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Montgomery County Council
County Executive Elrich

April 29, 2024

Dear County Council members and County Executive Elrich,

As the Mayor of Washington Grove, I urge the County Council to approve construction funding of the Washington Grove (WG) Connector in the 2025 Capital Improvements Plan (CIP).

The Washington Grove Connector project has been estimated to cost less than \$1 million and the T&E Committee approved designating the Connector explicitly for funding in MCDOT's FY 2025 "Bikeways Program Minor Projects" plans in March. It is the only approved project that is in mid-county and the only new trail that crosses an expressway.

I request that all Council members support the T&E committee recommendation during the Full Council session.

History: Washington Grove has advocated for construction of this short shared-use paved pathway of approximately 300 yards through County undeveloped property for many years beginning with a 1994 Town resolution. The Connector was included in the County 2006 Shady Grove Sector Master Plan, and subsequently in the 2017 County Bikeways Master Plan given the highest priority ranking for construction and completion. In the 2021 Shady Grove Sector Master Plan Minor Amendment it was elevated to a construction recommendation. Finally late last year, WG and MCDOT agreed on an alignment for the Connector from the end of Brown St in WG to Crabbs Branch Way in the County. It is now incumbent on the County to make good on constructing this significant improvement to the transportation network of the County that has been recognized and anticipated for decades.

Significance: Constructing the Connector will positively impact a far greater population than Washington Grove. The Connector represents a key missing link that will improve interconnection between 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.

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

more than 2.5- 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, greater than 3 miles, leaves Washington Grove towards Amity Drive to Epsilon Road and still does not avoid Shady Grove Road as it approaches the Metro Access Road. Neither of these routes are safe. The cost of not building the Connector would be to maintain an unacceptable status quo.

Specific Benefits: Respecting cost-benefit considerations, this hard surface trail connecting WG to Shady Grove Metro will have numerous benefits beyond providing non-vehicular access to the Metro for WG and surrounding communities. It will:

1. Reduce 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. Shorten the time to access the Metrobus system connections of 21 Ride-on and MTA buses at the Shady Grove Metro.
3. Provide safe connectivity by bicycle along largely marked bikeways to King Farm, Montgomery College Rockville Campus, and central Rockville.
4. Create 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. Connect 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. Improve 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. Improve services to disadvantaged residents. Gaithersburg and Rockville are two of the most 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.

In conclusion, I reiterate to the County Council and the County Executive, that the Washington Grove Connector should be constructed as soon as possible by including funding in the 2025 CIP. For its cost, this short addition to the County bikeways system will have an out-sized impact on our section of the County that includes Washington Grove, the City of Gaithersburg, and 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,



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Mayor, Town of Washington Grove

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