


From: Nancgh nancgh@aol.com 
Subject: as requested, links regarding Heavy Dashed Red Line Shared Use Path Connection plus recommendation
Date: October 10, 2021 at 3:49 PM
To: gftemple2@gmail.com, chambers.grisham@icloud.com



Hi Kriss and Gary,

As a follow up to my comments at the last public meeting of the Shared Use Bike Path Connection Task Force on September 30 th, I am sharing links that provide a summary history of the Town's public opposition to various proposals by the County to expand the Humpback Bridge to four lanes and to widen Railroad Street with the goal of connecting it to Crabbs Branch Way.

As Gary summed up very well after my comments, there may be serious unintended consequences of the Town suggesting the consideration of widening the Railroad Street corridor beyond the intersection with Brown Street to accommodate a bike path (the red dashed line). This "option" goes well beyond the alternate routes currently under consideration by the County for the shared use bike path.

On and off over the years, County transportation planners have looked to expanding our Railroad Street corridor to relieve traffic on Rte 355, Shady Grove Road and Mid County Highway. One of the first such proposals was a four lane road connecting Railroad Street to Crabbs Branch Way. While a bike pathway route behind the Salt Domes might be acceptable, a cut through vehicular road connecting to Crabbs Branch Way would not be desirable. As a Town we have fought successfully for years to make sure Railroad Street and the Humpback Bridge were not widened for vehicular traffic to avoid additional traffic, congestion, higher speeds, more accidents, and additional air, light and noise pollution from more cars and trucks on Railroad Street and on Washington Grove lane (note: more traffic would be funneled onto Washington Grove Lane going to and from Midcounty Highway, or beyond). It would also create additional cut through traffic through Town and problems for Town residents getting in and out of Town.

In Washington Grove's 2009 Master Plan and in the pending 2021 draft Comprehensive Plan, the Town is on record opposing "any connection of Railroad Street to Crabbs Branch Way" and "to planning and construction of a new multi-lane bridge..." While there is no such Railroad Street or Humpback Bridge widening proposal for vehicles now in play, based on past history, these proposals tend to reemerge. Our Town Comprehensive Plan (2009 and current draft 2021 update) provides a good summary history of these various proposals over the years and the Town's successful efforts to fight them. I have attached the relevant existing text below for your convenience.

https://washingtongrovermd.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/2009_MasterPlan.pdf pages 27 to 29 and pages 35 to 38 of the current Town draft 2021 update to the Comprehensive Plan

<https://washingtongrovermd.org/wp-content/uploads/master-plan-2019/2021-comprehensive-plan-working-draft-062121.pdf>

In fighting these various adverse proposals mentioned above, the Town has been able to use Town ownership of land abutting the Railroad, as well as the historic designation of Washington Grove and the historic Humpback Bridge, to protect the Town. While the other bike path proposals may not involve a significant amount of Town land, any bike path proposal that entails widening of Railroad Street would likely include a significant amount of town land, as well as some privately owned land. My understanding is that the Town boundary actually includes Railroad Street but the Town has a longstanding written agreement with the County to maintain and operate it. As recently as 2020 there has been discussion of putting a third rail along the rail tracks. This would have major consequences for the Town. It is important for the Town to maintain ownership and control of the land abutting the existing railroad right of way.

Any widening of Railroad Street even for a bike path would entail taking down significant trees or adversely impacting other trees including their root systems. Note that the historic humpback bridge is a contributing feature of the historic preservation designation of Washington Grove and the bridge itself has historic status including the treed view shed (July 14, 2005 placed on the County's Atlas and Index of Historic Sites and accepted by the State as eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places and the MD Inventory of Historic Properties). As part of this effort, the view shed including the

Places and the MD Inventory of Historic Properties). As part of this effort, the view shed including the trees framing the bridge, are an important part of the designation. See section 7, page 8-9 https://mht.maryland.gov/secure/Medusa/PDF/NR_PDFs/NR-617.pdf

The trees and surrounding vegetation between Railroad Street and Brown Street are an important part of Town history. In response to a proposal by CSX in 2011 to widen the Hump Back Bridge, the Town hired a special arborist (Melissa Gildea, Lotus Design and Consulting) for advice about the trees that would be impacted. She noted that the large trees in this area are historic, and many predate the establishment of the Washington Grove in 1873. Further, the trees historically have existed as a buffer that has been left as a remnant forest. The untended nature of the area has contributed to the long life of the trees. In addition, the trees and their accompanying understory currently are a valuable buffer that provides visual relief from through traffic along Railroad Street, screening Grove houses and those walking to and from the Post Office from the existing traffic, pollution, car lights, and noise from Railroad Street and traffic crossing the Humpback Bridge. This forested area also contributes to the rural views from Washington Grove's historic walkways. In addition, the trees perform stormwater functions, modulate local temperatures and provide habitat. These trees are sensitive to construction and require special care. See attached Report to Town of Washington Grove, 2012-02-15, Melissa Gildea, Lotus Design and Consulting, LLC, pages 1-3

If it would be helpful, I would be happy to talk to you further about the Town history with the various road and bridge widening proposals, the historic designations, and tree preservation. Over the 36 years we have lived in Washington Grove, I have served as a Town designee or on Town task forces responding to the various widening proposals, working in the past with Gaithersburg and County officials, as well as CSX and the Town's consulting engineer and arborist. In addition, I served as a staff member to a County Councilmember for several years.

Given the complex issues around any widening of Railroad Street and potential unintended consequences, I would strongly recommend not including the dashed red line on Railroad Street for a possible shared use path in any discussions with the County at this time. In my experience, a small, seemingly innocuous line on a map can easily gain a life of its own. If in the future, we feel a bike path along Railroad Street warrants exploration, then I recommend the Town hire their own appropriate expertise (ie., legal, arborist, road safety, storm water engineer) to fully understand the various impacts on the Town before making any recommendations to the County.

In closing, I would like to thank you, and the entire Shared Use Task Force for the Task Force's in depth analysis of the proposed alternatives.

Best, Nancy
Nancy Helme
108 Grove Ave

Excerpt from Town of Washington Grove, 2021 Comprehensive Plan Draft 06-21-2021, pages 35-38

Humpback Bridge/Railroad Street

The present alignment of Railroad Street extending from the bridge to the southeast to Aitcheson Crossing and Oakmont Avenue became a public way by usage through the early 1900s. The B & O Railroad reconstructed the bridge about 1946, replacing a deteriorating timber structure with a new timber structure that replicated the earlier bridge design. 36

In April 1961, a Comprehensive Plan for the vicinity of Gaithersburg was adopted by M-NCPPC that showed a new road through the area now occupied by Girard Place and Gaithersburg Ford Tractor, crossing over the then existing alignment of Route 124 (East Diamond Avenue) with the bridge over the B & O tracks and tying into Oakmont Avenue in lieu of East Deer Park Drive.

The Town's 1975 Comprehensive Plan incorporated this location for the County's planned bridge replacement location but did so to preclude the direct connection of Railroad Street to Crabbs Branch Way. The plan noted that such a connection would stimulate increased traffic flow and that the bridge as planned would have a deleterious environmental impact.

Around 1977, a study prepared for the Gaithersburg Planning Department proposed construction of the new bridge at Girard Street. This concept was the subject of a public hearing by Gaithersburg in January 1985, and was supported by Town testimony.

Subsequent to the January 1985 Public Hearing in Gaithersburg, the County Planning Board asked the County DOT to prepare various studies of the alternatives to accommodate flow in this traffic corridor, including the Girard Street Option with variations, the Comprehensive Plan Option with variations, and the Railroad Street to Crabbs Branch Way Option. The Town asked that a "No Build" Option with variations also be evaluated.

The bridge alignment in the 1961 Gaithersburg Vicinity Comprehensive Plan would have created a new four-lane bridge crossing the tracks at a skew, much longer and approximately 6 feet higher than the existing bridge, highly visible and projecting traffic noise farther into the Town than at present, and "impose(d) a serious nuisance on Grove residents through loss of direct access to the south" (as stated in the Town's 1975 Comprehensive Plan) by requiring that all vehicular access to the Grove be by way of Washington Grove Lane.

The Girard Street Bridge Alignment would have moved most traffic to the west side of the railroad. The connection of existing Railroad Street to Crabbs Branch Way would still be a possibility to be faced. While the proposal would have had no significant visual impacts on the Town, it shared with the prior plans the requirement that all vehicular access to the Grove be by way of Washington Grove Lane.

The Railroad Street to Crabbs Branch Way connections would have opened a major traffic route paralleling Route 355 between Gude Drive and downtown Gaithersburg intensifying traffic on Railroad Street and Washington Grove Lane (then MD124).

In 2004, the County's Department of Public Works and Transportation (DPWT) once again brought up the issue of replacing the bridge with multi-lane alternatives, all of which, if built as proposed, would have deleterious impacts on the Town and neighboring residential communities and no significant transportation benefit. Part of the justification for consideration of four-lane bridge replacement options by DPWT was that Oakmont Avenue was identified in existing Comprehensive Plans as a four-lane road. 37

On July 9, 2005, the Washington Grove Town Council adopted a resolution opposing the three bridge replacement concepts proposed by DPWT and supporting rehabilitation and preservation of the existing humpback bridge. Among the negative impacts on the Town cited in the resolution of the DPWT proposals were:

- additional traffic, safety concerns, pollution, and noise at unacceptable levels that would be magnified by increasing the height of the bridge;
- the elimination of "forested areas on both sides of the tracks including cherished old Oak trees that contribute to the rural views from Washington Grove 's

historic walkways”;

- the taking of Town land dedicated to public use and adversely impacting internal Town pedestrian and auto circulation patterns.

The Town hired a bridge engineer, nationally recognized for historic preservation, to study the bridge. In a July 12, 2005 letter, the engineer stated, “My conclusion is that the bridge is in good condition structurally, and can be preserved for decades to come with the appropriate maintenance and rehabilitation.” Subsequently, the bridge was nominated for the Comprehensive Plan for Historic Preservation in Montgomery County, and the Montgomery County Historic Preservation Commission recommended the bridge for the Comprehensive Plan. On July 14, 2005, the Montgomery County Planning Board placed the bridge on the County’s Locational Atlas and Index of Historic Sites. The bridge was accepted by the State as being eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places and the Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties.

This plan recognizes the future of the humpback bridge and Railroad Street may be directly tied to two alternatives to expand transit capacity between Montgomery County and points to the north. The first alternative is a third set of railroad tracks proposed by the Maryland Transit Administration (MTA) to expand rail capacity. The MTA’s 2018 MARC Cornerstone Plan identified capital investments necessary for increased service on the Brunswick Line, including \$700 Million for additional mainline track expansions between Washington, D.C. and Boyds. While there is no funding commitment at this time for additional mainline track along the Brunswick line, the Shady Grove Sector Plan is being amended to state that properties adjacent to the MARC rail line should dedicate width called for by MTA’s Plan. For Washington Grove, it appears unlikely that a third set of tracks can fit under the humpback bridge.

The second alternative is the 2019 proposal for a monorail linking the Shady Grove Metro Station with Frederick. The proposed monorail route would start near the MARC train station in Frederick, then join I-270 where the elevated monorail would go on the east side of the interstate until Germantown, where it would leave I-270 and use other public rights of way to go to the Metropolitan Grove MARC station in Gaithersburg and then to the Shady Grove Metro station. No land acquisitions are required for this proposal. (Oct 30, 2020 note: The High Road foundation is about to release a report that Bob Eisinger says will show building a monorail would be an economically sensible way to relieve traffic between Frederick and the Shady Grove Metro station.) Acceptance of this proposed monorail would most likely displace adding a third set of railroad tracks adjacent to Washington Grove, and thus support retention of the humpback bridge. 38

With the completed annexation of the Cator/Harrison property, more of Railroad Street is now within the Town’s corporate limits, including the portion of Railroad Street fronting the Employment Office (EOF) zoned properties in the County known as Roberts Oxygen and the adjacent storage yard.

Recommendations:

- **Continue Town opposition to any connection of Railroad Street to Crabbs Branch Way due to the negative impacts of the high-volume traffic flow that would result on Railroad Street and Washington Grove Lane, as well as the potential for additional cut through traffic through the Town.**
- **Continue to support proposed access of the EOF zoned property (known as Roberts Oxygen) to Crabbs Branch Way, and seek long-term closing of that**

property's access to Railroad Street as called for in the Shady Grove Sector Plan, to help reduce industrial traffic crossing the CSX at-grade crossing on Railroad Street or traveling on Railroad Street through the Town.

- **Support improved maintenance and preservation of the existing single-lane historic humpback bridge, as well as the improved maintenance of the at-grade crossing.**
- **Seek full historic preservation designation of the existing historic humpback bridge at the county, state and federal levels.**
- **Continue opposition to planning and construction of a new multi-lane bridge from Oakmont Avenue or East Deer Park Drive across the CSX Railroad tracks.**
- **Continue to monitor development of the MTA plans for mainline track expansion by Washington Grove.**
- **Continue to monitor development of the plans for a monorail route between Frederick and the Shady Grove Metro Station.**
- **Maintain closure of Brown Street at Hickory Road to reduce cut-through traffic.**
- **Seek improved signage and other improvements on Railroad Street to slow traffic to enhance the safety of pedestrians and vehicles.**



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