



WABA

WASHINGTON AREA
BICYCLIST ASSOCIATION

October 29, 2018

Mr. Greg Slater, Administrator
Maryland Department of Transportation
State Highway Administration
7201 Corporate Center Drive
Hanover, Maryland 21076

Re: MD 97 Montgomery Hills Project Planning Study

Dear Administrator Slater:

I am writing on behalf of the Washington Area Bicyclist Association (“WABA”), its 6,500 members and the thousands of people who support improving options for safe and convenient bicycling in Montgomery County. WABA sees an important opportunity in the MD 97 Montgomery Hills Project Planning Study and urges SHA to fund the design and implementation phases so that work can proceed on this overdue and important improvement plan for the Georgia Avenue corridor. WABA firmly believes that Maryland State Highway Administration (SHA) Project Design Alternative 5B with the cycle track (protected bike lane) best meets the following community supported objectives to establish a balanced approach to transportation within the Montgomery Hills / MD97 corridor:

- Implement measures that improve north-south flow on Georgia Ave and limit the impact of traffic on residential neighborhoods,
- Redesign Georgia Ave to be less of a physical barrier for residents in adjacent communities,
- Improve walkability, bikeability, and safety,
- Improve the corridor’s aesthetics by burying utilities, using a tree-lined median, and more thoughtful street signage, and
- Reserve the character of residential neighborhoods.

Georgia Avenue is in dire need of improvements. Simply stated, the corridor is unsafe for all users: drivers, pedestrians, and bicyclists. Commuters and residents alike cannot travel through the area easily, and the existing conditions create an automobile-dominated environment which is unattractive and challenging for sustaining businesses. Traveling to businesses by foot, bike or bus is stressful, inconvenient and unsafe due to high vehicle speeds, limited signalized crossings, and 80-foot crosswalks. For drivers, traffic is often so gridlocked that even exiting a driveway is challenging. Providing alternative options to driving is essential for this community. Furthermore, the study’s extended planning phase (the original planning effort for this corridor started

seventeen years ago), has chilled private sector improvements that may have been undertaken by the adjacent property owners.

Alternative 5B with the cycletrack is the only reasonable choice to meet the lower pedestrian and bicyclist fatality targets in MDOT's Strategic Highway Safety Plan. And only alternative 5B stands a chance of helping Montgomery County eliminate all roadway fatalities by 2030. The County's Vision Zero Action Plan notes that 53% of all traffic fatalities in Montgomery County occur on state roads and that to reduce the number of fatal and injury crashes, SHA must re-engineer state roads to slow vehicle speeds and protect pedestrians and bicyclists. Furthermore, the County's new Bicycle Master Plan cannot achieve its goal of making biking safer and more accessible to bicyclists of all skill levels without addressing the substantial bicycle safety and access problems on Georgia Avenue.

As you may already know, the Montgomery County Council voted to fund the \$20 million Forest Glen East Metro entrance, which is at the intersection of Forest Glen Rd/Georgia Ave. and is within the Montgomery Hills project boundary. Park and Planning has estimated that SHA will be able to save approximately between \$2-3 million if this East entrance is constructed at the same time as the Montgomery Hills project. To take advantage of this opportunity, we urge you to select alternative 5B with the cycletrack, commit the necessary funding for construction, and set a date for construction to commence so this important work can advance.

We appreciate your time and consideration of our request.

Best,



Greg Billing
Executive Director

Submitted electronically

cc:

The Honorable Richard S. Madaleno, Jr., richard.madaleno@senate.state.md.us

Del. Alfred C. Carr, Jr., alfred.carr@house.state.md.us

Del. Ana Sol Gutierrez, ana.gutierrez@house.state.md.us

Del. Jeffrey D. Waldstreicher, jeff.waldstreicher@house.state.md.us

Sen. William C. Smith, Jr., will.smith@senate.state.md.us

Del. Sheila E. Hixson, sheila.hixson@house.state.md.us

Del. David Moon, david.moon@house.state.md.us

Del. Jheanelle K. Wilkins, jheanelle.wilkins@house.state.md.us

Gwen Wright, Director, Montgomery County Planning Department,

Gwen.Wright@mncppc-mc.org

Al Roshdieh, Director, Montgomery County Department of Transportation,

mcdot.director@montgomerycountymd.gov