

Press Release
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Transportation Tests in Montgomery Growth Policy Could Make Traffic and Pollution Worse Groups Say. Groups Urge Development Tests That Favor Transit-Oriented Development, Not More Road Lanes and Traffic

The Montgomery County Council is expected to take a straw poll on a new growth policy on Tuesday, October 30, with final votes later in November. Montgomery County environmental and transit advocates expressed concern today that proposed transportation tests for development would either push growth away from transit station areas, or would result in major road widenings – both of which would only generate more traffic and leave people with fewer options about how to get around. The groups' alternative measures support transit-oriented development, that helps reduce traffic and air pollution emissions.

"The experience of fifty years and studies by the National Science Foundation prove that road expansion will only generate more traffic," said Cheryl Cort, policy director of the Coalition for Smarter Growth. "The transportation test for new development being considered by the Council should focus on directing future development to Metro station areas and improving transit service, walking and bicycling in urban areas, towns and transit corridors."

Action Committee for Transit Vice President Ben Ross agreed, "It's a mistake to focus on road building as the answer to congestion – we'll only get more traffic. We can take cars off the road by providing better transit, and offering mixed use places that make walking and bicycling real options for many trips."

"A wealth of experience from Arlington County's Rosslyn-Ballston Metro Corridor shows 30 million square feet of development has been added with virtually no increase in traffic," said Cort. "Transit-oriented development works."

The Local Area Transportation Review (LATR) and the Policy Area Mobility Review (PAMR) being discussed by the County threaten to result in road expansions or costly requirements that amount to a de facto moratorium around Metro station areas.

Instead, the groups urge the Council to support transit-oriented development by improving transit service, parking management, bicycle/pedestrian facilities, and incentives that would maximize alternatives to driving alone.

"Transit-oriented development is the key to building a sustainable future for the County's residents and workers," Cort said.

"Building bigger and bigger roads, and undermining transit would mean that people would end up driving alone more for work and daily errands," said Cort. "We need to design great places around Metro stations and provide enhanced bus service, bicycle lanes, carpool incentives, transit passes, better sidewalk connections, and improved street designs and operations. All this will reduce driving trips and increase the value and interest in living near transit."

The groups urged the County Council to base its growth management policy on achieving reductions in the total number and length of auto trips generated by new developments, instead of requiring more traffic lanes on nearby roads, which tend to fill up almost as quickly as they are built. Specifically, the groups called for:

- 1) An incentive structure that directs development toward Metro stations and discourages scattered, auto-dependent development in greenfields.
- 2) A regional traffic test that measures the "vehicle miles traveled" ("VMT") induced by new development and favors those developments that induce the lowest VMT per capita.
- 3) A local traffic test that measures the vehicle trips induced by new development and favors those developments that minimize the total number of daily vehicle trips per capita.
- 4) Parking policies that include cost- and demand-based pricing, separate costs for parking and homes or offices; and sharing of spaces between uses, so that fewer parking spaces are needed in new buildings near Metro stations and the number of new parking spaces can be limited to what is really needed. Too much free or cheap parking is a major traffic attractor said the groups.

Without this approach, the groups say the ironic result of the new growth policy could be to favor scattered development that consumes more land and requires more and longer car trips, and in the end makes traffic congestion worse rather than better.