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**Committee: Environment and Transportation**

**Testimony on: HB705 - “Transportation - I-270 and I-495 - Prohibition on Toll Lanes (Stop Unnecessary Toll Lanes Act of 2021)”**

**Position: Support**

**Hearing Date: February 12, 2021**

The Maryland Chapter of the Sierra Club strongly supports HB705, which would prohibit the Maryland Transportation Authority or a private entity participating in a public-private partnership from imposing a toll for the use of I-495 or I-270.

We strongly oppose the controversial and ill-conceived proposal by the Governor for a public-private partnership (P3) to build and operate up to 4 toll lanes on I-495 and I-270 under a 50-year contract with the state. Our primary objection to expanding those highways with new toll lanes is that greater use of transportation demand management (TDM) and expansion of transit alternatives would be far less costly, better serve the needs of more residents at all income levels, and would be far, far better for the environment and public health. TDM alternatives include telework, more car and van pooling, and reimbursing employees who use transit vs. having their parking paid for.

Also, numerous studies show that expanding highways to solve congestion does not work for long because more lanes encourage more people to drive, which leads to congestion again, more sprawl, and more climate and health-damaging air pollution being emitted from the tailpipes of the increasing number of cars on the road. The transportation sector already is Maryland’s number one generator of climate-damaging greenhouse gas emissions. Our state’s Greenhouse Gas Inventory indicates that gasoline and diesel-powered vehicles account for 89% of this pollution. Tailpipe emissions from these vehicles also are hazardous to human health and contribute to cancers, heart disease, asthma, emphysema and other respiratory diseases. More than 80% of Marylanders live in counties that do not meet federal clean air standards for ozone, due in significant part to tailpipe emissions.

The state already has acknowledged difficulty in meeting the goal it set for itself in the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Act to reduce state greenhouse gas emissions 40% by 2030 (compared to the 2006 level). Adding new toll lanes to I-495 and I-270 will lessen the likelihood the state will meet this goal.

We also have serious equity concerns with the proposed “managed” toll lanes on I-495 and I-270 whose tolls would be based on the amount of congestion on the roads. The more congestion on the highways there is, the greater the demand to use the toll lanes and the higher the toll charged. Based on what has been happening with toll lanes on highways in nearby Northern Virginia, tolls may range as high as \$60 each day – far too high for anyone but wealthy residents to pay.

In summary, this bill makes sense for a number of reasons, and we urge a favorable report on it.

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Founded in 1892, the Sierra Club is America’s oldest and largest grassroots environmental organization. The Maryland Chapter has over 75,000 members and supporters, and the Sierra Club nationwide has over 800,000 members and nearly four million supporters.