

Testimony at Montgomery County State Delegation Priorities Hearing  
November 20, 2019

I'm Janet Gallant from Don't Widen 270.org.

We have nearly 1,000 members, and are one of many groups reaching out to people all over the county, debunking MDOT's simplistic stories and encouraging involvement and activism.

Last night a week ago, my colleagues and I were standing outside in Clarksburg in 23-degree weather, leafleting and talking to people who were heading to MDOT's upper-270 workshop.

You might expect these people to be supportive of the Governor's plan for congestion relief. But we saw virtually no support, just worry and anger. Anger that the state is rushing ahead with a project that so obviously won't help because the tolls will be too high and there will be no transit.

That anger is increasingly widespread and real. The Governor's proposal – to use high-priced toll lanes as the sole fix for congestion – is a bad plan. And we have every reason to believe that the bad plan will also be badly executed, putting taxpayers at tremendous fiscal risk, too.

To see what we're headed for, we have only to look at the business model for the new Virginia I-395 express toll lanes. Tolls can be as high as \$30 for a 10 to 12 mile segment. It can cost \$10 for just a **fraction** of a mile as part of the effort to price enough drivers out of the toll lanes to ensure the toll lanes flow. That's so significant: the free lanes must remain congested or there's no incentive for anyone to pay tolls.

The execution of the Governor's bad plan goes on out of sight. They don't share information, they don't consult would-be partners. Just today, the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission excoriated MDOT for, among other things, failing to provide data, analyses, and technical reports. On the

subjects of determining the level of tolls or ensuring that the contractor provides adequate and well-funded bonds and insurance, MDOT basically says, “Trust us.”

The nightmare scenario is that the project goes through as is, we endure years of construction misery only to find that taxpayers are bailing out the builder, tolls are out of reach, congestion is still there, and a for-profit company is in charge of it all.

What we need is fair, effective, multi-modal transportation. Slowing the Governor’s toll lane project, mitigating its harm, stopping it – coming at it from as many angles as we can, from your side, from our side – these have to be top priorities this session if there is ever going to be an opportunity for better solutions. This is urgent. We will support and amplify you and your bills, hearings, public meetings, community outreach, press statements – any and all of it. We need to get this right. Thank you.