

**2024 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM RASEC TO MAYOR AND COUNCIL:
PROPOSED LETTER FROM THE MAYOR TO THE MC DOT**

Christopher Conklin, Director
Montgomery County Department
of Transportation
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RE: 2025 CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Dear Director Conklin,

As the Mayor of Washington Grove, I'm writing to urge MCDOT to include construction funding for the Washington Grove Connector (Connector) in the department's proposed 2025 Capital Improvement Plan.

The Connector is a short off-street shared-use pathway segment in the 2017 County *Bikeways Master Plan* that is a priority for construction and completion. It was elevated to a construction recommendation in the 2021 Shady Grove Sector Master Plan Minor Amendment after being included in the 2006 Shady Grove Sector Master Plan. The WGC is poised to significantly improve interconnection of existing mid-County bikeways and the City of Gaithersburg's bikeway system, and create a safe access to the Shady Grove Metro station for many thousands of residents in the mid and up county.

The engineering study for the Connector in your department has now examined several possible alignments on County-owned undeveloped property that would connect the present end of Crabbs Branch Way with Brown Street in Washington Grove. In December 2023 the study specifically identified a preferred option that is both lowest in cost at \$811,000 and has the least environmental impact. Washington Grove has been advocating for construction of this short segment for many years. As you are aware, Town representatives and I have been working closely with the MCDOT study group to develop the current preferred alignment and we fully support moving ahead with its construction.

We believe it is now incumbent on the County to fund construction of the recommended alignment as soon as possible and make good on delivering a significant improvement to the transportation network of the County that has been recognized and anticipated for decades. Lest there be any doubt, constructing the Connector will positively impact a far larger population than Washington Grove.

Respecting the cost-benefit of the Connector, I would like to outline the existing transportation deficiency and the benefits this pathway will bring.

Currently, it is difficult and dangerous to reach the Metro from Washington Grove, from surrounding County communities, and from large parts of Gaithersburg by other than motorized vehicle. By foot or by bike, the shortest route from the nearest point in Washington Grove is several miles via Oakmont Avenue to Shady Grove Road to Crabbs Branch Way. Pedestrians and bicyclists endanger themselves riding on a busy two-lane road without shoulders or sidewalks and crossing numerous light industrial entries and exits (Railroad Street and Oakmont Avenue), crossing on-grade the CSX tracks, and using a narrow sidewalk along and then crossing of six-lane Shady Grove Road. The alternative route (3-4 miles!) leaves Washington Grove towards Amity Drive to Epsilon Road to Shady Grove Road to the Metro Access road.

A hard surface trail connecting the Town to Shady Grove Metro would have numerous benefits for the Town and surrounding communities beyond providing non-vehicular access to the Metro:

1. ***Reducing by over one mile the distance and hence the travel time to the Shady Grove Metro***, and provide a far safer route for neighboring communities via the Connector and low traffic Washington Grove streets to the bike lane and sidewalks on Crabbs Branch Way.
2. ***Shortening the time to access the Metrobus system*** connections of 21 Ride-on and MTA buses at the Shady Grove Metro.
3. ***Providing safe connectivity by bicycle*** along largely marked bikeways to King Farm, Montgomery College Rockville Campus, and central Rockville.
4. ***Creating safe and improved connectivity to and from the City of Gaithersburg***. Like Washington Grove, the City of Gaithersburg has for years wanted to connect Old Town neighborhoods and the rest of their bikeway system to the Shady Grove Metro. With the County committed to the Connector and Washington Grove providing a through route along Town streets, Gaithersburg has actively advanced plans to create a safe shared use pathway from Old Town that enters Washington Grove from the north, with construction expected soon.
5. ***Connecting to dozens of miles of other paved trails***, including:
 - Needwood Road, which connects to the Rock Creek trail running deep into the District and to the ICC trail, which is planned to reach Prince Georges County;
 - access at Gude Drive to the Carl Henn Millennium Trail which circles Rockville and connects to Shady Grove Medical Center and the Universities at Shady Grove; and
 - access to the improved shared use pathway under study for Shady Grove Road (should it be built).

These trails and their numerous spurs are part of a concerted effort by Montgomery County over the last decade or more to make bicycling a viable form of transportation for county residents. This effort is in keeping with a national effort to connect existing bits and pieces of trails into large networks of comfortable and safe places to ride. The 2017 Montgomery County Bicycle Master Plan is built on these goals.

6. **Improving access to retail.** The short connecting trail from Brown Street to Crabbs Branch Way will make it possible to walk or ride to the Grove Shopping Center at Crabbs Branch and Shady Grove Road from Washington Grove and surrounding communities. The present Giant Food, three restaurants, and childcare and other retail may be extensively expanded as the high-density residential development between it and the Metro is completed. Such improved access could be especially important for persons with limited mobility.

7. **Improving services to disadvantaged residents.** Gaithersburg and Rockville are two of the most ethnically diverse cities in the entire country, and each has significant pockets of poverty. Although the cities are nearly contiguous, travel between them is difficult except by motor vehicle, and nearly impossible east of I-270. Many residents, especially those who are non-white, do not have private automobiles and do not find that buses meet their needs. A disproportionate benefit for such persons would be the safe, efficient, and inexpensive bicycle option provided by the Connector.

To conclude, I reiterate to MCDOT (and the County Executive and the County Council) that the Washington Grove Connector should be constructed as soon as possible by including funding in the 2025 CIP. This short addition to the County bikeways system will have substantial impact on our section of the County that, in addition to Washington Grove, includes the City of Gaithersburg, and the residents of the surrounding County communities at Emory Grove, Midcounty Highway and Amity Road, all of whom lack a safe and direct bicycle and pedestrian connection to the Shady Grove Metro.

Respectfully yours,
John
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