



April 3, 2024

Montgomery County Sierra Club
P.O. Box 4024
Rockville, MD 20849

The Honorable Andrew Friedson,
President, Montgomery County Council
100 Maryland Avenue
Rockville, MD 20850

Dear Council President Friedson and Council Members,

We are writing to urge you to direct the Planning Department to include removal of the proposed Midcounty Highway Extended/M83 in the current technical update to the Master Plan of Highways and Transitways (MPOHT). Please also remove the proposed M83 highway from all other master plans in which it appears.

The Council passed Resolution 18-957 in October 2017, called “Transportation Solutions for Northwest Montgomery County.” It directed the Montgomery County Planning Board not to assume additional road capacity from the northern extension of Midcounty Highway when calculating the land use - transportation balance in future master plans. Since the Council decided to stop including this highway in the master plans seven years ago, the removal of M83 from the Master Plan of Highways and Transitways should be one of the technical amendments which the Planning Department is making now. Now is the time.

The climate crisis is an emergency which deserves our highest priority. The transportation sector is the single largest contributor of greenhouse gases (GHGs). Hybrid and electric vehicles are part of the solution, but this alone will not be near enough. We must also reduce the Vehicles Miles Traveled, and that means we must cancel planned highways like M83 and invest instead in rapid transit and walkable communities for people of all abilities and income levels. In addition, highways such as M83 involve extensive removal of carbon-sequestering trees and forests, which is counter-productive and harmful in a number of ways.

Montgomery County’s 2021 Climate Action Plan recommends that we expand public transit, limit major new road construction, and retain and increase our tree canopy. The County’s 2024 draft Hazard Mitigation plan says “Montgomery County will need to prioritize development which de-emphasizes a car-centric lifestyle.” Cancelling the proposed M83 is in accordance with these goals.

The proposed M83 Midcounty Highway Extended is a planned 5 mile highway which does not now exist. It is a relic of a fossil-fueled car-centric past we must leave behind. Proposed M83 highway would destroy or degrade forests, streams and wetlands in Germantown, Gaithersburg and Montgomery Village. It would cause severe fragmentation of valuable wildlife habitat, and damage five popular public parks, 100 acres of bio-diverse interior forest, and the Seneca Creek Greenway Trail.

The proposed M83 highway would also bisect three upcounty communities which are Equity Focus Areas, with diverse, lower income populations who depend a lot on public transit. These communities also depend on the public green spaces for clean air, peace and quiet, and walks in nature. The people here would suffer disproportionately from the noise of M83 construction and the toxic air pollution from diesel and gasoline exhaust. They may suffer even more from the loss of the forest cover we need to cool our cities as climate change makes them hotter.

There are better ways to meet the transportation needs of upcounty communities and promote the shift away from cars to a system centered on people. These include: improved Ride-On bus service; Bus Rapid Transit on Route 355; enhancing use of existing roadways; extending the Red Line Metrorail to Germantown; expanding service on the (MARC) Brunswick Line; and increasing affordable housing in neighborhoods served by rapid transit.

Some officials have told us to fall back, claiming that “M83 is dormant.” But the fact is, that as long as the proposed highway remains in master plans, it can be built at any time. **So we ask you to act now – this year – to fully remove the proposed M83 Highway from all master plans which now list it. The Master Plan of Highways and Transitways is undergoing revision this year, and we are told by experts that this is the most effective and efficient vehicle for the permanent cancellation of proposed highway M83.**

We ask for a written reply to this request. We would welcome a chance to sit down with Council Members and staff, to discuss this further. Thank you.

Sincerely,



Darian Unger
Chair, Montgomery County Sierra Club
DWUnger@Howard.edu