



COALITION FOR SMARTER GROWTH

September 17, 2009

Hon. Phil Andrews
President, Montgomery County Council
And County Councilmembers
100 Maryland Avenue
Rockville MD, 20850

RE: OPPOSE Gaithersburg West Master Plan: I-270 Growth robs jobs from rest of county, exacerbates traffic, sprawl and job/housing imbalance

Dear President Andrews and Councilmembers:

Please accept these comments on behalf of the Coalition for Smarter Growth, a regional non-profit organization focused on ensuring transportation and development decisions are made with genuine community involvement and accommodate growth while revitalizing communities, providing more housing and travel choices, and conserving our natural and historic areas. The Coalition for Smarter Growth has a consistent record of supporting Montgomery County's efforts to implement smarter, more sustainable growth. We have strongly supported development at Shady Grove, Twinbrook, White Flint, Bethesda and Silver Spring; protection and enhancement of the Agricultural Reserve; construction of the light-rail Purple Line; and affordable housing.

We urge you to oppose the Gaithersburg West Plan. We believe that the major expansion in planned employment proposed in the Plan is detrimental to county residents and poses a serious threat to smart growth in the region. We urge the county to refocus efforts to ensure a quality growth plan for the White Flint Metro station area, and fostering employment growth at existing underutilized Metro stations and along transit corridors in down and east county locations. The Life Sciences Center (LSC) portions of the Gaithersburg West Plan proposes excessive density for the location far from a Metro station, which will exacerbate the housing-jobs imbalance, and induce sprawl and unnecessary car traffic.

Job growth forecasts make clear that excessive capacity for employment in Master Plans such as Gaithersburg West in the I-270 corridor is robbing jobs from more accessible locations that could reduce traffic congestion and better match jobs and housing (see Attachment 1). Comparing the Round 7.1 and 7.2 job growth forecasts for 2030, we see significant growth in employment in the I-270 corridor (+17,339 jobs) and a decline in job growth for the urban ring and east side of the county (-15,565 jobs). This means that as we are investing in the Purple Line, we are reallocating jobs away from the inner urban Purple Line alignment and up the I-270 corridor. This shift in jobs from the inner urban ring and eastside will only exacerbate traffic forcing long commute trips especially for the east side residents with few local employment centers. The continued imbalance of jobs and housing in the I-270 corridor will amplify induced housing development to the north and into Frederick County and beyond, contributing to sprawl, farmland loss and environmental degradation.

Employment capacity expansion that shifts jobs away from down and east county would also worsen the ability for county residents to find housing they can afford close to jobs. Housing Opportunities Commission has expressed concern about this plan's impact on existing jobs-housing imbalance in the I-270 corridor and the ability of the county to offer housing affordable to workers, especially at low and even moderate incomes. Shifting more jobs to the corridor and perpetuating the jobs-housing imbalance only fuels the area's affordability problems, reinforcing long commutes and sprawl development.

We also remain concerned that the planned expansion of commercial development capacity at the Life Sciences Center will undermine the land market needed to encourage redevelopment at existing transit stations. In contrast to the LSC employment expansion plans, the county has the opportunity to focus growth at the White Flint Metro station and Rockville Pike to create a genuine, functioning transit-oriented urban district out of an inefficient suburban strip development pattern. Likewise, other Metro stations and obsolete automobile-oriented commercial corridors in the urban ring, adjacent to Metro stations and east county should be the focus on planned growth. By directing jobs and housing to existing corridors and Metro stations, we believe that Montgomery County can ensure its leadership on smart growth and building a sustainable economy.

Sincerely,



Cheryl Cort
 Policy Director

Attachment 1

Changes from the Round 7.1 to Round 7.2 Job Growth Forecasts for 2030

Major Subdivision	Employment				
	2005	Round 7.1 Forecast	Round 7.2 Forecast	change	% change
I 270 corridor	282,294	404,729	422,069	17,339	4.284%
urban ring	134,343	155,945	147,011	-8,934	
Georgia Ave.	35,792	40,074	37,392	-2,682	
Rt 29	29,572	46,881	42,932	-3,949	
Total East County	65,364	86,955	80,324	-6,631	
TOTAL		242,900	227,335	-15,565	-6.41%

Compiled by Pamela Lindstrom