

**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SENATE BILL 229**  
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Senate Finance Committee

My name is Gary Hodge, President of Regional Policy Advisors. I'm speaking today as a former elected Charles County Commissioner and Executive Director and Chairman of the Tri-County Council for Southern Maryland. In my roles as a public official, advisor to elected officials and a citizen activist, I have been engaged in transportation planning, policy and advocacy for almost 50 years.

I support Senate Bill 229, introduced by Senator Susan Lee (16-Montgomery) with 15 co-sponsors, and by Delegate Mary Lehman (21-Prince George's) in the House with 52 co-sponsors, and request your favorable consideration.

Proponents of Senate Bill 229 are here to address some compelling concerns related to the massive toll projects being proposed by the Administration—the \$9-13 billion addition of toll lanes on I-270 and the Capital Beltway (I-495), and potentially on the Baltimore-Washington Parkway (295), as well as a new toll Bridge across the Chesapeake Bay that could cost \$4 to \$10 billion dollars, or more.

The Governor recently called the toll highway-building program “the largest P3 traffic relief project in the world.” Is that an argument for speeding up, or for taking a more thoughtful and deliberate approach, evaluating the impacts and the alternatives before plunging ahead and making irrevocable commitments with potentially serious consequences for the future of our State, our communities and our people?

This simple 31-word bill would amend an existing State law enacted more than forty years ago, in 1978, covering the nine Eastern Shore counties, Section 4-407 of the Transportation Article, and extend the same authority to all Maryland counties. It would require the State to obtain the “express consent” of a majority of the affected counties before building new toll highway or bridge projects in the State.

The bill has three goals:

First, to make sure that the State advises and consults the elected county representatives of Maryland citizens whose lives would be directly affected by proposed State toll projects;

Second, to make sure that the impacts of major new toll highways and bridges are evaluated before irrevocable decades-long State commitments and multibillion dollar investments are made, and that cost-effective alternatives—including rapid transit alternatives—are fully considered;

Before the State embarks on “the biggest P3 in the world” it deserves much more scrutiny than it has received so far.

Some impacts that need to be carefully evaluated are:

- The long-term impact of these toll projects on the State's finances, its bond rating, and the risks of default to Maryland taxpayers,

- The impact that high tolls will have on Maryland's commuters and motorists, knowing that the financial viability of the P3 scheme relies upon sustaining high levels of traffic congestion on the free lanes in order to generate revenue on the toll lanes,
- The impact that construction of toll highways and bridges, with on-ramps, exits, interchanges, road widening and support facilities will have on the residents of adjacent neighborhoods and communities, farms, natural resources and heritage areas.
- The impact of new highway construction on future growth, development and land use patterns that will shape the future of the State,
- The environmental impact of a massive new highway-building program on the State's goal of reducing mobile-source greenhouse gas emissions,
- The impact that depleting Maryland's future capacity to invest in infrastructure with greater potential to stimulate economic growth and jobs could have on the State's future economy and competitiveness, and
- The ability of a toll-financed highway-building scheme to deliver on the promise of reduced traffic congestion, and enhanced mobility, access to jobs and economic prosperity for all our citizens.

And the third important goal, to restore the tradition of consultation, collaboration, transparency and accountability between the Maryland Department of Transportation and the State's counties on transportation policy, priority-setting and project implementation. In the last four years we have seen this dynamic relationship wither to insignificance.

The Administration's massive new transportation initiatives were unveiled at press conferences without warning to the public, the affected communities or their local elected representatives. At the same time, regional priorities with proven economic hitting power and the promise to deliver faster commutes, reduced congestion, and enhanced local mobility—projects that have already been vetted, repeatedly by major State studies—have languished on the former Secretary of Transportation's desk, waiting for action.

Major questions like these are being raised all over the State by concerned citizens and elected officials—questions that still have no answers.

There is reason to hope that the State's newly appointed Secretary of Transportation, who has earned a reputation as a responsive and effective administrator, will restore Maryland's 50-year tradition of collaboration with representatives of local government on major transportation projects.

But an enduring cooperative relationship between the State and the counties should rest on a foundation in law that survives the relatively brief tenure of Secretaries and Governors. Senate Bill 229 needs to be enacted. Please give it your favorable consideration.

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