

Testimony before the Transportation Planning Board

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www.SaveTheTrailPETITION.org

May 20, 2009

Mr. Chairman and Transportation Planning Board Members,

My name is Pam Browning and I am the Organizer of the Petition to Save the Trail.

The Petition has gathered over 17,000 signatures, asking that the Purple Line be built elsewhere other than along the Capital Crescent Trail, or be tunneled underground.

The Capital Crescent Trail is one of the most popular Trails in the nation. Studies document that as of 2006, there were more than 10,000 uses of the Trail between Bethesda and Silver Spring on a weekly basis. That number has grown even higher in the intervening 3 years..

Because the Trail between Bethesda and Silver Spring is an essential link in a circuit of regional Trails, Petition signers are from all over the Region: While 40% are from the Bethesda-Chevy Chase area, 60% come from other areas, including 20% from Silver Spring, Kensington and Rockville; 19% from Washington, DC; and 9% from Virginia.

More than 1,500 trail supporters have written emails to Governor O'Malley and 500 have written their own postcard messages, opposing the Purple Line along the Trail. Trail supporters are not anti-transit. We support BRT -- and there are better routes than along the Trail.

And we are not opposed to rail, but overwhelmingly, trail users believe that if the Purple Line is going to be a rail line, then it should be a Metro loop, not a light rail, at least in the segment connecting the two legs of the red line -- to create a seamless circuit that would significantly improve the Metro system. This should be either tunneled underground or built along the Beltway from Silver Spring to Bethesda Medical Center, where BRAC is bringing thousands of new employees, patients and visitors to the new National Naval Medical Center.

In fact, during the BRAC comment period, more than 500 comments were submitted requesting this seamless Metrorail connection. In 2003, years before BRAC was announced, the Montgomery County Planning Board found this Beltway Metro loop plan, which was created and recommended by WMATA staff, to be feasible, and voted unanimously that this plan should be studied further if the light rail did not receive construction funding back in 2003. And yet, there has been no further study, even since BRAC was announced.

A light rail along the Trail would be an environmental disaster. According to the MTA's Environmental Impact Statement, essentially all of the trees in the right of way would be destroyed. Trains would run 10' from the Trail!

I have here a book of Photos, and postcards written from the Trail, and binders of over a thousand emails, which I would be happy to meet with any of you and show you at your convenience. Please feel free to contact me.

**Also, please check the Petition website at:
www.SaveTheTrailPETITION.org.**

In the meantime, here are a few:

Excerpts from emails and postcards written to the Governor to Save the Trail:

"I use this trail almost every day. My life changes for the better every time I go out for a walk, a hike, a bike ride or a run; and I see this sense of serenity on the face of the many other trail users I come across daily."

"Locating the Purple Line on our unique and spectacular Capital Crescent Trail would be a throwback to the primitive transportation planning of half a century ago -- when government was far less responsive and less sensitive to the value of amenities like parkland, recreation areas, and historic treasures."

"This trail is key to maintaining the 'livability' of this area, and provides a unique resource that encourages many people to exercise outdoors."

"The Trail from Bethesda to Silver Spring is extremely important to the Marathon Charity Partners who train weekly and raise funds for six different charities in the DC area. Please DO NOT take this beautiful natural treasure away from us."

"We have lavished praise on visionary decisions by political leaders in the past to save our natural areas, from Rock Creek Park to the C&O Canal Trail. We need the same kind of vision now with decisions that both meet our transit needs and preserve our dwindling natural places."

"As a long time member of the Montgomery County Road Runners Club, runner and coach, I have had the opportunity to witness firsthand the great numbers of county residents who regularly utilize the trail for a wide variety of activities. Please do not underestimate the importance of this resource to our community-it is of much greater significance than you can imagine. Please save this resource for all of us and those who will come after us. Once its gone we'll never have the chance to get it back."

"There are alternative routes for the Purple Line, but there is only one route for the Capital Crescent Trail."

"Why do I care enough to spend the time to write you this letter today? I'll tell you why. Because I spend countless hours each week running and biking up and down the trail."

"Although I am a fervent supporter of mass transit, I am heartbroken over the plan to sacrifice the natural beauty and culture of the Capital Crescent Trail. If there is one thing that trumps mass transit, it is the pageant of people walking and biking to their destinations, carrying their groceries home, and catching up with old friends while strolling under the beautiful mature trees that line the Trail."

"I commute to school on the trail and run on the trail with my fellow Bethesda Chevy Chase HS cross country runners. I consider this trail my home away from home."

"I am a 79 year old woman. The Crescent Trail has been a very important part of my health regime - it takes me places and forces me to walk. I love it as it is."

"I'm writing to you because it would absolutely break my heart to see a light rail system built along the Georgetown Branch Trail."

"In my eighties, I am concerned about the Montgomery County I will be leaving for the generations that will be following me."

"To be able to feel the serenity in the midst of an urban environment that the Trail provides is incalculable."

"This trail is truly one of the most remarkable features of our great metropolitan area."

"It provides free outdoor activities for families to stay healthy and fit."

"For young and old, all sizes – to come out and get sunlight, exercise and build community."

"I am bothered that we are telling underdeveloped and developing countries to preserve their forests, so that we can all breathe, but that we could even consider chopping down this pleasant linear forest, when alternatives are available."

"I ride and run on the trail while training for tri-athalons. Also, my wife and I take our three young boys for bike rides on the trail. When they were younger we ran with a baby-jogger."

"I am a 6th grader at Newport Mill Middle School in Kensington, Maryland. I use the Capital Crescent Trail to go biking with my dad and uncle. Places like the trail are few and far between in our urban area. We should do all we can to preserve them."

"The Trail is a true asset to Montgomery County – with mature trees that cannot be replicated – and should not be dismissed as expendable, replaceable, or the unfortunate casualty in your decision."

"WHY KILL THE GOOSE THAT LAYED THE GOLDEN EGG?"

"I personally use the Capital Crescent Trail every single week, rain or shine (sometimes blizzards!), summer and winter, to meet and connect with friends, as we run, jog, and keep track of our mileage. Sometimes we are training for a half marathon or 10 mile race, sometimes I ride bikes with my children, but the Capital Crescent Trail is something that is so much a part of our lives, our experience here, and our community, that it would be devastating to lose it!"

"What I'd like to impress upon this group of leaders making the decision for either the Trail or the Purple Line is that the Trail needs to be experienced to fully understand the beauty and the enjoyment that this area provides to our community."

"I'd like to point out that Rachel Carson, author of the "Silent Spring", lived and wrote this book from her home in Silver Spring. The silent that the title of the book refers to is about the lack of birds after their environment was irrevocably damaged. My wife couldn't believe the "voices" of the birds and the other animals that inhabit the Trail."

"hi, i am 15 year old girl who is also an avid runner. the capital crescent trial is a wonderful place for my friends and me to go for runs on the weekend or take walks with my family. if you build the purple line, you will be destroying a place that has become a sanctuary for many people. think about a place that you love to go to, maybe a beach or lake, and then imagine somebody coming and destroying your peaceful place. well, that is what you are doing to the trail".

"More than once a week, for over two years now, we use the trail from Bethesda to Silver Spring to go for a run or to walk with our three children. It is an exhilarating experience - in this city, where everything in the public domain is so much centered on using cars, to find a trail that is quiet and that goes through nature, on for miles."

"I'd suggest you walk or bike this part of the trail to see it with your own eyes. I have been running on this trail for the past 15 years with a group of 10 women. We are out there every Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday at 6 am every single week. This trail is one of the things that makes this area great."

Bethesda was recently featured in December 2008 issue of SELF MAGAZINE as "Best Overall" in the COUNTRY as The Healthiest City. The Capital Crescent Trail was specifically cited as the top feature of Bethesda. Why do you want to destroy it????"

"This will be a voting issue for me. I will vote against anyone who comes within a country mile of this horrendous deal."

The Trail between Bethesda and Silver Spring is a Regional Trail

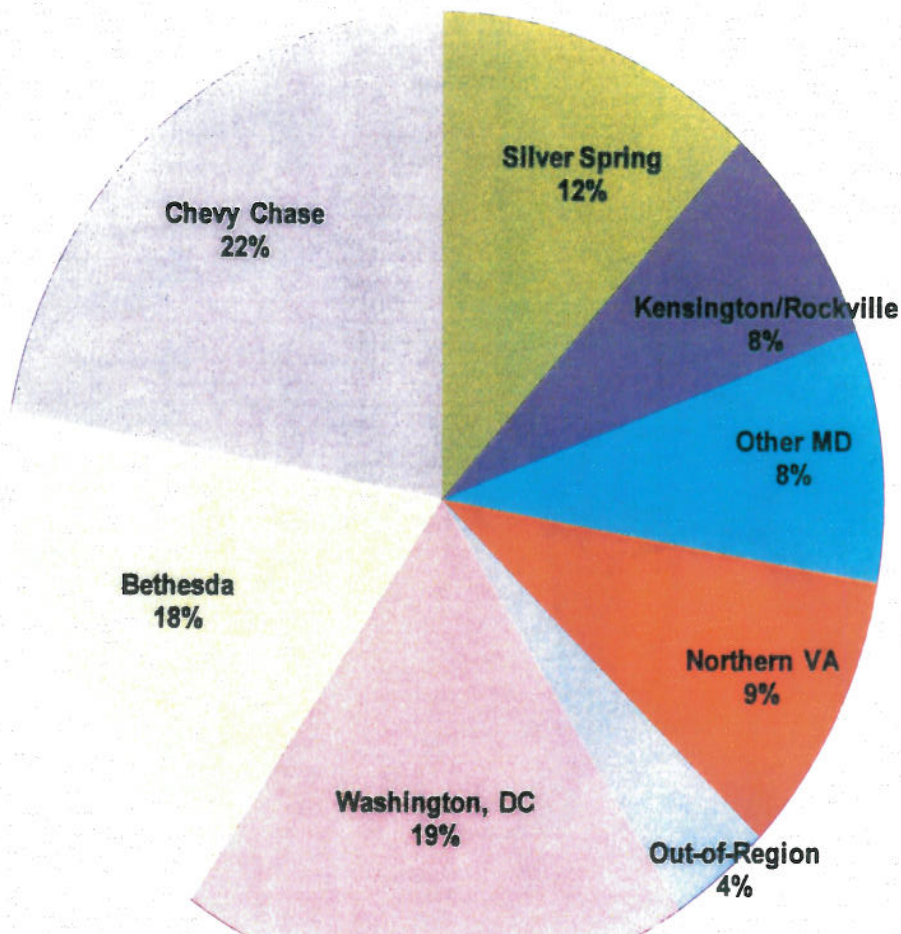
Trail users come from near and far.

The Trail is an essential link that connects Silver Spring, Kensington, Rock Creek Park, Bethesda, Georgetown, Alexandria, Mt. Vernon, and more.

- 40% of Petition signers come from Bethesda and Chevy Chase communities;
- 60% come from *outside* the Bethesda-Chevy Chase area, including:
- 28% from Silver Spring, Kensington and other parts of Maryland,
- 19% from Washington, DC, and 9% from Virginia.

Residence of Petition Signers

(A sample of signatures gathered May - July 2007,
along the Trail at Mile Marker 2.0, west of Connecticut Avenue.)



TESTIMONY BEFORE THE TRANSPORTATION PLANNING BOARD

MAY 20, 2009

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Today I speak on behalf of the Greater Bethesda Chevy Chase Coalition. For over twenty years, the GBCCC now representing thousands of Capital Crescent Trail users has nurtured the trail between Bethesda and Silver Spring making it the down-county linear park amenity it is today. Over the years, we have mobilized thousands of people who have spoken with their participation and their financial support to allow everyone access to green space .

My personal involvement began in the early 80's. A water/sewer line was proposed along the Little Falls Creek in Westmoreland Park between Massachusetts Avenue and MacArthur Boulevard. Rather than just remove the trees and destroy the woods, the community rallied. With construction crews, we walked the park, identifying a logical route. A path was created. The Trail was born. Immediately, nearby residents, dogs, children and employees from the Army Map Service used the path. Phase one was amazing success.

Abandoned B and O railroad tracks ran parallel to the path. One hot day, County Executive Neal Potter, State DOT, legislators and residents walked the tracks. Why not seize an opportunity to access unused parkland and create a continuous link from Georgetown to Silver Spring and beyond? Call upon government, residents, business and the Coalition for the Capital Crescent Trail. The job is underway. Enter the GBCCC. Reclaim the Georgetown Branch right of way for community use, its cinder trail making meandering to Silver Spring through portions of Rock Creek Park.

Next a bridge over River Road, followed by a tunnel under Wisconsin Avenue and a trestle across Rock Creek Park east of Jones Mill Road extending the Trail. Finally, Trail users could safely ride and walk along a continuous path without dodging cars in four lanes of traffic – no longer a stress-filled experience.

Now it was possible to make a loop, visit the zoo, relax at the waterfront and visit the Mall or head out to Lake Needwood via the Audubon without using a car. How fantastic!

Dedication, energy and cooperation have brought the Trail to thousands. Almost every day I walk from my home to Downtown Bethesda. I see hikers and bikers, adults and kids, strollers and dogs who value the continuous parkland linking Virginia, DC and Maryland, blissfully riding and walking, many unaware that the Trail is threatened by the Purple Line. One cannot question its value. A proposed Purple Line would destroy its future.