



COALITION FOR SMARTER GROWTH

Testimony before the Montgomery County Council regarding:

White Flint Development Tax District Transportation Infrastructure Improvements

By Cheryl Cort, Policy Director
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Please accept these comments on behalf of the Coalition for Smarter Growth. We are a regional non-profit organization focused on ensuring transportation and development decisions accommodate growth while revitalizing communities, providing more housing and travel choices, and conserving our natural and historic areas.

Support for implementation of the White Flint Sector Plan and its urban boulevard vision

We would like to express our support for the White Flint Sector Plan and urge the Council and County Executive to create a feasible transportation infrastructure financing plan to move this effort forward without delay. We call on the Council to work with the Executive to establish a financing plan that is fair, accelerates redevelopment, and rightfully places this high value Metro-oriented development plan as a top priority for County and state transportation spending. The urgent need to create a workable, timely transportation financing plan requires us to rethink our spending priorities.

Rather than spending billions of dollars on road widenings and grade-separated interchanges for high speed vehicle travel, we need to ensure that our first priority goes to supporting the infrastructure needed for transit-oriented development. We must prioritize building interconnected pedestrian and bicycle-friendly street grids around our Metro stations. Also, we must transform existing urban highways like Rockville Pike into truly multi-modal boulevards that support community vitality. These investments build better community life and a stronger economic base for the future. Building a walkable street network also reduces vehicle trips and increases value. Endless expansion of roads generates yet more traffic and less transportation choice.

It is critical that the County leverage the value of its strongest assets – Metrorail stations – and create great walkable communities where strip malls and dangerous highways thwart their economic development potential. Leveraging Metro-oriented development means remaking Rockville Pike into a boulevard that knits together a vibrant mixed use community. While all of the County's Metro stations are important assets, White Flint offers greater near term market potential. By ensuring the timely re-creation of the White Flint area and Rockville Pike, the County can generate more resources to support to the revitalization of other important Metro station areas where more growth is needed, such as Wheaton.

We believe that the White Flint Plan can build on the successes of other major Metro station development experiences in the region. In Arlington County, the Rosslyn-Ballston corridor has built out 17 million square feet of commercial space and nearly 20,000 housing units between 1970-2007. At the same time, there has been no or only modest increase in traffic on the streets serving the area. Surrounding single family home neighborhoods are not only intact, but thriving due to their access to restaurants, stores, active public spaces and transit. Residents have a wealth of choices for how to travel – walk, bicycle, transit, car share, bike share, or private vehicle. Non-driving mode shares in the Crystal City and Rosslyn-Ballston Metro corridors are growing and now exceed 50 percent. Car ownership rates are low, and the proportion of people walking, bicycling and riding transit to work and for errands is high.

We think that the Sector Plan offers the basis for achieving similar success. Guiding new development here rather than elsewhere in the county will help reduce how much people need to drive for work or errands. Creating a walkable place also fosters a wonderful quality of life. The plan's vision to create a great urban place inspires people to walk, bicycle, visit stores, hop on a bus, and relax on a bench in the civic green. Offering this lifestyle provides a carbon footprint about half of that of a typical suburban household.

The proposed new street connections are a critically important part of repairing this sparse suburban superblock environment, making it walkable, bikable, and accessible to transit. Remaking Rockville Pike as a boulevard with bicycle lanes, low speed street design, on-street parking, and pedestrian-oriented buildings and public spaces should be the centerpiece of this plan. Adding rapid transit service on Rockville Pike is important, especially for shorter trips in the corridor between Metrorail stations. These transportation investments cost money and need to be made a high priority for the County. We urge the Council to champion a feasible financing plan to rebuild the area's outmoded infrastructure so the full value of this already high-value area can be realized.

This plan offers the blueprint for a great, transit-oriented and sustainable, mixed use community. Now it needs the commitment of the County Council and Executive to see it through to implementation.

Thank you for your consideration.