



January 23, 2025

**Comments to Montgomery County Planning Board  
Position: Support keeping M-83 in the County Master Plan of Highways & Transitway (MPOHT)**

Submitted by: Paula Ross, President & CEO, Gaithersburg-Germantown Chamber of Commerce

The Gaithersburg-Germantown Chamber of Commerce (GGCC) represents over 450 businesses along the upper I-270 corridor. I offer the following comments regarding M-83, and the proposal to remove M-83 from the Master Plan of Highways & Transitways (MPOHT), on behalf of our membership.

The GGCC is opposed to removing M-83 from the Master Plan for several reasons, including:

1. M-83 is a key element of the county's planned transportation network; removal of this road would raise significant equity issues for the communities on the east side of I-270.
2. M-83 provides direct connection, in Clarksburg, from Snowden Farm Parkway to Shady Grove Metro and ICC – the only viable option to improve mobility and access to jobs.
3. M-83 reduces congestion on I-270 between Montgomery Village Avenue and Ridge Road.
4. BRT is not an alternative to M-83, it is a complement and needs important adjustments to be successful in serving Upcounty residents and businesses.
5. M-83 will be an important connection to the Lakeforest Mall redevelopment project, its new retail centers and community amenities.
6. Removal of M-83 from the master plan at the request of a small, but vocal minority is short-sighted and ignores the needs of current and future Upcounty residents and businesses.

**M-83 is a key element of the county's planned transportation network; removal of this road would raise significant equity issues for the communities on the east side of I-270.**

There has been no movement on M-83 for several years under the current administration, and there has not been funding for the road's development. Residents who have purchased homes, and developers who have invested in the Upcounty, committed to these opportunities with the assurance of certain infrastructure, including M-83's development. M-83 was the basis for the density that was approved and constructed in Damascus, Clarksburg, Germantown,

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Montgomery Village, and other areas east of I-270, and it was confirmed in the 1994 Clarksburg Master Plan.

The western arterial to I-270, Great Seneca Highway, was completed long ago, facilitating improved mobility and supporting award-winning smart growth developments like Kentlands and Lakelands (neither of which would exist without it), along with robust bioscience-led employment growth. Great Seneca Highway has been a huge benefit for the relatively affluent western suburbs in the I-270 corridor. It also successfully avoided, minimized, and/or mitigated adverse environmental impacts. The result: A major planning success for the western side of the corridor, but no progress whatsoever on the east side.

The successful Great Seneca Highway development connects key services - the hospital and Universities at Shady Grove in particular – with retail areas, bioscience jobs, and key residential developments in Gaithersburg and Germantown on the west side of the I-270 corridor. The diverse, working-class communities on the east side of I-270 from Derwood to Clarksburg have been waiting – often in awful traffic congestion - for THEIR promised connections. The decades of delay in building M-83 have resulted in lack of mobility, lack of employment growth, and lower property values on the east side of the corridor.

**M-83 provides direct connection, in Clarksburg, from Snowden Farm Parkway to Shady Grove Metro and ICC – the only viable option to improve mobility and access to jobs.**

The Gaithersburg Germantown Chamber of Commerce SUPPORTS a modification of the scope of MPOHT to include the Mid County Highway Extension. The Chamber supports assurance of a good and efficient parkway type of road link from Clarksburg to link in with the current terminus of the Mid County Highway on Montgomery Village Rd., and an extension, as indicated on the plan, of the southern section to link M-83 to the ICC.

This will be the most robust expansion of the eastern arterial allowing for movement from the northern regions of the east side of the County to the ICC and allow free flow of traffic from east or west on the ICC, to the Metro, and I-270.

This traffic mover will facilitate the final large expansion, and the best method to fully develop potential commercial/residential sites of the County as envisioned in the original plan from 1967. This will provide jobs through commercial development, and include affordable housing with residential development. This is the last of the available areas for larger scale development.

It is important to move forward in making the eastern arterial a reality to move people and goods in the expanding sections of the Upcounty as planned in 1967.

Failure to complete the promised infrastructure short changes good growth, jobs, and affordable housing. This is an economic impact.

**M-83 reduces congestion on I-270 between Montgomery Village Avenue and Ridge Road.**

Consider the promises that were made to communities like Clarksburg. 46,000+ residents now live there, depending on a roadway network that was designed for 6,000 residents. There are no viable or realistic transit solutions for low-density suburban communities like this where well

over 90% of daily trips are – and will always be – made on our road network. The reality is, residents of Clarksburg and surrounding communities were promised M-83 and there is no “plan B” that meets their needs. These cars are currently sitting on I-270 because there are no alternatives. M-83 is that promised alternative to I-270.

**BRT is not an alternative to M-83, it is a complement and needs important adjustments to be successful in serving Upcounty residents and businesses.**

Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) has been studied for years and found not to provide the mobility benefits of M-83, nor does it provide a direct connection to the ICC, or divert any significant traffic off I-270, or reduce congestion delays on MD-355 or any of the most congested intersections in the corridor. There are also ongoing concerns about the viability of taking away existing travel lanes on the already congested MD-355 to convert to a bus-only lane, without providing an alternative route (such as Mid-County Highway) to relieve the pressure, and the nagging question of what to do with the one-lane sections of 355 nearing Clarksburg.

While we recognize that transit is a piece of the puzzle that will solve our overall County’s transportation needs in the future, it is imperative that the Upcounty communities are recognized as being very different than the Downcounty urban cores. The BRT plans need to include parking at the BRT stations. Our communities are not as dense as Downcounty; we are reliant on cars and roads to take children to school and daycare, to run errands, and to travel to jobs. Simply not building roads or parking areas will not cause our residents to take the bus, especially if they cannot leave their car at the bus station. It causes people to move away due to lack of mobility – taking tax dollars with them.

**M-83 will be an important connection to the Lakeforest redevelopment project, its new retail centers and community amenities.**

Prior traffic studies did not properly address the impact of the City of Gaithersburg’s new plans to develop the much higher density, mixed-use activity centers at Lakeforest Mall. When the various phases of this project come online in the upcoming years, where is all the new traffic going to go? Montgomery Village Avenue? Route MD-355, especially with one less travel lane each way than it has now due to BRT, is not a viable option. Adding some alternative capacity in the corridor (i.e. M-83) to disperse the travel demand that will be generated, is absolutely necessary. This was not part of the 2017 study and needs to be reexamined now that the City’s plans have progressed.

**Removal of M-83 from the master plan at the request of a small but vocal minority is short-sighted and ignores the needs of current and future Upcounty residents and businesses.**

Removal of M-83 from any master plans is no small thing, and should not be dictated by a small but vocal minority of residents whose daily lives, businesses and property values are disproportionately effected. Its removal is short-sighted and ill-advised, it would undermine the balance and integrity of the entire corridor’s transportation network, worsen the east-west economic divide in the corridor, and cause many more problems than it would solve from a transportation standpoint.

Looking at the positive developments and growth that occurred with the establishment of the western arterial, Great Seneca Highway, that led to solid development of the western side of the county, the **Gaithersburg-Germantown Chamber of Commerce recommends that the Planning Board strongly support M-83 as the long-planned and never-delivered eastern arterial that will ensure the Upcounty has the transportation infrastructure needed to support the County's economic future and residents' transportation needs.**