



ROCKVILLE, MARYLAND 20850

February 16, 2023

The Honorable Paul Wiedefeld, Secretary
Maryland Department of Transportation
7201 Corporate Drive, Post Office Box 548
Hanover, Maryland 21076

Dear Secretary Wiedefeld,

Montgomery County is a diverse community with many transportation needs. As always, we appreciate our cooperative relationship with the State of Maryland so that, together, we can meet the needs of our residents and businesses. The Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) has continued to make significant contributions to the transportation network in Montgomery County, including providing needed funding for WMATA, nearing completion of the I-270 Innovative Congestion Management project, programming funds for the construction of the Georgia Avenue improvements through Montgomery Hills, and advancing construction of the Purple Line.

Notwithstanding these accomplishments, our County continues to need expanded investment in its transportation system. For the FY2024-2029 Consolidated Transportation Program (CTP), we have organized our priorities by emphasis area to aid in programming of future State resources toward the transportation needs in Montgomery County.

Vision Zero Implementation

In 2022 there were 514 fatal accidents resulting in 544 fatalities in the State of Maryland. Within Montgomery County alone 574 pedestrians and bicyclists were crash victims, 19 of them died on our roads. Vision Zero was adopted by the State and many of its subdivisions - including Montgomery County - to address this literally life and death matter. Vision Zero is not a stand-alone activity, rather it is a culture shift to a systematic safety approach. In past decades, the road network in Montgomery County was developed under policies designed to increase speed, minimize delay, and maximize throughput for motor vehicle traffic. While motor vehicle travel is an important piece of our transportation system, emphasis on walking, biking, and transit access are, appropriately, higher priorities for investment in the road network today. In addition to education, enforcement, and advocacy, implementation of Vision Zero through engineering needs to inform every change made to the design and operation of the road network.

Montgomery County is in the sixth year of its Vision Zero action plan. The first five years of the County's program brought improved collaboration with MDOT in the identification of high hazard locations and implementation of safety countermeasures on both State and County roads. An example of the progress that has been made is MDOT/State Highway Administration's (SHA) *Context Driven Access and Mobility for All Users* guide, and MDOT SHA's involvement in the development of the Montgomery County Complete Streets Design Guide.

While progress has been made, we continue to see significant numbers of severe and fatal crashes on our road network, particularly for pedestrians. To achieve our Vision Zero goals, in addition to continuing work on improving guidelines and standards, we need MDOT to increase the allocation of resources to implement pedestrian and bicycle safety, accessibility projects, and speed reduction strategies. We request that MDOT initiate a new statewide program with significant funding to expedite implementation of pedestrian and bicycle safety engineering improvements with a particular emphasis on Equity Emphasis Areas and transit access. In addition, MDOT/SHA should continue to evaluate every project it is undertaking to make sure the projects are informed by Vision Zero and will result in improved safety outcomes. Finally, we urge MDOT to review its access permit policies to look for opportunities to expedite Vision Zero projects that are implemented by local jurisdictions within the State right-of-way. Often MDOT and MCDOT collaborate on strategies to implement a needed Vision Zero improvement, only to have the project experience a substantial delay in obtaining the necessary approvals from the various technical branches within MDOT.

Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Implementation

Bus Rapid Transit is a key element of the County's Master Plan. It is critical to both our transportation network and expanding the economy of Maryland in Montgomery County. Our success depends on implementing a comprehensive BRT network throughout the County.

The County is at the midpoint of the design of BRT on MD 355 between Clarksburg and Bethesda and has nearly completed design of MD 586 (Veirs Mill Road) between Rockville and Wheaton. These two projects will unlock the redevelopment potential of North Bethesda and will improve transit service to the thousands of daily transit riders who depend on services connecting Wheaton and Rockville.

Creating this network demands that we advance many of our BRT projects simultaneously. Our top priorities for the County within the next few years are listed below.

1. **MD 355 BRT.** Due to funding limitations, the MD 355 project is presented as three separate projects in the County Capital Improvement Program. However, it is important that we advance the entire project as quickly as possible to meet the transit access needs of the Upcounty, connect major activity centers between Germantown and Rockville, and support the major development opportunities in North Bethesda. Last year, the County programmed the promised funding from the Opportunities Lane project to comprise most of the local match for anticipated federal funds to build the center section of the MD 355 BRT between Montgomery College-Rockville and Montgomery

- College-Germantown and design is underway for all segments of the project.
2. ***Veirs Mill Road BRT.*** The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) has recently authorized us to enter project development for the Veirs Mill Road BRT from Montgomery College-Rockville to Wheaton. As both corridors are state highways, MDOT's engagement during design and construction and financial participation in these projects will be important.
 3. ***US 29 Phase 2 BRT.*** FLASH on US 29 – the first of its kind in Maryland – opened in 2020. Montgomery County will need MDOT assistance and cooperation to continue advancement of our BRT system that is critical to expanding the economy of Maryland in Montgomery County. We appreciate the State's \$5 million contribution to the design of the Median Lane BRT concept to improve transit travel time reliability between Tech Road and Downtown Silver Spring. Preliminary design is scheduled for completion by FY25, and we request that the State participate in the local match to federal aid we will be soliciting for this project.
 4. ***New Hampshire Avenue BRT.*** Planning is underway for BRT in the MD 650 (New Hampshire Avenue) corridor. This is a candidate State-led project for construction as it is in both Montgomery and Prince George's Counties and connects into the District of Columbia at the Fort Totten Metro Station. In addition, this corridor provides vital links to the Food and Drug Administration's White Oak Headquarters, a key economic engine for the East County. Given the multijurisdictional nature of this project, its implementation should be led by MDOT once the planning is completed in FY24.
 5. ***North Bethesda Transitway.*** The North Bethesda Transitway will provide a vital link between the Metrorail Red Line and Northern Virginia via Phase I South of the Opportunity Lanes project, and it will also provide a substantial economic opportunity by linking the Rock Spring area to the Red Line. Its planning will be completed later this fiscal year and we will be looking to MDOT to help fund construction starting in the next couple of years.
 6. ***I-270 Transit Corridor Connectors.*** The Council recently adopted Corridor Forward: The I-270 Transit Plan. This plan identified the MD 355 and MD 586 BRT projects as the most crucial first steps in improving transit accessibility along the I-270 corridor. The Plan also replaced the Corridor Cities Transitway concept with a series of Corridor Connectors, dedicated bus lanes that link key activity and employment centers to the County's primary north-south rapid transit lines, as well as Metrorail and the MARC Rail Brunswick line. These projects are key ingredients to the success of the biotechnology industry in the Great Seneca Science Corridor and state engagement in their implementation is important to the economic strength of Maryland. We wish to emphasize the importance of the I-270 Transit Corridor Connectors and the years of commitments made to the communities that will be served by the Corridor Connectors and the County's emphasis on the life sciences industry. We request that the State change the Corridor Cities Transitway (CCT) Project Information Form (PIF) in the

CTP to reference “I-270 Transit Corridor Connectors” and provide funding for additional buses to operate the Great Seneca Science Corridors project embedded in this plan.

7. ***Park-and-Ride Expansions.*** Park-and-ride capacity is of limited supply and heavily used in Montgomery County. Key locations in need of park-and-ride facility expansions include Burtonsville and along the I-270/MD 355 corridor in Clarksburg, Germantown, and Gaithersburg to accommodate local commuters and those from Frederick, Carroll, and Washington counties.

Locally Operated Transit Support (LOTS)

We thank MDOT for its capital and operating support of the Montgomery County Transit System, including Ride On, Ride On Extra, the Flex and, starting in 2020, the Flash. Sustained financial support from MDOT is critical to providing quality transit service in Montgomery County. Priorities for Locally Operated Transit Support include:

1. ***Zero emission bus infrastructure.*** The County is transitioning to an entirely zero-emission bus fleet. As part of our strategy, we will invest in zero emission buses as a regular component of our transit fleet. To enable this transition from traditional fuels, we request State technical and financial assistance with the installation of electric charging infrastructure at the three County transit depots, including funding to support the replacement of our Nicholson Court Depot, which is currently leased and cannot accommodate zero-emission buses.
2. ***Ride On ExtRa.*** Services like the Ride On ExtRa, operating on MD 355 between Lake Forest and Medical Center, have proven to be an effective model for improving the performance of transit and attracting additional customers. Montgomery County requests increased assistance through the LOTS program to extend Ride On ExtRa to Germantown and Bethesda and to operate the service all day instead of its current peak period configuration.
3. ***LOTS Grants.*** Inflation, increased fuel costs, and competition for a shrinking pool of CDL drivers are driving up the cost to deliver Transit services in the aftermath of the COVID-19 Pandemic. We request that LOTS grants be increased annually based on the prior year’s Consumer Price Index (CPI-U).

Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) Investment

MDOT should be commended for providing major capital and operating support to WMATA. Priorities for WMATA include:

1. ***North Bethesda North Metro Entrance.*** The County has identified a second entrance at the North Bethesda Station as a high-priority improvement. It is key to improving the economic vitality of North Bethesda in general and for the biotech industry there in

particular. We ask for MDOT's advocacy to fund the balance of this project in WMATA's Capital Program.

2. ***Metrobus priority treatments.*** We ask for State financial support to implement bus priority treatments that will be recommended in the ongoing WMATA Bus Network Redesign and the Ride On Reimagined Study.

Commuter Rail Expansion

The MARC system operated by MTA is important for moving commuters to Rockville, Silver Spring and Washington, D.C., and the system could provide even greater benefit through enhancements to the service and increasing the system's accessibility. The potential of the MARC system is even more significant with direct connection to the Virginia Railway Express (VRE) system to provide seamless links between key activity centers in Northern Virginia and those in Montgomery County. Priorities for MARC enhancements include:

1. ***Midday and Off-Peak Service*** (Planning and Operating). MARC service provides an option for peak period, peak direction commuting. As travel patterns change and reverse commuting becomes more significant, providing more midday and off-peak trains will increase the value MARC service provides to Montgomery County and will increase the attractiveness of employment in Maryland for the growing population in the District of Columbia and Northern Virginia. Changes in commuting patterns in the wake of the pandemic presents an opportunity to modify service to better serve commuters throughout the day. Other commuter rail providers, such as the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority, have taken advantage of this opportunity and seen impressive results in terms of ridership. We ask that MDOT add midday hours and service in the off-peak direction between Union Station and Germantown.
2. ***Boyd's Station Expansion*** (Design and Construction). Improvements to the rail station facilities and restoration of the Hoyle's Mill Building to complement the improvements funded by the County at Boyd's Station.
3. ***North Bethesda Station*** (Planning). The White Flint Sector Plan and Corridor Forward: The I-270 Transit Plan calls for the construction of a new MARC Station in the area that was formerly referred to as White Flint, and we request that MDOT advance study of the station.
4. ***Shady Grove Station*** (Planning). The Shady Grove Sector Plan and Corridor Forward: The I-270 Transit Plan call for construction of a new MARC Station with direct connections to the WMATA Red Line station and the numerous bus services that operate from Shady Grove. This location has the promise to increase its significance as a multimodal hub if commuter rail connections could be made here. We ask that MDOT initiate a planning study for adding a commuter rail station at this location.

Pedestrian and Bicycle Facilities

Improving pedestrian and bicycle safety as highlighted in our Vision Zero Program, creating a safe and attractive walking environment in our key growth areas, and the implementation of bikeshare as a permanent component of our transportation system are critical needs for State support. Priorities for pedestrian and bicycle facilities enhancements include:

1. ***Pedestrian/Bicycle Safety Implementation on State Highways*** (Design and Construction). We request that the State increase funding to address sidewalk gaps, crosswalk conditions, trail crossings, and other issues in support of the County's Vision Zero Action Plan. Many of our highest-need locations are on State highways. Sidewalk gaps should include adequate buffers between the new or improved sidewalk and the curb to improve pedestrian level of comfort.
2. ***Bicycle and Pedestrian Priority Areas (BiPPAs)*** (Planning, Design and Construction). The County has identified over 30 BiPPAs and has prioritized five for early actions. To be effective, the County will need State cooperation and financial support to implement improvements to State infrastructure in these priority areas. A high priority activity within this program is to make improvements on access routes to the Purple Line and State funding for these improvements will help accelerate their construction. Specifically, the County requests continued funding for design and construction of the master-planned two-way separated bike lanes on the east side of 16th Street between Montgomery Hills and Spring Street.
3. ***Bikeshare Program Support*** (Grants). Federal, State, and private grants have been essential for bikeshare in Montgomery County, a system that has now grown to nearly 100 stations. Bikeshare contributes to help achieve non-auto-driver mode share (NADMS) goals in focus areas within the County and provides an excellent complement to local and regional transit systems. State operating support for this system will help secure its long-term future.
4. ***Intercounty Connector (ICC) Multiuse Trail*** (Planning). A multiuse trail was constructed concurrent with the ICC for much of its length. We request that the State begin planning for completion of the gaps between MD 182 (Layhill Road) and Notley Road and between MD 650 (New Hampshire Avenue) and Briggs Chaney Road.

State Highways

The following projects represent our highest priorities for improvements to non-Interstate State Highways:

1. ***Accelerated Traffic Signal Modernization*** (Design and Construction). The State traffic signal system contains many locations with structural impairment, inefficient incandescent fixtures, underperforming detection, and pedestrian crossing configurations that do not meet today's needs. In addition, the recent small plane crash in Gaithersburg resulted in

loss of power to many State traffic signals, highlighting the need for uninterruptable power supplies to ensure continued operation during power failures. MDOT/SHA and Montgomery County would benefit from prioritization and acceleration of traffic signal modernization in the County, including deployment of additional adaptive traffic signal controls on key corridors within the County.

2. ***MD 117 (Clopper Road) Improvements*** (Design and Construction). Now that the Watkins Mill Interchange is completed, traffic patterns on MD 117 have changed substantially. MDOT completed planning activities for improvements to MD 117 between the Seneca Creek State Park entrance and the I-270 southbound on-ramp. Montgomery County submitted a Chapter 30 funding application for this project in 2018 and 2019. Implementation of these improvements between I-270 and Longdraft Road are important to accommodate the changes in Interstate access.
3. ***MD 198 (Spencerville Road) Improvements*** (Design and Construction). Concepts for improvements between Old Columbia Pike and US 29 through the Burtonsville business district have been identified. The County requests that the State select and refine a design concept for this portion of the corridor that is supportive of the *Burtonsville Crossroads Neighborhood Plan (2012)* goals. In Burtonsville, the project should also identify ways to reduce the width of Old Columbia Pike north of MD 198 to better match reduced traffic demands and to reduce the barrier formed by this roadway.
4. ***MD 355 (Frederick Road) Improvements from MD 27 to Stringtown Road*** (Planning). Expanding MD 355, consistent with the Clarksburg Master Plan is critical to improving access to Clarksburg. In addition to traffic capacity, the improvements need to address pedestrian and bicycle connectivity, access to schools, and transit needs. We look forward to reviewing the results of the initial planning that MDOT is now advancing and to defining a project that addresses the needs on this corridor.
5. ***MD 190/River Road*** (Planning). In alignment with the County and State's commitment to Vision Zero, the County requests a safety-oriented re-evaluation of River Road between the Capital Beltway and Little Falls Parkway for potential bicycle and pedestrian safety improvements. The County has identified River Road as part of the High Injury Network in the County's Vision Zero Action Plan. The County's recently adopted Thrive 2050 Comprehensive Plan identifies River Road as a Growth Corridor, and yet it lacks critical bicycle and pedestrian facilities such as buffered sidewalks, separated bike lanes and protected crossings.
6. ***MD 97 from I-495 to the north edge of the Wheaton Central Business District*** (Planning). The Forest Glen/Montgomery Hills Sector Plan evaluated and recommended an innovative interchange concept on MD 97 at the Capital Beltway that we encourage MDOT/SHA to study, which appears to provide significant traffic safety and operations benefits to MD 97 through this area. This priority also includes planning for the reconstruction of MD 97 from the Beltway to and including the Wheaton CBD to include significant bicycle, pedestrian,

and traffic safety elements, essentially an extension of the similar project on MD 97 through Montgomery Hills that was recently budgeted by the State.

7. ***MD 97 (Georgia Avenue) and MD 28 (Norbeck Road) Interchange*** (Planning). The intersection of MD 97 and MD 28 is constrained and congested, particularly due to the proximity of the MD 200 Interchange just to the north and the intersection of MD 28 and MD 115 just to the west. Improvement to this location is important for facilitating access between Olney and Silver Spring and for the connection from Rockville to MD 200. We request that the State initiate a new evaluation of solutions to address this long-standing transportation bottleneck. The design should prioritize pedestrian and bicycle safety by exploring innovative interchange concepts and address missing sidewalk connections on MD 28 between MD 97 and MD 200.
8. ***MD 108/Laytonsville Bypass*** (Planning). The Town of Laytonsville has planned a bypass route for MD 108 around the west side of the town. This bypass, now partially constructed, will alleviate congestion at the intersection of MD 108 and Brink Road/Sundown Road, improving the character of the historic center of town.

Interstate Program

The County has been an active participant in the MDOT/SHA process for projects on I-270 and I-495. We agree with the need to improve the performance of these corridors by looking at options that include expanding transit, but also recognize that effective communication and collaboration with the new administration is needed.

Questions remain about the replacement of the American Legion Bridge, changes to the highways further north, advancement of transit commitments and ongoing litigation. These remaining questions and the new administration's commitment to partner with local leaders and community stakeholders reinforce the need to work collaboratively to ensure that projects are delivered in ways that move us closer to our transportation, environmental and economic development goals.

As solutions to the transportation problems are explored, careful and transparent analysis is needed to evaluate the necessity of public-private partnership as a delivery approach, to ensure that federal funding opportunities for the project are maximized, and to ensure that the full interest of the public is served by whatever project delivery approach is determined. This exploration should include a careful assessment of the need for toll financing, generally, and the specific toll structure proposed to ensure equity and protection of Maryland residents from excessive tolls.

With Virginia now constructing the I-495NEXT project to extend the express toll lanes up to the George Washington Memorial Parkway, a coordinated approach is essential to replace the American Legion Bridge. Additionally, we urge the State to maximize federal funding to preserve state funding capacity for the concurrent delivery of major transit improvements along state routes like BRT on MD 355, Veirs Mill Road, Old Georgetown Road, and in the Great Seneca Corridor that are now being advanced through planning and design by the County.

Mr. Paul Wieldefeld, Secretary

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We have an opportunity to reset the dialog around the transportation needs in the I-270/I-495 corridor. The previous efforts provide a baseline for future partnership and the County will continue to urge for deeper collaboration and improvements in access to destinations in the corridor. Openness to new approaches and possibilities can lead to a much better outcome and more consensus on how we should collectively move forward as a county and region.

We thank you again for your continued partnership in meeting the needs of Maryland residents and businesses in Montgomery County. If you have questions about our priorities, please contact us.

Sincerely,



Marc Elrich
County Executive



Evan Glass, President
County Council

cc: The Honorable Wes Moore, Governor, State of Maryland
Montgomery County House Delegation
Montgomery County Senate Delegation