



Pedestrian Master Plan Public Hearing
Montgomery County Council

July 25, 2023

Council President Glass and Council Members,

The Washington Area Bicyclist Association (WABA) offers comments on the draft 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. We appreciate the extensive data collection and analysis performed and planning staff's survey efforts and attention to equity.

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 Priority 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."

I will point out that it is imperative that the County Council and Executive fund the actual work. I will provide two examples where you have not done so but can still.

MCDOT is planning median BRT bus lanes for US 29 and has designated BiPPAs – again, Bicycle and Pedestrian Priority Areas – along the corridor. However neither the county nor the State Highway Administration has funded construction of the US 29 sidepath indicated by the county's Bicycle Master Plan within US 29 BiPPAs. You should work with the state to create those master-planned sidepaths.

The second example is Veirs Mill Road. You have funded bicycle and pedestrian improvements for the Veirs Mill-Randolph Road BiPPA, linked to BRT construction, but not for Veirs Mill Road in the Wheaton CBD (Central Business District) BiPPA. Downtown Wheaton is an equity focus area. Please expedite pedestrian and bicycle safety improvements there and in the other council-designated priority areas.

I have two more points.

First, the roll-out of context- and corridor-based planning should not delay a key reform, area-wide speed-limit reduction, per the Pedestrian Master Plan's Recommendation P-9.

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.

Finally, WABA opposes Pedestrian Master Plan's Recommendation P-8b: Increase in-person traffic enforcement activities. Data from the county's Office of Legislative Oversight shows that in-person, police traffic enforcement has been and remains highly racially discriminatory. For this reason, WABA supports the STEP Act, introduced by Councilmember Jawando with Councilmember Mink, calling for significantly reduced police traffic enforcement, with greater adoption, in line with plan Recommendation P-8a, of increased automated traffic enforcement.

Overall, 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 and about aggressively funding the plan's recommended improvements.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Seth Grimes, Maryland Organizer
Washington Area Bicyclist Association
seth.grimes@waba.org