



WABA
WASHINGTON AREA
BICYCLIST ASSOCIATION

June 21, 2022

Re: Military Road Trail Feasibility Study

To Whom It May Concern:

We are writing on behalf of the Ward 3 Bicycle Advocates (W3BA), a group of Ward 3 residents who seek to make it safer for people of all ages to move around Ward 3 by bicycle, and the Washington Area Bicyclist Association (WABA) and its more than 7,000 members across the Washington metropolitan area. We share the belief that biking can and should be an equitable, safe, low-cost, time-saving, and sustainable way to navigate our cities for all residents.

We are thrilled that the National Park Service is studying the potential for a multimodal bike/pedestrian trail across Rock Creek Park adjacent to Military Road NW. There is currently no good east-west connection across Rock Creek Park for people who are walking or bicycling between Wise Road NW in the north and Tilden Street NW in the south.

We appreciate the degree of outreach that the National Park Service has done so far, including the recent public meeting. Overall, we are very supportive of the proposal that we have seen so far and urge the Park Service to proceed with the plans as quickly as possible.

We do have the following comments for the Park Service, and in some cases the District Department of Transportation, to consider as it moves to the next phase of the project:

1. Project Scope

The project as designed—a multi-use path adjacent to Military Road NW from Oregon Avenue NW to 16th Street NW—meets a critical need. However, the scope of the project should be expanded in the following ways:

- a. **East to 14th Street NW.** 16th Street NW is not a hospitable place for people who bicycle. Just one block to the east—14th Street NW—the city has installed a set of bike lanes that extend continuously for more than 4.5 miles. The project should not stop at 16th Street; rather, the Park Service should partner with the District Department of Transportation (DDOT) to continue the cycle track east to 14th Street NW.
- b. **North on Joyce Road NW.** The Park Service is missing a golden opportunity to add an additional safe route for pedestrians and bicyclists by not continuing the route north on Joyce Road until it intersects with 16th Street NW near

Rittenhouse Road NW. If at all possible, this addition should be studied and built in concurrence with the current project.

- c. **Western connections.** At this point in time, it is unclear where people using bicycles would go as they exited the new multi-use trail on the western side. Military Road has fast-moving traffic, with very narrow sidewalks; this is not an advisable route for bicyclists at this time. We encourage the Park Service to work with DDOT to develop connections and/or indicate the connections for people on bicycles after they exit the trail on the western side.

2. **Lighting**

There was no discussion of lighting the trail in the slides outlining the project. We recognize that the installation of lighting in a forested area can have adverse environmental impacts requiring proper consideration. However, people who are walking, running, or bicycling on the trail after dark will have a risk of serious injury if lights are not installed given the proximity of the trail to fast-moving vehicular traffic on Military Road. Given that the area is well-developed and trodden, and with dark sky-friendly lighting readily available, we believe that the addition of trail lighting would be minimally impactful to the natural environment and, on balance, well worth the investment.

3. **Joyce Road Crossings**

Having the multi-use trail cross Joyce Road twice is far from desirable, as it increases the risks of conflicts between motor vehicles, bicyclists and pedestrians. Our preference would be to keep the cycle track on the south side of Joyce Road for the entirety of the route, recognizing that such a layout may be impossible given the challenging topography of the site and require reconstructing and shifting the roadbed of Joyce Road slightly to the north.

We also recognize, though, that this would significantly increase the costs and environmental impacts of the project. As such and given the low traffic on Joyce Road at this time, we can support the proposed routing along the north side of Joyce Road east of Beach Drive and having the cycle track cross back over Joyce Road. However, should traffic conditions change—if Beach Drive is reopened to automobile traffic with a subsequent uptick in traffic along Joyce Road, for example—we may need to reconsider our support for these two crossings.

Regardless of traffic conditions and in order to ensure that people on foot and on bicycle are safe as they cross Joyce Road twice, we encourage the Park Service to use speed tables and/or other traffic-calming infrastructure to ensure that safe automobile speeds are maintained and that drivers are prepared for pedestrians and cyclists.

4. **Increase the distance from Military Road where possible**

The schematics indicate that in the western segment of the project, there will be, on average, a standard 5-foot buffer between Military Road and the multi-use trail. Given

how fast car traffic moves on that section of Military Road, we encourage you to consider increasing the width of the buffer wherever possible or consider using a barrier to ensure that cars do not endanger cyclists and pedestrians.

5. **Original Alignment is preferable to Alternative Alignment 1**

The original alignment separates the multi-use trail from Morrow Drive, which we think is advisable. We support bumping out the intersection to decrease the length of the crosswalk.

6. **Alternative Alignment 2 is preferable to the Original Alignment**

We feel that Alternative Alignment 2 has a number of advantages. This configuration better supports the concurrent or future extension of the multi-use trail along Joyce Road NW north of the intersection with Missouri Avenue NW (see earlier comments re: Project Scope). Additionally, drivers are conditioned to expect pedestrians and cyclists crossing the road near intersections. Given that Alternative 2 is closer to Missouri Avenue NW, this will help reduce the chance of conflicts. We support bumping out the road to reduce the length of the crosswalk and to slow vehicles.

7. **Missouri Avenue NW / 16th Street NW Intersection**

The end of the cycle track near Missouri Avenue NW and 16th Street NW looks to be exceedingly stressful for people on bicycle. Here the on-street cycle track along quiet Missouri Avenue NW quickly merges *back* onto a shared-use path now alongside the fast-moving traffic of Military Road NW, all happening at a particularly steep grade of ~10 degrees. We encourage you to harden, bump-out the curb, or otherwise protect the merging point and ensure sufficient width and separation/protection of the shared-use path through to the intersection at 16th Street NW. Ideally and as outlined in our first comment, the widened path can be continued across the busy 16th Street NW intersection—leading pedestrian intervals would be welcomed here given the volume of right-turning traffic—to 14th Street NW and its extensive cycle track.

This proposed multi-use trail will build upon and amplify the District of Columbia's and Rock Creek Park's amazing network of trails, a network that has seen a notable increase in use with the closure of Beach Drive NW to automobile traffic. We therefore strongly support both this proposal and the permanent prioritization of non-car users of Beach Drive NW so that people of all ages and abilities can enjoy Rock Creek Park as the national resource that it is, rather than as a highway.

Thank you very much for your consideration of these comments,

Josh Rising | Founder, Ward 3 Bicycle Advocates

Kalli Krumpos | Trails Coalition Manager, Washington Area Bicyclist Association