

**Greater Olney Civic Association**  
*Transportation Committee – Bikeways and Pedestrian Subcommittee*

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**STATEMENT OF PURPOSE AND NEED:  
BOWIE MILL ROAD BIKE LANES**

*April 5, 2015*

**Background:**

The Greater Olney Civic Association (GOCA) Transportation Committee has chartered a *Bikeways and Pedestrian Subcommittee* to study and recommend improvements to pedestrian and bikeway access throughout Olney and the surrounding area. This Subcommittee, composed of five members of the Olney community, has identified a critical need to complete a proposed bikeway along Bowie Mill Road, located in Olney's southwestern quadrant.

**Purpose:**

The purpose of this statement is to recommend that the Greater Olney Civic Association formally endorse and request completion of Class 2 bike lanes along the length of both sides of Bowie Mill Road.

The Subcommittee believes that, while any and all available infrastructure improvements to the region's bikeway system is highly desirable, the Bowie Mill Road corridor presents a unique and well-timed opportunity to complete a critical missing link between Olney, local mass transit, and also link to the Rock Creek Hiker/Biker Trail. The Bowie Mill Road bike lanes are a logical extension of the pending bike path construction along Needwood Road from the area near the Shady Grove Metrorail station to the Intercounty Connector, and Magruder High School.

In support of this recommendation, the Subcommittee recognizes:

- Olney contains numerous bike lanes and shared use paths that connect areas within our boundaries, however, the community lacks any substantial bike lane and bike path connections to the regional county bike trail system;
- Olney's proximity to regional bikeway systems, such as the Intercounty Connector bike path, and the future Needwood Road bike path, provide an excellent opportunity to complete a connection from Olney to the surrounding area that is both practical, and well-defined in scope;
- GOCA's Transportation Committee has determined via local survey that Bowie Mill Road is a heavily-traveled corridor, providing a critical link from Olney Town Center and surrounding neighborhoods to destinations such as Sequoyah Elementary School, Magruder High School, Lake Needwood, and the Shady Grove Metrorail station;
- Olney residents have voiced a specific desire for bike lanes along Bowie Mill Road, citing the dangerous conditions for bicyclists currently using the road (*e.g.*, blind curves, no shoulders, and a 40 mile per hour speed limit);
- Importantly, Montgomery County has identified Bowie Mill Road for further development with bike lanes, as part of a larger, regional Bikeways Master Plan

The Subcommittee recognizes that completion of bike lanes alongside Bowie Mill Road will require additional safety measures and improvements, to ensure that bicyclists can safely traverse Bowie Mill Road. These additional recommendations are discussed in further detail below.

**Countywide Bikeways Functional Master Plan:**

On February 1, 2005, Montgomery County adopted a draft for the Countywide Bikeways Functional Master Plan, a comprehensive amendment to the 1978 Master Plan of Highways (Resolution No. 15-880). The Plan formally recognized bicycling as one of the most “important,” “efficient” and “cost effective” methods of transportation, providing individuals with access to mobility, without regard to economic status. The Plan recognized, however, that it would be impossible for the County to evaluate the specific need for every mile of proposed bike path. Instead, the County relies on feedback from the residents of the various communities throughout the County to propose recommendations and request implementation.

**Status of Bowie Mill Road:**

Bowie Mill Road spans a distance of approximately 3.3 miles, between the intersections of Muncaster Mill Road to the southwest, and Olney-Laytonsville Road (Maryland Route 108) to the northeast.

At present, Bowie Mill Road permits one lane of vehicular traffic in each direction, separated by a double-yellow line. The road is characterized by moderate hills, blind turns, missing or incomplete segments of sidewalks or shoulders, and limited visibility, making bicycling both dangerous to the rider and drivers. Where certain segments of Bowie Mill Road have sidewalks, these sidewalk segments are incomplete, and comprise less than one-third of the length of the road from end-to-end.

Bowie Mill Road is currently designated on the Plan (“BL-20”) for development with On-Road (Class 2) Bike Lanes. As set forth in the Plan, Class 2 Bike Lanes are generally designed with the following characteristics:

- 4’ to 6’ marked lane
- Delineated by 6” wide solid white line to separate it from motor vehicle travel lanes
- Identified by pavement markings (bike logo or bike lettering with arrow); and
- Designed and constructed to American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) and Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD) standards, including appropriate informational, warning, and regulatory signs

The Subcommittee agrees that a Class 2 bike lane designation is appropriate for Bowie Mill Road, and strongly endorses this recommendation.

**Connectivity with Regional Bikeway System:**

Olney is centrally located within Montgomery County and is fortunate to have separated (Class 3) bike lanes traversing its boundaries from east to west, along Route 108. However, Olney lacks any substantive connection to regional bike trails, including the partially-completed trail along the Intercounty Connector, and the trail along Needwood Road currently in design. Essentially, Olney bicyclists are currently restricted to travel on completed routes within Olney’s boundaries.

The Subcommittee has identified Bowie Mill Road as a significant and unique opportunity to improve connectivity with the region, because this particular segment would provide access to both regional trails discussed in the paragraph above. Specifically, if completed, the Bowie Mill Road bike trail would enable Olney residents to immediately connect to points such as:

- Sequoyah Elementary School
- Magruder High School
- Points east and west via the Intercounty Connector Bike Trail
- Needwood Mansion and Shady Grove Metrorail Station via the Needwood Road Bike Trail
- Lake Needwood and the Rock Creek Hiker/Biker Trail

**Value to the Community:**

In an informal survey conducted by GOCA's Transportation Committee in November 2014, the Committee identified that an overwhelming majority of Olney's residents (84%) drive to work. For those residents that work outside the home, more than half (56%) commute to points for which the Bowie Mill bike lanes would improve connectivity, and immediately reduce vehicular congestion.

For example, 39% of Olney residents commute to Rockville, Silver Spring or Bethesda. Completion of the Bowie Mill bike lanes would permit Olney residents to access all three points through existing or planned regional bike trail connections. Further, 19.8% of Olney residents commute to Washington, D.C. Of this group, more than half use Metrorail. Completion of the Bowie Mill bike trail, in conjunction with the Needwood Road trail, would provide immediate access to the Shady Grove Metrorail station. Notably, parking for bicyclists at the Metrorail station is free, while drivers currently pay in excess of \$5 per day to park. Year-round bicyclists could potentially realize a cost savings in excess of \$1,000 per year.

Informal observations also demonstrate that the completion of the Bowie Mill bike lanes would improve local traffic congestion on commuter routes during peak hours. For example, many Olney residents have observed significant traffic back-ups and delays at the intersection of Bowie Mill Road and Muncaster Mill Road immediately prior to, and following, school hours. Completion of the Bowie Mill Road bike lanes would permit a significant number of high school students that currently drive to and from Magruder High School to bike instead.

The benefits of expanded access to community trails are well-documented. Apart from the obvious health and wellness benefits, the overall health of the community, improving livability in the county by adding transportation options for its residents, having more commuters using bike paths supports County conservation and environmental efforts. Trails and bike lanes also provide access to historical landmarks, allowing residents to enjoy the outdoors while visiting culturally rich areas that identify Montgomery County as a unique destination (Sandy Spring Friends Meeting, Rachel Carson's home, Underground Railroad, Sandy Spring Museum, Historic Brookeville, etc.).

Finally, completion of the Bowie Mill Road bike lanes would permit residents of nearby neighborhoods to access Olney Town Center businesses without the need to drive, improving local commerce. Trail-based travel is a major economic driver in many small communities, like Olney. Completion of the Bowie Mill Road bike lanes would support local businesses.<sup>1,2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> [http://outdoorindustry.org/research/economicimpact.php?action=detail&research\\_id=167](http://outdoorindustry.org/research/economicimpact.php?action=detail&research_id=167)

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.rita.dot.gov/bts/sites/rita.dot.gov.bts/files/publications/special\\_reports\\_and\\_issue\\_briefs/special\\_report/2011\\_07\\_12/html/entire.html](http://www.rita.dot.gov/bts/sites/rita.dot.gov.bts/files/publications/special_reports_and_issue_briefs/special_report/2011_07_12/html/entire.html)

**Potential for Utilization:**

GOCA's Transportation Committee is aware that many Olney residents desire to use public transportation, but choose not to do so because of the limited frequency of service. For example, Montgomery County's Ride On Route 53 provides service from the Shady Grove and Glenmont Metrorail stations to Olney; however, this service only runs during peak hours, and only then, at half hour intervals. Metrobus routes run more frequently along major roadways (such as Georgia Avenue), but do not provide flexibility to commuters who would need to first reach designated pick-up points. Bicycling is a logical extension of Montgomery County's public transportation system, because it provides additional reliability and flexibility for commuters who wish to commute both point-to-point, or point-to-public transportation. In addition, thanks to previous investments by Montgomery County and surrounding jurisdictions in their public transportation infrastructure, most Metro and Ride On buses are equipped with bike racks. Improved bicycle access along the Bowie Mill Road corridor would result in increased use of existing public transportation options, including Ride On and Metrobus routes.

**Additional Consideration – Muncaster Mill Road:**

The Subcommittee recognizes that, upon completion of the Needwood Road bicycle lanes, there will be an additional need to ensure a safe, reliable method of connecting the proposed Bowie Mill Road bicycle lanes to the Needwood bicycle lanes, across Muncaster Mill Road. The Subcommittee understands that this important safety consideration will be addressed as part of the North Branch Trail project (M-NCPPC P871541, last modified 4/21/14), as stated: "The second segment connects the Route 200 Bikeway to the future trail being built by the developer at the Preserve at Rock Creek." The Subcommittee welcomes the opportunity to participate alongside Montgomery County and the Preserve at Rock Creek community in evaluating appropriate connections between the two bike trails.

**Request for Action:**

In light of the considerations discussed above, the Pedestrian and Bikeways Subcommittee respectfully submits the following requests of the Greater Olney Civic Association:

1. A formal resolution endorsing this Statement of Purpose and Need;
2. A written request to the Montgomery County Executive, the Montgomery County Council, District 14 and District 19 Delegates, and the Governor of Maryland to begin commencement of a study to determine the most economic and efficient method for completing the Bowie Mill Road bike lanes, and provide a target date for completion;
3. A written request to the Montgomery County Bikeways Coordinator to determine if short-term safety measures (such as lane markings and improved signage) can be installed in the interim.

The Bikeways and Pedestrian Subcommittee appreciates your consideration, and we welcome the opportunity to assist GOCA, regional leaders, and the County in implementing this project request as expeditiously as possible.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of the Subcommittee,



Daniel C. Rubenstein, Chair