



Pedestrian Master Plan Public Hearing
Montgomery County Planning Board

March 23, 2023

Chair Zyontz and Planning Board Members,

The Washington Area Bicyclist Association (WABA) offers brief comments on the Planning Board draft of the Montgomery County Pedestrian Master Plan.

WABA is a nonprofit organization with over 1,000 Montgomery County members. We envision a just and sustainable transportation system where walking, biking, and transit are the best ways to get around.

The draft Pedestrian Master Plan is excellent work. We commend Acting Director Stern and her predecessors and Mr. Glazier and his colleagues.

The plan's design, policy, and programming recommendations are sensible and comprehensive. If approved by you in anything resembling its current form and detail and enacted by the Montgomery County Council, the plan will advance Montgomery County in our efforts toward Vision Zero.

We appreciate that the plan, like other Montgomery County planning efforts, recognizes that bicyclist and pedestrian safety are linked.

A chapter describes the Bicycle and Pedestrian Areas (BiPPA) funding program, "one of the primary ways that the county funds pedestrian and bicycle improvements." The plan describes next prioritization steps that would comprehensively evaluate, in a data-driven way, Downtowns and Town Centers, Major Roads, Neighborhoods, and equity focus areas (EFAs). It would use this reprioritization "for all new capital improvement program projects that address pedestrian and bicycle safety and connectivity challenges." Good.

Downtown and town center are two of the context designations that the county has adopted in recent years. The county's development of a context-driven approach is another positive development. Please ensure that Montgomery County planning is aligned with state efforts, in particular as you further develop corridor solutions that link major activity centers.

The roll-out of context- and corridor-based planning should not delay a key reform, area-wide speed-limit reduction.

We recognize the impact of vehicle speed on the risk of serious injury and death of everyone involved in a collision, whether a pedestrian or bicyclist or other roadway users struck and also a vehicle's driver and passengers. According to the Federal Highway Administration, "a driver traveling at 30 miles per

hour who hits a pedestrian has a 45 percent chance of killing or seriously injuring them. At 20 miles per hour, that percentage drops to 5 percent.” Similar fatality and serious-injury stats apply for bicyclists struck by a driver traveling at a higher versus a lower speed.

Compare that effective July 1, 2020, the District of Columbia established a default speed limit of 20 mph for all local streets, residential streets that primarily serve neighborhood traffic.

The County should request a 2024 Maryland local bill or a state-wide bill that will amend Maryland Transportation Code §21-803 to allow speed-limit reduction for an entire jurisdiction or area following creation of a jurisdiction- or area-wide complete-streets plan. Then the County should follow up with systematic reduction to 20 MPH on residential streets rather than just the project-linked steps outlined in the County’s 2021 complete-streets guide. Also consider recommending wholesale corridor-based reductions. Systematically lowering speed limits in this way is not prescribed by the Master Pedestrian Plan, but it’s a complementary step that will advance Montgomery County toward Vision Zero.

The draft Pedestrian Master Plan is excellent work. Please approve it with any necessary revisions that come to light and also think about near-term steps you can promote to make Montgomery County roadways safer for all.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

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