

**STATEMENT OF ED RICH, PRESIDENT
GREATER FARMLAND CIVIC ASSOCIATION
Budget and Taxation Committee
February 22, 2021**

I am the president of the Greater Farmland Civic Association, which represents over 900 homes in the Old Farm, Tilden Woods, Hickory Woods, and Walnut Woods neighborhoods, directly abutting the twelve-lane highway that is Interstate 270. We **strongly support** the enactment of **Senate Bill 0843 I-495 and I-270 Public-Private Partnership—Partnership Agreement—Requirements (MDOT Promises Act of 2021)**.

SB 0843 address concerns of the serious financial risks as well as specific concerns raised by the current P3 project to put toll lanes on I 270 and I 495. This bill contains necessary safeguards: it ensures that the BPW cannot approve the P3 agreement without the inclusion of specific language regarding financial responsibility; it prevents any land or home acquisitions other than those specified in the approved construction contract; it prevents the submission of the P3 agreement for approval by the BPW until the final environment impact statement has been completed; and it guarantees a minimum dedication of toll revenues for transit (at least 10%). The bill puts into statute the State's promises regarding the P3 project, thereby protecting Maryland residents.

Because of our location, the Governor's proposed expansion of 270 will have a substantially negative environmental impact on our community. We strongly support legislation that will simply mean: promises made-promises kept.

We have seen the Governor touting the benefits of his P3 project while downplaying the environmental impact on those who live near the project. We have seen how the state's Transportation Department pays lip service to our concerns while ridding the project of any alternatives other than the laying down of more concrete and asphalt. We have seen first-hand that building additional lanes leads to more cars, more traffic, and environmental degradation in our neighborhood and the surrounding areas. We listen daily to traffic reports about accidents on 270 and 495 that routinely shut down these highways and wonder how wide these highways would need to become for cars to get around a jackknifed tractor trailer or the frequent multi-vehicle pile-up, not to mention the inevitable rubber-necking that occurs in both directions that slows through-traffic to a crawl. We've seen the Governor's ill-conceived announcement of the reconstruction of the American Legion Bridge with no consideration of space for a monorail or other rail system that could alleviate traffic between Maryland and the employment centers in Tyson's Corner and Falls Church. While we continue to oppose the plans for highway expansion as ill conceived and unnecessary, we believe that the Governor, MDOT and the State Highway Administration should, at the very least, be legislatively required to abide by their promises.

The contract that MDOT has awarded without even bothering to complete an Environmental Impact Statement says that the contractor will do its construction work at no cost to the state or taxpayers. While this is dubious at best and leaves aside the obvious point that the lanes will be available solely for those who can afford to use them, the 50-year contract ultimately limits Maryland taxpayers in finding new solutions to traffic and environmental degradation in a period of time that a recent United Nations scientific report has called crucial to preventing the worst consequences of climate change, caused in large part by burning fossil fuels. There is much more at stake here than giving some commuters a faster drive to work, particularly now when, due to the Pandemic, many have discovered the benefits of teleworking and will permanently and gladly forego their hours of commuting time in exchange for a better quality of life.

We strongly believe that the state can and must find a fair, comprehensive approach that makes other modes of transportation more accessible, affordable, reliable and viable alternatives to the private vehicle and that encourages the creation of employment centers and opportunities, along with affordable housing options, along the I-270 corridor at major transit hubs and telework options to reduce the need for numerous residents to drive to and from work.

We thank you for your consideration and urge you to do right by our residents and all Maryland residents.