

WRITTEN STATEMENT BY CITIZENS AGAINST BELTWAY EXPANSION
FOR HEARING ON TRANSPORTATION PRIORITIES LETTER
JANUARY 24, 2023

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Citizens Against Beltway Expansion is a voluntary community organization made up of Maryland residents and civic associations. We appreciate the opportunity to submit testimony.

The transportation priorities letter initiated by the Montgomery County Planning Board draws on a previous letter sent to then-MDOT Secretary Slater in 2020. The letter assumes that MDOT's plan to add private toll lanes to I-495 and I-270 will proceed.

The Elrich administration has appropriately redrafted the highway section of the letter to reflect ongoing concerns about the project and to urge that MDOT step back and work with the County on a better plan to address congestion on I-495 and I-270. We agree that the County should pursue a better plan.

In a November 2021 letter to MDOT, commenting on the Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the project, the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission stated that the toll lanes plan would not resolve congestion, only move the bottlenecks. They stated, "The Preferred Alternative does not eliminate congestion in the corridors studied but and [sic] instead shifts it from the vicinity of the ALB (e.g., McLean and Potomac) to other areas in Maryland. While some of these bottleneck shifts were expected, the degree of congestion resulting from the proposed project is severe on I-270 north of I-370, on the Inner Loop on the top side of the Beltway, and on the Inner Loop in Prince George's County." Toll lanes are not the answer.

Moreover, decades of research documents the failure of expanding highways to resolve congestion. The research shows that people change their driving habits and even move further from jobs in response to the expansion of a major road. In 1962, this problem was coined the Law of Peak-Hour Traffic Congestion. A [study](#) published in 2009 by the National Bureau of Economic Research confirmed that the expansion of most major roads is met with a proportional increase in traffic.

Widening highways only reduces congestion for a few years before traffic builds back up. Widening the American Legion Bridge, the western side of I-495 and I-270 would only be a short-term fix at considerable cost to the environment and our communities.

Widening these highways would increase vehicle miles traveled and the greenhouse gas emissions that pollute our air and worsen global warming. The expansion would damage Plummers Island and could displace burials at the historic Morningstar Moses Cemetery in Cabin John. It would also degrade water quality in Montgomery County. It is interesting to note that MDOT's mitigation plan for the toll lanes project relies heavily on the purchase of credits for the restoration of streams in Frederick

County, providing no benefit to streams that would be degraded by the toll lanes. It seems likely that a similar mitigation plan would be implemented for any plan to widen these highways.

Rather than widening the American Legion Bridge, I-495 and I-270, we urge the Council to press MDOT to explore more sustainable alternatives. In particular, the State should look at incentives to employers to encourage more telework. During the pandemic, the Maryland Transportation Institute found that just a 5% reduction in vehicles could reduce congestion by 32% to 58% on local freeways. A 15% reduction eliminated nearly all bottlenecks. Telework should be a key component of a congestion relief plan. Other alternatives include:

- Implement planned Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) on MD Route 355 (which runs parallel to I-270) and on MD Route 586 (Veirs Mill Road - which facilitates east-west trips).
- Expand service on the MARC Brunswick Line (which runs parallel to I-270).
- Implement/increase the number of commuter buses that run on I-270 and I-495, ideally on dedicated lanes.
- Increase the frequency and reliability of all bus services in the I-495 and I-270 corridors, ideally on dedicated lanes.
- Implement more protected bike lanes and trails along roadways in the I-495 and I-270 corridors.
- Use appropriate elements of the I-270 Innovative Congestion Management program on I-495; implement Transportation Systems Management and Operations as is being used on the Baltimore Beltway, adopt more Transportation Demand Management including telework, car and van pools and subsidized transit passes.
- Plan for more rail cars on the Purple Line and increased frequency.
- Extend the Purple Line across the American Legion Bridge to Tysons, VA.
- Mandate that employers above a certain size participate in sustainable commuter services programs such as Montgomery County's Fair Share for Employers Program or the Maryland Commuter Choice Program. Such mandates exist in Washington, DC, Washington State and New Jersey.
- Study the use of reversible lanes on I-270 and I-495 to manage rush hour traffic.

Widening I-495 and I-270 with toll lanes or general-purpose lanes will not solve congestion. We urge that the priorities letter press MDOT to pursue more sustainable solutions.