
July 15, 2020

The Honorable Bridget Donnell Newton
Mayor
City of Rockville
111 Maryland Avenue
Rockville MD 20850

The Honorable Monique Ashton
The Honorable Beryl L. Feinberg
The Honorable David Myles
The Honorable Mark Pierzchala
Council
City of Rockville
111 Maryland Avenue
Rockville MD 20850

Dear Mayor Donnell Newton and Councilmembers Ashton, Feinberg, Myles and Pierzchala:

Thank you for your letter related to the I-495 and I-270 Public-Private Partnership (P3) Program and Managed Lanes Study (MLS). I understand your concerns and am happy to respond.

We understand COVID-19 is impacting all Marylanders today in how we work, spend our free time, and travel. While the Maryland Department of Transportation's (MDOT) number one priority is Marylander's health and safety, we are continuing our efforts to ensure transportation improvements are being developed to meet our State's needs not only for today but for the next 20-plus years.

We have continued to monitor travel as the restrictions related to COVID-19 have begun to relax. While overall traffic is still lower than it was at this same time last year, we have seen significant recovery in traffic on MDOT State Highway Administration (SHA) highways. At the height of the restrictions, traffic was down over 50 percent on highways statewide when compared to 2019. However, as of the end of June traffic is down less than 13 percent on highways statewide when compared to 2019. Reductions to transit ridership has been more significant and has not recovered nearly as much as highway traffic. According to the MDOT Maryland Transit Administration, transit services were down nearly 80 percent compared to 2019 at the height of the restrictions and are still more than 60 percent down as of the end of June. The Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority has also seen significant ridership reductions with rail being down over 90 percent and bus being down nearly 70 percent at the end of June when compared to 2019. Recent studies from experts predict an increase over pre-COVID highway traffic, especially on interstates. While our traffic is not back to pre-COVID levels today, indicators show that we will return to or exceed pre-COVID levels of traffic on our highways.

The Honorable Bridget Donnell Newton
The Honorable Monique Ashton
The Honorable Beryl L. Feinberg
The Honorable David Myles
The Honorable Mark Pierzchala
Page Two

Studies completed prior to the COVID-19 public health event indicated that even with increased telework both transit and highway improvements will be needed to address the congestion in the National Capital Region (NCR). The NCR's long-range transportation plan, Visualize 2045, was completed and approved by the NCR Transportation Planning Board (TPB) considering projected growth in population, changes in traffic volumes and mode usage, and the locally approved land use.

Visualize 2045 defines the initiatives to which TPB has committed and championed for years to address the ever-increasing congestion on our region's roadways and provide enough transit capacity to serve additional anticipated passengers. These initiatives include bringing jobs and housing closer together, expanding bus rapid transit, moving more people on Metrorail, increasing telecommuting, improving walking and bike access to transit, completing the National Capital Trail, and expanding the express highway network with new managed lanes using dynamic pricing. Visualize 2045 notes that all of these initiatives will be needed to significantly improve the region's transportation system performance.

Similar managed lanes have been used North of Baltimore and in Virginia, Texas, and Florida showing significant congestion reductions. Adding free-flow managed lanes directly caused significant delay reductions and increased speeds in the general-purpose lanes. Since managed lanes were opened, the general-purpose lanes on I-95 North of Baltimore saw a 12 percent delay reduction, and the general-purpose lanes on I-495 and I-95 in Virginia saw a 7 to 15 percent travel time reduction. Similar results have been seen in Dallas where general-purpose lanes next to managed lanes showed 10 to 15 percent speed increase. In Miami, the I-95 general-purpose lanes speed increase was even greater, increasing from approximately 20 miles per hour (mph) to 40 mph while the managed lanes speeds increased to more than 55 mph.

In addition to improving interstate travel, managed lanes have reduced traffic on nearby arterial roads and neighborhood streets. We understand that there are concerns that additional traffic on these arterial streets may impede access to I-495 and I-270 by causing additional congestion. Our traffic analysis has found that that by serving more traffic on I-495 and I-270, the demand on the surrounding arterial and neighborhood roads will be reduced, saving local travelers time up to a seven percent decrease in delay. The environmental study MDOT must complete requires us to develop an analysis for the Federal Highway Administration's (FHWA) approval to demonstrate that the improvements can be implemented in a manner that does not negatively impact the safety and operations of the interstate and the nearby arterial and local roadway network. This analysis will ensure the arterial roadway will safely collect, distribute, and accommodate travel, and any necessary improvements required by FHWA to accomplish the safe operations of the arterial roadways will be required of the P3 Developer.

The Honorable Bridget Donnell Newton
The Honorable Monique Ashton
The Honorable Beryl L. Feinberg
The Honorable David Myles
The Honorable Mark Pierzchala
Page Three

The MDOT SHA has performed detailed regional traffic analysis, which is included in the MLS Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS). This detailed analysis shows that significant travel time savings will be provided in 2040 with the addition of managed lanes. The modeling also shows that induced demand, or entirely new travel, generated from these potential improvements would be less than one percent. Modeling has also demonstrated that “cut-through” traffic that is already driving and would like to use the interstates will be put back on the interstates as intended, reducing traffic along neighborhood and arterial streets. While managed lanes with dynamic pricing were not utilized when I-270 was widened in Rockville over 25 years ago, the improvements demonstrated that the increase in capacity of I-270 did not generate new traffic but removed existing traffic off arterial roads in Rockville. A study by the TPB in 2001 showed that traffic was less on MD 355 in Rockville in 1999 than in 1992. In 1999, there were on average over 16,000 less vehicles daily on MD 355 between MD 189 and MD 28 than in 1992. This reduction in traffic happened even with population, housing, and employment growth in Rockville significantly greater than expected when those I-270 improvements were planned. The managed lanes we are considering are expected to have a similar effect in pulling traffic off the arterial roads in Rockville; however, these new lanes will be managed with dynamic pricing so people will always have the ability for a reliable trip when it is critical.

Considered in the MLS build alternatives and as part of the P3 Agreement, public mass transit buses will be allowed to use managed lanes on I-495 and I-270 without a toll. This will provide new opportunities for more reliable transit service to encourage more people to use transit. Managed lanes coupled with improved access to transit stations and park and ride lots serviced by limited stop express buses provide time competitive options to driving and new opportunities to serve unmet suburban to suburban transit demand. Additionally, proposed improvements will provide direct ramps to and from managed lanes to enhance access to transit stations and park and ride lots with easy access for transit vehicles to the managed lanes for high-speed, reliable travel.

We are committed to work in collaboration with the affected counties to identify specific transit service improvements that will be included in the P3 agreements to be approved by the Maryland Board of Public Works (BPW). This commitment ensures that transit improvements will be provided at defined and predictable times in collaboration with our local partners. This approach is a much stronger commitment than the original BPW condition of providing 10 percent excess revenue for transit.

The Honorable Bridget Donnell Newton
The Honorable Monique Ashton
The Honorable Beryl L. Feinberg
The Honorable David Myles
The Honorable Mark Pierzchala
Page Four

We appreciate your concerns about homes, businesses, and community facilities within Rockville. Our analysis has shown that no homes, businesses, or community facilities will need to be relocated within Rockville. Furthermore, the MDOT SHA is committed to avoiding and minimizing any property needed and impacts to environmental features such as greenspace and mitigating for noise where possible. We understand personally that we are talking about families, neighborhoods, and communities that have value and memories associated with them and are committed to working with all stakeholders to ensure concerns are heard and addressed.

The MDOT SHA has attempted to stay within existing right-of-way to the extent possible to avoid and minimize potential property needs within the Rockville neighborhoods that abut I-270. The design and engineering options that were analyzed to reduce the potential impacts in Rockville included reducing grading areas, adding retaining walls, modifying interchange ramp designs, adjusting direct access locations, and locating stormwater facilities underground. As the process moves forward, MDOT SHA is committed to working with the P3 Developer to identify approaches that may further reduce potential property needs or mitigate any impacts to affected properties.

A noise analysis has been completed and the results are included in the DEIS. The Rockshire, Saddlebrook and Fallswood communities are currently protected by a noise barrier and the Woodley Gardens and Regents Square communities are also currently protected by a noise barrier. Both noise barriers were evaluated under the future build conditions and will continue to provide required noise abatement for these communities. The Rose Hill Falls community is provided noise abatement by a berm. We evaluated a noise barrier on top of the berm and found it not to be reasonable under State and federal noise guidelines. We have, however, determined that this area will require further detailed study due to the complex topography associated with modeling the combination of a berm and noise barrier. This analysis is currently underway, and the results will be included in the Final Environmental Impact Statement. The West End Park noise barrier is found to be feasible and reasonable as part of the MLS. It would tie into the Woodley Gardens and Regent Park noise barrier, and extend south to West Montgomery Avenue. The noise analysis will be refined as more detailed engineering is completed; however, I want to assure you that we will provide noise barriers for any community in Rockville that qualifies for mitigation under the MDOT SHA noise policy and federal regulations if a build alternative is approved and we move forward with the highway improvements construction.

The Honorable Bridget Donnell Newton
The Honorable Monique Ashton
The Honorable Beryl L. Feinberg
The Honorable David Myles
The Honorable Mark Pierzchala
Page Five

The MDOT SHA and Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) released the DEIS and Draft Section 4(f) Evaluation for agency and public review on July 10, 2020, and an email notification of the document availability was sent to the City of Rockville. Additional notification to the public included a Notice of Availability published by the Environmental Protection Agency, a notification placed on the P3 Program website, emails sent to all interested parties on the P3 Program mailing list, print ads in the Washington Post and other local and regional publications. A series of public hearings associated with the DEIS will be held including four virtual and two in-person hearings in August and September 2020. The 90-day comment period for the DEIS and Draft Section 4(f) Evaluation is from July 10 through October 8, 2020. The complete DEIS and Draft Section 4(f) Evaluation as well as additional details regarding the public hearings can be found on the P3 Program website at 495-270-p3.com/DEIS.

Phase 1 of the P3 Program is being solicited under the Progressive P3 model, also known as a pre-development agreement. A Progressive P3 is a two-step project delivery method where the P3 Developer will be selected to be a strategic partner with the Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) in the development and delivery of Phase 1 of the P3 Program.

As part of the first step of the Progressive P3 model, the P3 Developer will partner with not only MDOT, but other stakeholders including, but not limited to, the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission, Montgomery County, Frederick County, the Cities of Rockville and Gaithersburg, adjacent communities, property owners, and the public to address concerns and reduce risks. As part of this partnership, the P3 Developer will advance design to further avoid and minimize impacts to environmental resources, communities, properties, utilities, and other features. Once impacts and risks have been further reduced and expectations clearly defined, MDOT and the P3 Developer will finalize the second step of the Progressive P3 model; pricing and schedule for the 50-year agreement of the final design, construction, financing, operations, and maintenance of a section of Phase 1. This Progressive P3 process will allow increased collaboration with MDOT SHA, the P3 Developer, and the City of Rockville to develop the final requirements and ensure concerns are addressed.

We appreciate the City's desire to be involved in the development of the Request for Proposals (RFP). The MDOT SHA has been coordinating with City staff and will continue to do so as the RFP is developed. The RFP will be used to select the P3 Developer. In the selection of the P3 Developer, areas such as commitment to minimizing impacts to property, utilities, and the environment; working with stakeholders, local jurisdictions, communities, property owners, and other third parties; and addressing long-term congestion on both the managed lanes and the general-purpose lanes are all important elements that each potential P3 Developer will be evaluated on to allow MDOT to make a determination on who is the right partner to collaborate with Maryland on these critical improvement to I-495 and I-270.

The Honorable Bridget Donnell Newton
The Honorable Monique Ashton
The Honorable Beryl L. Feinberg
The Honorable David Myles
The Honorable Mark Pierzchala
Page Six

Thank you again for contacting me. I appreciate hearing from you. If you have any additional questions or concerns, please feel free to contact Jeffrey T. Folden, P.E., DBIA, MDOT SHA I-495 and I-270 P3 Office Deputy Director, at 410-637-3321 or jfolden1@mdot.maryland.gov. Mr. Folden will be happy to assist you. Of course, you may always contact me directly.

Sincerely,



Lisa B. Choplin, DBIA
Director, I-495 and I-270 P3 Office

cc: The Honorable Kumar P. Barve, Maryland House of Delegates
The Honorable James W. Gilchrist, Maryland House of Delegates
The Honorable Cheryl C. Kagan, The Senate of Maryland
The Honorable Julie Palakovich Carr, Maryland House of Delegates
Mr. Robert DiSpirito, City Manager, City of Rockville
Jeffrey T. Folden, P.E., DBIA, Director, I-495 and I-270 P3 Office, MDOT SHA
Tim Smith, P.E., Administrator, MDOT SHA