



OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

Marc Elrich
County Executive

MEMORANDUM

July 2, 2025

TO: Kate Stewart, President
Montgomery County Council

FROM: Marc Elrich, County Executive *Marc Elrich*

SUBJECT: Removal of M-83 from Master Plan of Highways and Transitways (MPOHT)

In September 2024, I wrote to the Montgomery County Planning Board to request the removal of the proposed M83 Highway from the Master Plan of Highways and Transitways (MPOHT), citing its removal as a necessary step toward achieving our climate and transit goals in the Upcounty. The Planning Board reviewed the issues, with input from Montgomery County's Department of Transportation (MCDOT), and has recommended removing the northern portion of the planned highway from MPOHT. I wholeheartedly support their decision – it is environmentally sound and clears the way to focus on Upcounty transit.

Please see the attached memo from MCDOT, which provides detailed information in support of the Planning Board's recommendation. We ask that you keep the recommendation intact.

Enclosure: Memorandum from Department of Transportation regarding M-83 in the MPOHT

cc: Cecily Thorne, Chief of Staff to the Council President, Montgomery County Council
Craig Howard, Executive Director, Montgomery County Council
Stephen Kenny, Legislative Analyst, Montgomery County Council
Richard S. Madaleno, Chief Administrative Officer, Office of the County Executive
Ken Hartman-Espada, Assistant Chief Administrative Officer, Office of the County Executive
Tricia Swanson, Director of Strategic Partnerships, Office of the County Executive
Chris Conklin, Director, Department of Transportation



Marc Elrich
County Executive

Christopher R. Conklin
Director

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

M E M O R A N D U M

July 1, 2025

TO: Kate Stewart, President
Montgomery County Council

FROM: Haley Peckett, Deputy Director for Transportation Policy
Department of Transportation (MCDOT)

SUBJECT: Master Plan of Highways and Transitways
Public Hearing Draft – MCDOT Comments

Thank you for the opportunity to review the April 2025 Planning Board Draft of the Master Plan of Highways and Transitways (MPOHT). We are generally in agreement with the plan and appreciate the work of Planning staff and the Planning Board in addressing many of our previous comments provided earlier in the plan's process.

We agree with the Planning Board's decision to remove the northern portion of the planned Midcounty Highway (M-83) from the master plan and suggest that Council keep this recommendation intact and offer the following input in support of this recommendation:

TRANSIT ALTERNATIVES: MCDOT supports using transit to increase capacity on corridors parallel to the proposed M-83 corridor. Transit options that are in development or could be implemented by agency partners include bus rapid transit along MD 355, Corridor Connectors identified in the I-270 Corridor Forward Plan, and express buses as part of the State's Managed Lanes Project. Into the longer-term, master plans include an extension of the Red Line to Germantown. All represent a more sustainable path forward for connecting the Clarksburg and Germantown areas with the rest of the county and region.

The County has some of these projects in active development, and the State has been making some investment in the I-270 corridor while working toward a larger solution. We are mindful of concerns that some of these projects may still be years away. Revising

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the alignment of M-83 and/or designing and constructing the existing alignment would not deliver relief to the Upcounty on a faster timeline and would likely take longer.

THRIVE MONTGOMERY: The Midcounty Highway corridor does not reflect the road network vision established by Thrive Montgomery 2050, which seeks to deprioritize the addition and construction of new 4+ lane roadways in favor of more livable streets that are more favorable toward walking, biking, and transit.

SAFETY: Eliminating the M-83 corridor will relieve concerns related to safety, noise, and cut-through traffic that would have resulted from a new highway being built through residential neighborhoods and alongside several schools.

There remain safety concerns on other streets that are currently experiencing congestion and cut-through traffic as motorists attempt to navigate to and from the Upcounty area. There are many tools available to address these concerns to see that traffic operates safely, and as part of the Thrive fiscal impact statement we identified a need for increased funding in the Neighborhood Traffic Calming program as one key component to seeing that such existing concerns are safely addressed.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS: The M-83 corridor traverses predominantly through sensitive environmental areas, reflecting the nature of transportation planning back when it was first proposed in the 1960's. This alignment has substantial environmental impacts to trees, wetlands, contiguous forest, and parkland that no longer align with the established vision of Montgomery County.

There is little opportunity to shift the M-83 corridor to avoid these impacts as the areas alongside the corridor are already heavily developed and include hundreds of individual properties. This contrasts with the realignment of Observation Drive proposed in the ongoing update to the Clarksburg Sector Plan, which reduces environmental impacts by shifting a small portion of the roadway away from the stream, impacting only two property owners – both of which have been closely involved in and supportive of the realignment.

Building new roads does not lead to a reduction in auto emissions because any new road capacity is soon congested by vehicular demand that had previously found other options. In the long term, expanding the road network also continues to promote unsustainable growth that results in yet more environmental impacts. We agree with the recent letter from the Upcounty Citizens Advisory Board which states that new growth should be balanced with infrastructure. While the MPOHT does not itself affect land use, we are closely engaged with the Planning Department in their ongoing work with updates to the Clarksburg and Germantown Sector Plans and have raised these same concerns with the Planning teams.

PLANNED BIKEWAY: Removal of Midcounty Highway's northern segment would not affect the master planned bikeway along this corridor, which is master planned as part of the separate Bicycle Master Plan. However, if Midcounty Highway is removed from the plan, the bikeway's current classification no longer makes sense. It may be prudent to consider a subsequent effort that considers whether the bikeway might be reclassified as an Off-Street Trail. Such a trail would likely fall under the purview of Park & Planning. Treating the facility as a trail could ease the management of environmental impacts while allowing greater flexibility in design, unlike a bike facility parallel to a roadway.

RIGHTS-OF-WAY: Substantial portions of the Midcounty Highway corridor's rights-of-way have already been acquired, largely via dedication or reservation. From a cursory review it appears that many of these rights-of-way have been acquired for *public use* rather than explicitly for a highway. As the bikeway would remain in the master plan: it appears that the rights-of-way acquired for Midcounty Highway would be unaffected by removal of Midcounty Highway. A future update to the Bikeways Master Plan might identify a narrower right-of-way for the bikeway, which at that time could allow for returning excess rights-of-way to their respective property owners.

Thank you again for the opportunity to review and provide feedback on this master plan. We look forward to working with the Council to ensure this plan continues to support our County's goals.

cc: Chris Conklin, MCDOT
Corey Pitts, MCDOT
Andrew Bossi, MCDOT
Claire Iseli, CEX
Meredith Wellington, CEX
Dale Tibbitts, CEX
Kara Olsen-Salazar, DGS
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