



Testimony for the April 12, 2023 Fairfax County Board of Supervisors Public Budget Hearing

Good evening Chair McKay and members of the Board. My name is Kevin O'Brien and I am testifying this afternoon on behalf of the Washington Area Bicyclist Association and its 7,000 members throughout Northern Virginia and the Capital region. Let me begin by saying thank you for the opportunity to comment on this FY2024 budget. We have worked closely with partner organizations in the Fairfax Healthy Communities coalition on joint written budget testimony submitted earlier this week, so some of my points will sound familiar.

For fifty years, WABA has worked to transform the Capital region by improving the conditions for people who bike. Our work to advocate for dedicated bike infrastructure, pass laws that promote safe roadway behavior, and provide education programming for all road-users has resulted in a drastically different cultural and political approach to biking for transportation, here in Fairfax County and across the region. Biking can and should be an equitable, safe, low-cost, time-saving, and sustainable way to navigate our community for all residents.

Bicycling is also absolutely critical if the County is to meet its carbon reduction commitments to combat climate change. With transportation contributing 42% of the carbon emissions in the County, we need an all-of-the-above approach. That of course includes electrification but will also require reducing car trips, and the humble bicycle can be just the solution.

To do that, though, will take this Board making some hard choices. We must reprioritize our transportation spending, slow or halt expensive roadway expansion that exacerbates traffic

congestion and our climate crisis, and recommit to growing our transit and active transportation networks including our trails, sidewalks, and bikeways.

WABA commends the work the Board has taken so far to fund the County's active transportation and safe streets programs in this and prior budgets; however, we believe more can be done and we therefore urge the following steps for this Board's consideration.

Commit to making our streets safer for all users

On May 10, 2022, the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors unanimously endorsed the Safe Streets for All Program, a comprehensive initiative to address systemic transportation safety issues for people walking, biking, taking transit, and driving. Included in the recommendations is a call for roadway infrastructure changes to slow traffic on our community's streets. Unfortunately, the County has not yet dedicated staff or funding to begin executing the program, and the ramifications are dire: in 2022, the County saw its highest-ever number of traffic-related pedestrian and bicyclist fatalities. The delay in meaningful action cannot continue.

1. **Fund Safe Streets For All Program Manager FTE.** We urge the Board to fully stand up its Safe Streets for All Program beginning with the inclusion of the program manager FTE at FCDOT in FY24 to coordinate the efforts.
2. **Fund the expansion of the automated speed enforcement (ASE) program to every school and major construction site in the County.** State regulations limit use to only these two site categories, but the County could still make a meaningful effort to curb speeding by maximizing its ASE usage.

Act on the ActiveFairfax Transportation Plan recommendations

The ActiveFairfax Transportation Plan – the County's most significant overhaul of its bicycle, pedestrian, and trails plans – continues to round into form and is expected to be finalized this year. The plan's recommendations address critical safety needs for residents who already walk and bike and also make improvements to allow more residents to choose walking and biking to conveniently and safely meet their daily transportation needs. Realizing the Plan's vision will require substantial, dedicated, and consistent funding starting *now*.

1. **Continue prioritizing and making ad hoc funding available for the County's 6-year, \$100M emergency sidewalk repair program.** We must return our facilities to a state of good repair by addressing the backlog of unfunded pedestrian and bicycle improvements. We commend FCDOT's efforts to develop a robust and equitable prioritization process but urge the Board to look at all possible means to expedite these critical repairs.
2. **Enter into formal negotiations with VDOT.** We are cognizant of the uncertainty regarding maintenance responsibility for facilities along many VDOT-managed roadways, but we cannot continue to pass the buck when it comes to fixing our crumbling sidewalks. Clarify maintenance roles on ALL County roadways so as to provide FCDOT with a clear mandate and comprehensive scope for its maintenance budget. We would then call on the Board to identify and make available permanent maintenance funding for all the County's trails, sidewalks, and bikeways.

To conclude, we feel strongly that the adoption of the measures discussed herein would meaningfully contribute to the County's transportation, climate, and community goals by making our roads safer and our active transportation network more connected. Fairfax County can and should be a place where walking, biking, and rolling are the best ways to get around. Thank you for your consideration.

With gratitude,
Kevin O'Brien, Virginia Organizer
Washington Area Bicyclist Association