

May 20, 2020

To: Greg Slater  
Maryland Secretary of Transportation  
7201 Corporate Center Drive, Hanover, Maryland 21076

Mr. Tim Smith, Administrator  
Maryland State Highway Administration  
707 North Calvert Street  
Baltimore, MD 21202

Re: Opening Streets to Pedestrians/Cyclists and Closing them to Vehicles

Secretary Slater and Administrator Smith:

We urge you to consider implementing an “open streets” concept under which SHA would partially close certain State Roads to address the needs of citizens during the COVID-19 lockdown. This concept was noted in an April 8, 2020 Q&A session with Secretary Slater and Maryland Advocates For Sustainable Transportation . In that session, Secretary Slater acknowledged the possibility of an “open streets” implementation on some State roads as long as the neighboring households and businesses were consulted.

We appreciate how hard it is to manage public spaces during the recent global pandemic. Around the world, state agency managers and elected officials have struggled to find the right balance between public access to open space and public health and safety concerns. Such strategies have been implemented in Bogata, Columbia; Paris, France; Oakland, CA; and other places around the World. Closer to home, in Maryland, we applaud Montgomery Parks’s decision to open parts of Sligo Creek Parkway, Beach Drive and Little Falls Parkway to people on foot and bicycles during April of this year.

Exercise is essential to maintain a strong immune system, and many people lack a yard or outdoor private space where they can run and play or bike. It is also essential for people to get sunshine, Vitamin D, fresh air and a change of scenery. Getting out of one’s home, especially if one’s living space is small, is also vital for mental health. Additionally, having such safe space on our State roads for using alternatives to cars in order to do shorter trips (under 3 miles in length) to work and other essential trips, is also vital. It therefore is critical that the creation of such space be done on an equitable basis in which streets are chosen that will serve all communities, particularly lower income and more diverse communities. We also note that the response to the street openings has been overwhelmingly positive.

Given that COVID-19 and its related social distancing may be with us for a prolonged period, we would like to ask that the State Highway Administration engage in implementing the open streets concept.

Specifically, we would like to ask for the following:

- 1) MD SHA, in cooperation with County/Municipal departments of transportation draw up a list of State roads which would be eligible for partial closures of car traffic lanes for use by pedestrians and bicyclists.
- 2) After drawing up such a list, MD SHA move to implement such lane closures, perhaps with a small number of pilot roads designated, with a larger number being designated for such lane closures and implementation of those plans.

We appreciate your time and consideration of these requests and look forward to working with you on implementing workable scenarios that will help residents in the State stay healthy during the COVID lockdown.

Sincerely,

Paul Goldman, President  
Action Committee for Transit

Jane Lyons, Maryland Advocacy Manager  
Coalition for Smarter Growth

Alison Gillespie, President  
Forest Estates Community Association

Kristy Daphnis, Chair  
Pedestrian Bicycle Traffic Safety Advisory Committee

Peter Gray, Vice President, Board of Directors  
Washington Area Bicyclist Association

cc: Chris Conklin, MCDOT  
Marc Korman, Maryland State Delegate  
Jared Solomon, Maryland State Delegate  
Marc Elrich, Montgomery County Executive  
Montgomery County Council