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January 25, 2001

Montgomery County Planning Board
M-NCPPC
8787 Georgia Avenue
Silver Spring, MD 20910

Public Testimony on

**"Facility Plan for the Capital Crescent & Metropolitan Branch Trails"
January 18, 2001 Planning Board Draft**

The Coalition for the Capital Crescent Trail strongly supports the Facility Plan for the CCT/MetBranch Trails and the trail alignment proposed in that plan. We ask the Planning Board to approve its transmittal with a strong recommendation for early implementation.

CCCT and the Trail Users:

The Coalition for the Capital Crescent Trail is an all-volunteer, non-profit organization advocating for the completion of the Capital Crescent Trail (CCT) into Silver Spring, and working to provide amenities to the Trail to give trail users a safer and more pleasant trail experience. We have over 1600 members and 30 affiliate organizations, and we are widely recognized as the leading citizens group to represent the interests of the Capital Crescent Trail users.

Who are the trail users? During the fall of 2000 the Coalition performed a trail traffic survey at two different locations on the CCT in Bethesda, under the direction of the M-NCPPC Department of Parks. The traffic data is still being analyzed by the Parks Department, but the raw data we obtained during the 43 one-hour long observation periods immediately leads us to several conclusions about trail use:

- 1) The trail is very heavily used – over 400 trail users per hour were regularly observed on weekends near the Bethesda trailhead, and over 500 users per hour were observed at least once during peak periods at both survey locations;
- 2) Most trail users are on foot – bicyclists are the largest single group of users, but bicyclists are usually outnumbered by the many walkers, joggers, inline skaters, and children in strollers. To characterize the CCT as a bicycle trail is to overlook the trail's important contribution to improving the recreational and non-motorized transportation opportunities for all of the residents of the neighborhoods it passes through, especially pedestrians.

3) A significant increase in trail use quickly follows opening bridges or tunnels to provide trail continuity across busy roadways – trail traffic in Bethesda has increased by roughly 70% since the last survey taken in 1996 before the River Road Trail Bridge and the trail tunnel under Wisconsin Avenue were open. We expect a big increase in trail use on the Georgetown Branch Trail in Chevy Chase and Lyttonsville when the trestle over Rock Creek is opened for trail use next year.

Relationship of the Interim CCT to the Preferred Final Trail and the proposed transitway/trail project:

We are very pleased with the Draft Facility Plan for the Capital Crescent and Metropolitan Branch Trails that is now being considered by the Planning Board. It provides a good blueprint to bring to the Silver Spring neighborhoods the benefits that the CCT has already delivered to our neighbors in Bethesda and Chevy Chase, while also completing a vital link in the planned CCT/Metropolitan Branch regional trail network. The plan shows that a good quality interim trail can go forward immediately, without any significant interference with the final transitway/trail project and while supporting the preferred final CCT trail alignment. The plan shows these interim trail improvements can either be incorporated into the final transitway/trail project, or can continue to serve the neighborhoods as permanent neighborhood pedestrian facilities and local trail access paths upon completion of the final transitway/trail. No new funds are needed to build expensive trail structures which would later be unneeded or need to be torn down for the transitway/trail project.

A safe and continuous Interim CCT from Jones Mill Road to Grace Church Road:

The plan recommends making improvements to the CCT from Jones Mill Road to Grace Church Road first, as CCT Phase I. These are badly needed to prepare for the increase in trail use that will come with opening the trestle. We urge you to accept the report recommendations for CCT Phase I, and to support its immediate implementation. DPWT has a funded project to open the trestle over Rock Creek Park for trail use and the trestle should be open next year. The facility plan identifies several serious problems that need to be corrected quickly. The intersection of Jones Mill Road and Jones Bridge Road, now being used as the trail crossing, is dangerously inadequate because of a blind curve in Jones Mill Road. At Stewart Avenue, the trail abruptly changes character and goes on-road down very busy Brookville Road, a road the report correctly characterizes as hazardous and unsuitable for trail users. There is no trail access for the communities of Rosemary Hills and Lyttonsville or to the new Rosemary Hills Recreational Center. There is no off-road trail access to Rock Creek Park and its Hiker/Biker trail. The gravel trail surface has a recurrent erosion problem in the section just east of the trestle. These problems are all addressed by the facility plan CCT Phase I recommendations. If Phase I is implemented, a safe and inviting off-road interim trail will be complete from Jones Mill Road into North Woodside. The residential streets Grace Church Road and Second Avenue can provide a good temporary on-road connection to complete the interim trail route into downtown Silver Spring.

It is of the highest importance to take the trail off dangerous Brookville Road as soon as possible, but we need to keep focused on getting the access from Stewart Avenue to Talbot Avenue on the preferred CSX spur route. Only that route is both direct and completely off-road, which is important to preserve the character of the trail. The plan recommends, for Phase I, developing an alternate Stewart-Kansas access route from the end of Stewart Avenue through a parking lot to Kansas Avenue, and going on-road several blocks to Talbot

Avenue. This is judged as necessary because of lengthy delays expected in obtaining an easement from CSX alongside the CSX spur. Because we seek to develop the CSX spur route during Phase II, in Phase I we should only build those alterations to Stewart Avenue that are necessary for safe access to Kansas Avenue and that would be consistent with development of the preferred CSX spur access route as the primary route within a few years. For example, consider using bike lanes on Stewart Avenue temporarily and defer extending the curb to make room for an off-road trail along Stewart Avenue. We should avoid investing more in the alternate Stewart-Kansas alignment than is needed since it may only serve for a few years as the interim trail route. We should begin seeking the CSX spur easement now, to prepare for a CCT Phase II start in a few years. If the CSX easement cannot be obtained to support development of the preferred trail route as part of Phase II, we can consider further improvements to the alternate Stewart-Kansas route instead in Phase II.

The Interim CCT from Grace Church Road into the Silver Spring CBD:

The plan recommends building the CCT interim trail between Grace Church Road and Fenwick Lane in CCT Phase II. This includes providing a crossing at a pedestrian light at 16th Street, creating a grade separated crossing under the Spring Street Bridge, and developing an off-road trail between Third Avenue and the CSX tracks in Woodside, which can remain as the permanent trail. Implementation of Phase II should follow immediately behind completion of Phase I. Details of the proposed transitway/trail design will soon be available as the Preliminary Engineering/Final EIS study comes to a conclusion within two years, and transitway design issues will be resolved so that the Phase II trail project can be designed to not obstruct the proposed transitway/trail project or require rebuilding later. CCCT generally agrees with the specific alignment recommendations made in the facility plan for the interim trail. While we continue to have a preference for the grade separated crossing of 16th Street that the alternate route on the west side of 16th Street provides, we can accept the plan recommendation to cross 16th Street at Lyttonsville Road at a pedestrian light. A light to cross 16th Street is very badly needed by the community and this interim trail alignment can provide that light and leave a much improved neighborhood pedestrian environment behind after the final CCT is built on the transitway/trail CSX rail alignment. A crossing of 16th Street at a pedestrian light would be unacceptable for the final CCT, however, because of the long wait times and the temptation to J-walk. It is very important to ultimately build the final CCT on the CSX rail alignment as called for in the facility plan and the county Master Plan, in order to have a more direct alignment and a grade separated crossing of 16th Street. The Interim CCT alignment proposed in the plan will complement the final preferred CCT alignment very well, providing the needed local community access to the CCT from the North Woodside neighborhoods.

Through the CBD to the Metropolitan Branch Trail:

We will not comment in detail on the facility plan for the Metropolitan Branch Trail. Metropolitan Branch Trail Coalition representatives will speak to that part of the plan. We are generally pleased with the plan for the MetBranch, we have been working closely with the MetBranch Coalition, and we support their comments. Completion of the Metropolitan Branch Trail is very important to us because it complements our own trail so well and is vital to forming a complete trail network. The connection between the Metropolitan Branch Trail and the Capital Crescent Trail needs to be seamless, directly through the new Transit Center on the CSX rail alignment. Any transit center design must include a good quality trail connection and must effectively incorporate a pedestrian/trail bridge over Colesville

Road if the transit center and CBD core is to be easily accessible to pedestrians and cyclists. The trail, with its grade separated crossings of Colesville Road and Georgia Avenue, is vital to creating the safe and inviting pedestrian environment that is sought for downtown Silver Spring and the transit center. In the CBD and transit center area the trail should be 12' wide or more where possible rather than the minimum AASHTO 10' standard. This will quickly become a very high pedestrian traffic area. We already regret we did not build the trail wider in downtown Bethesda - we will as quickly regret only making the trail 10' wide in downtown Silver Spring.

The facility plan recommends that the trail surface change from asphalt to concrete paving blocks in the downtown CBD, to keep it more like the surrounding streetscaping elements there. But we believe the trail should have an asphalt surface through the CBD. Joints in concrete paving blocks discourage inline skaters, and unless done very well will also be unpleasant for cyclists. It is also better to call attention to the trail in this area rather than trying to make the trail "blend in". Keeping the trail in an asphalt surface will help people recognize that this is a shared use trail and not just another sidewalk. It helps alert them to the presence of more purposeful traffic and of more cyclists. We want the trail to stand out. One can look to the Silver Spring Green Trail alongside Fresh Fields at Wayne Avenue to see that an asphalt trail surface can fit into an urban streetscape very attractively.

Thank you! This is the "win-win" plan we have wanted:

We wish to conclude by thanking the study consultants Lardner and Kline, and also Rachel Newhouse and the other staff of M-NCPPC. They have made an exceptional effort to reach out to us and other interested groups and to keep us informed and involved. They have had a difficult task to balance many conflicting interests. The plan they have developed is a good blueprint for building the Interim CCT now in a cost effective way that will not prejudice the ongoing transitway/trail project studies and decisions, and also protects our ability to ultimately complete the CCT on the preferred CSX rail alignment that is so important for the best permanent trail. They have produced a good plan that we can support enthusiastically. We believe they have come as close to a "win-win" plan for all interested groups as is possible. Now it is time to bring the Capital Crescent Trail to Silver Spring.

Sincerely,

Wayne Phyllaier
CCCT Chair