
May 17, 2021

The Honorable Charles Allen
Chairman
National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board
Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments
777 North Capitol Street, N.E., Suite 300
Washington DC 20002

Dear Chairman Allen:

I am writing to update the National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board (TPB) on Maryland's I-495 & I-270 Public Private Partnership (P3) Program. Included with this letter is the Maryland Department of Transportation's (MDOT) recent fact sheet announcing a new recommended preferred alternative (RPA) for the I-495 & I-270 Managed Lanes Study (MLS) to deliver Phase 1 South: American Legion Bridge I-270 to I-370. This study was previously updated to be more consistent with key elements of Visualize 2045 including adding high-occupancy toll (HOT) lanes, an integrated regional commuter bus network, increased access to transit, and improved bicycle and pedestrian connections throughout the region.

While the February 2021 revisions to the project submission for inclusion in the Air Quality Conformity Analysis remain unchanged - changing Express Toll Lanes (ETL) to HOT lanes - additional changes *not reflected* in that submission are now proposed. These key revisions include changing the phases from I-495 east of MD 187 to the Woodrow Wilson Bridge and I-270 east spur from east of MD 187 to I-495 from construction to study status only. This change will allow MDOT to continue further analysis and collaboration with the public, stakeholders, and agency partners until we have enough support to advance congestion relief improvements on this section of the interstate system. The remaining phases including I-495 from the American Legion Bridge to east of MD 187 and I-270 from I-495, including the I-270 west spur, to I-70, which are part of the Phase 1: American Legion Bridge I-270 to I-70 Relief Plan currently being solicited for a Progressive P3/predevelopment agreement, will remain as construction at an estimated cost of \$6.0 billion.

As you know, for almost three years the MDOT State Highway Administration (MDOT SHA) has been conducting a thorough review, study, detailed traffic analysis, environmental analysis, financial analysis, and capital cost analysis while continually gathering input from the public, regulatory agencies and other important stakeholders. Based on all of this work, on January 27 MDOT SHA formally recommended **Alternative 9**, adding two HOT lanes on I-495 across the American Legion Bridge to west of MD 5, and adding a HOT lane and converting the existing high-occupancy vehicle (HOV) lane into a HOT lane north on I-270 to I-370 for the MLS.

Under the *new* RPA, the same improvements associated with Alternative 9 are proposed but only within the limits of Phase 1 South. The Phase 1 South limits extend on I-495 from the George Washington Memorial Parkway, across the American Legion Bridge, to east of MD 187 and on I-270, including the west spur, to I-370 and on the I-270 east spur from east of MD 187 to I-270. Under this alternative, a new American Legion Bridge will be provided and buses and vehicles with three or more people will be able to travel the new HOT lanes free of charge, reducing dependence on single-occupant vehicles and providing opportunities for faster, more reliable bus transit service, carpooling and vanpooling throughout the region. All existing general-purpose lanes will continue to be free to travelers. The RPA will provide long-needed congestion relief to travelers in both the HOT lanes and general-purpose lanes within Phase 1 South.

This MDOT RPA is consistent with key elements of the Visualize 2045 long-range plan, which calls for the addition of new HOT lanes on I-495 and I-270 in Maryland, and an integrated regional commuter bus network. MDOT SHA is proposing to use the new HOT lanes not only to provide traffic relief, but also to improve the speed and reliability of regional bus service by using the new HOT lanes to provide improved connectivity and transit services between key economic centers in both corridors. MDOT SHA announced new commitments for the bicycle and pedestrian community as part of the program including: improved bicycle and pedestrian connections and trail connectivity across the American Legion Bridge; regional transit improvements such as expanded bus capacity at Shady Grove Metro; expanded park-and-ride facilities; and environmental enhancements.

Visualize 2045 came about because traffic modeling analysis of the previous long-range plans indicated a dramatic worsening of congestion by 2040, even if everything in those previous plans were built. The American Legion Bridge I-270 to I-70 Relief Plan is an integral part of the Expanded Regional Express Lane Network in Visualize 2045, as it will provide new regional transit options and dramatically improve congested conditions around major chokepoints like the American Legion Bridge and I-270. As the region seeks to reduce our dependence on driving alone, the RPA will encourage carpooling by exempting cars with three or more passengers and buses from the tolls.

We fully recognize that COVID-19 is impacting all Marylanders today – in how we work, in how we spend our free time, and in how we travel. Traffic volumes have so far returned to roughly 90% of pre-COVID-19 levels, and by the time the new HOT lanes are operational, the volumes are fully expected to return and grow based on the region's projections. The National Capital Region is projected to add 1.3 million more residents by 2045. Multiple studies over the last decade have shown that the National Capital Region is already one of the most congested metropolitan regions in the nation, and Marylanders faced the second highest commuting times in the country. The American Legion Bridge I-270 to I-70 Relief Plan is a long-term regional plan that allows MDOT to prepare for projected increasing traffic volumes and commute times between now and 2045.

The Honorable Charles Allen
Page Three

We will continue to update the TPB as we move forward with this program. We appreciate your coordination, and if you need further assistance, please contact Ms. Heather Murphy at 410-865-1275 or via email at hmurphy@mdot.maryland.gov. She will be happy to assist you.

Sincerely,



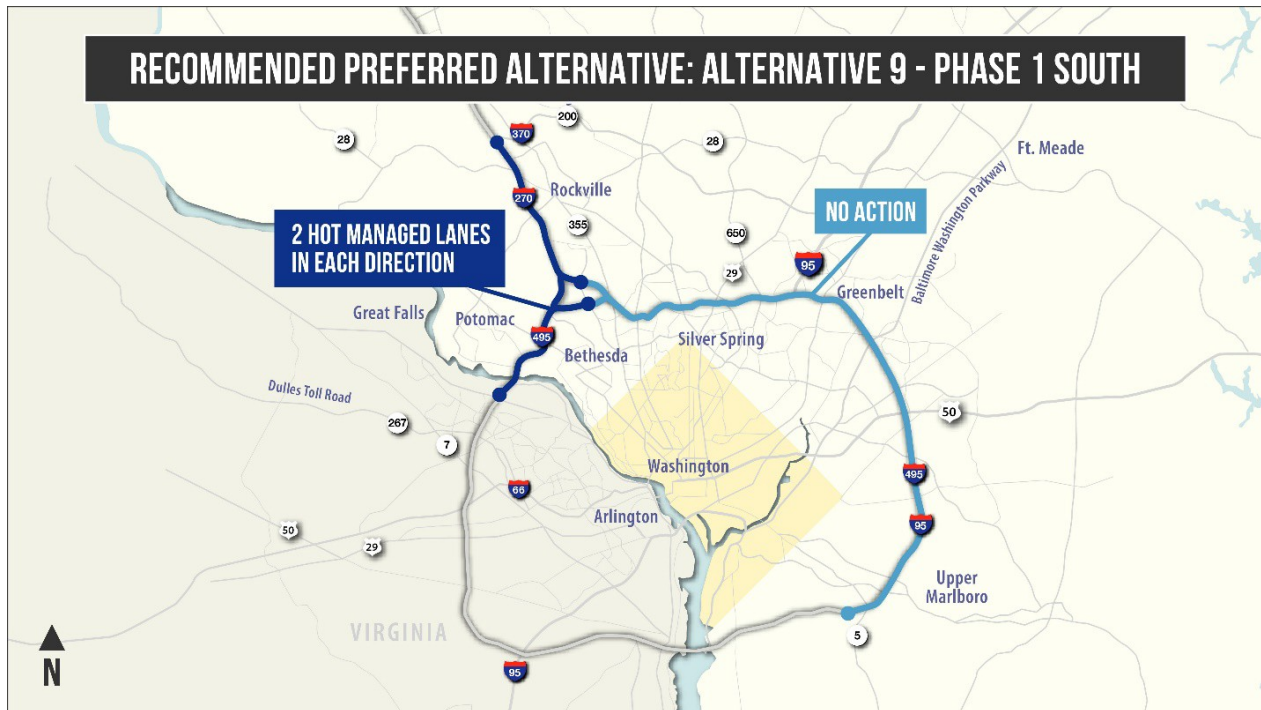
R. Earl Lewis, Jr.
Deputy Secretary

Attachment

cc: Ms. Heather Murphy, Director, Office of Planning and Capital Programming,
MDOT

Fact Sheet

New Recommended Preferred Alternative to Deliver Phase 1 South: American Legion Bridge I-270 to I-370



New Recommended Preferred Alternative

After several months of continuous collaboration and listening to agency partners, public officials and stakeholders, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the Maryland Department of Transportation State Highway Administration (MDOT SHA) have identified Alternative 9: Phase 1 South as the new Recommended Preferred Alternative (RPA) for the Managed Lanes Study (MLS). The new RPA focuses solely on building a new American Legion Bridge and delivering two high occupancy toll (HOT) managed lanes in each direction on Phase 1 South: American Legion Bridge I-270 to I-370 with no action at this time on I-495 east of the I-270 eastern spur.

In late summer 2021, FHWA and MDOT SHA will issue a Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement (SDEIS) for Alternative 9: Phase 1 South for public and agency comment. Consistent with Alternative 9 in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) published in July 2020, the RPA, Alternative 9: Phase 1 South, proposes adding two HOT managed lanes in each direction from the George Washington Memorial Parkway in Virginia to east of MD 187 on I-495. On I-270 from I-495 to north of I-370 and on the I-270 eastern spur from east of MD 187 to I-270, the new alternative proposes adding one HOT managed lane and converting the existing high-occupancy vehicle (HOV) lane into a HOT managed lane, resulting in a network of two HOT managed lanes in each direction.

MDOT SHA and FHWA continue to consider all comments that were received as part of the DEIS and public hearings held last fall and continue to work with agencies and stakeholders to avoid and minimize impacts to the environment and the communities in the study area. The agencies will respond to substantive comments received on both the DEIS and the SDEIS in the study's combined Final Environmental Impact Statement/Record of Decision (FEIS/ROD).

Who can use the HOT Lanes?

In the Alternative 9: Phase 1 South RPA, existing general-purpose travel lanes throughout the corridor will be retained and will remain free for use by all motorists. Drivers with less than three occupants in the vehicle would only pay if they choose to use the HOT lanes. HOV3+ will allow carpools, vanpools and other vehicles carrying three or more people to travel faster and more reliably in the new HOT lanes free of charge any time of day. Buses and motorcycles also will be granted free passage on the new HOT lanes free of charge, providing opportunities for a faster, more reliable trip.

Benefits of New RPA

The new RPA will address existing traffic and long-term traffic growth, enhance trip reliability, provide additional travel options and improve the movement of goods and services within Phase 1 South. This new RPA will provide significant pedestrian and bicycle commitments to improve the connectivity of area sidewalks and trails, including the addition of a multi-use trail on the new American Legion Bridge across the Potomac River.

Future Action

This RPA does not suggest that improvements will not be needed on the top side and east side of I-495. If the new RPA is selected at the conclusion of the MLS, consideration of improvements to remaining parts of the interstate system would advance separately, subject to additional environmental studies, analysis and collaboration with the public, stakeholders and agency partners.

Click [HERE](#) for more details about the new RPA, the MLS or predevelopment work.

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