



Bicycle & Trail Advisory Group

Prince George's County ⇨ Founded January 1998

November 10, 2011

MEMORANDUM:

TO: Don Halligan, Director of Planning and Capital Programming, Maryland Department of Transportation

FROM: Prince George's County Bicycle and Trails Advisory Group (BTAG)

RE: Extension of the WB&A Trail

Thank you for your work on identifying the missing links in the Maryland trail network and for attempting to facilitate efforts to connect the Prince George's and Anne Arundel segments of the WB&A Trail. The Prince George's County Bicycle and Trails Advisory Group (BTAG) wants to reiterate its support for the construction of the WB&A Trail on, or very close to, the abandoned railroad right-of-way. Although M-NCPPC staff has continued to work with Anne Arundel County on possible alternative alignments, Prince George's County has not changed its position on the appropriate location for the river crossing. Prince George's County has consistently favored the most direct route as close as possible to the old WB&A right-of-way.

For reference, attached is a copy of a letter dated September 14, 2001, from former Prince George's County Executive Wayne Curry to Anne Arundel County Executive Janet S. Owens, urging her to continue the trail along the former right-of-way of the WB&A Railroad. Prince George's County was aware that the Meyer family preferred a northern detour which would cross the river near Bowie State University. But Prince George's County opposed that detour because it would greatly increase construction costs, require permits to impact protected wetlands, and result in a longer and more circuitous trail off the original level, graded rail corridor. People expect a rail trail to be straight with minimal hills.

About five years ago, with funding administered by the State of Maryland for the Recreational Trails Program, the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission Department of Parks and Recreation extended the trail from Race Track Road along the old roadbed to the Patuxent River, anticipating a crossing there. Although Prince George's County opposes the more northerly crossing, M-NCPPC staff has continued to cooperate with the efforts of Anne Arundel to create an alternative to the direct alignment, by working on trail improvements between the WB&A and Bowie State University, which would facilitate the more northerly crossing that Anne Arundel County prefers. BTAG hopes that Anne Arundel County will similarly keep both options open by preserving the necessary rights-of-way for the more direct alignment—either *on* the former railroad right-of-way or *along* the former right-of-way as the Preserve at Two Rivers is developed.

We understand that the state is not in a position to directly referee a disagreement between counties regarding the trail alignment. However, we hope that increasingly limited public funds can be spent as efficiently as possible for this project, as a substantial investment of county and state funds will be required to implement this trail connection. Highway programs often base decisions on a careful and *transparent* evaluation of the costs, benefits, and environmental impacts of the different alternatives. Trail programs need the confidence and enthusiasm of the public and should include a similar transparent evaluation process. We think that public confidence will be enhanced if people are provided a clear explanation about the reasons for preferring one alignment over the other, which may require a detailed analysis.

We would like to invite you to the next quarterly meeting of the Prince George's County Bicycle and Trails Advisory Group on Friday, January 20th to discuss the extension of the WB&A Trail in more detail. BTAG is structured similarly to the Maryland Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee, with a composition that is roughly half government officials and half interested citizens. Although this letter does not necessarily represent the official views of any government agency, BTAG assisted in drafting the original letter from County Executive Curry, and a more detailed discussion of the alternatives would greatly help BTAG and the county as it plans for trail improvements throughout Prince George's County. The recommendations of this memorandum were reviewed and endorsed at the October 21, 2011 quarterly meeting of the Bicycle and Trails Advisory Group. If you have any questions or would like to discuss these items further, please contact Fred Shaffer of M-NCPPC at 301-952-3661.