

Testimony at the Phase 1 South: American Legion Bridge I-270 to I-370 Toll Rate Range Setting Process In-Person Testimony Public Hearing by Arthur Katz, Ph.D

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

The MDTA Board has been put in the difficult position of being pressed to prematurely use its broad powers to proceed with Toll setting actions that would contribute to irrevocably approving the current I-495/I-270 project.

This project is a mess. It has become incoherent.

In contrast, MDOT is currently implementing a major traffic management system on I-270 that could reduce future peak travel times by up to 40% but the Board will not be able to evaluate its effectiveness if it prematurely acts.

MDOT recently removed the Beltway toll lanes east of the I-270 spurs from current action - The new version of the project in many instances will be worse than doing nothing. It is likely that we will have Toll trips that are slower compared to trips on the I-495/I-270 highways without toll lanes - the so-called No Build alternative.

A recent Post editorial expressed concern about a chokepoint at the American Legion Bridge causing serious traffic problems if the toll road isn't built. But the chokepoint does not go away in MDOT's truncated project. It simply migrates to a point on the Beltway between the two I-270 spurs where 6 lanes must become 4 - because the toll lanes east of the spurs must vanish. The likely result is peak congestion backing up at least to the I-270/I-495 split.

Drivers making trips from west of the Spurs to eastern destinations will experience serious slowdowns at this chokepoint.

With congestion building at the split, it is very possible that No Build peak travel times for round trips involving I-270 such as between I-370 and River Road, or the Clara Barton exit, or Virginia could be faster than the non-toll lanes of the toll road (where 85-90% of the drivers travel) and even for the toll lanes themselves.

We haven't even included the hundreds of millions of dollars in costs and the dramatic disruptions to communities, local economies and the environment from rebuilding all the interchanges and bridges along I-270 and the Beltway.

To reiterate, the Board would benefit from seeing if the MDOT traffic management initiative can work, avoiding turning the existing 12 lanes on I-270, which equal the widest point on the New Jersey Turnpike, into 14.

Each of you has been handed a dilemma: How can I fulfill my fiduciary responsibility to the people of Maryland, Montgomery and Prince Georges counties when I have no final information from the EIS to weight the pros and cons, benefits and costs of this project?

The fundamental question to be answered is: What are the appropriate tolls when the project does not work?

Please delay action on tolls and the project, until you can make an informed decision.

Thank you