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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
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Transcript of Senator Cheryl Kagan's testimony
to the Maryland Transportation Authority (MDTA)
Re: proposed expansion & tolls on I-270 & I-495
Monday, July 12, 2021, Rockville

Good afternoon. For the record I am Cheryl Kagan, very proud to be the Senator for Rockville and Gaithersburg.

It has been quite a journey to hear from literally thousands of people who live in my district, and, as Mayor Newton indicated, from around the region, with their thoughts and concerns.

Clearly, we have traffic issues. It was hard to get to work. And then there was COVID.

Do we need solutions to our problems? Absolutely. But I'm here to raise four fundamental concerns that I hope are impetus for this board to slow down the process.

First, everyone has talked about the tolls. I had the experience when I was going to Virginia to speak at a national 9-1-1 conference during rush-hour. There was a lot of traffic, and signs were really unclear. And Secretary Slater has heard this story - and I was trying not to get into the toll lane - and I was confused and freaked and suddenly, I end up getting on my E-Zpass a charge for \$67!

Now I was a very early and consistent supporter of the ICC. The Inter-County Connector provides an important service for people trying to get from my district to the Baltimore area. But for me, it's a splurge; I can't afford to even pay the \$2.72 or whatever it is even on off-peak hours. The idea of \$67 to get to my conference in a timely manner was insane. I assure you that most of my

constituents would not be able to do that. I think many of my constituents, and folks who have spoken today, have been very effective in talking through the details. With respect, Secretary Slater, the details have been hard to find. And you and I have had a number of conversations about those. And the “we think” and “we hope” and “the plans are unclear yet “ is insufficient to send this plan forward.

That’s only Issue One.

Issue two, the Environmental Impact Statement, which I haven’t heard very many people talk about, but that’s because it’s been around so long. EIS data should be forthcoming, should be clear, should be reliable, should be accurate, before this project moves forward. It’s our responsibility to be the stewards of our environment.

Third, telework is something we have all gotten used to. I was a few minutes late because I was on an important Zoom meeting that I couldn’t leave. We are all connecting with people in different ways. We’re all working different hours and different days. I suspect that, like me, you’ve been doing work into the late evening and on weekends. We are not going to go back to 9 to 5 Monday through Friday commuting-- we’re just not. And so pulling the trigger now and pledging to go forward with this project when we don’t know how much teleworking will continue post-COVID, and how many people are actually going to go back to sitting on 270 and sitting on the Beltway in traditional work hours... I think it would be irresponsible for us not to have access to that data.

And then the fourth issue is in Congress. The Biden-Harris administration is talking about lots and lots and lots of federal funding for infrastructure improvement. *Why on earth* would we want to tax and toll Maryland residents in addition to, in lieu of a possible bonanza of funding that could be coming through with that project?! And even the smaller budget (reduced from what the President had proposed) could still mean significant funding, thanks to Congressman David Trone, now on the Appropriations Committee, and our other wonderful leaders.

The last thing I’ll just reference is that there were terrific conversations about Monorail. There’s the Bus Rapid Transit (BRT). There’s been inadequate conversations about mass transit and the opportunities that those options offer.

We have got to be careful as we do this, because I can tell you there are constituents of mine who might happily pay \$67 to ride in a fancy toll lane; I assure you that as you go further north into Gaithersburg, into Germantown, those folks for the most part are not going to be able to afford the tolls. Yet they are the ones who'll be driving more miles and paying higher tolls.

I implore you: I'm not against the concept of solutions. I am not a "never never." I am a "not now" and "not without the data we need."

Thank you so much for your attention and for holding this hearing in Rockville, the heart of this project.

Thank you Mr. Secretary. Thank you board members.