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## Opinion

# Multimodal paths in Annandale need further study

January 3, 2023 at 2:00 p.m. EST

Barbara E. Taylor's Dec. 26 letter, "[Arlington's housing burden](#)," which concluded, "The missing middle proposal is not ready for prime time.," resonated with me. The letter highlighted the fact that the proposed zoning changes would not result in affordable housing for families, and demonstrated how misleading and unsupported some public policies can be when they are given attractive labels. Calling it "missing middle" does not mean it actually addresses the needs of the "middle."

A similar case of misleading labeling is being used by the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) and Fairfax County to justify spending \$74 million on modifying a few intersections and building 10-foot-wide shared-use paths along both sides of a [3.5-mile stretch of Braddock Road](#). They are justifying this expense by calling it "multimodal." They are claiming that the paved paths will reduce traffic congestion because they will encourage people to walk or bike instead of drive.

However, VDOT has not provided the public with valid justification for its claims or projections of future use. Many assumptions and citizen input used by VDOT and Fairfax County planners are from before 2018 and need updating. The proposed shared-use paths along this corridor duplicate some existing paths used by residents to bike, exercise, walk their dogs or go to bus stops. Those paths meander through trees that provide shade and some relief from traffic noise, which will likely be preferred by residents instead of walking or biking next to heavy traffic. Calling this project "multimodal" does not mean it will be "multimodal."

In addition to the high cost, the construction of these paths will require the destruction of acres of trees to make way for a 23-foot-wide strip of land that encompasses the 10-foot paved path. Replacing the trees with pavement will also require considerable stormwater management efforts that the trees help to provide naturally. VDOT has planned to ask for an exemption from the National Environmental Policy Act requiring a full environmental impact statement, likely arguing that the extent of tree removal is relatively small. If it is possible to claim that a relatively small project will not significantly impact the environment, our tree canopy could be depleted one acre at a time — literally and figuratively a "death by 1,000 cuts."

To evaluate the presumed benefits vs. the monetary and environmental costs of this project, Virginia and Fairfax County need to hire an impartial expert to evaluate the assumptions and recommendations VDOT is proposing. Only then can we determine whether this project is truly justified and worth the cost.

**Michael Perel**, *Annandale*