

Lake Roland Nature Council

From: Lake Roland Nature Council <lakeroland@lakeroland.org>
Sent: Tuesday, November 28, 2023 9:24 AM
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Subject: Lake Roland Nature Council NCR to JFT Feasibility Study Fromal Response

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To whom it may concern,

The Lake Roland Nature Council was present at the NCR to Jones Fall Trail meeting on November 15th, and our Executive Committee members that were not able to be present due to our concurrent annual meeting have reviewed both the County 2040 Bike and Pedestrian Master Plan as well as the DPWT JMT Feasibility NCR Extension Maps of Potential Alignments - Public Meeting 2 presentation materials.

Unfortunately, the DPWT JMT Feasibility presentation fails to take into account actual feedback provided by the Nature Council during a series of consultations with Daniel Paschall of the East Coast Greenway (his draft routes were reflected in the Public Meeting 1 presentation materials which included the Nature Council recommended route) and bicycle advocacy groups in Baltimore including two listed members of the Baltimore County Pedestrian & Bicycle Advisory Council, Elliott Plack and Sachin Hebbar (Advisory Council members that the Nature Council believes are advocating for the alignment outlined in the DPWT JMT Feasibility presentation), as well as the DPWT hosted outreach meeting at the Timonium public library March 22nd referred to as Public Meeting 1 and a June 22nd Webex meeting with the Nature Council.

In all instances, the Nature Council expressed concerns with respect to routing any such trail connectors through Lake Roland Park into the Ruxton Riderwood community along Roland Run via the Blue Trail in Lake Roland. These areas represent both significant and expanding flood plains and environmentally sensitive areas regarding habitat species that have returned to the park. We proposed an alternative routing which would have connected the JFT to Lake Roland Park, then through Lake Roland on the Red Trail and then onto Meadowood Park via a decommissioned railroad bed and then used existing bicycle/pedestrian lanes and low volume roads toward Timonium. This routing alignment leveraged an existing decommissioned railroad track bed, the Greenspring line. This alignment also leveraged existing parking options, options that do not exist along the feasibility alignment as it exits the park at the Blue Trail head.

To the best of our knowledge, no site visits were conducted to Lake Roland Park by the engineering consultant, nor was the Nature Council consulted with respect to the environmental sensitivities of the park during the feasibility study. A public statement that there is no “endangered species” per the Maryland Department of Environment as stated at the November 15th Public Meeting 2 is not sufficient relative to the species that actually exist in that location of the park today. The Nature Council believes the various routing options shown in the feasibility alignment as it pertains to Lake Roland reflect a lack of engagement and onsite analysis of the park, and as such, are not feasible options. In a separate Webex meeting on June 22nd with the Lake Roland Nature Council, the severe flooding that occurs on the Blue Trail that parallels the Jones Falls, a trail alignment that moves based on the flood driven movement of the Jones Falls riverbed was clearly outlined. Also referenced during the Webex meeting was the severity of flooding in the park downstream from the Circle Road bridge along the Roland Run tributary and is well known and documented by numerous sources, a recent news cast video of two individuals being separately rescued by a Baltimore County Fire Department Swiftwater Rescue team at the Circle Road Bridge, the bridge submerged, is [HERE](#).

During the Webex, a location for a grade transition ramp paralleling the light rail tracks south of the Red Trail crossing to achieve an ADA slope grade to the railroad crossing was referenced regarding the park peninsula and outlined as a yellow track in a satellite image provided. Rather than considering this option, the Feasibility Study proposes both a needlessly expensive and unsightly high bridge across the light rail tracks which will disturb a historic site that is part of a registered historic district on the west side of the tracks where the bridge lands, or a circuitous trail routing that is completely inappropriate regarding the location of an existing very active dog park called Paw Point. This option proposes a grade ramp but approaching from the north, an opposite and more impactful direction than what the Nature Council proposed. Again, all matters that would have been obvious onsite.

As this e-mail will be going to our elected officials that played a role in funding the feasibility study, actions on their part the Nature Council supported, we wanted to include the information that the Lake Roland Nature Council has reviewed and assembled to date including the Nature Councils supported alignment, information that was provided to DPWT and the JMT consultant. This information is housed on the Lake Roland Nature Council’s website.

- **Jones Falls Trail to NCR Trail Potential Alignments**

- **Lake Roland Nature Council Supported Alignment**

- [Lake Roland to Meadowood Park Trail](#)
- [JFT to NCR Trail LRNC Potential Alignment](#)
- [JFT – NCR Connectivity Proposal](#)
- [Lake Roland Light Rail Crossing Routes](#)
- [JFT to NCR LRNC Not Supported Route](#)

- **JFT to NCR Coalition Proposed Alignment**

- [JFT to NCR Coalition Potential Alignment](#)
- [JFT to NCR Coalition Presentation \(Power Point\)](#)
- [JFT to NCR Coalition Presentation \(PDF\)](#)
- [BCGA Agenda Including JFT to NCR Coalition Presentation](#)

- **Additional JFT to NCR Trail Information**

- [East Coast Greenway Lake Roland Current Alignment](#)
- [East Coast Greenway Lake Roland Potential Alignments](#)
- [\\$120,000 Grant to Evaluate NCR to JFT Connection](#)
- [Bill 61-22 \(Supplemental Appropriation\) NCR to Jones Falls Trail](#)
- [JMT Feasibility NCR Extension Maps of Potential Alignments-Public Meeting 1](#)
- [JMT Feasibility NCR Extension Maps of Potential Alignments-Public Meeting 2](#)
- [Linking Jones Falls and NCR trails- Sun Paper](#)
- [Linking Jones Falls to NCR Trails Study Funding – Sun Paper](#)
- [Jones Falls Trail Green Way 1](#)
- [Jones Falls Trail Green Way 2](#)

- [Jones Falls Trail Green Way 3](#)
- [Turning Baltimore's Trails Into a Network](#)
- [Map guides way on the Jones Falls Trail](#)
- [Jones Falls Trail Woodberry to Cylburn Connection](#)
- [2040 Baltimore County Bike and Pedestrian Master Plan](#)

In addition, the Nature Council feels it is in the best interest of both the project, and the public, to not restrict the number of questions that the public is allowed to ask at a public meeting as was intentionally done during the November 15th presentation meeting, a limit of three questions. For a study that was funded with \$125,000 in state funding and \$25,000 in county funding, to tell an audience of 65-70 people that only three questions would be taken/addressed regarding a work product that is going final in December of 2023 is in exceptionally poor form, something we as a council have never experienced in any other county run public input meeting before, let alone with DPWT. It gave the attendees the feeling that the meeting was more about getting the study over the "billing finish line". This is separate to the palpable frustration exhibited by those that raised their hand in time to be one of the lucky three regarding their individual concerns and those that were not as lucky.

As an observation, reading the room during the November 15th Public Meeting 2, there were obvious members of the public that had significant and meaningful questions as it pertains to how this feasibility alignment impacts their community, or their individual home for that matter, and they were not able to be heard. As it pertains to the role of the Nature Council, the council's role is limited to issues and impacts that occur within the boundaries of Lake Roland park, issues and impacts that occur outside of those boundaries are for our partner in the park, Baltimore County Government and the myriad of departments that are in place, to address. Therefore, based on the format of the November 15th Public Meeting 2, the limitation of three question from the public, and the lack of engagement in previously provided information from the Nature Council, we felt this was the best format to address our concerns.

In closing, the Nature Council is extremely supportive of connecting the JFT to the NCR trail via Lake Roland regarding a pedestrian and bike friendly greenway, a concept that the council has advocated for over a decade. This is no different from the Nature Councils support of the connection of the light rail to the park via a boardwalk creating transit oriented recreational opportunities for all. The Nature Council understands population densities, locations of schools and other ROI drivers/metrics for basing portions of the feasibility alignment, but the councils greatest concern is that this feasibility alignment will generate enough negative pushback in key areas outside of Lake Roland that it will disable the project all together, which would be tragic, therefore we request that the alternative routing that the Lake Roland Nature Council proposed be re-reviewed in earnest and that DPWT and JMT staff meet on site at Lake Roland. Please remember, the NCR trail is extremely well received, and it runs through low density areas limiting (not eliminating) community pushback.

Therefore, the Lake Roland Nature Council is going on record as formally opposing the proposed routing through Lake Roland Park, in particular the exit point from the park along Roland Run into the surrounding community, as represented in the North Central Railway (NCR) Trail Extension Feasibility Study as presented on November 15.

Respectfully,

Lake Roland Nature Council Executive Committee.

Gero Verheyen
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Trails Committee Co-Chair
Lake Roland Nature Council
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