

February 25, 2022

Montgomery County Council  
Council Office Building  
100 Maryland Ave  
Rockville, MD 20850

**FY 23 Capital Budget and FY 23-28 Capital Improvements Program (CIP)**

**Testimony for February 9, 2022**

**Jane Lyons, Maryland Advocacy Manager**

Thank you and good afternoon. My name is Jane Lyons and I'm speaking on behalf of the Coalition for Smarter Growth, the leading organization in advocating for walkable, bikeable, inclusive, transit-oriented communities.

We are extremely pleased by the level of funding for bus rapid transit in the County Executive's recommended CIP and urge you to keep those appropriations. Montgomery County became a national inspiration when it approved an 81-mile BRT network nearly a decade ago in 2013; and while it is great to now have the FLASH along Route 29, implementation of the network is taking too long given the urgent need for better transit for access to jobs and fighting climate change. Funding and moving expeditiously through design to construction on Veirs Mill and the MD-355 Central BRT routes is critical to achieve transportation equity. These corridors provide essential connections to jobs, education, and more, and have some of the highest existing transit ridership, and offer the greatest benefit from your investment.

Furthermore, we urge you to support the \$433 million included for Vision Zero, and further bolster the amount appropriated for pedestrian and bicycle transportation facilities. We hope the prioritized projects will include a focus on street lighting, access to transit stations such as the Purple Line and BRT, safe routes to schools, and equity emphasis areas. We are dismayed to see that the Capital Crescent Trail tunnel has been stripped out of the CIP again. We urge that this high-capacity and safety-critical bike/ped facility be added back.

Other priorities for achieving more sustainable, inclusive communities include: Metro entrances, electrification of the Ride On fleet, and moving the bus depot to allow for TOD at Shady Grove. We also urge you to increase funding for affordable housing and parks and recreation, and to keep school capacity projects on track. Please see our written testimony for our full comments. Thank you.

Please see our detailed testimony below:

### **Transportation:**

- **Buses:** We are extremely pleased by the level of funding for Bus Rapid Transit projects in the County Executive's recommended CIP and urge you to keep these appropriations, including construction funding and continued planning for future routes. For too long, promises of an expanded BRT system have fallen flat with no construction funding for projects outside of Route 29. Both Veirs Mill and MD-355 Central BRT routes are major steps toward transit equity, with Veirs Mill providing a critical east-west connection and MD-355 connecting Upcounty centers to Rockville and the Metro system. Both of these transit corridors already have very high ridership, and those riders deserve better. Thus, we urge you to keep construction funding for the central MD-355 corridor in the CIP, as well as \$6.25 million for US 29-Phase 2, \$6.25 million for Bus Priority Program - Minor Projects, \$7.9 million for bus stop improvements, and \$12.1 million for Great Seneca Science Corridor Transit Improvements. These projects should not rely on funding from the harmful I-459/I-270 highway expansion.
- **Metro access:** It remains important to make better use of one of our county's biggest assets, the Metro system. We are glad to see the County Executive's recommended CIP include funding for Bethesda Metro Station South Entrance, White Flint Metro Station Northern Entrance and Access Improvements, and the Forest Glen Passageway.
- **Bicycle and pedestrian safety:** We urge you to support the \$433 million included for Vision Zero, and further bolster the amount appropriated for pedestrian and bicycle transportation facilities. We support WABA's request for \$100 million investment in Tier 1 bike projects in equity emphasis areas. All bicycle and pedestrian projects should include a focus on street lighting, access to transit stations such as the Purple Line and Bus Rapid Transit, safe routes to schools, and equity emphasis areas. We are dismayed to see that the Capital Crescent Trail tunnel has been stripped out of the CIP again and urge that this high-capacity and safety-critical bike/ped facility be added back.
- **Electrification:** We are excited to see \$152 million included to help transition the Ride On bus system to a zero-emission fleet. This is an important step toward meeting the county's greenhouse gas emission reduction goals and improving public health.

To help fund these critical green transportation initiatives, we urge you to modify or eliminate road expansions, such as Goshen Road South, which would cost \$168 million, and the Burtonsville Access Road, which would cost \$8.25 million over six years.

### **Redevelopment:**

- **White Oak Science Gateway Redevelopment:** If the county is going to spend \$40 million to help fund the road construction costs, then those roads should all be complete streets in accordance with the Complete Streets Design Guide, including protected bike infrastructure. We should not be building new roads that do not adequately serve all users. It is much cheaper to install these now than to retrofit roads with them later.
- **MCPS Crabbs Branch Bus Depot Replacement:** We are glad to see progress on relocating the bus depot in order to realize the Shady Grove Sector Plan's vision for transit-oriented development.

### **Affordable Housing:**

- Level funding is not enough to meet our housing needs. We applaud the Council for FY22 marking the first year the HIF will meet the \$100 million goal. We would like to see this continue into the future and be bolstered further. As we invest in county amenities, we must ensure affordable housing funding keeps pace in order for low income residents to be able to stay in the county and enjoy those improved amenities.

### **Parks & Recreation:**

- We ask that the \$19 million that has been cut from the Parks Department's budget be restored, with a priority on the Wheaton Regional Park improvements, which will help more of the surrounding community access the park. Parks are necessary places for refuge, recreation, climate resilience, and community gathering, which has been especially evident during the pandemic.

### **Schools:**

- As the county continues to grow, it is important that our schools grow as well. We ask that construction plans for JoAnn Leleck Elementary are funded and stay on schedule, and that ongoing construction at Burnt Mills and South Lake Elementary Schools stays on schedule as well. As previously stated, we also need to prioritize safe routes to school so that students are able to easily walk or bike to school.

### **Conservation and climate:**

- We urge you to continue to support the Agricultural Reserve, bolster spending on stormwater management and other flooding mitigation measures to prevent dangerous flooding incidents and reduce runoff, and add funding for street tree planting. There is \$18.6 million in the CIP for street tree preservation, but none for adding more street trees. Street trees play a critical role in our ecosystem, including reducing the heat

island effect, of which Montgomery County is especially at-risk of. We urge you to include appropriations for stewarding new street trees in areas with particularly high heat levels.