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Testimony to the Montgomery County Planning Board
Regarding the Metropolitan Branch Trail

May 18, 2006

My name is Peter Gray and I am speaking on behalf of the Board of the Coalition for the Capital Crescent Trail and our 2000 plus members. We ask that the Planning Board adopt Phases 1 and 2 of the Park and Planning Staff proposed "Option 5 Modified" for the Metropolitan Branch Trail ("Met Branch") which includes a bridge over Georgia Avenue, and move forward for detailed design and construction of that bridge immediately. We further ask that the Planning Board recommend that the project include further development of design and cost information for the East-West Highway underpass to a level needed to support an informed decision to realign the Metropolitan Branch Trail along Selim Road in the future.

Any successful trail design for the Met Branch should incorporate the qualities that have made the Capital Crescent Trail ("CCT") so successful, including the ability for users to cross major roadways on the numerous bridges and two tunnels on the trail. The CCT is the most heavily used trail in the region, with traffic counts greater than 500 users per hour in Bethesda at peak periods. One of the reasons for the high traffic count is the use of a tunnel under Wisconsin Avenue that allows the easy passage of bikers and hikers using the trail from neighborhoods east of Wisconsin. Another is the construction of a bridge over Bradley Boulevard just south of the Bethesda trailhead. Absent the Wisconsin Avenue tunnel on one side of downtown Bethesda and the bridge over Bradley Boulevard on the other side, the ability of bikers, pedestrians, wheelchair users and others to access downtown Bethesda would be greatly restricted. The overall use of the CCT is significantly enhanced by the access to the various bridges and underground passages at different points on the trail.

The underpasses and bridges on the CCT have maintained the basic 10 foot width of the trail or even widened the trail at those points. If the bridge over Bradley Boulevard or River Road had been only six feet wide and cyclists had to dismount when passing over either of those bridges, it would have severely restricted their usage of that crossing and been a strong disincentive for off road cyclists, including families with young children to use such a bridge. Such a restricted passage for those trail users would surely have retarded the success of the CCT throughout its length.

Furthermore, over the several years that the Delcarlia and Wisconsin Avenue tunnels have been in use there have been no safety or loitering problems associated with use of those underpasses. For illustration purposes, I have attached to this testimony pictures of what the proposed

underpass for the Met Branch would look like along with a picture of the current tunnel under Wisconsin Avenue on the CCT. The Wisconsin Avenue tunnel is 800 feet long, easily five times longer, much darker, with a much worse sight line, than the underpass proposed at East West Highway; yet good design with lighting and fencing have successfully addressed the many predictions of mayhem heard when we first proposed opening that tunnel. No one hesitates to use that tunnel now and the coalition feels that the fairly short underpass proposed under East-West Highway will also not pose a hazard to Met Branch users.

The CCT has been a wildly successful trail as it has been able to preserve its largely off road nature with bridge and underground passages at many major intersections. This has allowed trail users to feel insulated from car traffic. The Coalition hopes that the Planning Board will examine the success of the CCT and use that example to construct the Met Branch Trail in a similar manner, with as many crossings at major roadways as possible that also insulate trail users from cars. The coalition believes this can best be done by adopting Phases 1 and 2 of the M-NCPPC Staff proposed "Option 5 Modified" including the bridge over Georgia Avenue with detailed design and construction of the bridge immediately and further development of design and cost information for the East-West Highway underpass to a level needed to support the potential to realign the Metropolitan Branch Trail along Selim Road in the future.

Respectfully submitted,

Peter Gray, Vice Chairman, CCCT

LOCAL EXPERIENCE WITH TRAILS IN UNDERPASSES AND TUNNELS:

The underpass proposed for the Metropolitan Branch Trail at Burlington Avenue (East-West Highway) would be similar to this successful one on the Washington Baltimore & Annapolis Trail at Race Track Road near Bowie:



These two much longer tunnels have been in use on the Capital Crescent Trail for many years with no reported safety or vagrancy problems:



The Dalecarlia Tunnel under MacArthur Blvd.



East entrance to the Air Rights Tunnel under Wisconsin Avenue.



Interior view of the 800' long Air Rights Tunnel.