

Statement by National Parks Conservation Association in Support of HB 67
Maryland Department of Transportation Promises Act of 2021
Before the Environment and Transportation Committee
February 12, 2021
Kyle Hart, Mid-Atlantic Field Representative

Members of the Environment and Transportation Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to share the support of National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA) for House Bill 67. We comment today on behalf of our 28,398 members and supporters in Maryland. The National Parks Conservation Association is the only national membership organization dedicated to advocacy of behalf of our country's national parks. NPCA's mission is to protect and enhance America's National Park System for present and future generations, a mission we have upheld since NPCA was created by the very first National Park Service Director, Stephen Mather, in 1919. Maryland is fortunate to be home to 18 national park sites, visited yearly by almost 7 million people and contributing to over \$300 billion in economic benefit to the state.

According to the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS), the proposed expansion of I-495 and I-270 would negatively impact 100 acres of National Park Service (NPS) land, plus an additional 30+ acres of local and regional parks. The entire project would negatively impact 1,500 acres of forest canopy, 30+ miles of streams and rivers, and 4 acres of wetlands. NPS sites that would be negatively impacted include Greenbelt Park, the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park, the George Washington Memorial Parkway, Clara Barton Parkway, Suitland Parkway, and the Baltimore-Washington Parkway. Although not directly impacted, Rock Creek Park's streams and wetlands will suffer from increased polluted runoff created by adding more impervious surface to its watershed. NPCA is highly concerned about the effect this proposal will have on parks, recreation, tourism, and local watersheds.

Over the course of the planning for this project, the Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) has made numerous promises to the public regarding the proposed expansion. HB 67 would simply codify those promises and ensure that MDOT holds up their end of the bargain. For instance, MDOT has repeatedly stated that the project would come at no net cost to taxpayers. However, the DEIS indicates that upwards of \$1 billion in state subsidies could be needed to complete construction. MDOT also promised it would not send the Board of Public Works a developer contract until the environmental review was complete. Now MDOT says it will submit one as early as April, months before the Final EIS is complete. The bill would codify other promises that MDOT has repeatedly made over the years to ensure that they don't attempt to renege on those as well.

If this project is truly in the best interest of Maryland residents, MDOT should have absolutely no problem with this bill. All NPCA is requesting is that we hold them to their word. That is why NPCA urges the Committee to report House Bill 67 favorably. Thank you.