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Testimony to the Washington Metropolitan Transit Authority
Regarding the Silver Spring Transit Center

April 24, 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 planners for the Silver Spring Transit Center take all possible measures to provide a direct and grade-separated trail alignment for the CCT into the transit center. The alignment along the CSX/WMATA corridor has the best potential to do this. A trail alignment at-grade along Second Avenue is very undesirable. We also request that planners support building of the bike station and secure bike parking as needed for the transit center goal of supporting bike/transit intermodal transportation.

Any successful trail design must preserve the qualities that make the CCT so successful elsewhere. The CCT is the most heavily used trail in the region, with traffic counts greater than 500 users per hour in Bethesda in peak periods. This very high trail activity brings tremendous benefits to the Bethesda business community and to residents of that area of the county. The CCT can bring similar benefits to the Silver Spring Transit Center area. The CCT can help fulfill transit center goals of providing an improved pedestrian environment, increasing transit ridership, and assisting the redevelopment of Silver Spring. The CCT can also bring very significant recreational benefits to an area that has a high minority and low-income population, and that is underserved for public recreational facilities. The CCT is so successful in Bethesda in large measure because trail users feel sheltered from motor vehicle traffic. The CCT does not follow alongside busy roads and has only two roadway crossings over its seven mile length between Bethesda and Georgetown. If these characteristics are lost in Silver Spring, then the CCT will not be as heavily used and many of its potential benefits will be lost.

It is of greatest importance that the CCT come into the Silver Spring Transit Center on a direct alignment that is well protected from motor vehicle conflicts, and that connects seamlessly to the Metropolitan Branch Trail. The CSX/WMATA alignment holds the best promise of achieving this. The December 2004 Draft Transit Center Environment Assessment and 4(f) Evaluation shows the transit center design as reserving space for the transit and trail on this alignment. But the exact alignment is yet to be determined pending Bi-County Transitway decisions. We urge Transit Center designers and Bi-County Transitway designers to do everything possible to provide the CCT and

MetBranch Trail with a direct alignment and a seamless connection in the Transit Center. We appreciate the design challenge of bringing both transit and trail through the choke point at the Metro Plaza Building and also along a good alignment within the Transit Center. Unfortunately we can identify no other route into the Transit Center that can preserve the directness and separation from motor vehicles that is essential to the success of the CCT.

The CCCT regards any transit/trail alignment that would bring the CCT along Second Avenue as only a “last ditch” fallback position. A trail built at-grade along Second Avenue will be close alongside heavy traffic and will have numerous crossings of busy streets, including Colesville Road. This route will present designers with the lose-lose choice of either completing the trail connection to the Metropolitan Branch Trail by going along Dixon Avenue (thereby not bringing the CCT into the Transit Center) or by having the trail thread its way through the transit center (thereby routing the CCT through Transit Center vehicle and pedestrian congestion).

Any trail route at-grade along Second/Wayne Avenues will have multiple conflicts with motor vehicle traffic, which will lead to significantly reduced usage. Traffic is forecast to increase by 600 vehicles/hour in peak periods in this area. The new hotel, residential building, office building, and retail will generate more turning and crossing traffic. A new bus left turn lane is planned for westbound Colesville Road, putting yet more buses across the path of the Green Trail. In the very unfortunate event that the CCT is brought onto the Green Trail at-grade alignment, then the “nameplate” of the CCT should not be used on this portion of the trail. Trail users identify the CCT name with a high quality trail separated from motor vehicle traffic, and this trail would not be worthy of the CCT name.

Furthermore, the plans now have a continuous bike route along the south side of Colesville Road and call for cyclists to dismount to use a narrow sidewalk on the South side of Colesville Road. This is the main connection from the Green Trail to the Metro entrance. The Master Plan on the other hand calls for an off-road bike trail here. A sidewalk that prohibits cycling cannot be fairly called a bike route or a bike facility. Also the planned 20' between the curb and the proposed Hotel should be increased to at least 30', as requested by M-NCPPC, to make room for cyclists.

Another issue relates to access to the MetBranch Trail. The plan needs to include better access between the MetBranch Trail and the upper levels of the transit center and the street network. Currently there is no connection to either Bonifant or Ripley Street.

As for bike parking at the transit center, the current design does not provide adequate secure parking. The proposed rack and locker locations are sited in unmonitored locations and will not be protected from the elements. Additionally, no lockers have been sited at the north end of the station. Cyclists, particularly bike commuters will not be incented to use mass transit, absent secure bike parking protected at least somewhat from the weather.

Initial plans for the transit center included a Bike Station, but DPWT and WMATA have withdrawn their support. The transit center is an ideal location for a bike station, where three regional bike trails will converge in the area's most transit oriented urban center. WMATA should include a bike station in it's plans and facilitate the subsidization of its operation.

In conclusion, the plans laid out tonight diverge in important ways from the Master Plan with regard to access from the trails to the transit center and alongside the transit center. In order to attract bicyclists to maximally use the new transit center, it is important that WMATA and all parties involved in developing the transit center make access from the trails a separate and important element in executing the plan for the transit center. That realization of the plan should follow the Master Plan in the way in which the CCT comes into the transit center and in the way the CCT, the MetBranch and the Green Trails access the transit center and each other. Further, the transit center should include sufficient secure bike parking for bike commuters and recreational cyclists who will also use the transit center, and WMATA and the county should support the building of a Bike Station near the transit center.

Respectfully submitted,

Peter Gray, Vice Chairman, CCCT