



THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

July 6, 2020

Mr. Gregory I. Slater
Secretary
Maryland Department of Transportation
7201 Corporate Center Drive
Hanover, MD 21076-0548

Dear Secretary Slater:

Since the onset of the global pandemic and the Governor's resulting "stay-at-home" Executive Order, the traffic congestion on Maryland's major highways has practically disappeared. The requirement to telework by government, as well as private sector employers, has shown that peak traffic can be significantly impacted through a statewide incentive to encourage telework. Not all jobs can be done remotely, but there is evidence that a small percentage of traffic reduction by those employees who do not need to be on the roads at peak times can result in a free flow of traffic throughout the day.

Dr. Lei Zhang, Director of the Maryland Transportation Institute at the University of Maryland (Institute), reports that the Institute has developed a comprehensive model of travel choices and traffic conditions for all roads throughout the State of Maryland referred to as the Maryland Statewide Transportation Model. This tool tells us how much traffic we need to reduce to keep roadways operating at free-flow conditions on I-270, I-495, and elsewhere. In general, we only need 5% to 15% of drivers to avoid traffic bottlenecks during peak periods for all of the traffic jams in Maryland to dissipate. To achieve that reduction, drivers can choose – when practical – to work from home, use alternative modes of transportation, shift departure time, change travel routes, or use other Transportation Demand Management practices.

For example, Dr. Zhang and the Institute observed in 2018 that a 2% reduction in the 114,000 vehicles that travel on I-270 northbound during the afternoon peak period (4 – 7 pm) would result in a 27% reduction in that thoroughfare's peak period congestion. That is a mere 2,280 vehicles over three hours. To reduce peak period congestion by 100% and have free-flow conditions, a quick estimate shows that traffic on the thoroughfare would need to be reduced by 13% – or 14,820 vehicles.

Those numbers are achievable and do not require billions of dollars in new infrastructure investment using risky financing methods of which we have now become all too familiar with the downsides. Moreover, saving money on roadway expansion will allow us to re-target some of those funds and focus on other critical transportation needs around our State. We have the opportunity to use the data to work with all levels of government, the Transportation Planning

Board and Maryland's other Metropolitan Planning Organizations, the private sector business community, and Maryland commuters to explore ways to reduce traffic, particularly during peak times in innovative ways.

There are models to encourage telework. Virginia has offered a telework tax credit at various times over the years to encourage employers to establish telework policies. Montgomery County is using COVID-19 related emergency funding to help reimburse telework-related costs. A statewide effort could go even further and tie the COVID-19 related emergency to ongoing encouragement of telework. Together, these efforts can reduce highway construction costs, increase economic development, enhance traffic safety, and create more family time and better quality of life for our region's workers. Reducing or even eliminating traffic congestion through this targeted and low-cost effort would be a transformative change for the State of Maryland. This is the time to move forward on bold and innovative initiatives to impact our daily lives.

We are requesting that your Department take this unique opportunity to work with the Institute and other government agencies and stakeholders to investigate and recommend policy initiatives to solve one of the State's most challenging problems – traffic congestion. We would be happy to assist with the effort.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Delegate Marc Korman, Chair
Transportation and the Environment
Subcommittee



Delegate Carol Krimm, Vice Chair
Transportation and the Environment
Subcommittee

cc: Ms. Lynda Eisenberg, Chair
Baltimore Regional Transportation Board

Ms. Kelly Russell, Chair
National Capital Regional Transportation Planning Board