

Mr. Rick Kiegel, PE
Project Manager
Corridor Cities Transitway
Maryland Transit Administration
Office of Planning
6 St. Paul Street, Suite 902
Baltimore, MD 21202

October 22, 2014

REQUEST FOR WASHINGTONIAN WOODS IMPACT STUDY

Dear Mr. Kiegel,

While the Cities Corridor Transitway (CCT) has generated numerous studies and reports, none appear to document of the specific impacts to Washingtonian Woods, a neighborhood that is arguably *the most* impacted.

There are hundreds of homes on the “frontlines” of this project, yet only one study — that is, a sound study, which is unpublished at this time — appears to have been conducted.

Bus Tire-To-Property Line measurements are potentially in the single digits. These actualities warrant a closer look.

Today, Washingtonian Woods formally requests an Impact Study detailing the CCT’s impact to various qualities of life.

What is currently a safe, sought-after place to raise a family, grow old, enjoy outdoor recreation is flagged for significant change.

A majority of community members¹ are concerned that this picturesque, tree-filled, park-centric, suburban (with a slant toward rural) corner of Gaithersburg will be truncated by an urban transitway that threatens several qualities of life:

Muddy Branch Road (MBR) Segment

Situation: Washingtonian Woods was conceived with minimal access in and out of the neighborhood — a decision likely made to create a private, wooded enclave of homes a commutable distance to Washington DC, without the noise and traffic of a city. WW has just three egresses for 575 homes. Two of the three are on MBR. Most unit owners in the Vistas and Oaks (200 units) access and egress at the MBR intersection closest to Great Seneca Highway (GSH).

Concern A: Additional Traffic Signals

The two traffic signals proposed on MBR will inhibit access into and out of WW's Midsummer Drive entrances. Inserting these lights into the .55-miles between GSH and Darnestown Rd. also *ignores FHA safety guidelines² stating, "anything greater than two signals per mile has a significant impact on congestion and safety."*

Additionally, with traffic lights at main egresses, WW residents can expect idling traffic to back up into the neighborhood. Homes closest to these entrances will experience additional noise and air pollution.

□ Please address.

Concern B: Non-Car Transportation Void

The GSH/MBR intersection is treacherous for pedestrians, runners, and cyclists. Add the CCT, and non-car travel may prove impossible. As the project's goal is to get cars off the road, the CCT must also offer opportunities to promote alternate non-car modes of travel.

Amenities such as a pedestrian overpass at GSH and MBR, shared use paths, a protected "landing" area at crosswalks, and greenery will make a more pleasant non-car experience.*

* U.S. DOT and FHA federal surface transportation law states that **the safe accommodation of non-motorized users shall be considered during the planning, development, and construction of all Federal-aid transportation projects and programs.** Further, The Maryland Department of Transportation's principal mission is "to enhance quality of life for Maryland's citizens by providing a balanced and sustainable multimodal transportation system..." Bicycling and walking are important modes of transportation that support this goal. In 2002, MD-DOT

developed the *Twenty Year Bicycle and Pedestrian Access Master Plan* that serves as a blueprint for becoming the best state in the nation for bicycling and walking. In support of the Master Plan, the State Highway Administration issued a *Policy for Accommodating Bicycles and Pedestrians on State Highways*. It states: “...it shall make **accommodations for bicycling and walking a routine and integral element of planning, design, construction, operations and maintenance activities...**”

- Please provide non-car amenities; reconcile these agency promises.

Concern C: Aesthetic Decline

WW has ordered grand new stonework entrance signs, which are to be installed over the next year or two. The CCT will negate the work and cost incurred to create an upscale, welcoming, first impression.

- Please provide strategies to preserve WW's curb appeal.

Concern D: Noise Pollution

Homes along Muddy Branch Road and Hillside Lake Terrace will experience noise impact due to the CCT. No study has been provided, as of the date of this letter. No plans have been suggested providing noise abatement strategies.

- Please provide several noise mitigation concepts to homeowners abutting Muddy Branch Road, including the Oaks condominiums and Vistas condominiums on Hillside Lake Terrace 90 days in advance of 30% design completion.

Great Seneca Highway (MD 119) Segment

Situation: Some WW Upshire Circle homes backing up to GSH pre-date the highway itself. It is assumed that the SHA built at reasonable, safe distances from these homes. Yet, the current CCT alignment cuts in 51 feet closer, putting it 5 feet over the fenceline at 421 Upshire Circle and as close as 8 feet from 70 units along Hillside Lake Terrace. This extreme proximity to “people zones” (where people live, work, breath, sleep and play) is unacceptable.

Concern A: Noise Pollution

Homes along Upshire Circle and Hillside Lake Terrace, as well as Washingtonian Woods Park-goers, will experience “moderate” noise impact due to the CCT, as per a January, 2014 MTA study. This prompts protective measures. While a sound wall is one promised strategy, it is not

an ideal solution, as it severely alters the character of a home.

☐ Please provide several noise mitigation concepts to homeowners in the 400-block of Upshire Circle and all homes on Hillside Lake Terrace 90 days in advance of 30% design completion.

Concern B: Air Pollution

“Diesel exhaust contains ozone precursors, benzene, arsenic, dioxins, formaldehyde and other toxic substances and is a significant contributor to airborne concentrations of fine particulate matter (PM). Significant health impacts including lung damage and premature death are associated with exposure to fine particulate matter. It can also aggravate conditions such as asthma and bronchitis. Diesel exhaust has also been classified as a probable human carcinogen with no known safe level of exposure.”³

Consider this from the [Los Angeles County of Public Health](#): “A buffer of at least 500 feet should be maintained between the development of new schools, housing or other sensitive land uses and freeways.”⁴

Similar best practices apply to transit projects built near public parks. The 22-acre Washingtonian Woods Park is a local treasure. It offers nature trails, tennis courts, a recreation field used by local soccer programs, a basketball court, fishing and a brand new playground.

☐ Please address health impacts to homeowners and park visitors.

Concern C: Greenery

Construction of the CCT along the south side of GSH will destroy hundreds of mature trees along three dense “people zones” : Upshire Circle, Washingtonian Woods Park, The Vistas. These trees provide character, beauty, and visual/psychological relief from GSH traffic.

☐ Please provide strategies for preserving these trees.

Concern D: Diminished Property Values. According to the Center for Housing Policy, there are, “...drawbacks to living near — or too near — certain forms of transit. Alternately called ‘nuisance effects,’ ‘negative externalities,’ and ‘disamenities,’ the noise, traffic, and pollution associated with transit systems can cause homes located in close proximity ... (think of a home’s backyard abutting a train line) to have lower values than those slightly farther away because they lower the appeal – and thus the market price — of the neighborhood.”⁵

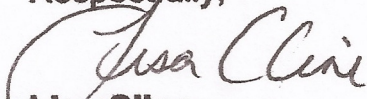
☐ Please supply a real estate impact summary to residents.

Final Note

Before this segment of Montgomery County was branded a "bio-tech" corridor, it was — and remains — an enviable residential corridor. To be completely successful, the CCT must integrate kindly with those who live there and respect the natural surroundings it will share.

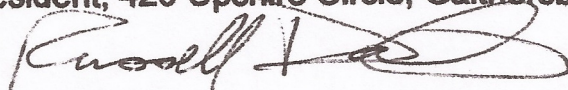
With this in mind, please reconsider alternative CCT alignments.

Respectfully,



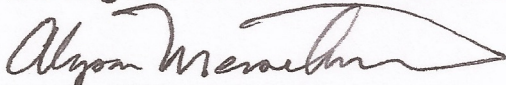
Lisa Cline

Resident, 420 Upshire Circle, Gaithersburg, MD



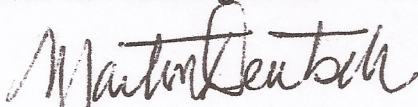
Russ Dalin

Washingtonian Woods HOA President

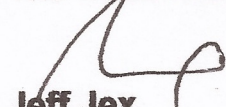


Alyson Meiselman

Vistas at Washingtonian Woods Condominium Association President



The Oaks HOA President



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With Support From:

Tim Newell, Belward Farm steward

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The Gaithersburg – North Potomac – Rockville Coalition, Scale-it-Back.com

cc: Henry Kay, James T. Smith, Martin O'Malley, Congressman Delaney, Anthony Brown, Robert L. Smith, Isiah Leggett, Melinda Peters, Arthur Holmes, Gary Erenrich, Joana Conklin, Casey Anderson, Tom Autry, Patrick Butler, Jim Gilchrest, Luiz Simmons, Kumar Barve, Mayor Sydney Katz, John Schlichting, Jud Ashman, Mike Sesma, Cathy Dryrzgula, Catherine Matthews

REFERENCES

¹ WW-initiated neighborhood CCT survey, via Survey Monkey:
<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/KRGT7X6>

² U.S. Department of Transportation Federal Highway Administration, "Benefits of Access Management, Access Spacing,"
<http://www.safety.fhwa.dot.gov/geometric/pubs/accessmgmtbrochure/access.htm>

³ The Transit Cooperative Research Program "Hybrid-Electric Drive Heavy-Duty Vehicle Testing Project Final Emissions Report", Report Number 59, 2000.

⁴ County of Los Angeles Public Health, "Air Quality Recommendations for Local Jurisdictions," January, 2013.

⁵ Center for Housing Policy, "*Public Transit's Impact on Housing Costs*" by Keith Wardrip, August 2011.