

Analysis of North-South Alignment Safety/Trail Experience Impacts
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1. Which alignment will make it more difficult to mitigate the Purple Line's impacts on safety and the trail user experience?

Space, not alignment, is the biggest issue facing the Town with regards to safety and trail user experience. This is not surprising since the original right of way was for a single freight railroad track and then set aside for a single-track light rail line. With the limited space available (32 to 66 feet, the narrowest in the 16-mile project), a single-track operation between Connecticut Avenue and Woodmont would resolve many safety issues. Placing the trail on the south side of the tracks is the safest alignment, and single track for one mile in this region is the safest option.

2. Describe the safety and trail user impacts of the State's proposed alignment.

A study conducted by Paul H. Reistrup concerning the Purple Line and alternative analysis cites two critical safety issues with regard to placing a trail next to a rail: the risk of derailment and the reaction time a pedestrian might have to an approaching train before one makes the decision to cross or wait for the train to pass. Siting an elevated trail to the south would give pedestrians, most of who cross from the Town, a higher vantage point from which to see and react to an approaching train. Students in particular, would have more time to react in the morning crossing when it is dark outside. Other times of the day, mass crossings would take place in better light. If a train were to derail -- a foreseeable event if the record of the Metro serves as a guide -- the tight space between the trail and the two tracks would present perilous conditions for pedestrians and trail users.

With two tracks, it likely will be impossible to engineer a trail above the trains going through the tunnel to Woodmont Avenue. If there is a trail through the tunnel, locating the trail on the south side would let more residents walk into Bethesda without crossing tracks. If a trail in the tunnel proves impossible, Montgomery County's promise to citizens for a trail will be broken. Trail users would be forced to cross Wisconsin Avenue at one of the most dangerous intersections in Montgomery County.

3. What, if anything, should the Town ask for in regard to these impacts at this point in the planning process?

In the interest of safety for Town residents, high school students walking to and from school, and other trail users, a single track on the north side provides the greatest margin of safety. To date MAG has seen no demonstration, drawing or depiction of the rail and the trail going through the tunnel to Woodmont. Given the relatively low ceilings and narrow passage way, it does not appear possible to design an acceptable safe trail through the tunnel without some reasonable compromise. If the County intends to honor its promise to have both a rail and a trail, then it should be designed to be safe and user friendly. **The Town should urge the County and State to reconsider the single track option for the last mile of the route in the critical interest of safety.**