

Candidate Name (Affiliation): **Maritza Zermeno (D)**

District: **Mount Vernon**

1. Improving Public Transit

Public transit is the backbone of a sustainable, equitable transportation system and a thriving economy, and Fairfax County has admirable plans to expand its bus rapid transit (BRT) network to ensure fast, frequent, and reliable service for residents. While public transit ridership on some systems has been hit by the pandemic with reduced commute trips due to increased teleworking, transit remains key for essential workers, and for supporting compact, walkable communities.

Do you support increased funding for public transit to address budget shortfalls and make improvements to better serve riders?

Candidate's Response: **Yes**

What is your experience riding public transit? What ideas do you have to improve public transit in Fairfax County?

Candidate's Response: **The Mount Vernon District of Fairfax County is a mass transit desert. Bus transit along parts of the Route 1 corridor is slow and greatly limited by a 3-mile bottleneck which must be addressed. There is little access to rail from most of the District. The Metro system needs to be extended to Hybla Valley, Ft. Belvoir which now employs more people than the Pentagon, and to Lorton Station. This would provide an enormous economic impact, give low-income residents an opportunity to travel to better paying jobs, and greatly reduce the congestion on the Route 1 corridor and the Springfield Metro station.**

My personal experience certainly does not reflect that of the population along those routes because I have the luxury of travel at my schedule. For me the routes are relatively convenient, however, my destination by bus is almost always the Huntington Metro Station. Transit to other parts of the County is difficult and lengthy.

2. Active Transportation Funding

The ActiveFairfax Transportation Plan – the County’s most significant overhaul of its bicycle, pedestrian, and trails plans – 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 walk and bike conveniently and safely for daily needs. Realizing the Plan’s vision will require substantial, dedicated, and consistent funding.

Would you support Fairfax committing dedicated annual funding to support the ActiveFairfax Transportation Plan, even if that meant potentially delaying road expansion and interchange projects?

Candidate’s Response: **Yes**

What is your personal experience dealing with or advocating for pedestrian or bicyclist safety issues?

Candidate’s Response: **This is a more complex issue, especially in the Mount Vernon District. We just built and improved a 3-mile bike path from the Mt. Vernon Estate to Richmond Highway. It cost millions, resulted in tearing out hundreds of very old trees and is unused except of a handful of local residents getting exercise, but the carbon footprint for that section of bike path is enormous.**

The bike paths do not connect residential areas and areas of employment. However, the roads in most of the District are of an older design without sidewalks and curbs and thus pose a danger for pedestrians and bikers. While trails and paths can provide areas of high use, such as those along the George Washington Parkway, their benefit must be weighed against the benefits of improved mass transit development.

3. Low-Stress Bike Network

Fairfax County has committed to reducing the amount people have to drive and associated transportation-related carbon emissions. The County’s climate plan calls for meeting a goal of 30% non-auto commuting trips by 2030. To make this shift, the County will need robust, accessible alternatives and bicycling is an ideal, low-cost, carbon-free alternative. But that mode shift requires dedicated infrastructure including an expanded network of trails and comfortable, protected, low-stress bicycle facilities – not just painted bike lanes or sharrows – to make bicycling meaningfully safer, more appealing, and more accessible and often requires roadway redesign that reduces parking and/or vehicle lanes.

Compared to the current prioritization, do you think greater priority should be given to the needs of bicyclists and pedestrians in the County’s roadway designs?

Candidate's Response: **Yes**

How would you ensure that people of all ages and abilities have robust active transportation access to and along the County's major and most important thoroughfares and connecting streets?

Candidate's Response: **The most reasonable solution in the southern parts of the County would be widening existing secondary access for lane sharing with barriers that have been successfully employed in other districts.**

Overall, improving pedestrian safety in the County will require a multi-faceted approach that involves a combination of road design improvements, speed management, education and awareness campaigns, enforcement and technology.

4. Safe Streets for All

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. At the same time, Fairfax County experienced a troubling uptick in traffic-related pedestrian fatalities in 2022.

Do you support the full implementation of the Safe Streets for All Program in Fairfax County, including changes to roadway design guidelines and an expanded automated speed enforcement program?

Candidate's Response: **Yes**

What proven traffic safety improvement policies, programs, and/or technologies would you like to see implemented in your district and throughout the County? Given the lack of clarity around who has the legal and budgetary authority to make roadway safety improvements stemming from state ownership of County roads, what steps would you propose to ensure that these roadway safety improvements are implemented?

Candidate's Response: **The greatest impact would be pedestrian activated signal cross walks which would greatly improve safety and convenience.**

Given the lack of clarity around who has the legal and budgetary authority to make roadway safety improvements stemming from state ownership of County roads, what steps would you propose to ensure that these roadway safety improvements are implemented?

5. Safe Routes to School

Trips to and from schools are among the best opportunities to reduce car trips in Fairfax County. A robust Safe Routes to School (SRTS) program can play a critical role in encouraging more families to walk and bicycle to school, which has been shown to increase confidence and sense of independence among children while also reducing pickup/dropoff vehicle congestion and associated carbon emissions. Unfortunately, the County's SRTS program includes just one dedicated staff position for a public school system that serves 185,000 students.

Would you support expanding the Safe Routes to School program, including additional staff capacity, to get more kids to walk and bike to school?

Candidate's Response: **Yes**

What other policies or budget items will you pursue to upgrade transportation infrastructure so kids can safely walk and bike to school?

Candidate's Response: **Improved street lighting along with lane widening with pedestrian-activated cross signals would have the greatest short-term impact.**