

February 11, 2020

Honorable Kumar P. Barve
Chair, House Environment and Transportation Committee
House Office Building, Room 251
6 Bladen St., Annapolis, MD 21401

Subject: **Support HB 292**

Dear Chair Barve and House Environment and Transportation Committee members:

Montgomery County Faith Alliance for Climate Solutions (MCFACS) unites people of faith to help solve the climate emergency that is disrupting and threatening life on Earth. MCFACS represents 50 diverse faith congregations, whose voices are valuable in the conversation on climate change, and whose faith-based actions draw on a deep well of love for each other and the planet we share. More about us can be found at www.facebook.com/groups/MCFACS/about/

We implore you to improve Maryland's public transportation systems to help all Marylanders to affordably get to work and travel as needed while reducing global warming emissions. We strongly oppose the recent Board of Public Works (BPW) decision to support new lanes on I-270 and the Beltway, particularly when so many important transit needs are going unaddressed. We ask you to both support and work for passage of House Bill 292 and its companion Senate Bill 229 which would extend to all Maryland counties an existing law that requires the State to get consent from a majority of the impacted counties on the Eastern Shore before proceeding with new toll facilities that affect them.

Automobiles are one of the two biggest sources of greenhouse gas emissions yet the state is poised to encourage their further use while not providing a transit alternative, including on an expanded American Legion Bridge.

Here is a partial list of Maryland's unmet transit needs.

- The MARC Brunswick/Frederick line, now confined to weekday rush-hour service, should be expanded to daily, all-day service similar to MARC's Penn Line.
- Gov. Hogan should reverse his decision to leave Montgomery County's Corridor Cities Transitway twisting in the wind. <https://bethesdamagazine.com/bethesda-beat/transportation/state-ends-commitment-to-corridor-cities-transitway/>
- Gov. Hogan should revisit his decision to kill Baltimore's badly-needed Red Line.
- Transit in the "planned" community of Columbia must be expanded beyond today's hourly service on circuitous local bus routes, including daily, hourly Baltimore-Columbia Mall-Silver Spring Transit Center bus service (as currently offered on Maryland Commuter Bus 201 linking BWI and Arundel Mills Mall with Shady Grove Metro and other Montgomery County locations).
- Public transportation—currently non-existent—should be provided between the Baltimore/Washington region and St. Mary's College of Maryland.

Addressing these and other transit needs would both make it easier for travelers to minimize driving in the short term and foster transit- and pedestrian-friendly development that will make it easier for even more people in the future to escape auto dependence.

As well, the public-private partnership (P3) approach would create serious equity problems because the toll lanes – as we have seen in Virginia – often would be unaffordable for most people. For the economics to work for the private operator, congestion on existing lanes must remain severe enough to encourage an adequate number of people to pay high tolls to escape it. **We feel the toll lanes (primarily for the wealthy) are unfair and morally wrong.**

Equally important, [a recent Congressional Budget Office report](#) found that taxpayers are on the hook for 44% of P3 costs, contrary to the “something-for-nothing” story the state is telling..

It has been represented that the P3 project the BPW approved will provide a “stream of revenue” for transit. That money will go to the affected counties and thus will not address most of Maryland’s unmet public transit needs and create more traffic and pollution problems in the future.

This new expansion, by funneling more traffic onto the Beltway east of I-270, will increase pressure to widen that part of the Beltway, setting in motion still further investments that take Maryland in the wrong direction.

Consider how quickly new lanes on I-270 filled up after the highway’s 1990 widening. In October 1990, widened I-270 debuted “as a 12-lane superhighway of the future.” But, reported *The Post*, “less than eight years after the project was finished, the highway has again been reduced to what one official called ‘a rolling parking lot.’” Col. Robert McGarry, then county transportation director, said later, “I personally thought [congestion relief] would last much longer than this...I just didn't in my wildest dreams think it would fill up that fast.”

www.washingtonpost.com/local/roads-are-built-metro-lines-open--eventually/2011/08/31/gIQA14LqzJ_story.html

<https://dontwiden270.org/news/2018/8/15/maryland-has-widened-i-270-before-howd-that-work-out>

We ask you to remember the teachings of your faith tradition and consider the moral implication of the increased road construction, causing more greenhouse gas emissions; harming the climate – witness Paradise, California, last year, Australia this year, and extreme weather events, such as the tornados last week, and increasing number of flooding events in Maryland.

Again, we encourage you to make the bold policy decisions to strengthen public transportation and encourage transit-friendly development. We need policymakers who understand why Marriott and other major corporations – paying attention to younger workers – are vacating auto-dependent places like Rock Spring Drive.

It should not be necessary to explain why a massive highway project makes no sense. It's not just environmental issues, but the absurdity of further intensifying automobile dependence when a growing share of the population – especially seniors and younger workers – know the environmental challenges we face and prefer living and working in transit- and pedestrian-friendly communities.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Tod', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Tod Wickersham on behalf of

Montgomery County Faith Alliance for Climate Solutions

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Cc: Montgomery County Executive, Marc Elrich
Montgomery County Council Members
Other Delegates from Montgomery County