



Public Comment Provided on January 11, 2024 at the Annual Organizational Meeting of the Northern Virginia Transportation Authority

Good evening members of the Northern Virginia Transportation Authority. Thank you for the opportunity to speak tonight. My name is Kevin O'Brien and I am testifying on behalf of the Washington Area Bicyclist Association (WABA) and its more than 5,000 members across Northern Virginia and the Washington metropolitan area to encourage the Northern Virginia Transportation Authority to truly prioritize active transportation improvements and vulnerable road users' safety as it begins to contemplate projects for funding in its next Six-Year Program.

For over 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. Bicycling can and should be an equitable, safe, low-cost, time-saving, and sustainable way to navigate our communities for all.

The Northern Virginia Transportation Authority has certainly played a role in transforming the bikeability of our region, now considered among the nation's best. NVTA has funded over \$5 billion in transportation investments with dollars going to critical transit and complete streets projects. But far too much funding has gone to widening roads and building interchanges – over 60% of dollars according to our friends at the Coalition for Smarter Growth – fueling ongoing auto-dependent sprawl and induced demand that exacerbates the epidemic of road violence affecting our region and the nation (among many other negative externalities).

Fifteen people on bicyclists were killed on Virginia roads last year along with 117 pedestrians, continuing a steady, deeply troubling upward trend over the past decade. While the scourge of road violence is multifaceted with no silver bullet solution, one critical element is better dedicated infrastructure and the need to reprioritize our long-range investments with safety and vulnerable road users top of mind. Doubling down on a status quo infrastructure approach can only further entrench existing car-dominant travel patterns, with predictable and deadly results.

The alternative: a commitment to modal shift and transportation options with renewed focus on effectively moving people rather than cars, on expanding transit capacity and pedestrian spaces and bikeways rather than vehicle lane miles. We applaud those of NVRTA investments that we think reflect that alternative focus. Projects like bus rapid transit on Route 1 that will move more people, faster, and more safely through the congested corridor; enhancements and expansions to our ever-popular W&OD Trail; and complete streets projects in Falls Church and beyond that recognize the continued vitality and vibrancy of our communities relies on people walking (and biking) around them, not driving through them.

How we spend our money reflects our values, and the Northern Virginia Transportation Authority has an opportunity to better live up to its adopted core values of Equity, Sustainability and Safety with this next Six-Year Program. Let's invest in a better future, one that truly enables everyone in our region to get where they need to go safely, sustainably, and conveniently. We look forward to working with you and others towards that kind vision. Thank you again for the opportunity to share tonight.