

Jeri L. DeYoung
Chief of Resources Management
Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park
1850 Dual Highway, Suite 100
Hagerstown, MD 21740
phone 301-714-2210
May 15, 2019

Dear Ms. DeYoung:

The Coalition for the Capital Crescent Trail (CCCT) is submitting the following comments to support Alternative 1, Option A of the proposals of the National Park Service (NPS) to improve vehicle, pedestrian and bicycle access at Fletcher's Cove. CCCT was organized shortly after the passage of the National Trails System Act of 1968 to advocate for the creation of the current Capital Crescent Trail on an abandoned railroad right-of-way connecting Silver Spring, Maryland with Georgetown in the District of Columbia. We worked many years with NPS and Montgomery County to obtain the rights-of-way and develop the Trail and continue working to maintain and improve the Trail, as well as assure its safety and usefulness. We are proud that the Trail has become one of the most used Rail-Trails in the Nation.

We strongly support the NPS proposal to improve the safety of access to Fletcher's Cove and believe that Alternative 1A is the best way to accomplish this for the following reasons:

1. Alternative 1A improves access to Canal Road without constructing a new vehicular bridge across the Canal, Towpath and Capital Crescent Trail. Such a bridge would completely destroy the current natural environment of the Cove and introduce a new, intrusive architectural element into the area. This is inconsistent with the historical and cultural context of the C&O Park. The Park was established after Supreme Court Justice Douglas highlighted its cultural, historical and environmental importance in response to a proposal to build a Freeway along the lower portion into Georgetown. A new vehicular bridge to access the lower parking lots so close to the site of the abandoned Three Sisters' Bridge proposal violates the spirit of the Park's founding.

2. Alternative 1A's proposal to allow emergency vehicles to use the existing bridge across the Canal, together with a new ramp down to the lower parking area, is the most efficient and safest way to allow for emergency access. We recognize and fully support the need to allow emergency vehicles into the Cove. While emergencies happen, they are fortunately rare. The number of times emergency vehicles will use the existing bridge and new ramp is not likely to be often and is thus unlikely to seriously disturb the flow of users on the Towpath or the Trail.

3. A new bridge is unnecessary and would be very costly. Alternative 1A provides more direct access to the Cove and Park. Moreover, scarce funds could be better used making other improvements to the Park, as, for example, by repaving and widening the Trail to current standards.

4. In addition, under Alternative 1A, the creation of a new ramp, in lieu of the existing stairs, to the lower level is likely to reduce congestion at crossing point and encourage more cyclists to explore the Cove near the Potomac River. Currently, many Trail users stop at this crossing point for many different reasons – to get water, to go to the lower part of the Cove, to use the restrooms or decide between using the Trail or Towpath. This creates congestion and a safety hazard, especially to cyclists travelling along the Trail or Towpath. A new ramp, if wide enough at the Trail/Towpath level, creates a larger area for users to congregate without blocking the Trail or Towpath. Also, the existing stairs deter many cyclists from getting off their bikes to explore the Cove. In comparison, a ramp will encourage cyclists to visit the Cove area near the Potomac River. We believe this is a very important ancillary benefit of Alternative 1A.

5. Alternative 1B is not desirable because it maintains the existing stairs and does not widen the area where the pedestrian bridge meets the Trail and Towpath. This does NOT help reduce congestion and perpetuates the current congestion safety problem. Also, the routing of emergency vehicles along the Towpath for any distance increases opportunities for damage to the Towpath and for conflicts between Park users and vehicles, again causing a greater safety hazard than having emergency vehicles cross the Towpath and Trail at a single point.

6. CCCT strongly supports other measures that NPS proposes to increase the safety of vehicular access using the current roadway and tunnel, including installation of traffic signals at the tunnel and similar improvements. We believe that pedestrians and cyclists are most likely to use the existing

bridge for access to the Cove and caution that it might be best to retain the tunnel only for vehicles for safety purposes. We also believe that a new entrance to the Cove from Canal Road offers many safety benefits.

CCCT appreciates the opportunity to work with the NPS on this and other matters. We would be pleased to meet with Park personnel to discuss our comments in more detail.

Respectfully submitted,

Ron Tripp
President,
Coalition for the Capital Crescent Trail