

Chairpersons Sen. Guzzone, Sen. Kelley, Vice Chairs Sen. Rosapepe, Sen. Feldman

I urge your support for SB 843 I-495 and I-270 Public-Private Partnership – Partnership Agreement (Maryland Department of Transportation Promises Act of 2021).

I have lived for more than 30 years in my home in Oakview, 0.2 of a mile from Roscoe Nix Elementary school, which in turn abuts the existing Beltway. Before that I lived in Takoma Park and Hyattsville, and was engaged in environmental issues including multiple environmental impact studies of the Interstate County Connector, and local climate change mitigation issues.

I've long followed the progress of the Managed Lanes group of the State Highway Administration /Department of Transportation (SHA/DOT), attending several of their neighborhood workshops. I also attended National Capitol Park and Planning Commission (MNCPPC) meetings with SHA/DOT and watched commission members struggle in vain to get SHA/DOT to share vital information on their plans, ultimately telling the SHA/DOT team that they needed to share more. When I asked Chair Casey Anderson why MNCPPC didn't file a public information act request to get more from SHA/DOT, he said they were considering it. As was I, but I feared a slow-walk with page charges I couldn't afford.

In 2020 I joined other volunteers to critique the 18,000 page draft environmental impact statement (DEIS) of this project. I read in detail several thousand pages and skimmed many more. In the discussion of existing hazardous waste sites, large sections of the maps of the project were labeled as unknown/to be determined.

Furthermore, there was no analysis of hazardous wastes in sites proposed for remediating streams and wetlands. And one proposed remediation site is on land around MD 200 and its ramps in Konterra, where Indian Creek's watershed was macerated to allow the diversion of MD 200 south of its original route for facilitating cross-county traffic to BWI just to give Konterra access to I-95:

“Sufficient access to the Interstate system will be critical for the Konterra property to develop into its full potential,” the State Highway Administration said in a 2004 report. That access would come by way of the ICC. **In order to build ramps from the ICC into Konterra, the state paid the development's owners \$74 million for 240 acres. Earlier, the same land had been appraised at \$32 million, though the Gould family had challenged the lower valuation.”** Eugene L. Meyer, *The Road Less Traveled*, Bethesda Magazine, September-October, 2013, emphasis added.

Konterra is still undeveloped. But Indian Creek is irrevocably changed. Using it as a mitigation site for I-495/I-270 environmental damage won't restore it.

Taxpayers then paid only a few million dollars plus the ongoing costs in more miles travelled of a poorly aligned MD 200 for that travesty.

With the more than \$11 billion proposed expansion of I-495/I-270, despite all the claims of Governor Hogan and SHA/DOT, taxpayers are at risk for much more.

The cost issues, direct and indirect, raised by the mostly critical comments on the DEIS have not been addressed by SHA/DOT:

According to SHA, the state received close to 3,000 comments on the DEIS over the 120-day public comment period, which concluded on Nov. 9. State officials are currently reviewing the comments and conducting additional analysis.

“Giving all comments proper consideration takes time and is our immediate focus,” SHA wrote in its statement. “This will include continuing discussions with our agency partners and others to reach mutually beneficial solutions as this National Environmental Policy Act process continues.”

Briana Adhikusuma Follow, <https://bethesdamagazine.com/bethesda-beat/transportation/state-expects-i-495-i-270-widening-to-proceed-despite-navys-opposition/>

Instead of waiting for the final environmental impact statement, and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) federal Record of Decision (ROD) SHA/DOT has plunged ahead and engaged TransUnion as the favored private candidate, leaving the resolution of these problems in TransUnion’s hands: the proverbial fox guarding the henhouse.

There are numerous other serious direct fiscal issues including impact on water and electrical infrastructure, and the cost to ratepayers and all taxpayers for addressing these.

But the most serious issue is the push – against local opposition -- to cover ever more land with impermeable surface leading to flooding and water pollution, while there is evidence that more work from home and less commuting will reduce congestion (no studies based on these projections have been done). In addition to other very imperfect planning for the next half-century that could leave Maryland taxpayers at risk if toll revenue doesn’t meet expectation. The design data for this project (kept secret by SHA/DOT) appears to be based on the post WWII 20th century world rather than our rapidly changing one, where there will almost certainly be more working from home and less commuting. Where younger generations may or may not decide to live in suburban sprawl. And should we should encourage more sprawl if we are to meet very ambitious near and long-term climate goals?

At one SHA/DOT MLS workshop I asked what the climate effects of removing all the trees adjacent to the current Beltway would be. “Oh, we’re going to replant trees,” he said. “Where?” I asked. “Planting them in Western Maryland is good for them, not good for us.”

The history of Governor Hogan’s push to widen I-495 and I-270 is a sad example of executive overreach, ignoring the legislature, local voices, and both fiscal responsibility and more important, environmental responsibility in a time where we are seeing more and more crises from climate change and the failure of governments to acknowledge and address it. Witness wildfires in Australian and California, extreme cold in Texas and other states, flooding here in Maryland and Virginia and Florida, other catastrophes around the planet. What good are more jobs in a dying planet?

I urge the members of these committees to support SB 843 and other efforts to hold this insane project in check, to keep DOT to the promises that were generously made but are now being ignored.

Sincerely,

Sarah Leshner,

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