College Park, county oppose UM's plan to close road this summer

City, council officials say proposed closure will hurt bus service on Campus Drive

by David Hill | Staff Writer

College Park and Prince George's County officials — as well as students at the University of Maryland, College Park — have criticized the university's plan to partially close the campus' busiest street this summer, arguing the move will inconvenience bus passengers who travel the route on their way to school or work.

The university plans to close a stretch of Campus Drive — about a third of a mile on UM's main thoroughfare which runs west from its main entrance on Route 1 — to private vehicles and public buses from June 19 to Aug. 13.

While university officials have said the closure will allow them to gauge the long-term feasibility of closing the road to private traffic — an environmentally and pedestrian-friendly goal in the university's master plan — the County Council and City Council both drafted letters Tuesday opposing the move.

"It really seems inexplicable that they would come up with a test that doesn't reflect the master plan's goal of having transit and not single-occupant vehicles," said Mayor Andrew Fellows, adding the university has long encouraged public transit over car traffic. "And it inconveniences people who want to use mass transit and use the campus this summer."

The closed stretch — from the university's "M" traffic circle to Cole Field House — will remain open to university shuttle service. It will also be re-opened to all traffic for the university's July 4 celebration.

About 5,500 private vehicles and 750 transit vehicles use Campus Drive from 6 a.m. to 7 p.m. each weekday, according to a study by the Maryland Transit Administration. The Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority will have to re-route its four bus routes along the road, said WMATA bus operations specialist Larry Glick.

Many students have opposed the closure, some of whom criticized the plan at a May 4 public forum. Jesse Yurow, a 21-year-old junior from Owings Mills, said he wants cars off the road, but a ban on public buses runs counter to the university's longtime support of mass transportation.

"Closing it to cars is a good idea," Yurow said. "If buses are allowed to run, it would make the buses run a lot smoother."

County Councilman Eric Olson (D-Dist. 3) of College Park suggested the plan could also
be the university's latest resistance to a proposed Purple Line route along Campus Drive. The university has long opposed putting the 16-mile light rail route there, arguing it could harm pedestrians and disturb nearby research equipment.

"It's quite a coincidence that they oppose the Purple Line on Campus Drive for so long and then they [close the road to public transportation]," Olson said. "If they're doing it short-term, there's no reason to think they won't consider it long-term."

Ann Wylie, UM's vice president of administrative affairs, said she's "not really surprised" by widespread opposition to the closure, adding university officials are still considering input and haven't made a final decision.

"Any time you disturb people's transportation, they're going to be upset," Wylie said. "We're still deciding what we're going to do."

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