



November 17, 2011

Share the Bethesda Tunnel - with single-track transit.

The Coalition for the Capital Crescent Trail (CCCT) is an all-volunteer organization that represents over 2000 trail supporters throughout the region. We have been advocating to complete and protect the Capital Crescent Trail as a high quality shared-use trail in the Georgetown Branch right-of-way since the railroad abandoned the corridor 25 years ago.

CCCT continues to take no position to support or oppose the Purple Line. But if the Purple Line is built, it must be built in such a way that the Trail will be preserved as a high quality trail. The Trail has become the region's most important shared use trail, with over 23,000 weekly trail uses counted at the Bethesda trailhead. The continuity and safety of the Trail through Bethesda is essential to preserving this irreplaceable resource.

The estimated cost of keeping the Trail in the tunnel on an overhead structure with the Purple Line has recently risen to \$40M. We recognize that this cost may simply be too high. But we cannot accept walking away from the promise that the Trail will remain in the tunnel before all reasonable ideas have been explored.

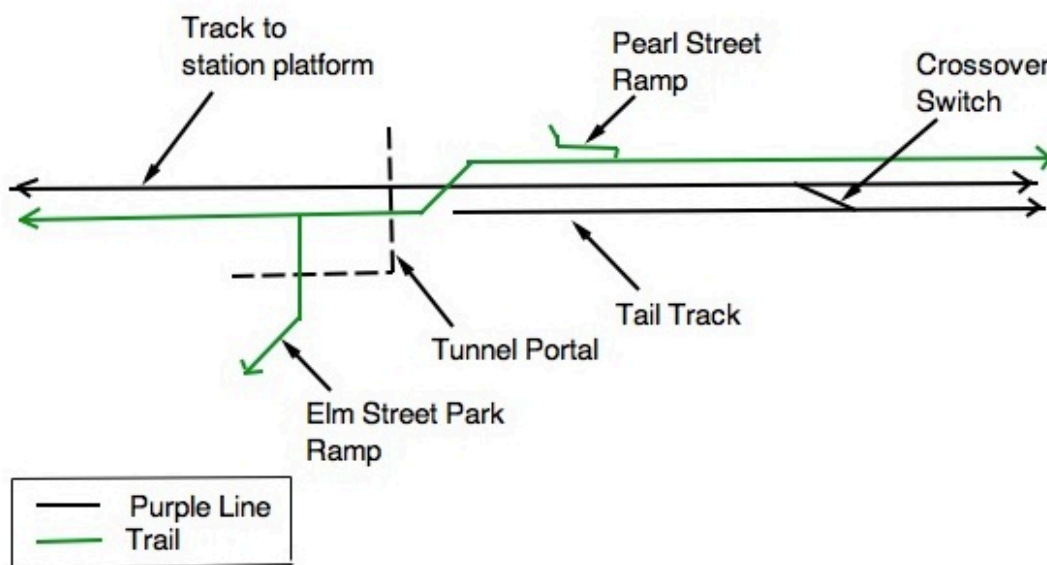
While the proposed alternative surface route along Bethesda streets could be much improved if the M-NCPPC staff recommendations were fully implemented, it would still fall short of having the continuity and safety essential to many of our Trail users. Many users are families with children, teens going to school, and inexperienced recreational users. The safety, and perceived safety, of the alternate route can never be as good as the tunnel route.

One idea that has great promise is to single-track the Purple Line in the tunnel. We believe this concept can provide a practical and low-cost means of keeping the Trail in the Bethesda Tunnel alongside the Purple Line while meeting the Purple Line operational requirements

A very short single-track section should be able to support the short transit headways required. We believe that if the single track section extends east only a few feet beyond the east end of the tunnel, then trains can reach the transit platform, board passengers, and clear a tunnel single-track section in much less than 6 minutes.

CCCT is aware that a single-track section from the Bethesda Tunnel to the Columbia Country Club has already been proposed and rejected as not meeting minimum headway requirements, and as compounding the problem of inadequate train storage space at Bethesda. But the previous proposal had an approximate 3500' single-track section from Pearl Street to the Country Club. This new concept would have a single-track section of approx. 1200' from the Bethesda station platform to Pearl Street. MTA determined that trains could only maintain a seven minute headway over the single-track distance of 3500'. This much shorter 1200' section should support a headway that is much shorter. This new concept can also provide a tail track in the area immediately east of the Bethesda Tunnel. This would enable a back-up train to be stored at Bethesda and can replace some of the Purple Line operational flexibility that will be lost by losing one of the tracks in the tunnel.

Schematic of Single-Track Concept



Single-track in the tunnel would allow the Trail to be a much better trail than it would be if on an overhead structure. It could go through the tunnel at the existing grade alongside the Purple Line track, could bring trail users directly to the Purple Line station platform from both the east and west, and would not need the tortuous switchback ramp proposed at Woodmont Plaza.

This concept deserves careful evaluation by MTA and Montgomery County DOT. If a careful analysis shows that the Purple Line operational impacts caused by single-track in the tunnel are modest, then single-track is the compromise we badly need so that transit and trail can successfully share the tunnel at reasonable cost and risk.