



August 9, 2021

Superintendent Washburn
Rock Creek Park
2545 Williamsburg Lane N.W.
Washington, DC 20008

Re: Upper Beach Drive Management Plan

Dear Superintendent Washburn:

The Capital Trails Coalition (CTC) thanks you for undertaking the planning process to evaluate the future use of Upper Beach Drive in Rock Creek Park.

The CTC is made up of over 70 member organizations, agencies, and businesses across Northern Virginia, the District of Columbia, and Maryland. Our goal is to create a nearly 900-mile network of world-class multi-use trails that are equitably distributed and connected. This low-stress trail network will transform public life by providing access to open space and reliable transportation for people of all ages and abilities.

We believe that the resources of Upper Beach Drive should be preserved for present and future generations and that the Upper Beach Drive roadway should not be used as an auto commuting route. The CTC strongly supports the National Park Service's (NPS) Management Concept 2, ***Full Closure for Recreation***, as articulated during your July 8, 2021 public meeting. Making these zones car-free permanently would maintain a safe, quiet, and low-pollution greenway in the city's largest park for families, walkers, runners, bicyclists, wheelchair users and other outdoor enthusiasts -- seven days a week.

Beach Drive plays a very important role in the Capital Trails Network. The creation of this greenway would close a critical gap in the region's current multi-use trail network. Currently, there are no off-road facilities that could take pedestrians, runners, rollers, or bicyclists from Rock Creek Park in the District of Columbia to the Rock Creek Trail system in Montgomery County. Additionally, the National Park Service's National Capital Region completed a Paved Trails Plan that designates Upper Beach Drive as a "Regional On-street Route" as part of the NPS trail network. But with automobile traffic welcome during weekdays, this "trail" is unusable for most potential users.



The COVID-19 pandemic has been traumatic and devastating to many residents across the region. In an attempt to counteract the uncertainty, isolation, and immobility of quarantine, people have turned to walking, running, and cycling on Beach Drive. In March 2020, trails nationwide saw, on average, a 79% increase in use. Trails are not simply a nice to have amenity, but are critical pieces of sustainable transportation infrastructure and are vital to our mental and physical health.

Our view is that access/accessibility to the park for those who would use it during weekday closures has drawn a brand-new group of users, most of whom would not otherwise visit during the week. The closure to car traffic has actually enhanced access for those with physical limits, including the elderly, young children and the disabled in areas they never would be able to enter during weekdays when cars are permitted on Beach Drive.

Furthermore, the District of Columbia has a stated goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions 50 percent by 2032. Under the District's plan, 75 percent of commute trips would be made without a car in that year. On the Federal level, President Biden has stated a goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions 50 percent by 2030. Transportation is the largest category of greenhouse gas emission sources. The decision to reopen upper Beach Drive to commuter auto traffic would encourage auto use at a time when both the District and the Federal Government are attempting to discourage its use to address the threat of climate change. We believe that the environmental assessment needs to acknowledge this fact and evaluate the concepts/options' impacts on auto use.

The CTC respectfully requests that you select Concept 2 and permanently close Upper Beach drive to car traffic.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Piperno
Trails Coalition Manager
Washington Area Bicyclist Association