

Montgomery County Council  
100 Maryland Avenue, 6th Floor  
Rockville, MD 20850

February 7, 2024

Re: 2025-2030 Capital Improvements Program

Dear President Friedson and Members of the County Council:

My name is Michael Larkin, and I am a resident of Silver Spring. The Capital Improvements Program (CIP) budget is an opportunity to build a county with transit-oriented development, more affordable housing, safer pedestrian and biking infrastructure, and ensure we are serious about being environmentally sustainable.

The \$82 million allocated to the Housing Initiative Fund and \$15 million for the Non-Profit Preservation Fund are crucial investments that will bring the county closer to the scale of commitment we must meet for the production and preservation of affordable housing. This level of funding should be a benchmark and not the ceiling for the future because it will welcome more people to our county to live and work. However, the \$24.2 million reduction to Montgomery Parks funding request is not welcoming to all, and it will harm community members most in need of green space. The funding shortfall could mean Parks is not able to build and maintain walking and biking trails in places such as Wheaton Regional Park, a large park that is accessible by public transportation.

This county seeks to build world-class transit options, and it is excellent news that the CIP is investing significantly in Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) on MD 355, Viers Mill Road, and US 29. As a rider of the US 29 Flash bus, I cannot emphasize enough that BRT must be implemented with dedicated lanes on all routes. Dedicated lanes will encourage drivers to shift to public transportation, and it helps community members that cannot afford a car but are now sitting in traffic while riding the bus and waiting longer for buses. More people using reliable BRT means less congestion and less pollution. BRT will not meet its full promise if it is not built to the highest standards possible. The Institute for Transportation and Development Policy developed [The BRT Standard](#), an evaluation tool that localities in the United States and globally have looked to while developing their BRT systems. World-class BRT in Montgomery County must mean dedicated bus lanes.

In addition to dedicated lanes, a successful BRT system requires pedestrian and biking infrastructure because many transit riders begin their journey by walking or biking. The pedestrian and bicyclist could be the student going to school, someone going to work, [or the parent going to the local grocery store](#). The US 29 Flash route includes public schools, the Food and Drug Administration, shopping centers, social service providers such as Manna Food Center, and the wonderful Northwest Branch Trail. The new east county campus of Montgomery County College will be accessible on the US 29 Flash route. This level of development should be conducive to walking and biking. During the summer of 2023, I collaborated with fellow volunteers to talk with residents at the Burnt Mills trailhead on US 29 about the construction of the dedicated bus lane for The Flash. People overwhelmingly agreed that the lane's construction is the perfect time to address pedestrian and bike safety issues. It is simply not right to build BRT stations that are hazardous to life and limb while traveling to them.

The US 29 Flash route is within an Equity Focus Area (EFA), and data presented to this Council in the Pedestrian Master Plan clearly showed EFAs suffer [higher rates of crashes that result in a fatality or severe injury](#). Community members of color and lower incomes are bearing the burden of unsafe walking, rolling, and biking conditions. I have participated in pedestrian and bike safety audits, [including on US 29](#). The members of this Council or your staff have gone to these audits. We have all gone to or at least read about white shoe and ghost bike memorials after a fatal crash. We all know many residents are navigating narrow sidewalks and dangerous roads to access transit and other amenities.

This budget is an opportunity to dedicate the necessary resources to build a BRT system that people will want to use because it is dependable and includes safe pedestrian and biking access. It is an opportunity to start ending the need for memorials. That is a more humane Montgomery County. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Michael Larkin

