

DontWiden270.org - Citizens Against Beltway Expansion (CABE)
Montgomery County Sierra Club - Rockville Coalition Against Widening I-270

October 16, 2018

To: Board Members of the Maryland-National Park and Planning Commission

On behalf of thousands of Maryland residents, we are writing to urge you to ask some tough questions when you are briefed on the state's proposed alternatives for relieving congestion on I-270 and I-495 on October 17th.

As you are likely aware, Governor Hogan's emphasis on widening both highways to make room for new for-profit toll lanes has raised concerns about the feasibility of the financing plan for the \$7-\$9 billion project, the possibility of the need to use eminent domain to seize homes, businesses and properties adjacent to the highways, the short-term nature of the relief that widening offers congested roads, the potential impacts on local parks, the increase in greenhouse gas pollution resulting from encouraging more vehicular traffic, and the lack of emphasis on long-term solutions such as transit.

A new Washington Post [poll](#) plainly shows a majority of voters rejecting toll lanes, reflecting the growing controversy around the Governor's plan. According to the poll, "The centerpiece of the Republican governor's proposal — a \$9 billion project to add four lanes apiece to the Capital Beltway, Interstate 270 and the Baltimore-Washington Parkway — is even opposed by voters in the Washington suburbs, whom the plan is supposed to help. More than half of voters in the D.C. suburbs prefer to invest in public transit rather than building more roads."

The substantive concerns and public sentiment about the project make the M-NCPPC's role in the project of utmost importance. We urge you to ask questions about the following topics on Wednesday morning:

Concerns about seizure of homes, businesses and property:

[Gov. Hogan](#) and [Transportation Secretary Pete Rahn](#) have frequently promised the public that no homes will be taken to make room for widening the highway.

- Is there any legal, binding language at all which guarantees that no homes or property will be seized through eminent domain?
- Given their repeated public promises, why don't they take the additional step of putting it in writing, with binding language that simply rules out consideration of any proposal which involves taking homes, businesses or property?

- The State has issued [public statements](#) saying that its “intention” and “approach” is to remain within the existing rights-of-way of I-270 and I-495. But that doesn’t actually rule out going beyond the existing rights-of-way, does it?
- If the State’s position is that it will remain within the existing rights-of-way, why did the State’s Request for Information about the project and presentations to bidders include the topic of how to manage the risks associated with acquiring additional rights-of-way?

Protecting taxpayers and viability of the project’s financing:

- What are the State’s projections regarding how many toll lane users will be needed and what the toll price will need to be in order to cover all costs of the project as envisioned in the various options under consideration?
- In states where toll lanes have been part of highway expansion and renovation projects, taxpayers have wound up footing the bill. What are your plans for who will pick up the bill if the toll lanes don’t generate the revenue required to pay for themselves?
- Will the projected tolls pay for the expensive stormwater management upgrades the project will require?

Known ineffectiveness of widening as a congestion solution:

Widening highways has been found again and again to [be ineffective at addressing congestion long-term](#). I-270 is an example itself: As the [Washington Post reported in 1999](#), less than eight years after a \$200 million project that widened I-270 to up to twelve lanes in some places, “*the highway has again been reduced to what one official called “a rolling parking lot.” Traffic on some segments already has exceeded the levels projected for 2010.*” Recent highway widenings in [California](#) and [Texas](#) have resulted in slower commute times.

- Is the State taking into consideration that widening highways to add new lanes has repeatedly resulted in more traffic and longer commute times? If so, how is this principle going to be applied to the State’s review of the 15 options and consideration of proposals after that?
- Has the State modeled how long any congestion mitigation benefits resulting from adding lanes might endure? If so, what are the findings? If not, does the State plan to do so? If not, why not?

Apparent lack of attention paid to rail and transit solutions:

- What options has the State explored to find rail or rapid-bus transit solutions to the congestion on the highways?

Impact on Maryland greenhouse gas pollution and climate change:

- The State of Maryland and the MD Department of Transportation have committed to cut greenhouse gas pollution by 40% by 2030, compared to 2006 levels. Widening highways

to encourage more cars on the road will increase pollution, not reduce it. How does the State reconcile its commitment to cut carbon dioxide pollution with this project?

Please respond and let us know what actions you will take (or have taken, if we've missed something) to register your concerns with and questions about this project.

Sincerely,

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