

# **Purple Line Issues & Concerns**

Sligo Creek Elementary School (SCES) and Silver Spring International Middle School (SSIMS)

CONTACTS: Amy Kenney ([president@scespta.org](mailto:president@scespta.org) or 301-920-0464)  
Heather Powers Sauter ([president@ssimspta.org](mailto:president@ssimspta.org) or 301-704-0907)

## **I. Introduction and Background**

We appreciate the efforts that the Maryland Transportation Authority (MTA) and Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) have made recently to inform our communities of the proposed Purple Line project and its impacts on our schools, including the public meeting that was conducted with our communities on November 19, 2014. We also appreciate MTA's commitment to include SCES and SSIMS PTSA representatives on the Community Advisory Teams, and we look forward to working with you in that capacity.

Together, nearly 1700 students ages 5-15 attend school at SCES and SSMIS, spanning kindergarten through eighth grade. Hundreds of staff members work at our schools, and we have more than 2,000 parents and guardians who have an interest in our schools.

SCES and SSIMS have been growing for the last several years and growth is projected to increase over the next few years, straining our schools' human and economic resources and physical space. Beginning in January 2015, SCES and SSMIS will undergo a capacity study that will explore options for an addition on the campus potentially affecting both schools.

The parent communities that we represent have raised many safety and welfare concerns related to the proposed Purple Line. This position statement is the result of our efforts to consolidate and present our concerns and interests. These safety and welfare concerns include those raised by our space constraints, the proposed placement of a Traction Power Substation (TPSS) on school property, construction issues, and environmental questions raised regarding the appropriate use of land that is dedicated to the education of our children.

## **II. Safety Concerns**

Of paramount concern to our parents is our children's safety while commuting to and from school and while being engaged in learning activities on school property. A safe school environment must include safe walking and biking corridors, safe traffic patterns, and safety around construction sites. Potential safety issues that may result from the proposed changes to the school grounds must be addressed. These include, for example, the proposed TPSS, the proposed replacement of campus green space with high concrete retaining walls, and the location of light rail train tracks on Wayne Avenue directly abutting the school grounds.

A. Station Location – our parents have told us that the proposed location of a Purple Line Station at the intersection of Dale Drive and Wayne Avenue, the precise corner where our elementary and middle schools are located, presents myriad safety concerns. Increased public traffic in the area near our schools will bring increased, unmonitored interactions

among our students with adults who have no connection to the schools. This creates the need to ensure that measures are in place to prevent harm from coming to our students as they come and go from school. *We believe that from the standpoint of our children's safety, the proposed station at Dale Drive is ill advised.* The safety of our children must be given priority over the anticipated convenience of potential Purple Line riders, who will be able to take advantage of the two proposed Purple Line stations more appropriately sited at the library and at Manchester Road. The Dale Drive station is projected to have one of the lowest projected ridership of any on the Purple Line and it is only 3 blocks from the Manchester Road station. While a mere three Purple Line Stations are proposed between Bethesda and downtown Silver Spring, the corridor between Silver Spring and College Park is proposed to have ten stations. ***We request that other options be explored, such as eliminating this proposed station or moving it further from the schools.***

**B. Street crossings** – Many of our students walk to our schools from the nearby residential area within which our campus is located. Parents are concerned that the increase in the width of Wayne Avenue will make crossing difficult and dangerous for the numerous children who walk to school from the neighborhoods on the south side of Wayne Avenue, which is within our catchment area. ***We request that the following actions be taken to ensure the safety of our students:***

1. **Eliminate the proposed left turn lane.** The Purple Line already presents the need to widen Wayne Avenue significantly. Wayne Avenue currently operates efficiently without a left turn lane. The addition of a left turn lane diminishes safety for students because it will require even more widening of Wayne Avenue at Dale Drive. Geographically, this space is constrained already because of the hilly terrain. Each additional traffic lane, whether intended for vehicles or for light rail trains, increases the time required for little feet to cross Wayne Avenue. Wayne Avenue is a busy street. How long will morning and afternoon commuters be willing to wait for children to cross the street? How do we balance drivers' concerns with getting where they need to be with our children's need to cross the street safely?
2. **Conduct a pedestrian survey** to measure the traffic crossing Wayne Avenue and Dale Drive as well as the number of pedestrians that would cross each of the driveway entrances.
3. **Reduce the speed limit and maintain speed cameras** for both cars and trains on the portion of Wayne Avenue that is within walking distance of the schools.
4. **Implement further safety measures**, such as flashing lights during peak student crossing times and additional crossing guards for the public streets and for the driveways on school property.

**C. Retaining walls and fences** - The Purple Line plans call for the construction of a significant number of retaining walls and fences on school property. These structures are attractive nuisances. Children will be attracted to walk along and climb them. Our schools do not have the economic or human resources to police the walls and fences. What features can be added to prevent children from risking injury on these structures? ***We request that other options be considered to reduce the number of retaining walls.*** *To the extent that retaining walls are proposed in order to preserve the existing number of parking spaces, we request that other, more creative options be considered,*

*such as putting the parking underground or locating it somewhere other than at the front of the school.*

D. Traction Power Substation (TPSS) - Neighborhood residents do not want a large, visually-unappealing substation visible from their homes. We believe that the presence of a TPSS not only will diminish the appearance of our schools, but also will negatively impact our students' learning environment. Locating the TPSS on the grounds of schools that currently accommodate nearly 1700 students presents health, safety, and welfare issues. Our school communities have not been provided with information regarding noise levels, radiation levels, and any other safety or environmental risks that the TPSS may pose. We have been told that the only possible location for a TPSS on our schools' property is right outside the SSIMS principal's office. This location requires yet another 15-20 foot retaining wall and presents yet another attractive nuisance. In addition, a TPSS requires a significant amount of space. Our school populations are growing, and we do not want to jeopardize the potential for our schools to expand if needed.

***We understand that the newest technology requires fewer substations than were originally estimated for the project. Accordingly, we request that that latest technology be utilized so that the TPSS at Wayne and Dale can be eliminated from the proposed Purple Line plan.***

***If the TPSS cannot be eliminated, we request that other options be considered for the TPSS, including burying it underground or relocating it so that it is not visible from one of the facades of the school that students pass each day.***

E. Pedestrian access and safety along Wayne Avenue (retaining walls) - The sidewalk along Wayne Ave is proposed to be transformed into a mixed-use trail that is shared with bicycles. The retaining wall proposed to be built along Wayne Avenue will constrain pedestrians by surrounding them with a high wall on one side, multiple lanes of car and train traffic running in both directions on the other, and bicycle traffic to watch for. The curve in the road raises visibility concerns for pedestrians using the multi-use trail. *Given that children are less predictable than adult pedestrians when walking, running, or riding bicycles, what provisions can be made to ensure that children who are using the sidewalk will have sufficient space to maneuver safely? From a safety standpoint does it make sense for the bike path to be on the sidewalk or is it better in the road so that cyclists and pedestrians are separated?*

F. Parking Lot Traffic Flow - The proposed addition of a parking lot entrance on Dale Drive will mean that elementary and middle school students who cross Dale or Wayne to walk to school will have to cross car traffic that is accessing the parking lot. Similarly, students will have to cross the Wayne Avenue parking lot entrance to access the school.

1. *Pedestrian Safety* – Sufficient sidewalks need to be placed strategically so that they follow the regular flow of pedestrian traffic and pedestrians are not drawn to using the parking lots as shortcuts.
2. *Efficient Car Traffic Flow* - The Dale Drive parking entrance is proposed to have only a short driveway, which will result in traffic backups onto Dale and Wayne during peak drop-off and pick-up hours. In addition, the

Wayne Avenue parking lot drop off circle is far from school which will likely result in cars dropping off closer to the school entrance, causing backups onto Wayne Avenue. How will vehicular traffic flow be managed during these times to ensure the safety of student pedestrians and to ensure that there are not significant backups onto Wayne and Dale? **We request that additional safety measures be put in place for student pedestrians crossing the parking lot driveways.**

3. *Traffic pattern changes* - The proposed change to allow only traffic eastbound on Wayne Avenue to access the Wayne Avenue parking lot will make that lot far less accessible than it is today. Additionally, the proposed change to permit right turns only for traffic exiting the Wayne Avenue parking lot brings about an unanticipated consequence: U-turn attempts at the already-challenged intersection of Wayne and Dale. This increases our concern for our children's safety. **We request that anticipated traffic patterns resulting from the reconfigured parking lots be the subject of further study before Purple Line construction begins.**
4. *Pull off area* – At present there is a bus pull-off area on Dale Drive that is used by many parents to drop off and pick up students. This will be eliminated in the new parking lot design and will add to the already significant congestion in the parking lots. At present, parents line up in their cars three lanes wide to wait for their SSIMS students at pick up. It is unclear in the new design whether this is possible. If not, traffic stacking along Dale and Wayne will occur.

G. Train safety – Many parents are concerned that children will not be able to judge accurately whether they can cross safely in front of the Purple Line light rail trains. What measures are planned to educate our children on train safety, including impulse control? **We request that train safety education begin now and be guaranteed and funded as part of ongoing Purple Line maintenance for future student populations in the schools. In addition, we request that there be additional barriers and safety measures in place to protect children from entering and crossing the trains' paths.**

H. Evacuation routes for fires and emergencies –how the new parking lots and retaining walls will impact evacuation routes for fires and other emergencies remains unclear. *We must make sure evacuation routes are safe and clear, that all routes have the capacity to handle the volume of people emerging from the building, and that emergency vehicles are able to access the building at all times. Please keep in mind future capacity as well.*

### **III. Concerns Regarding Our Students' Educational Welfare**

A. Future Use of MCPS Space – Both SCES and SSIMS are at capacity and are projected to grow over the next several years. The Purple Line will take considerable space from the schools, especially if the TPSS is located on MCPS property. As the

schools continue to grow, there may be a need to expand our physical facilities. The addition of the Purple Line limits the options available for any future expansion. **Because SCES and SSIMS will be undergoing a capacity study, we request that plans for the precise location of the Purple Line stop, relocated parking, and TPSS be postponed so that the plans can be coordinated with that study. It does not make sense to foreclose the options available to the schools when we are anticipating the need for additional capacity in the near future.**

B. Parking - Parking is already a concern at the schools because the schools are short 26 spaces for current staffing levels. The number of staff will grow along with the increased student enrollment. We appreciate the effort to maintain the current number of parking spaces, but the projected parking plan leaves no room for expansion even though the school population is projected to grow. Moreover, the parking plan requires that the green, tree-filled hillside that leads up to the campus be transformed into parking lots, complex sidewalks, retaining walls, and fences. **We request that other options to address the parking situation be considered such as underground parking lots or relocating the lots to another part of the school so that green spaces can remain intact and space remains for expansion.**

Furthermore, using the street in front of our schools as a Purple Line stop will cause an increase in pedestrian and vehicle traffic at the intersection of Wayne and Dale. Purple Line riders may arrive at the station by car. The parking lots at the school are free and not monitored. With school parking already in short supply, a Purple Line station at Wayne and Dale will require measures in place to prevent Purple Line patrons from using the schools' parking lot as a commuter lot. Our schools do not have the economic or human resources to police the school parking lots for unauthorized use.

*The numerous and complex concerns raised by locating a Purple Line station in front of our schools underscore our request that this proposed Purple Line station either be eliminated from the plans or be relocated. **Alternatively, and as a last resort, should the station remain right in front of our schools, we request that the plans include either a Kiss and Ride or, preferably, measures to ensure that the intersection of Wayne and Dale, and the streets of the surrounding residential neighborhood, not be used as a de facto "Kiss and Ride."***

C. Concerns Regarding Ongoing Maintenance Costs – An important aspect of our students' educational welfare is the MCPS budget. The proposed Purple Line will create additional structures and modifications on the school's property. **We request a commitment that the ongoing maintenance of these structures and modifications be borne in future years by MTA, not MCPS.** Our schools' budgets already test our ability to keep up with our maintenance costs and our communities invest time and money to keep our schools' physical environment beautiful and well maintained through annual workdays and the generous donations of families and local businesses. We want to ensure that our school communities are spending their limited resources on projects that directly impact our students and their educational environment and not on maintenance costs for the changes associated with the Purple Line.

D. Construction Issues Impacting Students' Educational Welfare – We recognize that many uncertainties still exist regarding the timing of the construction for the Purple Line. Whenever construction does take place, however, we ask that it will be done in such a way

as to minimize the daily impact on our students, their families, and our schools' environments. Student safety near a construction site is a significant concern and measures must be taken to ensure that the site is inaccessible to students. Traffic flow patterns and congestion will be an issue during construction. The construction process must consider the school schedule. The drop-off and dismissal processes are already delicately balanced to ensure the safety and flow of students, parents, and school buses. During construction, traffic congestion and flow patterns must be considered for the safe and efficient drop off and dismissal of our children. Significant delays and problems getting children to and from school will negatively impact our students' readiness for learning and will be unacceptable to our parent community.

E. Educational Environment – Our schools' physical campus will change significantly with the addition of the Purple Line. Our schools and PTSAs have spent considerable time and funds to beautify both the exterior and the interior Outdoor Classroom. Our efforts have included artwork and landscaping that is not only aesthetically pleasing and native to the area but also supportive of our students' educational environment and instruction. We request that the architectural design and landscaping will be in keeping with our past efforts and include the highest standards for aesthetics and beautification. We would like our school grounds to be uplifting, inspiring, and positive to set the tone for an excellent educational environment. Above all, our school environment must be conducive to learning.

1. Loss of trees and green space - The construction plans to widen the road will significantly reduce the green space and tree canopy at the entrance and Wayne Avenue side of the campus with limited opportunities for restoration. Green space is a precious commodity in our community. Our children need us to set an example for the future by preserving our limited green space. ***We request that other options be considered that would retain the huge trees that are an important part of the current facade of the school.*** In addition, we request that as many "green" elements as possible be incorporated into the design, including living walls over the retaining walls and fences, additional trees, and extensive plantings to offset the addition of the concrete elements called for in the proposed Purple Line design.

2. Concrete Walls/Graffiti Mitigation– To avoid the potential for distractions from a positive learning environment, we request that as many artistic features as possible be incorporated into the design to diminish the effect of the additional concrete and fencing. ***We request that a plan for graffiti mitigation be in place for the concrete retaining walls, including planning for murals to be painted on the retaining walls to deter graffiti in the first instance.***

3. Storm water management - The plans call for a large storm water retention pond in the middle of the upper parking lot. The Montgomery County Rainscapes Program should be involved in making this space aesthetically pleasing while meeting the functional needs of handling storm water. It can include flowering perennials and trees to link with our Outdoor Classroom efforts and offset the loss of grass and mature tree canopy. ***We request that elements be included to reduce runoff, such as green roofs, rain barrels, and additional plantings to capture rainwater wherever possible.***

4. Changes to historical appearance - The construction requirements will change the historical appearance of the campus. Originally built in 1935 as the first high school in

lower Montgomery County, the original buildings were preserved when it was converted into middle and elementary schools in 1998.

F. Construction costs – *We request a commitment that any costs associated with the construction phase of the Purple Line be paid from Purple Line funds and not by MCPS, including but not limited to temporary relocation of the schools if needed during construction, the building of retaining walls and fences, the reconfiguring of the parking areas, and the restoration of the landscaping on school property.*