

**ENVIRONMENT AND ENERGY CONSERVATION COMMISSION**  
**c/o Department of Environmental Services**  
**2100 Clarendon Blvd., Suite 705**  
**Arlington, VA 22201**

March 25, 2019

The Honorable Christian Dorsey, Chair  
Arlington County Board  
2100 Clarendon Boulevard, Suite 300  
Arlington, VA 22201

**RE: Master Transportation Plan – Bike Element**

Dear Chair Dorsey:

The Environment and Energy Conservation Commission (E2C2) was appreciative of the opportunity to participate in the Master Transportation Plan Bike Element Working Group and to provide input on the future of biking in Arlington County. We support the goals of the Bike Element and encourage the Board of Supervisors to adopt it as a component of the County's overall plan for the future.

E2C2 supports the Bike Element's goals of creating bike infrastructure and a biking environment which encourages peoples of all ages and abilities to choose biking as a primary mode of transportation. Critical to this goal is a biking network that is safe, comfortable and low-stress.

It should be noted that the County's adopted Community Energy Plan commits to a reduction in transportation related carbon emissions from a 2007 level of 3.7 mt CO<sub>2e</sub>/capita/year to 1.0 CO<sub>2e</sub>/capita/year in 2050. This can only be accomplished through a significant reduction in the use of automobiles for transportation. A key element of this reduction will be the increased reliance on cycling. To reach this goal cycling must be safe and convenient for a wider segment of the County's population.

E2C2 is aware that the needed bike infrastructure to meet these goals (new and improved trails, on-street bike facilities) is competing for limited space within the County with other environmental interests. It is critical that the Bike Element identifies the key corridors and facilities needed to provide a safe and usable network, and that these projects be prioritized.

Specific to the current draft of the Bike Element, E2C2 encourages:

1. Lighting – Proper lighting of multi-use trails is important to promote safety and encourage biking by a large portion of the population. It is especially important for trails that are used by a mix of bicycles and pedestrians. However, as many of the trails pass through natural areas, excess light

or glare negatively impacts wildlife. E2C2 recommends that the County (either DES or DPR) develop lighting policies that provide for design lighting levels (lumens), color-correlated temperature (CCT) and fixture type for various trail types, environments and times of night. This effort could build on much of the work already performed during the Williamsburg lighting process and the Street Light Master Plan, but customized for bicycles, pedestrians and sensitive environmental areas. We recommend that this topic be addressed in the Natural Resource Management Plan update.

2. Natural Area Protection – Many of the existing multi-use trails, and some of the proposed connections identified in the Bike Element pass through sensitive natural areas. E2C2 considers it critical that the environmental benefits of increasing the use of bikes for transportation be weighed against impacts to these critical areas. As such we encourage the County to:
  - a. Only propose additional multi-use paths where they can be demonstrated to provide vital and unique links within the network of safe, comfortable and convenient bike routes.
  - b. Carefully plan those projects to avoid critical elements including established native trees, unique environmental features, wetlands, and resource protection areas. We note with appreciation that staff has already modified an earlier version of the plan to avoid a potential impact to the Magnolia Bog along Four Mile Run.
  - c. We also note recent language added to the Plan which specifically commits DES to submit new and significantly modified trails for an Environmental Assessment early in the design process (Policy 10a).
3. Trail Widths – In order to encourage non-automobile transit, trails must be safe and adequately sized for a wide range of users. However, additional paved trail width adds to the County's growing impervious surface cover, and can have negative impacts to natural areas. Depending on the location, volume of traffic expected and purpose (major community route versus connector trails), various widths from 8 foot to 12 foot can be adequate. E2C2 encourages the County to carefully study each project and provide only the minimum amount of paving necessary for safe use. We support the added Policy 10b, which calls for a review of the multi-trail width standards. The Natural Resources Manager and applicable commissions should review any proposed increases that are in parks and natural areas.
4. Trail Maintenance –Maintenance around trails, including mowing, tree trimming, and removal can have similar negative impacts to natural areas. E2C2 encourages the relevant County departments (DPR, DES) to determine the minimum necessary maintenance trail buffer widths for each type and use of trail, and to allow the vegetation outside of that area to grow undisturbed. This should be discussed in the Natural Resources Management Plan update. E2C2 feels strongly that oversight and accountability should occur to ensure that buffers aren't enlarged beyond what is necessary.
5. Plan, Design and Maintain as Transportation Facilities – If the goal of reducing the use of single occupancy vehicles is to be realized, cycling must be seen by a wide variety of Arlington residents as a dependable, safe and comfortable form of transportation. As such, biking facilities should be planned, designed, constructed and maintained as transportation facilities. This includes prioritizing safety, accommodating multi-modal use, and providing consistent maintenance.

Finally, we would like to commend DES staff for completing this process and developing this update with no assistance from outside consultants. Though the Board of Supervisors and County leadership failed to appropriate funding to support this critical effort, staff stepped up and took on this task in addition to their regular assignments. It is a true testament to the dedication and commitment of the staff to the County and the future of its transportation and environment.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "K Michael Hanna". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Mike Hanna, Chair  
Environment and Energy Conservation Commission