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Testimony On Behalf of the Town of Chevy Chase

Presented by Mary Anne Hoffman, Chair

Town of Chevy Chase Purple Line Mitigation Advisory Group

To the Montgomery County Council Regarding the Purple Line Functional Master Plan

June 29, 2010

I am Mary Anne Hoffman, Chair of the Town of Chevy Chase's Purple Line Mitigation Advisory Group, a committee of Town residents who are working with the State and County to mitigate the negative impacts of the Purple Line light rail project if it comes to our northern border. Town Councilmember Patricia Burda, who has met with most of you about the Purple Line, apologizes that she is unable to attend tonight's hearing.

We hope that the Council appreciates that the Right of Way adjacent to the Town is particularly challenging and problematic. Trains will run at 45 mph within feet of backyards and actual homes, while all streets around us have slower speed limits. Our children will be crossing the tracks at-grade with trains approaching at those speeds, and the Capital Crescent Trail, a beloved natural recreational park, will be altered into a treeless, sun-parched, narrow, hardscaped pathway – if the County has the money to do even that.

The County Council is now contemplating changes to the Purple Line Functional Master Plan that in essence breaks a promise with the community. In anticipating transit on this Right of Way, the original Master Plan specifically recommended single tracking because it deemed the hiker/biker trail to be an equally critical use of the Right of Way and recognized the safety and quality issues associated with double tracking. The original Master Plan also sought to "ensure that existing trees along the trolley/trail route are preserved wherever possible and that replacement of trees is of a sufficient quantity and quality to preserve and enhance the environment." This will be difficult if not impossible in the 66-foot Right of Way along the Town's northern border. The original Master Plan recommended placing the trail on the south side closer to residential properties and called for a bridge to cross over the tracks at Lynn Drive. And, finally, the trolley was to run several times a day, not every six minutes as now

planned. Many who have sought to vilify us have said, "Well, people bought property knowing a train was coming – so they have no right to complain." Most people along this Right of Way bought with the understanding the County laid out in that original Master Plan.

While we appreciate the time the County planning staff and State MTA representatives have spent with us, we still have serious reservations about the proposed changes. I have attached to this testimony our former submissions to the Planning Board, and many of our concerns as outlined in those documents still stand regarding the alignment of the Trail in relation to the tracks, safety of the at-grade crossing at Lynn Drive, width of the trail in the 66-foot Right of Way, and the Trail's passage through the Wisconsin Avenue tunnel. I would respectfully ask that you take the time to re-read those documents. And I would remind you that the Town of Chevy Chase is not alone in disagreeing with the Governor's locally preferred alternative. During the public comment period over 1,200 people and more than a dozen community groups from our area wrote in or testified to the State that light rail on the Trail is unacceptable. In addition, 18,000 Trail users signed a petition to tell the Governor how much they value saving this important urban park – particularly in light of anticipated increased development in the down-county area. Density, the County's vaunted new growth emphasis, simply must be balanced by open green space.

So I trust we've been clear: residents of the Town and other neighboring communities still continue to prefer a Trail on the south side of the tracks. However, if the County Council decides to go ahead and recommend that the tracks be placed on the south (and the Trail on the north), a number of mitigation measures will be even more critically needed. For instance:

- A safe Lynn Drive at-grade crossing to the Trail is imperative.
- Close coordination with the Town and other neighboring communities on the hardscaping and landscaping, including specimen tree preservation in residential yards adjacent to the Trail and in the rail Right of Way, should begin early in the engineering process.
- Safety, noise and year-round privacy issues must be carefully thought through if the tracks are located to the south, as trains will pass within feet of some homes.
- Safety, noise and privacy will be equally important where the Trail will be elevated above the fence line of residences closer to the Wisconsin Avenue tunnel.

We trust that in your quest to provide an east-west transit line between Bethesda and New Carrollton, that you will not sacrifice the quality of life of thousands of trail users and hundreds of homeowners in the process.

In closing, I would respectfully submit that we are not whiners, and we are not obstructionists. We have legitimate concerns and will experience very real, negative impacts from the project. And, we have every right to expect that you – our local elected officials – will fight to protect our community's interests. Thank you.