

MDTA Testimony: July 12, 2021
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I'm Janet Gallant, one of the coordinators of the volunteer organization DontWiden270.org.

At your June 24 MDTA Board meeting, Board member Lee Gaines asked if a recent regional Transportation Planning Board vote had effectively "killed" the toll-lane project. That was a reasonable question; Mr. Gaines was looking at this P3 project as a whole, in its wider context.

The responses Mr. Gaines got at the meeting were chilling. He was told that the toll setting process is independent of the procurement process is independent of the environmental review process. That they are independent tracks.

In fact, they're tightly woven together and all focused not on meeting people's transportation needs, but on maximizing revenue for private, international companies.

If this P3 is approved, the citizens you are charged to serve will experience real harm. The vast majority of people who regularly use I-270 and I-495 will find the toll-lanes outrageously unaffordable – the rush hour maximum when the toll-lanes open in 2026 will be over \$4.00 a mile. The same people will find the free lanes more congested than ever, and the cause of social and economic justice set back. All as a result of deliberate MDOT and MDTA design.

Here's an example of how the needs of middle- and lower-income people were discounted in the toll-setting process from the beginning. Among the documents released by MDTA is the study used to determine how much people are willing to pay to take the toll lanes. Problem is, only certain sorts of people were invited to take part in the study.

Of the 2,383 participants, 54% were male, the median age was 55-64, and 43% lived in 2-person households. Fewer than 12% had a household income under \$75,000. The median income was between \$125,000 and \$150,000. A whopping 23% earned \$200,000 or more.

Where are the majority of working families in this study? They aren't there because MDOT and MDTA never intended the toll lanes for them.

But that doesn't mean lower-income and middle-income people don't have a designated role in this toll-lane scheme. They – we – are the congestion fodder. We are the people who fill up the reduced number of free lanes until congestion is so intolerable that the few who can afford it pay the sky-high tolls to escape. It's been baked in from the beginning.

The State is rushing ahead with this P3 that – by design – will benefit only the wealthiest and those who stand to profit from the toll lane project. This project must not be approved. Thank you.