

Good evening, County Councilmembers.

My name is Evin Fernando, and I'm a rising junior living in Damascus and a part of the IB program at Watkins Mill High School, as well as the president of our Eco MoCo chapter. I'm here today to ask you to expand bus service to the upcounty, especially expand Route 90 to Damascus.

At school, we talk a lot about climate change, how it impacts our planet, our health, and our future. We learn about the greenhouse effect, sustainability, and the importance of protecting our environment. But beyond the science, I've also learned that the effects of climate change and environmental decisions don't impact everyone equally.

Communities like mine often bear the greatest burden. The Montgomery Village area is a lower-income community designated as "disadvantaged." Marginalized communities are often located in areas more vulnerable to climate impacts. Lower-income communities frequently have inadequate infrastructure to withstand climate-related events, leading to greater damage and displacement.

Thank you for removing the proposed M-83 highway from the Master Plan of Highways and Transitways and for choosing not to spend \$1 billion on a destructive highway. Imagine what we can now do with that kind of investment for our schools, for public transit, or for climate solutions that actually move us forward rather than take us back. Specifically, some of this money could be used to expand Route 90 as well as other Ride-On routes. Some people may say that people living up-county don't use the Ride-On buses, but I would like to speak to the contrary. Living in Damascus, I have taken the bus to Watkins Mill numerous times. However, I always have to take 2 buses to get there, which takes more than an hour. If we had more funds spent towards our transit programs, we would be able to accommodate more people like me who rely on the buses because they may not have cars, live with disabilities, are too young to drive, or for other reasons, to make the typical hour bus ride shorter, saving time for everyone.

Additionally, I have friends at Watkins Mill who walk 30-40 minutes every day to school, as they are within a certain radius where school buses aren't provided. Transit has helped most of these friends of mine and has allowed them to speed up their journey to school, even if it is by 10-15 minutes. It would also be critical to have a bus running in Damascus on the weekends, as they do on weekdays.

I urge you to invest in expanding Route 90 and other Ride On services in the Upcounty, investments that truly serve our communities and help all of us thrive.

Thank you.