

Action Committee for Transit
Questionnaire for Candidates for County Council, District 4

1) How do we transform the auto-oriented suburbs of District 4 into liveable and walkable communities?

I strongly endorse the recommendations of the Montgomery County Sustainability Working Group, including seeking an aspirational 80% reduction of carbon emissions in the coming years. To me, smart growth will be the key to reducing greenhouse gas emissions, since land use is one of the key policy areas the County Council is most easily able to influence. Reducing our collective carbon footprint will be increasingly difficult in the future, if we do not manage where people live and work and how they travel around the region. As a councilmember, I will be a strong advocate for environmentally sound land-use decisions that promote transit over road construction and transit-oriented development over sprawl. This will be a first step toward pulling people out of cars and into mass transit, while channeling residents into walkable, transit-accessible communities and away from our auto-dependent lifestyles.

This is not just an environmental issue, though. Creating more walkable communities will also mean sidewalk improvements, pedestrian safety measures, bike lanes and urban greenspace -- plus beautiful streetscapes and other amenities for residents. It is not difficult to realize that District 4 has witnessed the least amount of this type of redevelopment in perhaps all of Montgomery County. My community contains a series of strip malls that require residents to drive from place to place within District 4, and more often than not, to drive outside of District 4 for many needs.

As TIME magazine recently wrote in an article about ways to combat climate change: “in auto-dependent suburbs that were built without a traditional center, shopping malls offer the chance to create downtowns without destroying existing infrastructure, by recycling what’s known as underperforming asphalt. ‘All of these projects are developer-driven, because the market wants them,’ says Ellen Dunham-Jones, a co-author of the new book *Retrofitting Suburbia*.” District 4 fits that profile exactly. With what we know about the environmental and public health consequences of this type of lifestyle, we can no longer afford to sit idly by.

2) Do you support building the light rail Inner Purple Line from Bethesda to New Carrollton, as recommended by County Executive Leggett and the County Council?

The Purple Line is one of my top transportation priorities – and my support for the light rail project is more than just rhetoric. I am one of the only candidates who testified in favor of light rail at the Purple Line hearings last year. For me, the project is the model for how to structure smart growth development in a way to provide commuter relief, create jobs, and reduce our carbon footprint. I will always place transit projects above new road construction when prioritizing transportation funding. We need to find options that will connect the eastern part of the county with the metro system, while minimizing

any environmental impact on the surrounding communities. The Purple Line will do just that.

Unfortunately, in order to achieve many of our smart growth objectives, members of our community must make some sacrifices. The Capital Crescent Trail, though originally intended to be used primarily as a railway, is now a beloved part of Montgomery County. Tunneling the Purple Line underground, while an attractive proposal, would dramatically increase the project's cost, rendering it ineligible for federal New Starts funding. Essentially, the Purple Line, which will take 20,000 cars off the road, will never be built if it is tunneled underground. Sometimes the greater good must override other valid considerations. The Purple Line will reduce our carbon footprint and provide a means of attracting development away from the Ag Reserve and green spaces. Moreover, by constructing the Purple Line, many more trees in sprawl-regions will be saved from clear-cutting, than the number that would be cut along the Capital Crescent Trail.

3) All bridges over US 29 have been designed so that light rail could run in the median of the highway. There are several possible routes for a connection from White Oak to the Red Line or Purple Line. Would you support detailed study of running a light rail line that connects White Oak to the Metro system and then runs in the median of US 29 to Burtonsville, as a future project after the Purple Line and Corridor Cities Transitway?

The residents of District 4, who are majority-minority and less affluent than in western Montgomery County, have not received their fair share of mass transit investment from the state and county in the past, resulting today in one of the most auto-dependent populations in the region. The direct result of this has been longer commutes, more bus/metro transfers, more traffic, and more carbon emissions for and from my residents. The indirect result has been the marked absence of business investment in District 4, no walkable communities or sidewalk improvements, no bike lanes or streetscapes, and no central business district. In short, without transit in District 4, there is no opportunity for transit-oriented development or smart growth.

For these reasons I would be the strongest, proactive voice for a light rail connection from the Purple Line to White Oak and Burtonsville.

4) What should the county do to increase transit ridership?

Montgomery County must remain diligent in working with our state and federal officials in channeling our limited transportation dollars toward transit. The best way to increase ridership, therefore, is to simply ensure we build more transit. There is great demand for mass transit, and the *Washington Post* recently noted that transit ridership, especially on light rail systems, is currently at record highs.

Additionally, given our current budget crisis, I would attempt to increase transit ridership by preserving, as much as possible, current Ride On and transit routes. Unfortunately, some of these are being slashed, but many of our most transit-dependent populations rely

on them to get to work. I would also work to protect funding for employer-sponsored transit subsidies and other existing ride-share programs.

Given our budget crisis, we must also explore public-private partnerships to encourage a greener Montgomery. This may range from simple things like working with Zipcar and Clear Channel's bike-share program to expand into more areas of Montgomery County, as well as more complicated initiatives like seeking private financing or investment in transit projects from developers seeking to build transit-oriented development.

5) County master plans have stated a policy of focusing development around mass transit stations. Much development has occurred that has poor transit access, yet the county's planning also deserves much of the credit for the emergence of Bethesda and the revival of Silver Spring as centers of activity.

A) What smart growth projects near Metro stations do you support even though they have had opposition?

In District 4, I believe that smart growth/transit-oriented development at the Glenmont Metro station is an important policy goal despite some residents concerns. If we are going to relieve some of the congestion on our roads and reduce our carbon footprint, we need to have a forward-thinking approach towards transportation and land-use policies that get people out of cars and into mass transit as much as possible.

As I noted last year, the State's agreement to fully fund the Georgia Avenue/Randolph Road interchange is a huge accomplishment and will relieve pressure at a critical County intersection, however it should be noted that grade separated interchanges in future smart growth areas will have an impact on pedestrian and bicyclist mobility, which are both critical to successful smart growth areas. In addition, the County needs to re-visit parking ratios for development projects within walking distance to Metro stations. This will be particularly important in areas such as Glenmont where there is not a parking district.

I am tentatively supportive of proposed smart growth projects near the White Flint and Silver Spring stations, though would need to study the amount of affordable housing and traffic impacts of the proposed projects before coming to a final conclusion. I would also want to hear more about residents concerns to see if there would be any other impacts that need to be mitigated.

B) Do you support a requirement that developments described as "transit-oriented," such as the proposed Germantown and Gaithersburg West master plans, may only be constructed after rail transit access is built?

I would need to study the plans and impacts for these projects in detail, but without the master planning and public input processes being complete for these projects, I will tentatively say that I do not believe construction on proposed transit-oriented development projects should begin unless there is a clear, predictable timeline for creation of rail transit access. Smart growth arguments should never be used as a tool for

developers to create “un-smart growth.” Nevertheless, as a general matter, I do not necessarily believe that means that construction can never begin on a project unless transit already exists, rather I think we must know when the transit will be built and whether we can count on the existence of adequate funding to ensure the proposed transit will actually materialize. In certain instances, where the smart growth benefits are strong, and where transit is on its way, I would be open to compromises, as discussed below.

First, funds for smart growth projects must never be later diverted to roads instead of transit, and I will work diligently with state and federal officials to monitor such appropriations. Where developments are proposed along future transitways, we should never require highway construction in the planning process as an alternative to requiring transit construction. Obviously, smart growth construction should not be completed unless we know exactly how long the gap in time would be and what the traffic impacts would be in the intervening period. We never want to be in a bait-and-switch position where a smart growth development is proposed, but the transit never materializes, resulting in sprawl. Should the CCT not be built at all, or not be built along Germantown’s hypothetical alignment, the proposal would, at first blush, potentially fall in this category. Any smart growth plans, must therefore contain accountability for claims made about transit access.

The reason why I qualify my statement to say I am unable to say construction can never begin until transit access is constructed, is that there may be some instances where we know when transit will be built and when smart growth development might be created. That’s why I think these projects need to be looked at on a case-by-case basis and through a lens of someone committed to smart growth and reduction in auto-use. As an example, if the Purple Line funding moves forward, there may be a predictable schedule for construction of stations. This would potentially allow transit-oriented development to proceed along a schedule designed to coincide with the opening of stations. Additionally, I would be open to considering public-private partnerships with the state, county, developers and residents in smart-growth zones to create temporary modes of transit and traffic mitigation (such as shuttle service or temporary Ride On or bus rapid transit routes), should there be a predictable lag between development and guaranteed transit access.

If such a compromise ever needs to be reached, I would be strongly in favor of putting a cap on the number of years that can exist between completion of transit-oriented development and completion of transit access. Additionally, if need be, I would also favor requiring that a percentage of transit construction funds be in place before allowing transit-oriented development to be built.

My commitment to smart growth over sprawl will be of utmost importance to me as a member of the County Council, so you can rest assured that I will always view projects from this lens.

5) Do you believe that the decision by Governors Ehrlich and O'Malley to build the Intercounty Connector was wise or unwise?

As I stated last year, if I had been on the Council during its vote on the ICC, I would have opposed its construction. The \$3.2 billion cost would have been better put to transit. The ICC cuts aggressively through District 4 and is an example of how its communities of color and working families have received the problems from Montgomery County's growth (ie: traffic and unaffordable housing) without any of the benefits (ie: amenities, beautification, and retail). However, now that the road has received full funding, construction has begun, and the initial lawsuits were unable to stop the process, I am committed to ensuring that construction complies with and exceeds with the agreed upon mitigation measures to protect the adjacent watersheds, forests, and their habitat.

If efforts to defund the ICC prove successful, and the funds could be diverted to transit, I would revisit this issue. I say this because, in our rapidly deteriorating economy and growing climate crisis, I think that we need to focus our efforts on the projects that can bring us together, rather than divide us. Smart growth and transit projects provide exactly that opportunity, and in the past I have felt that a disproportionate amount of effort has gone into fighting an ICC already under construction, as opposed to transit alternatives that are harder to rally support for.

Name of Candidate: Nancy Navarro

Signature: 

Date: 3/24/09

Please return by March 24, 2009, to Action Committee for Transit, P. O. Box 7074, Silver Spring, MD 20907.