



## **GLEN ECHO HEIGHTS MOBILIZATION**

**Committee: Budget and Taxation**

**Testimony on: SB 843/HB 67 -- Maryland Department of Transportation Promises Act of 2021**

**Position: Favorable**

**Hearing Date: February 22, 2021**

Glen Echo Heights Mobilization submits this testimony in support of HB 67 and SB 843, bills to impose minimum obligations, standards, and requirements on the anticipated I-495 and I-270 Public-Private Partnership Agreement.

### **The legislation would:**

- Establish conditions on any approval by the Board of Public Works of a Public-Private Partnership for the expansion of I-495 and I-270.
- Limit the discretion of the Board of Public Works to approve such an agreement, and ensure the interests of the public, the taxpayer, and the environment, in the approval process.
- Factor into the approval process historical experience of other localities with similar public-private partnerships and attempt to hold Governor Hogan and the Board of Public Works to the unrealistic promises made with respect to this anticipated partnership.
- Prohibit the Board of Public Works from approving any agreements that expend additional state funds for the program beyond what is allocated in the Consolidated Transportation Program as of October 1, 2021.
- Make additions to and deletions from related State Finance and Procurement and Transportation provisions of the Maryland State Code.

### **We support this legislation for the following reasons:**

- The bill would prohibit the Board of Public Works from moving forward until a full Environment Impact Statement is prepared to assess impacts on the human environment of the I-495 and I-270 public-private project, as mandated by the National Environment Policy Act.
- The bill would impose burdens on the approval a public-private partnership agreement, and those burdens would protect Maryland taxpayers from being burdened financially by the same business and governmental promises that have deceived other jurisdictions in similar road development and toll projects.
- The bill would ensure that the Department of Public Works would not expend additional taxpayer resources beyond what has been approved.
- The bill would impose a 10% burden on any potential public-private partnership revenues and ensure that those revenues would go back to Maryland transportation projects.
- The bill would ensure that all public transportation vehicles could use toll lanes without charge.
- The bill would prohibit the state from acquiring lands before the approval of the partnership agreement, and thus prohibit individuals or organizations from benefitting from advance, anticipatory land acquisitions.

- **The bill would attempt to hold the Maryland government to the promises made to the public in return for obtaining approval to undertake the I-495 and I-270 expansion project.**

### **Conclusion**

Without doubt, GEHM opposes the project to begin with. It is inconsistent with other state and local commitments to focus on environmental sustainability and to take steps to minimize climate change. To the contrary, while playing lip service to climate sustainability, our state government has, with this project, doubled down on climate change impacts to the detriment of our children, Maryland citizenry, and the future of the planet.

But, from the perspective of the legislation, we believe our state government is, intentionally or unintentionally, setting up a partnership that will impose financial obligations on Maryland taxpayers and impose an ongoing burden to provide subsidies to a private partnership to continue to manage this toll project for decades to come. This has been the experience of other states and cities, who have been compelled to ensure that private enterprises make profits on toll projects while the public is compelled to subsidize the private enterprises. This legislation is an urgent attempt to avoid that outcome for Maryland citizens.