

My oral remarks on behalf of MD SC for MDTA hearing on July 12, 2021

My name is Brian Ditzler, I'm a resident of Silver Spring, and I am testifying here on behalf of Sierra Club Maryland.

We are concerned with the excessively high tolls required under this proposal, the high social costs of the toll lanes, and the way this toll lane proposal will deepen inequities in Maryland and fail to serve the public interest.

High Tolls. When the toll lanes open, the evening rush hour toll can be as high as \$50 for a passenger car driving from the GW Parkway to I-370. The maximum toll rate for a big rig trucker could be as much as \$42 per mile, or \$297 for a 7-mile trip. Those tolls—from passenger car to big rig—are unacceptably high - especially on a daily basis. And Transurban wants to make the tolls even higher, according to a letter they sent to MDTA on November 18 last year.

High Social Costs. The claim that the toll lanes will be virtually no cost to taxpayers is not true because the people who will pay the tolls are mostly Maryland taxpayers. Taxpayers also will be forced to absorb the cost of billions of dollars in utility relocations that will not be reflected in the tolls. The costs of the highway expansion will also be paid by individuals, school children, and communities harmed by significantly increased greenhouse gas and other health-damaging air pollution, significantly increased stormwater runoff, and the loss of property value, historic places, wildlife habitat, parkland, and tree canopy.

The private toll operators have a strong incentive to maintain congestion on the free lanes so that people will pay their high tolls. Thus, the majority of travelers will experience congestion the same or worse than before.

This toll lane proposal and the high tolls will further deepen the regional east-west racial and economic divide and societal inequities. This plan turns public land over to private investors for the benefit of the affluent, and tolls will not be affordable for working class and economically disadvantaged populations.

Public Interest Concerns. We also believe this deal is not in the public interest. Privatizing roadways can lead to significant control of regional transportation by private companies accountable to their shareholders rather than the public. Transurban is on record saying its goal in our region is to “maximize the tolls”. Road and mass transit improvements that would be good for our climate and desired by Marylanders are considered undesirable by Transurban and its shareholders. This toll lane proposal sets up a perverse incentive for a private company and our own government to lock in car-dependency and act against the public interest for generations.

In summary, we strongly disagree with the high tolls that are proposed that surely will substantially increase over time, with the high cost the project will have on our health, environment and pocketbooks, and the way this toll lane proposal will deepen inequities in Maryland and fail to serve the public interest.

