for the ActiveFairfax Transportation Plan are a critical first step for a strong plan that will make it safer and more convenient to walk and bike throughout the county.

However, having a plan won't be enough if it's not acted on, and acted on swiftly. It is imperative that the County move with urgency to complete this plan, including funding for Phase II and implementing a strong Safe Streets for All policy. You must also begin in earnest to implement and invest in the plan's goals and objectives.

Thank you for your continued work to develop a progressive and forward looking ActiveFairfax Transportation plan. We have no time to waste in making our County safer to bike, walk and use other active ways to move around and enjoy our community.

Thank you for your time and consideration of our comments.

Sincerely,

**Coalition for Smarter Growth**

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