

## EPC Letter in support of Duke St Option 2

Dear Mayor Justin Wilson, Vice Mayor Amy Jackson, and City Council,

The Alexandria Environmental Policy Commission is writing this letter to express its concern over City Staff's recommendation of Option 1 for the Duke at West Taylor Run Intersection sub-project of Duke Street in Motion., Instead the Commission recommends Option 2, implementing the full-length bikeway between Hilton St, West Taylor Run Pkwy and Cambridge Rd. we believe this is the superior choice due to the pedestrian and bicycle **safety**, bikeway **connectivity**, public **health**, **climate** change, and **environmental justice** benefits that it provides. Details on our rationale are provided below. We commend the Transportation and Parking Board's unanimous vote in favor of Option 2, and encourage City Council to do the same.

Thank you,

Kathie Hoekstra, Chair, Alexandria Environmental Policy Commission

**Safety:** Alexandria's Vision Zero plan calls for elimination of fatal and severe injuries on our streets by 2028, and includes a safe systems approach by taking a holistic look at traffic safety. Option 2 of the Duke at West Taylor Run Intersection analysis provides the safest choice for pedestrians, cyclists and vehicles. Our City would benefit greatly if that section of Duke Street were more accessible and safer for cyclists and pedestrians. Option 1's disruption of those 2 blocks of bike lanes is arguably more harmful to safety given the risks that bicyclists must take in switching to car lanes and then back. That section of Duke Street, with all of its commercial resources, should be more accessible and safe for cyclists and pedestrians.

**Connectivity:** Option 2 would include a bikeway as a critical component of the east-west bike connection supported by Duke Street in Motion. This two-way bikeway between West Taylor Run Pkwy and Hilton St would be part of a four-mile-long bikeway between the new INOVA Hospital and the King St Metro. The connectivity created by Option 2 aligns with strategies from the Alexandria Mobility Plan that seek to improve safety, comfort and connectivity of bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure by addressing network gaps, upgrading existing infrastructure, improving signage and wayfinding, and other actions to increase the share of residents walking and biking for transportation. Option 2 also aligns with the City's GO Alex program which encourages the reduction of automobile dependence, increasing mobility, and improving air quality through the promotion of public transit, ridesharing, bicycling, and walking as money and time-saving alternatives. This is a valuable opportunity to fill a network gap in the City's bike network.

**Public Health:** Alexandria's Community Health Improvement Plan 2025 includes a strategy to expand opportunities to free and low-cost physical activity, which includes a tactic to advocate for safer streets for people of all ages. By making this full bikeway safer, Option 2 will encourage walking and cycling, which benefit cardiovascular health, weight management, and overall physical fitness. Moreover, by encouraging more residents to cycle instead of driving, the city can reduce air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions, leading to better respiratory health and lower pollution-related illnesses. The increased physical activity associated with biking also helps combat chronic diseases like obesity, diabetes, and hypertension. Furthermore, providing safer and more accessible biking infrastructure supports mental health by reducing stress and improving mood through regular exercise. Overall, Option 2 enhances promotes a healthier, more active, and environmentally sustainable community.

**Climate:** In 2019, the City Council adopted a resolution declaring a climate emergency, recognizing that climate change poses a grave threat to everyone in Alexandria and around the world. Considering Eco-City Alexandria's Environmental Action Plan 2040 and its Energy and Climate Change Action Plan (ECCAP), making decisions that encourage more bicycling is a climate-smart move. By reducing vehicle miles traveled and encouraging bicycling, policy choices like this help reduce carbon emissions in our City toward the goals to reduce GHG emissions 50% by 2030 (from 2005) and 80-100% by 2050. Option 2 is more aligned with these principles than Option 1.

The EAP2040 Transportation chapter prioritizes low-carbon mobility options, with a goal to aggressively promote vibrant, human-scale city streets that prioritize people's access and mobility so that all Alexandria residents and visitors have access to the commercial and cultural resources of the city using low-carbon modes of transportation, consistent with the following level of precedence: pedestrians, bicyclists, public transportation, shared motor vehicles, freight vehicles and private motor vehicles. It further includes a short-term action to add an average of 3 miles of bicycle connections per year, prioritizing low-stress facilities, where possible, and connectivity with existing bicycle infrastructure, to create a network of bike-safe routes. The Transportation chapter also includes a goal to reduce automobile dependency and educate individuals and employers on mobility options other than single occupancy driving.

The ECCAP transportation strategy section includes a priority strategy to reduce vehicle miles traveled (VMT) significantly (30,000 MT CO<sub>2</sub>e by 2030 and 50,000 MT CO<sub>2</sub>e by 2050), through the implementation of strategies from the Alexandria Transit Vision and Mobility Plans. Biking has a significant effect on overall fuel usage: according to a report from the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, between 700 million and 1.6 billion gallons of fuel can be saved per year, and their associated carbon emissions avoided, if adequate bicycling infrastructure is available.

**Environmental Justice:** In January 2021, the Alexandria City Council issued the ALL Alexandria resolution acknowledging Alexandria's horrific racial history; recognizing the need and importance of community involvement to identify, develop and implement policies in the pursuit of equitable outcomes; and resolving to adopt practices and policies centered on creating and ensuring racial and social equity. Black and Brown communities are disproportionately suffering more from the impacts of pollution and climate change. For low-income residents across our City, offering dependable and safe bike lanes as a legitimate option for transportation opens up a lower-cost alternative than driving a car. By making our biking infrastructure more connected and safer, our physical environment becomes better for everyone: reduced carbon emissions, better air quality, and more inclusive transit opportunities.