



COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA
COUNTY OF FAIRFAX
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JEFFREY C. MCKAY
CHAIRMAN

February 29, 2024

The Honorable W. Sheppard Miller III
Secretary of Transportation
P.O. Box 1475
Richmond, Virginia 23218

Reference: Fairfax County's Concerns regarding the I-495 Express Lanes Northern Extension (I-495 NEXT) Project

Dear Secretary Miller:

The Fairfax County Board of Supervisors appreciates the Commonwealth's efforts in advancing the I-495 NEXT project to alleviate congestion and increase travel options in the Capital Beltway Corridor. Despite the significant strides being made on this project, we remain concerned about the status of Maryland's managed lanes system through the American Legion Memorial Bridge (ALMB) and the level of coordination between Virginia and Maryland in advancing projects affecting both states. We further have concerns about deforestation resulting from the project, secondary traffic effects caused by construction, and a lack of clarity on the purpose and design of ramps involved in the construction. To that end, the Board requests a better understanding of the collaborative approach with Maryland moving forward, and additional information regarding these concerns.

In September 2023, the Board sent to you a letter expressing the need to memorialize a written agreement between Maryland and Virginia that includes clear parameters for how work will be conducted in Virginia and requesting an opportunity to review and comment. To date, we have inexplicably not received a response. Consequently, there is a prevailing uncertainty among our Board and constituents on how Maryland's plan to improve the ALMB will affect the residents in Fairfax County. The Board requests the Commonwealth promptly respond to our previous letter and strongly recommends that the Commonwealth take a more proactive approach to coordinate with Maryland's plan to improve the ALMB, ensuring thorough engagement with stakeholders in Fairfax County.

While the I-495 NEXT traffic analysis indicated traffic improvements as a standalone project, the most significant benefits will not be attained until the corresponding project is completed by Maryland. Considering the diminished likelihood of the ALMB being widened or replaced by 2028, as previously indicated, we expect a prolonged period of slower I-495 northbound traffic in general purpose lanes, thereby creating negative impacts to local intersections. These extended issues are expected to adversely affect commuters on the mainline and residents in surrounding communities. Consequently, the Board requests the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) re-evaluate traffic conditions once the project is constructed and provide plans to mitigate these delays in the interim. Further, given the public's consternation and confusion surrounding the project's value as a standalone project, the Board requests that VDOT update its plans to better explain and illustrate the value of the ramps being constructed independent of any future connection to Maryland's managed lanes.

The Board is also deeply concerned about the construction impact of the I-495 NEXT project on surrounding neighborhoods, particularly the substantial deforestation along the I-495 corridor. In December 2020, the Board submitted comments on the I-495 NEXT Environmental Assessment, which included recommendations for the

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reforestation of disturbed areas and highlighted the need for commitments to compensation, soil rebuilding, and restoration of native plant communities. Given the significant landscape changes due to clearing and grubbing along this corridor, the Board requests that the I-495 NEXT project team coordinate with County staff to explore how the affected areas can be revegetated, in line with County recommendations, and provide a detailed plan that includes specific timelines and strategies for community engagement.

The construction of the I-495 NEXT project has also caused the redirection of traffic, which has significantly increased congestion on local streets in surrounding neighborhoods, especially during peak hours. The Board acknowledges and appreciates VDOT's willingness to work with County staff on potential cut-through restrictions where necessary. The Board looks forward to extending our collaborative efforts to assist additional impacted areas to ensure that traffic flow is managed effectively and disruption to local communities is minimized during the project's construction.

The I-495 NEXT project is of paramount importance to our region's transportation infrastructure. The Board looks forward to your support on resolving these concerns, as well as your continued collaboration to ensure the successful completion of I-495 NEXT and surrounding projects. If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact Martha Coello of the Fairfax County Department of Transportation at Martha.Coello@fairfaxcounty.gov or 703-877-5600.

Sincerely,

Jeffrey C. McKay, Chairman

cc: Members, Fairfax County Board of Supervisors

Bryan J. Hill, County Executive

Rachel Flynn, Deputy County Executive

Gregg Steverson, Acting Director, Fairfax County Department of Transportation

Bill Cuttler, District Administrator, Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT), Northern Virginia

Michelle Shropshire, Acting Megaprojects Director, VDOT