



## CLIMATE COALITION Montgomery County, MD

The Honorable Andrew Friedson, President  
Montgomery County Council  
100 Maryland Avenue  
Rockville, MD 20815

May 17, 2024

Dear Council President Friedson and Councilmembers,

Climate Coalition Montgomery County is comprised of 20 organizations working for full implementation of the Montgomery County Climate Action Plan. As such, **we request that you act immediately to tell the Planning Board to fully cancel proposed M83/Midcounty Highway Extended from the Master Plan of Highways and Transitways.** Removal of proposed M83 highway is a crucial step toward achievement of our Greenhouse Gas (GHG) reduction and transit commitments, and is necessary to protect residents from air pollution and heat emergencies already on the rise.

Canceling M83 and removing it from the Master Plan of Highways and Transitways (MPOHT) is a crucial step for our climate response, because it appropriately moves us *away* from car-centered planning and *towards* people-centric solutions such as Bus Rapid Transit on MD 355, affordable housing in transit-served neighborhoods, and cost effective use of existing roadways. In contrast, retaining M83 in master plans is de-facto support for continued expansion of the highway system - with a majority of vehicles on the road continuing to burn fossil fuels until at least 2050.

**The MPOHT is now undergoing revision by the Planning Department and Board.** This Fall, the Planning Board will send the proposed MPOHT revision package to the Council, expected to contain “Complete Street” changes and roadway re-classifications. Removing M83 is a technical amendment to the MPOHT, given that it’s *already* been removed from the Transportation Planning Board’s “Visualize 2050” list - and excluded from master plans after 2017. When Climate Coalition members asked planning officials to include removal of M83 within the MPOHT revision package, the planners replied that the Council, not the Planning Board, determines the scope of revisions to master plans. **That’s why we ask the Council to act immediately to tell the Planning Board to remove proposed M83 highway as part of the MPOHT revision package.**

Under Council Resolution 18-957 enacted on 10/31/2017, M83 is prohibited from inclusion in master plans from that date forward. But, **as long as M83 remains in prior master plans, it can be built at any time.** That’s why this project is neither “dead” nor “dormant” as some have claimed. Proposed M83 highway is frequently brought up during public master plan and transportation meetings; its presence is a misguided distraction as we seek to improve Upcounty transit.

**Forest Protection is Climate Justice for Upcounty Residents.** Residents of Germantown, Gaithersburg and Montgomery Village depend for their health upon the intact forest of North Germantown Greenway Stream Valley Park and the other parks threatened by proposed M83 highway. A hiker we met in Great Seneca Stream Valley Park, a resident of Montgomery Village, expressed shock when told of County plans for M83, noting “*This is the only green oasis in this part of the county. Everyone I know likes to hike and bike here.*” By acting now to remove M83 highway from the

master plans, you'll ensure that this greenway trail and irreplaceable forest continue to protect public health through providing clean air, cool breezes, and time in nature.

**Now is the time for the Council to act to remove proposed M83 from the master plans, and make** the course change required for climate justice and environmental protection in Montgomery County. You'll be joining decisionmakers across the country including in California, Colorado, and Indiana, who recently canceled highway projects that threatened urban and rural communities. We look forward to your considered response, and working with you to shift county resources into Bus Rapid Transit on Route 355 and other transit programs.

Sincerely,

Climate Coalition Montgomery County member groups:

350 Montgomery County Maryland (350 MoCo)

Ask the Climate Question (ACQ)

Bethesda Green

Biodiversity for a Livable Climate

Cedar Lane Unitarian Universalist Environmental Justice Ministry

Chesapeake Climate Action Network

Elders Climate Action

Green Sanctuary Committee of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Silver Spring

Montgomery County - Faith Alliance for Climate Solutions (MCFACS)

Montgomery Countryside Alliance

Safe Healthy Playing Fields

Sugarloaf Citizens Association

The Climate Mobilization MoCo

Transit Alternatives to Midcounty Highway Extended (TAME) Coalition

Zero Waste Montgomery County

Individuals: Kit Gage