



## **Sustainable and Equitable Transportation Alternatives to Adding Toll Lanes to I-495 & I-270**

### **Background**

Numerous [studies](#) have shown that expanding highways to reduce traffic congestion doesn't work because expanded highways attract more drivers, thus causing congestion again plus more air pollution from the tailpipes of the additional vehicles. Expanding highways also contribute to sprawl by encouraging drivers to move farther away from their jobs because they believe their commute times will be reduced.

There are many additional adverse impacts on public health, parks, tree canopy, waterways, various communities and historical places from the proposed highway expansion that are too numerous to list here but can be read about in the lengthy [comments](#) submitted to MDOT that were prepared by a number of organizations including the Sierra Club, with each set of Sierra Club comments co-signed by several dozen additional civic, environmental, smart growth, clean transportation and religious organizations.

Expanding highways is not an equitable way to improve the County's transportation system because a substantial portion of county residents who are lower income do not own a car or truck so must rely on public transit to get to jobs, healthcare, housing and recreation. Also, many residents who do own a vehicle couldn't begin to afford tolls of as much as \$50 a day going to and from work on the proposed toll lanes, with the Maryland Transportation Authority already having approved toll rate increases every year of 2.1 percent plus whatever the change is in the DC area Consumer Price Index (CPI).

While the Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) has promoted the toll lanes to reduce congestion and decrease commute times, MDOT's own data shows the toll lanes would not improve traffic in the general lanes in the I-495/I-270 corridor, and they would create traffic bottlenecks that now don't exist.

There is a stark east-west economic and racial divide between western Montgomery County and Prince George's County as well as between eastern and western Montgomery County. Adding toll lanes on I-495/I-270 would penalize Prince George's residents with expensive commutes and exacerbate that divide.

The Maryland Transportation Institute at the University of Maryland has determined that a 15% reduction in vehicles would nearly eliminate bottlenecks on local freeways, and that just a 5% reduction in vehicles would reduce congestion 32% to 58%. To achieve these reductions, drivers can work from home, shift departure times, or use other modes of transportation such as those listed below.

### **Sustainable and Equitable Alternatives to Expanding I-495/I-270**

Use federal and state funds as well as bonding to construct and maintain sustainable and equitable alternatives to building and operating four managed toll lanes on I-495 and I-270. We recommend a comprehensive and integrated approach that includes many of the following.

- Implement planned Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) on MD Route 355 (which runs parallel to I-270) and on MD Route 586 (Veirs Mill Road - which facilitates east-west trips) in Montgomery County.

- Expand the MARC Brunswick Line (which runs parallel to I-270).
- Implement/increase the number of commuter buses that run on I-270 and I-495, ideally on dedicated lanes.
- Increase the frequency and reliability of all bus services in the I-495 and I-270 corridors, ideally on dedicated lanes.
- Implement more protected bike lanes and trails along roadways in the I-495 and I-270 corridors.
- Use Innovative Congestion Management on I-495 (as is now working on lower I-270), Transportation Systems Management and Operations (TSMO) (as is being used on the Baltimore Beltway to reduce congestion), and more Transportation Demand Management (TDM) (e.g., telework, car and van pools, subsidized transit passes, etc.).
- Add more rail cars on the Purple Line (which runs parallel to I-495) and increase frequency.
- Extend the Purple Line across the American Legion Bridge to Tysons in Northern VA.
- Mandate that employers above a certain size participate in sustainable commuter services programs such as Montgomery County's Fair Share for Employers Program or the Maryland Commuter Choice Program. Such mandates exist in Washington, DC, Washington State and New Jersey.
- Turn one or possibly two one-way lanes on I-270 and possibly I-495 into reversible lanes to handle rush hour traffic.

**Address Economic and Racial Equity and Long-Term Sustainability through Transit-Oriented Development (TOD)**

- Facilitate more walkable, bikeable, compact, transit-oriented and infill development, especially more affordable housing near transit.
- Investment in TOD within a mile of each Metro and Purple Line station in Prince George's and eastern Montgomery Counties would help address current economic and racial inequities, create jobs with little or no commutes, reduce the rush hour demand to travel from east to west on I-495 in the morning and back in the evening, and it would even out the flows on the inner and outer loops of I-495 during the day.

**Address Possibilities Involving the American Legion Bridge**

- Hire independent expert(s) to undertake accurate traffic modeling on I-495 and over the American Legion Bridge, and once that data is available, undertake a study of all the alternatives (and their respective costs) to improve the bridge including:
  - Re-decking and refurbishing; and
  - Adding train, transit, bicycle and pedestrian access.