

August 6, 2015

M. Valerie Mosley
Capital Projects Manager
Arlington County Division of Transportation
2100 Clarendon Boulevard, Suite 900
Arlington, VA 22201

Sent via email to: MVMosley@ArlingtonVa.US

Re: S. Walter Reed Dr/Arlington Mill Dr Intersection Improvements (WRD/AMD)

Commission Members
Dennis Jaffe, Chair
Pam VanHine, Vice Chair
Ellen Armbruster
Rosemary Ciotti
Jim Feaster
Eric Goodman
Tom Korns
Eric Goldstein
Christine Ng
John Armstrong
Dan Foster
Collin Weber

Dear Ms. Mosley:

Thank you for your June 1, 2015 letter regarding the proposed WRD/AMD improvement project. The Pedestrian Advisory Committee (PAC) received on June 25, 2015 from Ed Hiltz, the Fairlington-Shirlington representative on the Neighborhood Conservation Advisory Committee, an email message inquiring as to the PAC's position on the proposal. At the PAC's July 8, 2015 meeting, we discussed the project, including a review of the Fairlington-Shirlington community's concerns, as well as your June 18, 2015 memorandum submitted by the Office of the County Manager to County Board Member John Vihstadt. The July 8th discussion, summarized online in [draft minutes](#), was the PAC's second review of the project, which you first presented to us on December 10, 2014.

The PAC recognizes improvements to the proposal as outlined in your letter. However, we voice concern and raise questions over the current proposal as we understand it. We have not taken a position on the entirety of the proposal. We remain agnostic concerning the component receiving the most attention in the community – retention of the slip lane at WRD/AMD. In this letter, we refer to both pedestrians and cyclists for inclusiveness. However, our charge does not include cycling, and we defer to the Bicycling Advisory Committee for their expertise.

The crux of our concerns and questions is consistent with concerns raised at our December meeting: ***We lack confidence that the current plan sufficiently prioritizes safety for pedestrians navigating the intersection to be in accordance with the Pedestrian Element of the Arlington County Master Transportation Plan.*** Some members also voiced concern about the capacity of the traffic island within the current design to handle the volume of bicyclists, especially given the connection to the Four Mile Run trail.

Our greatest concern is that the proposal does not address for pedestrians, cyclists and drivers the ambiguity as to who has priority to enter or cross the slip lane. We strongly encourage staff to consider placement of both a traditional stop light for all vehicles turning right via the slip lane and additional walk signals on each side of the slip lane, telling pedestrians when to proceed – and when not to. The absence of additional walk signals creates confusion, leading some pedestrians heading southwest on Walter Reed Drive, to rely upon an “irrelevant” signal at Arlington Mill Drive's southwest corner, giving them a false sense of security. *Without these components, we don't see incorporated into the proposal, effective traffic control devices that aim to prevent drivers from proceeding through the slip lane at the same time that pedestrians are crossing it.* That is troubling.

County staff have stressed that a slip lane provides the geometry needed for a sufficient turning radius, which in turn is described as necessary for safe travel of vehicles in opposite directions near this intersection. A stop light wouldn't seem to interfere with that objective.

Your June 1st letter referenced “Motion-activated flashing signage to alert vehicles of crosswalk users.” We lack confidence that this type of signage, by itself, sufficiently helps ensure safety for pedestrians and cyclists. For informational purposes, is the location of the illuminating *Yield* sign, as depicted in the image at the project website, accurate? While we do not endorse the *Yield* sign by itself, if the plan is to install it practically *at* the intersection, we are especially raising a red flag. Placement there simply would be inadequate to help make pedestrians sufficiently visible for drivers navigating the slip lane. Given staff’s indication that a major aim of the proposal is to better accommodate large vehicles, we know that the sight line for drivers of passenger cars heading toward the slip lane, behind large vehicles, is poor. The very spot at which pedestrians, about to cross the slip lane, are located, is out of plain sight for many drivers. That’s a problem. We don’t see it sufficiently addressed in the plan. Individuals who use wheelchairs, and are situated lower, are especially at risk.

We read in the GRAMS document:

Staff propose retaining the slip-lane to maintain the safe functionality of the intersection for the high volume of vehicles using the intersection and significantly modifying the slip-lane crossing and island to provide a safer, better environment for pedestrians and cyclists crossing the slip lane.

We lack confidence, however, that the plan sufficiently prioritizes providing “a safer, better environment for pedestrians and cyclists crossing the slip lane.” Rather, it sounds more like the priority is accommodating large County vehicles – and that safety for pedestrians is an “add-on” feature. *We believe the County needs to do a better job at resolving conflicting needs for capacity and safe navigation of pedestrians, cyclists and drivers.*

The memorandum states the slip lane’s geometry is needed to safely accommodate *large* County vehicles, but it:

- References volume for *all*, not just large vehicles traveling through the slip lane; and
- Makes no reference to volume of pedestrians or cyclists

Is the rationale for retaining the slip lane the geometry for the turning radii for large vehicles, or is it volume of all vehicles? If the latter is a substantial factor, does that signify that high volume of vehicles at other intersections will lead the County to more favorably view slip lanes elsewhere? We also would find it helpful to see crash data for this intersection – particularly data that would help to illuminate the causes for crashes.

The memorandum further states:

The larger radius required for a T-intersection would also cause a longer crosswalk for pedestrians and bicyclists, increasing their exposure risk to vehicles and diminishing safety, which counters the County’s policy related to improving pedestrian safety stated in the Pedestrian Element of the Arlington County Master Transportation Plan.

It is not clear to us how a T-intersection design for this intersection would unavoidably cause both a longer crosswalk and greater risk for pedestrians and bicyclists, without there being compelling, mitigating modifications that could be seriously considered. Whatever the length of the crosswalk is, we lack confidence that the overall proposal does enough to help make pedestrians sufficiently visible for drivers navigating the slip lane.

In conclusion, we believe proposal changes are necessary to demonstrate that the County is prioritizing improving pedestrian safety in accordance with the *Pedestrian Element of the Arlington County Master Transportation Plan*.

The PAC is likely to discuss the issue at our August 12th meeting. We welcome your participation or response for that meeting, and I welcome the opportunity to again speak with you about the project.

Sincerely,



Dennis Jaffe

Chairman, Arlington Pedestrian Advisory Committee

cc: David Goodman, Pedestrian Advisory Committee, Bicycling Advisory Committee, Ed Hilz