

Resolution No.: 18-870
Introduced: July 11, 2017
Adopted: July 18, 2017

**COUNTY COUNCIL
FOR MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND**

Lead Sponsor: Council President Berliner
Co-Sponsors: Councilmembers Riemer, Elrich, Floreen, and Leventhal

SUBJECT: Opposition to a New Potomac River Bridge Crossing

Background

1. On July 5, 2017, the Long-Range Plan Task Force of the National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board (TPB) recommended that the TPB approve further study of the “Additional Northern Bridge Crossing/Corridor” project.
2. The “Additional Northern Bridge Crossing/Corridor” project would consist of a new northern bridge crossing of the Potomac River as part of a multimodal roadway corridor extended from Virginia Route 28 into Montgomery County to connect to the Intercounty Connector (ICC).
3. On July 19, 2017, the TPB is scheduled to decide whether to accept the recommendation of the Long-Range Plan Task Force to do further study of the “Additional Northern Bridge Crossing/Corridor” project.
4. Montgomery County and the State of Maryland have consistently and repeatedly opposed construction of a “second crossing” of the Potomac River into Montgomery County. The route for such a crossing was removed from the master plan of highways and from the state’s highway program in 1974. There is no feasible route for such a roadway in Montgomery County, given the establishment of the Montgomery County Agricultural Reserve in 1980 and the amount of land now held in easements in perpetuity primarily for agricultural and limited residential uses.
5. This proposed corridor would significantly degrade the Agricultural Reserve, created by the Montgomery County Council in 1980 to conserve farmland and to protect the environment, as well as established residential neighborhoods in Potomac, Darnestown, North Potomac, Rockville and Gaithersburg.

6. The Agricultural Reserve has helped Montgomery County retain more than 500 farms that contribute more than a quarter billion dollars annually to Montgomery County's economy, employing more than 10,000 residents. It has served as a critical environmental stewardship tool, protecting forests, streams, and the federally-designated Piedmont Sole Source Aquifer through permanent agricultural land preservation easements.
7. Numerous previous studies have been conducted of an additional Potomac River bridge connecting Northern Virginia and Montgomery County, including a 2001 study by the Federal Highway Administration that was cancelled at the request of Congressman Frank Wolf (R) of Northern Virginia because of serious concerns about the negative impact of the project to neighborhoods on both sides of the river, the environment, the C&O Canal National Historical Park, and users of the Canal towpath. Studies have also demonstrated that a vast majority amount of commuters utilizing this corridor travel to destinations within or near the Capital Beltway.
8. As set forth below, the Montgomery County Council has made it clear on numerous occasions that the most important priorities in the I-270 corridor extending all the way to the American Legion Bridge -- a terribly congested corridor that imposes unacceptable travel times on Montgomery County residents and the region -- is to provide significant additional high-occupancy toll (HOT) lane capacity during peak periods that would also accommodate transit. These priorities should be implemented before further consideration of an additional crossing that would seriously degrade the environment, promote more sprawl, detract from fixing what is broken, compete for scarce transportation dollars, and create serious jurisdictional tensions.
9. In 2012, the Montgomery County Council and Fairfax County Board of Supervisors requested that the Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) include as part of a \$6 million study in MDOT's Consolidated Transportation Program the addition of two HOT lanes to the Capital Beltway from the I-270 West Spur to Virginia, consistent with the Commonwealth of Virginia Transportation Board's call to extend its Beltway express toll lanes into Maryland.
10. In 2015, the Montgomery County Council and Fairfax County Board of Supervisors reiterated the request to study toll lanes across the American Legion Bridge and asked their state's respective governors and transportation secretaries to focus their attention and resources on proposed improvements to the existing bridge rather than on an additional Potomac River crossing.
11. In 2015, the Virginia Commonwealth Transportation Board found that based on current and projected future transportation conditions, the most pressing and immediate needs for improved Potomac River crossings included reducing congestion on the American Legion Bridge and expanding Metrorail capacity between Rosslyn and Foggy Bottom in Washington, DC.

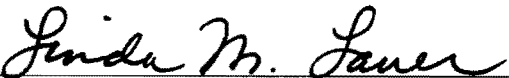
12. In June 2017, County Executive Isiah Leggett and the Montgomery County Council requested as one of their top transportation project priorities that MDOT advance a study of capacity and operational strategies from I-270 and along the Capital Beltway into Virginia that address freeway performance along with transit connections over the Potomac River, including advancement of HOT lanes between the I-270 West Spur and Virginia.

Action

The County Council for Montgomery County, Maryland approves the following resolution:

The Council urges the National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board to oppose further study of the "Additional Northern Bridge Crossing/Corridor" project and to reject inserting a new Potomac River bridge crossing into its long-range transportation plan.

This is a correct copy of Council action.


Linda M. Lauer, Clerk of the Council