

**The Neighborhoods of
Washingtonian Woods & Mission Hills
Gaithersburg, MD 20878**

November 13, 2014

Mr. Isiah Leggett, *County Executive*
Office of County Executive
Executive Office Building, 2nd floor
101 Monroe Street
Rockville, MD 20850

Dear Mr. Leggett,

We represent the Washingtonian Woods and Mission Hills neighborhoods in Gaithersburg, Maryland. We are a community totaling over 625 single-family houses, townhomes and condominiums. Our main entrances are on Muddy Branch Road.

The Cities Corridor Transitway (CCT) is soon to be our new neighbor. While we support public transportation, we have serious concerns about the ROI and ridership forecasts for the CCT, and about neighborhood impacts of the chosen CCT alignment. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss our overarching concerns about the CCT with you.

Assuming that the CCT will move forward in its current form, we seek a more holistic study of the quality of life impacts of the CCT alignment on our communities, and consideration of specific modifications that can benefit all affected parties.

MUDDY BRANCH ROAD ALIGNMENT

The CCT Locally Preferred Alignment runs south from the Kentlands along the south side of Great Seneca Highway (GSH), turns right onto the grassy median of Muddy Branch Road (MBR) before turning left into Belward Farm. This presents the following problems for Washingtonian Woods and Mission Hills:

1. Additional Traffic Signals – The two traffic signals proposed on Muddy Branch Road will inhibit access into and out of Washingtonian Woods' and Mission Hills' Midsummer Drive entrances. Inserting these traffic lights onto the 0.55-miles between Great Seneca Highway and Darnestown Road (Route 28) also ignores certain FHA best practices and crash reports regarding traffic light spacing.

With these lights, residents can also expect idling traffic to back up in front of homes. This means audible revving, braking and acceleration, and associated exhaust fumes. No abatement strategies have been provided to date.

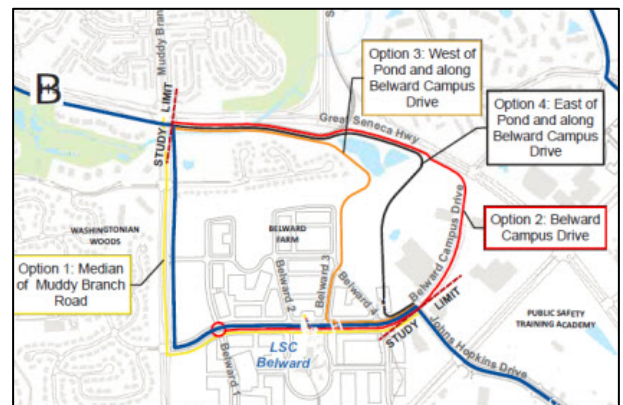
2. Aesthetic Decline – Washingtonian Woods, at great expense to its homeowners, is installing grand new stonework entrance signs. The CCT will negate the work and cost incurred to create an upscale, welcoming, first impression. Mission Hills already has a

welcoming community entrance that will be negatively impacted by the CCT.

3. Non-Car Amenities Void – The MBR intersection at GSH is presently dangerous 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 MBR and GSH, shared use paths, a protected “landing” area at crosswalks, and greenery will make a more pleasant non-car experience. After all, 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...”.

SOLUTION – Alternate Alignment: Last spring, Mission Hills successfully lobbied the MTA to study alternative alignments that would save the “taking” of one home. The study produced change: it moved the CCT into the MBR median. It also yielded **Option 4**. Option 4 serves everyone better — even Mission Hills — by keeping the bus off MBR entirely. Even the County DOT favors Option 4, as it preserves MBR for future road expansion.



Among the benefits of the Option 4 Alignment:

- Dramatically reduced impact on existing neighborhoods serviced by Muddy Branch Road.
- Reduced CCT travel time from Shady Grove metro to Kentlands and Metro Grove.
- Equivalent cost to recommended alignment.
- Supports desired center of density and town center concept proposed by Johns Hopkins by displacing planned CCT stop by < 1000 feet.

The communities of Washingtonian Woods and Mission Hills strongly endorse further study of the Option 4 alignment with the intent of expediting its approval and implementation. We are confident from communications with neighbors and civic groups that this request has broad support across the constituents of the greater GSSC region.

GREAT SENECA HIGHWAY ALIGNMENT

A large number of WW homes back up to GSH with a reasonable buffer of trees and berms creating a safe and pleasant environment. The current CCT alignment, however, cuts in **51 feet closer, putting it 5 feet over the fenceline at 421 Upshire Circle**, for example, and as close as **8 feet from 70 homes along Hillside Lake Terrace**.

This extreme proximity to where we live, work, sleep, play is unacceptable. Here’s why:

1. Noise Pollution – Homes along Upshire Circle and Hillside Lake Terrace, as well as visitors to Washingtonian Woods Park, will experience “moderate” noise impact as per a 2014 MTA study. This prompts protective measures. While a sound wall is one proposed strategy, it is not ideal, as it severely alters the character of a home/community.

2. 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.” This science, we believe, speaks for itself.

3. Greenery – The CCT will destroy hundreds of very old trees along GSH. These trees provide character, beauty, and visual/psychological relief from highway traffic.

*This is Great Seneca Highway. The circle to the left is Upshire Circle.
The entire tree “buffer” will be lost to the CCT.*



4. 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 ... to have lower values than those slightly farther away because they lower the appeal – and thus the market price – of the neighborhood.” Also worth noting, diminished property values lead to lesser real estate tax revenues.

SOLUTION: Move the alignment off the south side of GSH. Rethink the storm water management in the median so it can accommodate the CCT. In the least, “bend” the alignment toward the median (away from homes), saving the forested buffer.

We would greatly appreciate your input and assistance with regards to these matters. We have an ongoing dialog with project manager Rick Kiegel, the City Council, and the local press. Your voice will substantially augment ours. Please help reframe the CCT so it works everyone.

Respectfully,

Russ Dalin, Washingtonian Woods HOA President

Alyson Meiselman, Vistas at Washingtonian Woods Condo. Assoc. President

Martin Deutsch, The Oaks HOA President

Jeff Jex, Mission Hills HOA President