

September 28, 2022

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
Baltimore District
Attn: Mr. Nicholas Ozburn
2 Hopkins Plaza
Baltimore, MD 21201

Maryland Dept. of the Environment
Wetlands and Waterways Program
Attn: Mr. Steve Hurt
1800 Washington Blvd., Suite 430
Baltimore, MD 21230-1708

Dear: Mr. Ozburn and Mr. Hurt:

As elected officials in Prince George's County, we write to share our concerns about the plan to add toll lanes to I-495 and I-270. As you conduct your review it is essential that you consider the cumulative and future impacts of the project.

The Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) claims that substantial impacts were eliminated when they decided to move forward with only Phase I South of the project. However, it would be more accurate to state that these substantial impacts have only been delayed, given MDOT's plan to add toll lanes to the entire length of I-495 in Maryland in the future.

In 2020 the Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) issued a Draft Environmental Impact Statement for its plan to add toll lanes to the southern part of I-270 and to the Beltway in Montgomery and Prince George's County. Some months later, in May 2021, MDOT decided that it would move forward for now with Phase I South to add toll lanes to I-495 from the American Legion Bridge to the I-270 spur and on I-270 from the spur up to I-370. However, as demonstrated by a map on the Op Lanes website and a poster presented at recent hearings on the JPA, MDOT has not abandoned plans to add toll lanes to the entire stretch of the Maryland Beltway from the American Legion Bridge to the Woodrow Wilson Bridge and on I-270 from I-370 to I-70.

Even the Record of Decision (ROD) for the I-495 and I-270 Managed Lanes Study, which was approved by the Federal Highway Administration a few weeks ago, confirms the extent of MDOT's plan. Referring to a 2018 version of the regional transportation plan instead of the 2022 version, the ROD states on page 25 that:

“Three specific, financially constrained projects in the approved 2018 Visualize 2045 Plan that relates to this Study are:

CLRP-constrained element ID-1182: I-95/I-495 component of Traffic Relief Plan to include two managed lanes in each direction, between the Baltimore Washington Parkway and the Virginia State Line/Potomac River at the Woodrow Wilson Bridge.

CLRP-constrained element ID-3281: I-95/I-495 component of Traffic Relief Plan to include two managed lanes in each direction, between the Baltimore Washington Parkway and the Virginia State Line/Potomac River at the ALB.

CLRP-constrained element ID-1186: I-270 component of Traffic Relief Plan, to include two managed lanes in each direction, between I-495 and I-70/US 40.”

Moreover, MDOT is currently collaborating with the Virginia Department of Transportation on a study to add toll lanes to the Beltway from Springfield, VA to Maryland Route 210 near Oxon Hill. Under this plan, VDOT would conduct the study and construct the toll lanes, including the Beltway lanes in Maryland. Rather than conduct an Environmental Impact Statement, VDOT plans to do a less extensive Environmental Assessment. We are alarmed that this reduced level of study could become the template for the extension of the toll lanes in future phases in Prince George’s County.

There are other viable alternatives with fewer environmentally harmful impacts that have not been considered, including individual and combined methods that involve innovative congestion management as was done on lower I-270, other traffic demand management solutions including flexible work hours and telework and transit.

Given MDOT’s plans to extend toll lanes around the entire Maryland Beltway, it is imperative that you consider the future and cumulative impacts of the project. We believe that after such a review, you will conclude that the JPA for Phase I South should be rejected.

Sincerely,

Chair Calvin S. Hawkins, II
Prince George’s County Council, At-Large

Thomas E. Dernoga
Prince George’s County Council, District 2

Dannielle Glaros
Prince George’s County Council, District 3

Jolene Ivey
Prince George’s County Council, District 5

Rodney Streeter
Prince George’s County Council, District 7

Edward P. Burroughs, III
Prince George’s County Council, District 8