



**WABA**  
WASHINGTON AREA  
BICYCLIST ASSOCIATION

January 5, 2022

Re: Metropolitan Branch Trail: Blair Road to Piney Branch Road Design Comments

Dear Project Team:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the **Metropolitan Branch Trail: Blair Road to Piney Branch Road Design Survey**. We are very excited about this project as it helps address a major gap in the city's trail system and provides a key link in the bicycle and pedestrian transportation network.

WABA's top two priorities in need of your attention are on Segment 6 and Segment 5:

- On Segment 6: none of the proposed on-street facility types for Whittier or 4th St are sufficient to create a continuous and safe trail experience that is suitable for all ages and abilities. Instead, we propose a new multi-use trail on the south side of Whittier St (using park land and DDOT right of way) and a continuous 2-way protected bike lane along the east curb of 4th St. from Whittier to Cedar St (converting 4th one-way southbound and repurposing existing parking).
- On Segment 5: only alternative 3 delivers a manageable slope and a wider trail. The others are quite steep.

More detailed comments regarding each segment are listed in reverse numerical order (south to north) to highlight the importance of the longest segment in need of most attention.

#### **Segment 6 (Bair Rd to Cedar St)**

WABA supports branching the through-running trail from Blair Rd starting at Whittier St, then turning north on 4th St. NW. However, none of the proposed on-street facility types for Whittier or 4th St are sufficient to create a continuous and safe walking and biking trail experience that is suitable for all ages and abilities. Instead, we propose:

- A new multi-use trail on the south side of Whittier St (using park land and DDOT right of way),

- A continuous 2-way protected bike lane (PBL) along the east curb of 4th St. NW from Whittier to Cedar St (as proposed from Aspen to Cedar and by converting 4th one-way southbound plus repurposing east side vehicle parking between Aspen to Whittier), and
- A new traffic signal at Whittier St and Blair Rd to facilitate a safe trail crossing.

Why is a PBL is critical for 4th street? If the PBL is not continuous, southbound bicyclists must transition from the east side of the street to the general travel lane at a stop-controlled intersection (either Aspen or Butternut). This is not intuitive and drivers will not expect it. Furthermore, less confident riders will not feel safe navigating this transition. This would eliminate no more than 8-11 legal/safe parking spaces. All west side parking spaces would remain. This block has 5 homes on the east side and 2 have driveways for off-street parking. The safety and all-ages usability of a regional trail should be a priority versus residential car parking 1,000 feet from a Metro Station.

At the Cedar/Blair intersection, WABA supports alternative 1 which directs people on bikes to cross Cedar to the west of the pedestrian crosswalk. This locates potential bike and pedestrian conflicts on the widened north side sidewalk rather than the middle of the intersection, where additional conflicts are possible and the potential for injury is higher. If the north side travel lane removal is, for unforeseen traffic reasons, not possible, consider removing the south side travel/parking lane and narrowing the median island to find the needed road width. Widening the north side sidewalk should be a priority for improving the inadequate pedestrian spaces near the Metro and retail corridor.

#### **Segment 5 (343 Cedar Trail)**

WABA supports alternative 3 which provides a 12 ft trail and the gentlest slope behind 343 Cedar St. A 12' trail is preferable here because it will be a popular pedestrian path to the Metro and shops for residents. The additional width allows for more comfort near the tall retaining wall. Most importantly, the gentler 5% grade will be much easier to climb than the 8% grade proposed for alternatives 1 and 2.

#### **Segment 4 (Spring St)**

WABA supports alternative 2 with chokers and chicanes. As the vehicle parking and alley access for many Cedar St and Blair Rd buildings, Spring St sees more frequent vehicle use and is a tempting location for illegal parking. Chokers and chicanes will keep vehicle speeds low while discouraging illegal parking that may block sightlines and endanger more vulnerable trail users (like children). This design prioritizes safety for vulnerable road users and trail users while they walk and bike in the shared street.

#### **Segment 3 (Chestnut St)**

WABA supports the proposed street design. Vehicle traffic is for the few local addresses only, so a new speed bump and in-street sharrow markings should be sufficient. Additional MBT branded wayfinding signage would also be helpful and should be planned for.

**Segment 2 (Ramp to Chestnut St)**

WABA is supportive of either alternative 4 or 5. Though all five alternatives have similar slopes and are ADA compliant, the smoother turns of alt 4 and 5 will be easier to navigate by bike. Stairs create potential conflict points between walking and rolling users if they use the ramp simultaneously, but stairs also offer a more convenient path for pedestrians. WABA supports either alt 4 or 5, whichever is more popular with the public.

We also recommend that DDOT explore options and neighborhood interest for a small pocket park with benches at the top of the hill or partner with DC's Department of Parks and Recreation to explore a recreation use for this public space.

**Segment 1 (Piney Branch Rd)**

WABA supports Alternative 1 which constructs a new off-street multi-use trail on the south side of Piney Branch Road from the ramp to Eastern Ave. Alternative 2 (2-way protected bike lane) does not provide enough space for a comfortable 2-way protected bike lane and creates a complicated intersection at the bottom of the ramp that requires sharp turns without adequate space. Alternative 1, with appropriate wayfinding signage for southbound trail users, will avoid any confusion about where and how to cross Piney Branch Rd.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

*Stephanie Piperno*  
Stephanie Piperno

Trails Coalition Manager  
Washington Area Bicyclist Association