

Testimony regarding the County Executive Budget Listening

Via: OMB@co.pg.md.us

By Cheryl Cort, Policy Director

January 26, 2023

Please accept these comments on behalf of the Coalition for Smarter Growth, the leading non-profit organization in the D.C. region advocating for walkable, bikeable, inclusive, transit-oriented communities as the most sustainable and equitable way for the DC region to grow and provide opportunities for all. We are also supporters of [RISE Prince George's](#), a group of county residents and allies advocating for policies and practices that build shared, sustainable prosperity in Prince George's County by creating safe, walkable, inclusive and transit-oriented communities.

Blue Line corridor - Support for the complete streets efforts

We are excited by the efforts of the county to create a great Blue Line Corridor that leverages the value of the four Metro stations, and reimagines the Central Avenue corridor as a thriving place of new homes, businesses and public places.

We support the administration's funding focus on building the Central Avenue Corridor Connector trail. We are encouraged that the administration is working to break through the log jam that has delayed the trail from moving through the project process. We also need to fund complete streets including retrofitting fast, overly wide roads, and vast intersections. We can then add quality walk and bike infrastructure to create slower urban streets where walking and biking are safe and comfortable activities, and allow residents and visitors to reach the bus stop, Metro station, or other destinations easily on foot.

The I-495 at Medical Center Drive Interchange Project does not fit the goals for the Blue Line Corridor economic development strategy. It will spend millions of dollars to add more vehicle capacity that further puts at risk people attempting to walk and bicycle in the area. We recommend that the Administration work with the Planning Department to revise the traffic performance measures that are driving this costly project. This expansion of road capacity runs counter to the effort to create a mixed use, walkable, transit-oriented environment. The funding could be reprogrammed to retrofit overly wide roads and enhance walk, bike and transit infrastructure.

Land Use: Reallocate funds from sprawl to TOD and established communities

We urge the administration to work with MNCPPC to identify sewer and water extension plans that can be suspended. We ask that these capital budget dollars be reprogrammed from extensions to serve existing communities. Rethinking these extensions, which fuel sprawl development, will also give the county the opportunity to reprogram costly new road capacity, and refocus investments on missing sidewalks, safer crossings, and road diets around transit stations, and other town and urban centers. Such investments will enhance the quality of life for Prince George's residents, and fight climate change.

Supporting transit-oriented development (TOD) - we applaud the administration's focus on TOD. We ask that the administration further this by reallocating transportation, public works and other capital funds for transit stations, and inside the beltway communities. We also encourage the administration to continue to work with the Planning staff and the County Council to correct the zoning around transit stations which fail to provide adequate density to support feasible, quality, mixed use development.

Transportation: fully implement 2017 Urban Street Design Standards

We are encouraged by the complete streets projects that DPW&T has undertaken to address serious pedestrian safety issues, and the establishment of a Vision Zero program. There is much to do, however. Prince George's roadways, both county and state roads, are consistently over-designed -- they are too wide and encourage motor vehicles to go too fast. High speed roadways, combined with a mix of urban uses -- housing, stores, schools, bus stops, other destinations -- have tragic consequences. Prince George's leads the state and the region in traffic deaths and pedestrian deaths. We must urgently retrofit our overly wide roads in urbanized areas.

We ask the Administration to focus on implementing the 2017 Urban Street Design Standards. DPIE and DPWT should be implementing these standards to their fullest potential, and provide ample justification for any deviation from the standards. All urban streets in transit and local centers should have a design speed of 25 MPH. DPIE and DPWT should not only make this an imperative of their street designs, but they should evaluate streets built to the urban street design standard to assess performance once built. Where travel speed regularly exceeds the design speed, remedial measures should be taken. Overdesigned streets can even occur with the 2017 design standards - especially if too many travel lanes are provided compared to traffic volumes.

Transit: Support Silver Hill Road bus lanes

We appreciate that DPWT is working closely with WMATA on the better buses initiative and are eager to continue to engage in that effort. In the short term, we urge the Administration to support funding for the WMATA proposed Silver Hill bus lanes that take advantage of excess road space. The proposed tactical bus lanes will improve the quality of service delivered to the residents and visitors in the high ridership corridor. This is the first step towards implementing a bus rapid transit corridors system for Prince George's County. We ask the county to advance a rapid transit corridors strategy.

Housing: Increase Housing Investment Trust Fund and Right of First Refusal funding

The work of the Administration on funding and building affordable housing has been outstanding. The strategic use of Right of First Refusal (ROFR) has saved thousands of homes for residents who rely on their affordability. We applaud the achievements of this administration to leverage policies and funding to accomplish this work. We urge the Administration to continue its innovative work by adding more funding to support the affordable housing preservation and new construction efforts through the HITF and ROFR.

Climate Action Plan implementation: VMT reduction goal, tracking, support TOD/infill

The Draft Plan has many commendable features: recognizing the role of sprawling land use patterns. It shows how climate change is already impacting the county. The plan focuses on specific, short term actions. It seeks to put Plan 2035 growth management goals back on track. It calls for developing an “inclusive EV Deployment Strategy.”

However, further work and revisions are needed to strengthen vehicle miles traveled (VMT) reduction goals - the current plan seeks a meager 3.6% per capita reduction in how much residents and workers in the county have to drive. The VMT goal should be integrated into land use and transportation decisions, such as individual development approvals. VMT can be used as an alternative to vehicle level of service (LOS), as it is in California to measure the impact of new development on the road network. The CAP implementation can adopt a stronger VMT approach, and should ensure that VMT is a key component of the proposed “Climate Score” evaluation system.

As the Administration works with the County Council to implement climate protection actions, we ask that the policies for supporting TOD and infill development are strengthened and prioritized. We should be maximizing greenspace preservation by reducing and eliminating greenfield development in rural areas or that are far from transit, compact mixed use centers, and other areas outside the beltway. At transit stations, existing town centers, and at inside the beltway locations, we should be facilitating compact, walkable, transit-oriented development.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Cheryl Cort'.

Cheryl Cort
Policy Director