



# The Capital Crescent Trail

Summer 1997

Vol. IX No. 1

## OPEN THE TUNNEL!!

by

*Henri Bartholomot and Margaret Marchak*

On Wednesday, May 7, 1997, the Montgomery County Council voted 6:3 to delete funding from the County's proposed FY98 budget to open an existing underpass below Wisconsin Avenue for the Capital Crescent Trail. The County bought rights to the underpass — called the "Wisconsin Avenue Tunnel" — as part of the Capital Crescent Trail right-of-way more than eight years ago. But the County has since allowed adjacent property owners to fence it off to public use.

Trail supporters had strongly encouraged the Council to open the tunnel for the trail. According to Henri Bartholomot, board member for the Coalition for the Capital Crescent Trail: "The tunnel is THE critical link in downtown Bethesda between the completed part of the trail west of the tunnel (which goes to the C&O Canal and Georgetown) and an interim part east of the tunnel (which goes to Rock Creek Park and Silver Spring). Without it, hikers, bikers, runners, families, and children trying to go from one part of the trail to the other must travel a circuitous route along busy streets in the heart of Bethesda, and must cross multiple lanes of heavy traffic at Wisconsin Avenue. The tunnel avoids these impediments, by directly connecting the two sections of trail along the County-owned right-of-way."

Recognizing the importance of the tunnel to the trail, County executive Douglas Duncan had requested funding needed to pay for an asphalt trail surface, good lighting, fencing, self-monitoring security cameras, and road improvements at an adjacent intersection for \$180,000. The \$180,000 budget request for the tunnel is based on a cost estimate prepared last October by staff in the County Department of Public Works and Transportation. The Executive visited the tunnel in late January, and was surprised to see how open and inviting it is, with vaulted ceilings on the order of 30 feet height and side walls roughly 50 feet apart. Though the Council-approved County Master Plan calls for the tunnel to be opened for the trail, one or two of the Council members labeled it "a nice thing, but not a necessity."

Trail supporters strongly disagreed, expressing dismay over the vote on May 7. According to Bartholomot, "The Council had an opportunity to integrate the two sections of trail and to improve trail safety immensely — merely by opening this existing facility — and the majority did not take that opportunity. On behalf of the thousands of folks who use this trail each week, and who will continue to find the midsection of it fenced off to public use, we are deeply saddened." Council members Leggett, Krahne, and Dacek voted to support the tunnel funding.

Furthermore, the County purchased the right-of-way under section 8(d) of the Rails-to-Trails Act, and the purchase was approved by the U.S. Interstate Commerce Commission in the form of a "certificate of interim trail use." The certificate authorized the County to use the right-of-way for a trail and other compatible uses. It appears that keeping the tunnel fenced off violates both the spirit and the letter of that certificate, by cutting the trail in two and ceding use of part of the right-of-way to private property owners.

If you are out on the trail you are likely to encounter volunteers with clipboards who are collecting signatures to present to Council members in support of opening the tunnel. The CCCT Board also encourages CCCT members to contact the Montgomery County Council in one of the following ways:

Write: Council President Marilyn Praisner and Members  
Montgomery County Council  
100 Maryland Avenue  
Rockville, MD 20850

Email: [county.council@co.mo.md.us](mailto:county.council@co.mo.md.us)  
Phone: (301) 217-7907  
Fax: (301) 217-7987



*The east side of the tunnel is now being used as a parking lot after being blocked by chain link fence. Photo by John Campanile.*

*The Capital Crescent Trail* is published three times a board year (June-June) by the Coalition for the Capital Crescent Trail (CCCT), P.O. Box 30703, Bethesda, MD 20824, phone (202) 234-4874, [ewbrooks@oasys.dt.navy.mil](mailto:ewbrooks@oasys.dt.navy.mil). CCCT is a non-profit citizens' group promoting development of the 11.2 mile rail-to-trail conversion from Georgetown, D.C. to Silver Spring, MD for multi-purpose, recreational use.

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We request that all entries should be sent to the post office box listed above. Submissions should be sent on 3.5" diskette or via the internet to [ewbrooks@oasys.dt.navy.mil](mailto:ewbrooks@oasys.dt.navy.mil).

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**Reach the Capital Crescent  
by Internet**

For those of you who prefer to "surf the net" you can reach the Capital Crescent Trail through Ernie Brooks. ["ewbrooks@oasys.dt.navy.mil"](mailto:ewbrooks@oasys.dt.navy.mil) he'll process your request.

# RIBBON-CUTTING CEREMONIES FOR THE INTERIM TRAIL

by  
*John Dugger*

The interim Capital Crescent Trail from Bethesda to Silver Spring with an interim name "Georgetown Branch Trail," was officially dedicated at the Elm Street Park trail head on Saturday May 17 with speeches and a ribbon-cutting. The Director of the Montgomery County Department of Public Works and Transportation, Graham Norton, was master of ceremonies; his department was responsible for building this part of the Trail. Speakers included Bruce Roemer, representing County Executive Duncan; Ike Leggett and Betty Anne Krahne, Council members; Mier Wolf, Mayor of the Town of Chevy Chase; Pat Babbiste, Commissioner, Parks and Planning Commission; and John Dugger, Chair of the Coalition for the Capital Crescent Trail. Members of the Maryland Legislature attending included Senator Brian Frosch, and Delegates John Hurson, Nancy Kopp, and Chris Van Hollen.

This new part of the Capital Crescent Trail was recognized by all the speakers as a great community asset for commuting and for recreation, despite its incomplete status. Speakers addressed the need for completing this part of the Trail to the standard of the Trail from Bethesda to Georgetown, including opening up the tunnel, rebuilding or building anew the trestle over Rock Creek Park, paving the Trail, and making good connections to the Metro, and the Metropolitan Branch Trail at the silver Spring end. The Coalition was applauded for its role in getting the Interim Trail this far, particularly for the part played by Henry Bartholomot in chairing the Interim Trail task Force. It was noted that together with facilitation the completion of the Trail to Silver Spring, the Coalition would be responsible for maintenance of the Interim Trail.

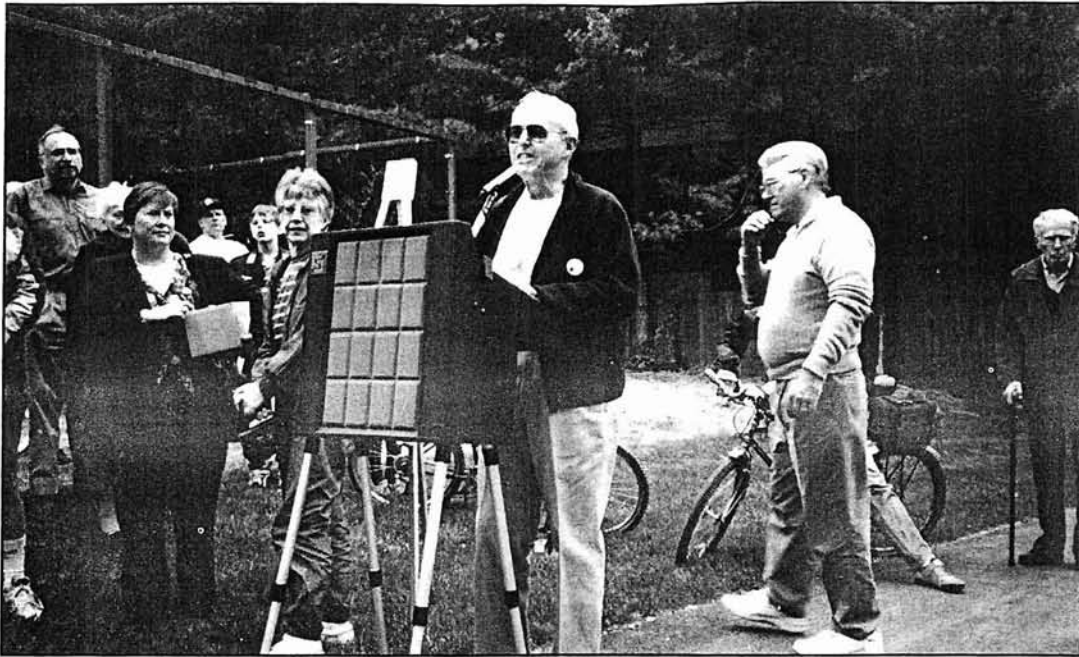
The opportunity to promote opening up the tunnel was taken by a number of participants; large placards saying "Open the Tunnel" were carried by many attendees, and most speakers addressed the desirability of opening the tunnel. Although the County Council has voted against funding the tunnel at this time, the Coalition has expressed its determination to obtain even wider citizen support for opening the tunnel, and to obtain County funding for paving, lighting, fencing, and other security measures. See previous article for details.



*Montgomery County Department of Transportation Chief Graham Norton addresses tunnel-supporting crowd. (The sign at the far right reads: "We have tunnel vision we want to see the Bethesda Tunnel open.")  
Photo by John Campanile.*

## RIBBON-CUTTING CEREMONIES FOR THE INTERIM TRAIL

*(Continued)*



*John Dugger, CCCT Chair, gives words of encouragement to crowd. Photo by John Campanile.*



*Small supporter takes signage one step further: "Please open the tunnel so I can be safe." Photo by John Campanile.*



## **PROPOSED GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY BOATHOUSE ON THE CCT**

*by*

*John Campanile and John Dugger*

The Coalition for the Capital Crescent Trail has written the National Park Service expressing its concern on the proposed land exchange between the National Park Service and Georgetown University for a boathouse along the Potomac River. While the Coalition is not opposed to an exchange, concerns have been raised that this agreement would entitle Georgetown access to their property via the Capital Crescent Trail for emergency vehicles and for vehicles/trailers carrying shells for the University-sponsored regattas. The proposed location of the boathouse, which would place it just upstream of the existing Washington Canoe Club, would lead to user conflicts at the Georgetown Trail head and create safety hazards for trail users.

The Coalition hopes that the Park Service will consider the alternative of allowing Georgetown to build on a site between the Canoe Club and Washington Harbor, where land is to be donated to the Park Service by the City of Washington when work is completed on the Whitehurst Freeway.

The Coalition will continue to work with the Park Service and Georgetown University to explore a more trail-friendly location for the University's boathouse downstream of the Washington Canoe Club. The Coalition believes that this location makes better sense for boaters, trail supporters, the University, the Park Service and the waterfront in general.

## **PARK VS. PARKING AT RIVER ROAD**

*by*

*John Dugger*

Whether Montgomery County should continue to lease to private parties a portion of the Capital Crescent trail right-of-way on the Kenwood side of the River Road bridge was an issue considered by the Montgomery County Parks and Planning Commission at an evening meeting on April 28. The Minkoff Company, contractors for repair of fire and flooding damage, with office and equipment buildings behind the Mobil station, and the Tower Company, owners of a now-empty five-story office building further back, have been using a strip of right-of-way along the access road and adjacent to a parking lot for parking vehicles, particularly large trucks and dumpsters; the rent established by the County for this use is \$5000 per year. The Parks Department has prepared plans for extensive landscaping of the entire right-of-way between the access road and the bridge foundation and adjacent to the Trail; these plans would preclude parking on the right-of-way. The Minkoff Company declared that it would have to move its business elsewhere, perhaps out of the County, if the leased parking is terminated; the Tower Company considers its building much less rentable without the leased parking strip.

The two companies jointly proposed that if the lease for parking were continued, they would pay for an elaborate scheme of landscaping in the area adjacent to River Road between their property and the Trail. Under the joint proposal, the appearance of the access to the Trail at River Road would be greatly improved, but less so than under the Parks Department proposal, which provides a much larger park area.

*(Continued on next page)*

## PARK VS. PARKING AT RIVER ROAD (Continued)

Parks Department staff had recommended that the leases be terminated and the full area be utilized for a park. Donald Cochran, Director of Parks, recognizing the preferences of the County Executive's office, reversed this recommendation and endorsed continuing the leases.

The Coalition in its statement to the Commission took the position that the Trail right-of-way generally should be kept free of private uses and supported the Parks Department plan. However, the statement continued, if the lease of part of the right-of-way for parking were permitted to remain in effect, the Trail should be well buffered from the parking area by extensive plantings, the parking area should be topped with asphalt rather than gravel, and parking should be available to the public at all times on a space-available basis. The Coalition requested that it be given the opportunity to help shape and comment on the detailed plans for parking and landscaping as these evolved, and that any leases granted be for a brief period--five to ten years--and subject to reconsideration rather than a presumption favoring renewal.



*Photo by John Campanile.*

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### Check Your Alignment...?

The Coalition for the Capital Crescent Trail urges trail users, especially those on bicycles and rollerblades, to exercise caution on the north ramp of the Dalecarlia Bridge. In addition to the trestle's wooden surface becoming slippery under damp conditions, the ramp itself narrows the trail from a 14-foot width to a 10-foot width.

County officials have cited economic reasons for their decision to use the old trestle that once carried the Georgetown Branch line over the Glen Echo Trolley line, but they do intend to revisit the issue when their budget allows. In the meantime, signs have been placed in both travel directions advising cyclists to walk their bikes on the ramp.

## An Early Spring Fling on the Capital Crescent Trail

The Coalition for the Capital Crescent Trail sponsored a bike ride on Saturday, March 22. Over 100 cyclists toured the entire 11.2 miles of the trail, including the Interim Trail running from Bethesda's Elm Street Park to Stewart Avenue in Silver Spring. For many, it was their first time on the Interim Trail and an opportunity to bike the detours around the unopened sections of the Wisconsin Avenue Tunnel and the Rock Creek Trestle.



*Under picture-perfect skies, cyclists assemble at the Bethesda Avenue trail head. Photo by John Campanile.*



*Riding along the Interim Trail near the East-West Highway overpass. Photo by John Campanile.*



*Crossing "en masse" at Connecticut Avenue. Three light cycles were needed to move the more than 100 participants across the avenue. Photo by John Campanile.*

*Lunchtime break at Pierce Mill finds CCCT board member Victoria Cordova (second from left) relaxing with other cyclists. Photo by John Campanile.*



*Special thanks to Brooks Sido of Bikes USA for his valuable mechanical support and for riding "sweep" on the Coalition's tour of the CCT. Photo by John Campanile.*



## Directions for Negotiating Interim Trail

*Complements of John Campanile*

Detours around the Wisconsin Avenue Tunnel and the Rock Creek Trestle are as follows. Note that these directions are from the south to the north.

### **TUNNEL (mile 3.5):**

- > At CCT/Bethesda Avenue trail head, turn RIGHT (eastbound, towards Wisconsin Ave.) on Bethesda Ave. for one block.
- > LEFT on Wisconsin Ave., then immediate RIGHT on Willow Lane.
- > Go one short block, then LEFT on 47th Street. Go one short block, then RIGHT on pedestrian entrance to Elm Street Park.
- > Ramp access to the crushed-stone Capital Crescent/Georgetown Branch Trail on your left, just beyond the tennis courts.
- > Return to Bethesda Ave. via Elm St.

### **ROCK CREEK TRESTLE (mile 1.0)**

- > Follow the CCT/Georgetown Branch Trail to Jones Mills Rd.
- > LEFT on Jones Mill Rd. (CAUTION: At-grade crossing - be aware of oncoming traffic).
- > Through traffic light, then immediate RIGHT on Susanna Lane.
- > Follow Susanna to end, pick up paved trail to Rock Creek, continue 1/4 mile.
- > RIGHT on RC Trail and continue 1/2 mile (Following RC trail over footbridge, under the trestle and through soccer field.)
- > Leave trail at Meadowbrook Lane (do not cross East-West Hwy.), go up hill and LEFT at Freyman Drive.
- > LEFT on Terrace Drive.
- > Trail right-of-way will be just ahead to the left at Grubb Road.

### **EAST WEST HIGHWAY ROUTE:**

- > RIGHT on Jones Mill Rd., down hill to East-West Hwy:
- > LEFT on East-West, continue up hill 3/4-mile to Grubb Road.
- > LEFT on Grubb, 3/4-mile to Terrace Drive.
- > RIGHT on Terrace to trail right-of-way.

### **ACCESS TO CCT/GEORGETOWN BRANCH FROM SILVER SPRING METRO STATION (mile 0):**

- > RIGHT on Colesville Road, one block.
- > LEFT on Second Avenue, continue 3/4 mile.
- > LEFT on Grace Church Road, continue 1/4 mile.
- > RIGHT on Fourth Avenue, then immediate LEFT on Talbot Avenue, continue 1/2 mile.
- > LEFT on Brookville Road, continue 1/4 mile.
- > LEFT on Stewart Avenue, downhill one short block to CCT/Georgetown Branch Trail entrance on your right.

## Thanks...

...to the **Cottonwood Foundation** for their \$1500 donation late last year to the CCCT that will go to the design and placement of a wayside along the trail.

...to **Carol Stewart** of the **Kenwood Garden Club** for the landscaping work she has done along the Kenwood vicinity of the Trail.

...to the 13 CCCT volunteers who assisted Board member **Doug Engle** (see photo) in erecting six vertical railroad ties from Little Falls Parkway to the Dalecarlia Reservoir. The ties were set in place during four work sessions on April 19-20. Mileage panels were added in early May.

...to the **Bethesda Friends School**. On April 20, these high schoolers picked up trash along the Silver Spring side of the CCT (the Interim Trail).



*Photo by John Campanile.*

### CORRECTION:

The Fall 1996 issue of this Newsletter incorrectly stated that the Bethesda Urban Partnership supports the opening of the Wisconsin Avenue tunnel. In fact, the Partnership had considered the issue but had not taken any position on it. We regret this error.

## Off With The Tracks

### Dial Up Trail Status/Conditions

The Coalition for the Capital Crescent Trail has begun a hotline on current conditions and new section openings along the trail. Callers can also leave a message on trail conditions at (202) 234-4874 dial #8.

### Attention Trail Users!

We want to encourage you to be the eyes and ears of the trail. Board members are on the trail every week, but not every day. If you find anything interesting happening on the corridor while out riding or know of any issues which might impact the trail, positively or negatively, give us a call at (202) 234-4874 and leave a message at #6.

## Carpe Diem

by

C.H. Breedlove, Jr.

I consider the nicest aspect of being retired is having the time and the opportunity to do those things that require a degree of spontaneity in order to accomplish something really special. March 11, a weekday, was just such a day in Washington. The weather was beginning to feel definitely like spring, with a bright blue sky and temperature in the upper 50's- a perfect day to go for a bike ride. I chose to bike along the newly-created "Capital Crescent Trail", which runs for about seven miles from downtown Bethesda to the Key Bridge area in Georgetown. The trail follows the old roadbed of a branchlike of the B&O Railroad. The rail line was abandoned as a method of hauling heavy freight from Silver Spring to Georgetown in 1984. It is now a delightful hiker/biker path, asphalt-surfaced and about six feet wide, crossing major roads on newly constructed bridges and passing through one 300 foot-long tunnel en route. The acquisition of the land and the subsequent construction of the trail must surely represent one of the wisest uses of public funds that one could possibly imagine. Because I was on the trail in the middle of a workday, I saw only a few other hikers and bikers and one Park police officer on a horse in the hour it took me to ride to Georgetown.

Once in Georgetown, I got off my bike at a small park, located at the foot of Wisconsin Avenue, and ate my picnic lunch while seated on a bench overlooking the Potomac and Theodore Roosevelt Island. The sun was shining warmly down and several gulls landed by me, after noting that I was eating and would perhaps be willing to share some of my lunch with them. Being aware of what happens when you feed one gull, I chose not to. Finishing lunch and feeling refreshed, I decided to continue my ride, after looking up and observing lots of pedestrians and bicyclists crossing the Potomac via Key bridge, using separate pedestrian lanes located on each side of the bridge.

After a few wrong turns in the vicinity of the C&O Canal, I eventually made my way up from beneath the Whitehurst Freeway and onto Key bridge. I rode on across the bridge and shortly entered onto another bicycle path that closely follows the Virginia shoreline of the river for several miles southward. With the wind at my back and a slight downhill grade, I made good time as I rode along. Lots of daffodils were in glorious bloom and, as I looked out across the broad Potomac, I could see the faint beginnings of the pink haze that presages the flowering of the cherry trees around the Tidal Basin. Washington is such a beautiful city, especially in the Spring, and especially when viewed from my vantage point along the river's edge. I stopped for a few minutes at Roach's Run at the northern end of National airport to both hear and feel the tremendous power of the jets as they fought for altitude only a hundred feet above my head. Then I continued my southerly ride, past the congestion of the airport, and on toward Alexandria, where finally I began to think about how I had to pedal and equal distance back to Bethesda. And I was getting tired. I reluctantly turned my bike around and began the long journey back. Within a few minutes, I began to realize just how strong my previous tailwind had been, as I hunched down on the bike and began to seriously beat against the 25 mph northwest wind that was blowing ever harder down the river. A few minutes later, the sun rather suddenly disappeared and was replaced by an ominous bank of violet-colored clouds that began to fitfully spit out a light rain on me. This caused me to try and step up my rpms. With no further rest stops and with legs and rear aching, I eventually made it back to the parking lot in Bethesda in about an hour of pretty much non-stop pedaling. My bike's odometer registered that I had traveled a total of the length of a marathon: 26 miles! It had been a good day to have been out on a bike.

## YES! I WANT TO HELP CREATE THE CAPITAL CRESCENT TRAIL

☐ \$100. Special Honor Membership; commemorative spike, your name in our annual report, action alerts for one year and subscription to *The Capital Crescent Trail*.

☐ \$30. Sustaining Membership; subscription to *The Capital Crescent Trail* and action alerts for one year.

☐ \$60. Sponsoring Membership, subscription to *The Capital Crescent Trail*, action alerts for one year and a T-shirt. Please circle size: L XL (sorry no size small or medium)

☐ \$15. Individual Membership subscription to *The Capital Crescent Trail* and action alerts for one year.

I know of an organization that may join the CCT. The group is \_\_\_\_\_  
Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
Telephone \_\_\_\_\_ (h) \_\_\_\_\_ (w)

**Coalition for the Capital Crescent Trail**  
**P.O. Box 30703, Bethesda, MD 20824 Telephone 202-234-4874**

## Calendar of Upcoming Events

July 14      Board Meeting - Bethesda Library -- 7:00 p.m.  
August 18    Board Meeting - Bethesda Library -- 7:00 p.m.  
September 22   Board Meeting - Bethesda Library -- 7:00 p.m.

Coalition for the Capital Crescent Trail  
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