
February 15, 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:

As we have done related to past major milestones, 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 our recent press release and fact sheet announcing the Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) Recommended Preferred Alternative (RPA) for the I-495 & I-270 Managed Lanes Study (MLS). This updates the project to be more consistent with key elements of Visualize 2045 including high-occupancy toll (HOT) lanes, integrated regional commuter bus network, increased access to transit, and improved bicycle and pedestrian connections throughout the region.

As you know, for almost three years the Maryland Department of Transportation 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 high-occupancy toll (HOT) lanes on I-495 across the American Legion Bridge to I-270, 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.

Under the MDOT Recommended Preferred Alternative (RPA), 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 MDOT RPA will provide long-needed congestion relief to travelers in both the HOT lanes and general-purpose lanes. As compared to the other MLS build alternatives, Alternative 9 will provide the best average speed and travel times, the greatest average hours of saving per commuter, and the largest reduction in local roadway network travel delays.

This MDOT RPA is consistent with key elements of the Visualize 2045 long-range plan, which calls for the addition of new managed lanes on I-495 and I-270 in Maryland, and an integrated regional commuter bus network. The MDOT SHA is proposing to use the new managed lanes not only to provide traffic relief, but also to improve the speed and reliability of regional bus service by using the new managed lanes to provide improved connectivity and transit services between key economic centers in both corridors. The 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 P3 Program is an integral part of the Expanded Regional Express Toll 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. While traffic volumes have so far returned to roughly 88% of pre-COVID-19 levels, and there may be some short-term reductions in travel that may extend for a few years, the American Legion Bridge & I-270 P3 Project is a long-term regional plan that allows MDOT to prepare for projected increasing traffic volumes and commute times between now and 2045. 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.

Given the TPB's priorities on Climate Change and their recent coordination with the Transportation Climate Initiative (TCI), we also wanted to convey Maryland's commitment to addressing the causes and impacts of climate change. The MDOT is an active member on both the Maryland Commission on Climate Change (MCCC) and develops the Maryland Greenhouse Gas Reduction Act (GGRA) Plan in coordination with the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE). It is important to us to address climate change-related concerns. The MDOT has brought significant resources to bare to ensure that we are analyzing the greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions impacts of our transportation network today, and well into the future. Our analyses have been peer reviewed and independently verified.

Our statewide analyses are based on the most recent state of the practice and reflect key assumptions utilized in the recent, Transportation Climate Initiative Program (TCI-P) to estimate current, on-road transportation emissions as well as the impacts of future plans, programs, projects, and policies. Maryland's transportation sector analyses for 2030 indicates a

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transportation system-wide reduction of 1.71 million metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent (MMTCO_{2e}) resulting from the implementation of our consolidated transportation program (CTP) and metropolitan planning organization (MPO) long-range transportation plans, including Visualize 2045.

While it is most useful, and relevant, to consider transportation impacts throughout the system holistically, we recognize the desire to understand project-level emission impacts. Based on MDOT SHA's Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the I-495 & I-270 Managed Lanes Study, the emissions impact of the project in the 2040 Design Year for Alternative 9 will result in a negligible emission increase of 0.04 MMTCO_{2e} between the Build and No-Build scenarios and an emission improvement of 0.085 MMTCO_{2e} between the Existing and Build scenarios.

Overall, Visualize 2045 indicates that we are moving in a positive direction. In fact, as population and employment in the region are projected to increase by 23% and 29%, respectively between today and 2045, we are also seeing an increase in transit trips of 38%, bicycle and walk trips of 49%, and a decrease in per capita VMT of 3%. Due to the increase in population and employment, the region will see an overall increase in VMT of 20%. This indicates that it is more important than ever to increase our attention on congestion mitigation, alternative modes of transportation, telework, and investment in alternative transportation technologies such as zero emission vehicles (ZEV). The increasing growth of ZEV ownership and infrastructure is a critical strategy for achieving GHG reduction. With almost 30,000 electric vehicles registered in Maryland today, and the proliferation of charging locations across the State, we expect electrification of the transportation sector will progress rapidly. We expect emerging vehicle technologies such as connected and automated vehicles to further boost these trends and achieve GHG reductions.

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 Kari Snyder at 410-865-1305 or via email at ksnyder3@mdot.maryland.gov. She will be happy to assist you.

Sincerely,



R. Earl Lewis, Jr.
Deputy Secretary

Attachments

cc: Kari Snyder, Regional Planner, Office of Planning and Capital Programming,
MDOT



For Immediate Release

[Terry Owens](#), MDOT SHA P3 Office – (410) 903-7454

MDOT SHA Recommends HOT Lanes to Provide New Travel Options for National Capital Region

*Recommended Preferred Alternative 9 Includes HOT Lanes, Supports New Transit Opportunities;
MDOT SHA Announces Commitments for Bike/Pedestrian Connections and Environmental Upgrades*

BALTIMORE, MD (January 27, 2020) – To provide Marylanders with new options and opportunities for improved travel in the National Capital Region, the Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) State Highway Administration (MDOT SHA) has formally recommended Alternative 9, adding two high-occupancy toll (HOT) lanes across the American Legion Bridge to I-270, and north on I-270 to I-370. This alternative also would add a bicycle and pedestrian connection across the new American Legion Bridge. MDOT is committed to delivering the improvements in phases, focusing first on the American Legion Bridge as the primary link between key economic centers in Maryland and Virginia.

Buses and vehicles with three or more people would 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. Under this MDOT Recommended Preferred Alternative (MDOT RPA), existing travel lanes throughout the corridor will be retained, and will remain free for use by all motorists. Drivers of single occupancy vehicles only would pay if they choose to use the managed lanes.

“In addition to delivering significant congestion relief in the existing free lanes, this Recommended Preferred Alternative provides Marylanders with new travel options including free use of the new managed lanes for carpoolers and transit riders, new bike and pedestrian connections in the community and across the Potomac to the C&O Canal, and a consistent reliable transportation network for the entire National Capital Region from Maryland into Virginia,” said MDOT Secretary Gregory Slater. “Addressing the congestion bottleneck at the American Legion Bridge and identifying a strategy to replace this 60-year-old infrastructure element of the regional transportation network is critical to Maryland’s economic recovery and growth. As we take yet another step in addressing these challenges, continued partnership and collaboration are crucial for continued progress.”

The phased delivery of the MDOT RPA for the I-495 & I-270 Managed Lanes Study focuses on the most critical area – the American Legion Bridge and I-270 – as Phase 1 South. The agency will not proceed with permitting and implementation of subsequent phases until additional environmental reviews are complete with further collaboration and engagement with agencies and the public.

Based on feedback already received from partner agencies, stakeholders and the public, MDOT today also is announcing new commitments for the 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.

The MDOT RPA for the I-495 & I-270 Managed Lanes Study (MLS) proposes adding two HOT managed lanes in each direction of I-495 from south of the George Washington Memorial Parkway in Virginia across the American Legion Bridge to west of MD 5. On I-270 from I-495 to north of I-370, the alternative would add one HOT lane and convert the highway's existing HOV lane into a HOT lane, resulting in a network of two managed HOT lanes in each direction. The result would be significant operational and multimodal network benefits, while retaining existing travel lanes as free lanes. MDOT SHA will not seek permits/authorizations outside of Phase 1 South: American Legion Bridge I-270 to I-370 until additional design details are developed in coordination with applicable agencies and environmental review is completed.

“Announcing our Recommended Preferred Alternative is another important milestone in our collaborative partnership with Virginia as we work together on the economic recovery of the entire National Capital Region,” MDOT SHA Administrator Tim Smith said. “We are excited about the important work ahead with our partners and stakeholders.”

Alternative 9 is one of several alternatives – including a No Build option and six managed lane alternatives – that MDOT SHA and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) included in the MLS Draft Environmental Impact Statement published in July 2020. A public comment period, including a series of virtual and in-person public hearings, was conducted between July 10, 2020, and November 9, 2020. MDOT SHA has determined the MDOT RPA best serves the study's Purpose and Need, which seeks to address existing traffic and long-term traffic growth, enhance trip reliability, provide additional travel options and improve the movement of goods and services.

MDOT SHA and FHWA continue to consider all comments received as part of the DEIS process. Additional analysis is being performed as needed and the agency will respond to substantive comments in the study's Final Environmental Impact Statement and Record of Decision, expected to be completed in fall 2021.

The MLS is an environmental study being conducted by MDOT SHA and FHWA in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). MDOT SHA is concurrently conducting a solicitation for the American Legion Bridge I-270 to I-70 Relief Plan. The solicitation will identify a private-sector partner to work collaboratively with all the stakeholders on the Phase 1 Predevelopment Work.

The P3 Program will be designed and developed using a multi-step Progressive P3 model. Selecting a partner for the Predevelopment Work over the next year allows MDOT SHA and the Maryland Transportation Authority to begin working with the Phase Developer and all stakeholders on best ways to advance the preliminary design to further avoid and minimize impacts to environmental resources, communities, properties, utilities, and other features by working with the counties, municipalities, state and federal agencies, property owners, utilities and citizens.

After this significant collaborative effort, and only if a build alternative is identified, MDOT would seek final approval from the Maryland Board of Public Works (BPW) for only the first Section P3 Agreement, which would be focused on the American Legion Bridge and connecting with our partners in Virginia, to advance final design, construction, financing, operations, and maintenance for 50 years.

Predevelopment collaboration through this progressive P3 model will provide more efficient pricing and better schedule certainty for section agreements before MDOT takes them to BPW for final approval only after a Record of Decision is received.

More details about the MDOT RPA's benefits and commitments are in the attached MDOT Recommended Preferred Alternative Fact Sheet for the I-495 & I-270 Managed Lanes Study and also available online. The fact sheet outlines specific commitments MDOT and its partners are making to deliver transit, bicycle and pedestrian, and environmental enhancements. For more information about the Managed Lanes Study or the P3 Program visit 495-270-p3.com.

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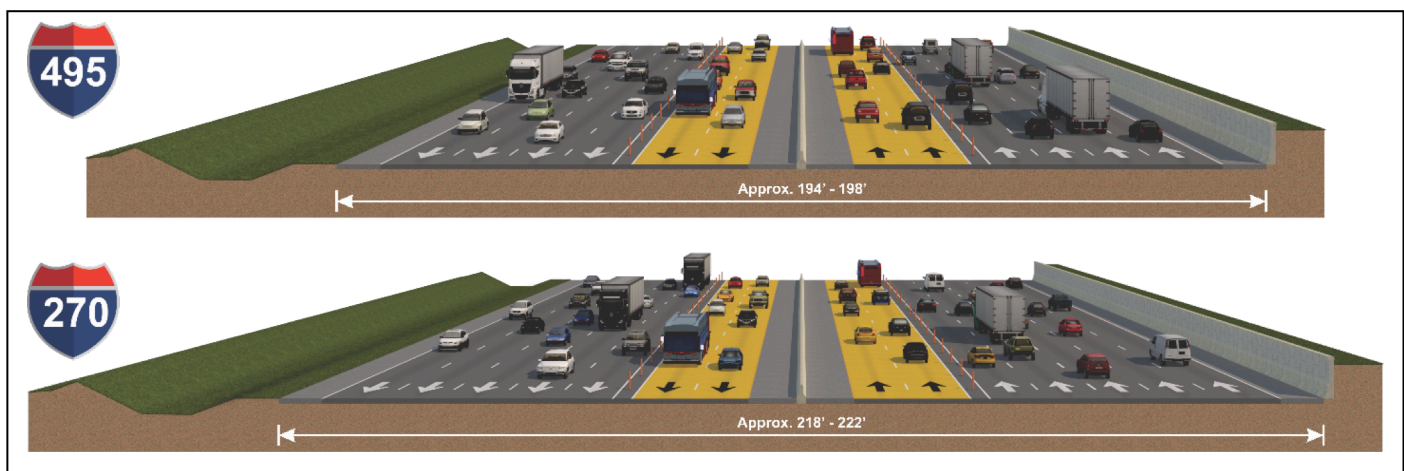
I-495 & I-270 Managed Lanes Study MDOT Recommended Preferred Alternative Fact Sheet

The Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) State Highway Administration (MDOT SHA) has formally recommended Alternative 9, adding two high-occupancy toll (HOT) lanes on I-495 across the American Legion Bridge to I-270, and north on I-270 to I-370.

Under this alternative, buses and vehicles with three or more people would 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. The program also would provide significant new bike and pedestrian connections.

Denoted as Alternative 9 in the I-495 & I-270 Managed Lanes Study, HOT Lanes are the MDOT Recommended Preferred Alternative (MDOT RPA), proposing two high-occupancy toll (HOT) managed lanes in each direction of I-495 from south of the George Washington Memorial Parkway in Virginia, across the American Legion Bridge, to west of MD 5. On I-270 from the Capital Beltway north to I-370, the MDOT RPA proposes to add a HOT lane and to convert the existing high-occupancy vehicle (HOV) lane into a HOT lane, resulting in a two-lane, HOT managed lanes network in each direction. The section of I-270 north of I-370 to Frederick will be considered as part of a separate environmental study. MDOT SHA will not seek permits/authorizations outside of Phase 1 South: American Legion Bridge I-270 to I-370 until additional design details are developed in coordination with applicable agencies and environmental review is completed.

MDOT RPA: High Occupancy Toll (HOT) Lanes Typical Section



It's important to note that Alternative 9 maintains free use of the existing free, general purpose lanes on the entire system. All travelers will be able to continue to use these lanes for free. The proposed HOT lanes under Alternative 9 will provide traffic relief throughout the corridor, as well as in these free general purpose lanes where no toll is required. Toll facilities would additionally provide funds for transportation improvements throughout the corridor – including expanded transit opportunities and infrastructure state of good repair costs and modernization -- that would not otherwise be funded.



I-495 & I-270 Managed Lanes Study MDOT Recommended Preferred Alternative Fact Sheet

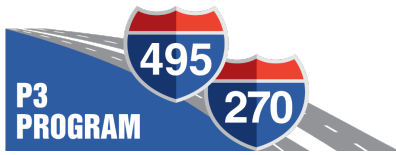
The MDOT RPA provides significant operational and multimodal system benefits including:

- the best average speed and travel times on I-495 and I-270, achieving free-flow speeds in the managed lanes while averaging 41 miles per hour (mph) in the free general purpose lanes, during peak periods;
- the greatest average hours of saving per commuter of about 73 hours per year;
- average PM peak period trips from the American Legion Bridge to I-370 would take just 15 minutes in the managed lanes, or just 23 minutes in the free general purpose lanes, compared to 32 minutes in the No-build Alternative, a time savings of up to 17 minutes one-way;
- the largest reduction in local roadway network travel delays -- 7.0 percent daily time savings;
- new travel opportunities and connections by providing toll-free travel for HOV 3+ users and bus transit in addition to the free general purpose lanes;
- new opportunities for ride sharing and car/van pooling, reducing dependence on single-occupancy vehicles (SOV);
- new travel options with expanded bicycle and pedestrian connections, including across the American Legion Bridge;
- the greatest increase in travel speed for transit buses in the HOT lanes assuring a reliable transit trip; new connections to existing transit services on local arterials that serve activity and economic centers;
- replacement of approximately 23 miles of existing noise walls and installation of more than 14 miles of new noise walls; and
- the most operational compatibility with the existing and proposed I-495 Express (HOT) Lanes in Virginia.

The MLS is being conducted by MDOT SHA and FHWA in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). MDOT SHA is concurrently conducting a solicitation for the I-495 & I-270 P3 Program Phase 1: American Legion Bridge I-270 to I-70 Relief Plan. The solicitation will identify a private-sector partner to work collaboratively with all the stakeholders on the Phase 1 Predevelopment Work.

The P3 Program will be designed and developed using a multi-step Progressive P3 model. Selecting a partner for the Predevelopment Work over the next year allows MDOT SHA and the Maryland Transportation Authority to begin working with the Phase Developer and all stakeholders on best ways to advance the preliminary design to further avoid and minimize impacts to environmental resources, communities, properties, utilities, and other features by working with the counties, municipalities, state and federal agencies, property owners, utilities, and citizens.

After this significant collaborative effort, and only if a build alternative is identified, MDOT would seek final approval from the Maryland Board of Public Works (BPW) for only the first Section P3 Agreement, which would be focused on the American Legion Bridge and connecting with our partners in Virginia, to advance final design, construction, financing, operations, and maintenance for 50 years. Predevelopment collaboration through this progressive P3 model will provide more efficient pricing and better schedule certainty for section agreements before MDOT takes them to BPW for final approval only after a record of decision is received.



I-495 & I-270 Managed Lanes Study MDOT Recommended Preferred Alternative Fact Sheet

MDOT is also committed to the following bicycle and pedestrian connections, regional transit improvements, and environmental enhancements:

Bicycle and Pedestrian Connections:

- Commit to priority bicycle and pedestrian connections to remove barriers and provide connectivity for bicyclists and pedestrians consistent with those identified in the affected county master plans and priorities.

Montgomery County

- New pedestrian/bicycle connection across the American Legion Bridge
- Replace and widen Bethesda Trolley Trail bridge crossings of I-495 and I-270
- Lengthen I-270 bridge over Tuckerman Lane north of Bethesda to accommodate future separated bikeway along Tuckerman Lane
- New buffer-separated side paths across MD 190 over I-495 near Carderock Springs
- Widen path along Seven Locks Road under I-495 between Moses Lodge Cemetery and Gibson Grove Church
- New separated bikeway along northbound MD 355 over I-495 between Bethesda and Rockville

Prince George's County

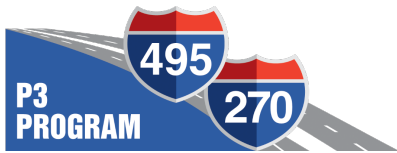
- New 8-foot-wide sidewalks across MD 212/Riggs Road bridge over I-495 near White Oak Manor
- New 10-foot-wide shared-use path along Cherry Hill Road near Beltsville on 2 bridges crossing I-495 Inner Loop and Outer Loop to provide trail connection across interstate
- New 8-foot-wide sidewalks on both sides of Glenarden Parkway over I-495 to improve connection and safety between Glenarden neighborhoods, an identified environmental justice community
- Pedestrian crossing of I-495 in the Largo area between Arena Drive, Metro Bridge, Central Avenue, and Southwest Branch – evaluate best location for the connection
- Expand 8-foot-wide sidewalks on both sides of Auth Road bridge over I-495 to improve access to the Branch Avenue Metro Station
- New connection to Henson Creek Trail near Temple Hills

Regional Transit and Rideshare Improvements:

- Free bus usage of the HOT lanes
- HOV3+ traveling for free, which also allows carpoolers and vanpoolers to ride for free on the HOT lanes
- Commit to the collaboration and delivery of certain regional transit improvements to enhance existing and planned transit and support new opportunities for regional transit service. These items were identified as priorities by the transit service providers and are under discussion with the respective counties:

Montgomery County

- Bus capacity expansion at WMATA Shady Grove Metrorail Station
- Park-and-Ride expansion at Westfield Montgomery Mall Transit Center



Regional Transit and Rideshare Improvements (continued):

Prince George’s County

- “Virtual BRT” stops and technology to support interest in a “virtual BRT” route extension of the Purple Line. This would include stop enhancements and technology such as next vehicle arrival information.
- A Prince George’s County bus maintenance facility to support their system and the buses that would travel along the managed lanes.

Environmental Enhancements:

MDOT SHA is committing to continue working collaboratively with our partner agencies to further avoid and minimize community, cultural, environmental, and parkland impacts, and finalize mitigation based on identified priorities that would, at a minimum, bring no net loss to impacted resources with a goal of net benefit.

Specific commitments and environmental enhancements include the following:

- Commit to further collaboration with National Park Service to continue to reduce impacts with special focus on George Washington Memorial Parkway and Baltimore Washington Parkway.
- Commit to pursuing options that avoid direct access to the Baltimore Washington Parkway.
- Commit to developing a strike team of nationally recognized experts in constructability, design and structures, focused on analyzing innovative options to minimizing impacts to NPS properties near the American Legion Bridge.
- Commit to environmental enhancements that would provide meaningful benefits to adjacent resources to improve the values, services, attributes and functions that may be compromised including water-quality improvements, stream restoration, and removal of invasive species on county parkland.
- Commit to further ongoing collaboration with the bi-county Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC) to develop solutions to address their comments and to address water quality concerns on parkland focused on stabilizing streams, creating natural surface channels, and revegetating areas to improve water quality and reduce flooding and pollutant loads. These water quality enhancements include, but are not limited to, these significant parks:

Montgomery County

- Cabin John Stream Valley Park
- Rock Creek Stream Valley Park
- Sligo Creek Parkway
- Indian Spring Terrace Local Park
- Northwest Branch Park

Prince George’s County

- Southwest Branch Stream Valley Park
- Heritage Glen Park
- Manchester Estates Park

Planning and design collaboration for the MDOT RPA will allow the State to work with utilities, including the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission, to provide for modernization and improvements of outdated water and sewer lines and other infrastructure underneath and adjacent to the Capital Beltway. This access will allow utilities and our county partners to review and plan upgrades that conform to and support their regional utility master plans now and in the future.