

Comments on Mandatory Referral #MR2025022

Piney Branch Road Bikeway, September 4, 2025



Silver Spring, MD 20901

Dear Chair and Members of the Planning Board,

I am a resident of the Long Branch neighborhood of Silver Spring and travel on Piney Branch Road every day, sometimes by driving and sometimes by walking. In the last year, I also spent several months going through the area using an electric mobility scooter. I am quite familiar with Piney Branch Road from the DC line to New Hampshire Avenue and I am particularly familiar with the area of Piney Branch between Sligo Creek Parkway and Flower Avenue.

My immediate neighborhood is bounded by Piney Branch Road, Flower Avenue, Wayne Avenue and Sligo Creek Parkway. It is an older neighborhood made up of an even mix of apartment buildings, townhouses and single-family homes. I appreciate that my home is close to many businesses and services, is well served by buses, and will have two Purple Line stops within four blocks of my house.

Despite these assets, Long Branch is not very comfortable for pedestrians, bicyclists or those using mobility devices. For that reason, I have been very interested in the plans for the Piney Branch bike improvements, as well as the plans for Flower Avenue bike lanes and modified sidewalks.

I am testifying before you today because the issue of pedestrian and bicycle safety and of the need for stormwater infrastructure improvements in my neighborhood will be part of my testimony on the East Silver Spring Communities Plan when it comes before you. I want you to start thinking about those issues now!

Regarding the Piney Branch Road Bike Plan, I have reviewed the staff report on this agenda item and agree with it. However, I would like to share with you a couple of aspects that were not highlighted in either the plan or the staff report.

First, my neighborhood has hills. The two-dimensional plan segments in the report do not show this. The long, steep hill up from Sligo Creek is the reason the Purple Line in my neighborhood is in a tunnel. Traveling from Flower Avenue to Sligo Creek Parkway on Piney Branch Road is very much downhill. This segment is wide and curved and is classified as a “boulevard.” Cars coming downhill from Flower Avenue pick up speed and pass around the frequent buses, particularly those making the tight right turn onto Manchester Road.

Due to the hill, curve and wide pavement width, it is ***absolutely unsafe*** to cross Piney Branch Road at Manchester Road to get to the bus stop on the southeast side. Because residents will not attempt to cross Piney Branch at Manchester, many of my neighbors walk up my street, Geren Road (which is steep and has no sidewalks), cross through Flower Avenue Urban Park to Flower Avenue and then go back to Piney Branch Road to reach the bus stops there.

Cars and buses find it very difficult to turn left from Manchester Road onto Piney Branch, and I don't believe I've ever seen a bicyclist try this turn.

I appreciate the plan's recommendation to install a crosswalk at Manchester on Piney Branch, but, as the plan reviewer noted, it will require a signal of some type to make the crossing safe. Striping alone will not work at this location! Additional improvements are needed to ensure this intersection can work safely for all users.

On a side note, I do not believe that any segment of Piney Branch Road should be classified as a Boulevard. Instead, there should be a more appropriate road classification adopted in the next master plan that provides for more

frequent protected crossings, better accessibility for business patrons and greater attention to pedestrian and bicycle comfort.

Second, there is little stormwater infrastructure in my neighborhood.

I understand that because the bike lane work will not go outside of existing curb lines, no stormwater requirements are triggered by this plan. However, with longer rain events due to climate change, and with the hills sloping down to Sligo Creek, the amount of water on the roadways is increasing and may affect these lanes. As an example, during the recent major rain event that dropped over 5” of rain in my neighborhood, soil from Flower Avenue Urban Park washed down Geren Road, onto Manchester, onto Piney Branch and then into Sligo Creek, where the creek then rose ten feet in 30 minutes.

The proposed bike lane medians are absolutely needed for safety, but will soil and debris collect in the bike lanes? The medians should be retained, but the lanes will need to be cleaned periodically. And, while I do not want this bikeway project slowed to install stormwater controls, the County must look at this neighborhood and schedule and make stormwater improvements.

Besides my additional comments on hills and stormwater infrastructure, I generally support the recommendations of the plan reviewer. The elements I particularly support are:

1. I urge the Planning Board to give great attention to the comfort of bicyclists and pedestrians through the entire length of the bike lane project. Crossing Piney Branch Road between Sligo Creek and New Hampshire Avenue is always difficult, even at signalized crosswalks – and there are long stretches without signalized crosswalks. Sidewalks are narrow and have few trees for shade. There are many bus stops without shelters. Overall, this area should be a prime area for walking, rolling, biking and using buses and the Purple Line. Good design of the bike lane project should help get us there.
2. There must be a signalized crossing at Manchester Road.

3. The plan reviewer calls attention to the right turn lane on the southwest corner at Flower Avenue and suggests that the turn lane be eliminated or altered to improve sight lines, particularly for drivers turning left onto Piney Branch Road from the business parking lot. I agree that the road configuration should be changed. However, I note that it is almost impossible to turn left from any business parking lot on Piney Branch Road, Flower Avenue or University Boulevard in Long Branch. Left turns are rarely attempted.
4. It is a good idea to install flex posts to help separate and protect the bike lanes in the portion of Piney Branch Road that includes the Purple Line.
5. I support the recommended 35 mph speed limit east of Carroll Avenue.
6. I do not have a position on the proposal to move the westbound bikeway to the curbside between University Boulevard and 200 feet east.

Thank you again for allowing me to share my testimony on the Mandatory Referral of the Piney Branch Road Bike Plan. I urge you to support the plan with the recommendations made by the plan reviewer.