

Opinion | Moving together on the Capital Crescent Trail tunnel and extension

By David Kosub

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“Ding, ding, ding” could be heard as the [Coalition for the Capital Crescent Trail](#) handed out free bells recently at [Bike to Work Day](#) in Bethesda. Our nonprofit fosters community and [advocates](#) for the nearby [Capital Crescent Trail](#) (CCT). Trail users shared thoughts with us on conditions, accessibility and electric bikes, known as e-bikes, but foremost were the Wisconsin Avenue tunnel and Silver Spring extension.

The CCT is one of the [most popular](#), [widely used](#) and successful trails in the D.C. area. Upward of 1 million people use the trail for recreation and commuting between Georgetown, Bethesda and Silver Spring (albeit with a circuitous detoured route), with easy access to Arlington. If the tunnel under Wisconsin Avenue and the trail extension to Silver Spring are completed, even more people could benefit from the trail.

The fates of these projects are intimately linked to the Purple Line. A tunnel did exist previously allowing safe passage under Wisconsin Avenue, but this [changed](#) in 2017 as part of light-rail construction. Now, the tunnel is devoted exclusively to light rail, and a new short tunnel for others has an uncertain future (especially as costs [climbed](#) to more than \$50 million). The developers and county did [promise](#) CCT users a new, paved extension from Bethesda to Silver Spring. But Purple Line delays [pushed](#) completion of the extension to at least 2026. And when this issue was raised at the [Purple Line open house](#), I was dismayed to hear there is limited, if any, thought about the trail’s extension until trains are tested.

We echo the sentiments calling for the extension to be prioritized and the tunnel to be funded and completed. We should all move together in supporting this plan, and here is why.

The projects move us toward [Montgomery County’s Vision Zero goal](#) of no pedestrian traffic fatalities. With the tunnel closed, pedestrians, runners and cyclists must navigate through heavily congested downtown Bethesda streets, potentially at risk for vehicular accidents. With the tunnel completed, trail commuters to and from downtown Bethesda, Metro and the Purple Line will have a safe, fast and reliable route away from congested streets. This year has seen at least 175 pedestrians and bicyclists [hit](#) on Montgomery County roads. As one of those 175 (and someone who has pushed for [pedestrian-friendly infrastructure](#)), I can attest to the concerns walkers have about road safety in downtown Bethesda.

The projects move us toward achieving the [county’s climate action goals](#). Shifting people from passenger vehicles to active transportation options will directly lead to reduced carbon emissions. The CCT extension will connect existing active transportation networks in our area,

such as the Rock Creek Trail and the Metropolitan Branch Trail. This will achieve the climate action goal of integrating park trails into the county's transportation system and also realizing the [Bicycle Master Plan](#). Moreover, these CCT investments align with the downtown [Silver Spring plan](#) to improve the amount and quality of [parks and open spaces](#) as well as encourage car-free options countering [environmental concerns](#).

The projects move us toward transit equity and accessibility. Extending the CCT will allow residents of eastern Montgomery County to walk, run or cycle to Bethesda, Georgetown and beyond. This racially and socioeconomically diverse area of the county is one that, after being overlooked in the past, deserves enhanced trail connections to address large blocks, difficult topography, and other barriers limiting pedestrian and cyclist access. The 2017 plan for Greater Lyttonsville, a community that would benefit from trail completion, calls for "trails and open spaces that could be expanded with new greenways and civic greens to benefit more residents," which promotes and encourages physical activity. Consider how to commute from here to Bethesda on foot or two wheels now. The most direct route is East-West Highway, with very limited alternate routes that are not sufficient, safe or appropriate for everyone. Perhaps you are an older person, a child or someone like me with a disability. How would you do it?

The county is also serious about transit equity connecting communities. In its [application](#) seeking federal RAISE grants, it argues the tunnel and extension provide a "high quality and safe bike, pedestrian and micromobility connection between a Historically Disadvantaged Community and Equity Emphasis Areas elsewhere in Montgomery County and major job centers." The requested \$25 million in federal funds would help achieve these goals.

We recognize that with many competing priorities, sustaining commitment and appropriating funds for these projects will be a perennial challenge. Residents' support is crucial to help us continue preserving, protecting and improving CCT safety, equity and access.

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