



COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA
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DRANESVILLE DISTRICT SUPERVISOR

BOARD MATTER
Supervisor James N. Bierman, Jr.
January 23, 2024

Virginia Department of Transportation I-495 NEXT Project

Background: Mr. Chairman, this Board has in the past supported, with some reservations, the Virginia Department of Transportation's (VDOT) I-495 NEXT project ("Project") which, in conjunction with Maryland's plans to widen the American Legion Bridge and construct High Occupancy Toll lanes, could reduce congestion, provide additional travel choices, and improve travel efficiency along one of the worst traffic hot spots in the country. However, recent changes to Maryland's plans and the manner in which the Virginia construction has been performed have been very concerning to area residents.

Construction on the Project began in mid-2022 and has included the removal of noise walls, the clearing of trees, and preliminary bridge work. The assumption all along has been that the Project would be closely aligned with Maryland's plans. For example, the Project envisions five ramps to be built or reconstructed. VDOT will build two of the ramps to connect to a tie-in to be built by the Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT). One ramp is to be built in Virginia by MDOT. This coordination and bi-state funding plan was memorialized in the Capital Beltway Accord that the governors of Virginia and Maryland announced in November 2019. The accord was heralded as a once-in-a-generation achievement for the Capital region.

Maryland's plans have changed significantly since the 2019 announcement. There will no longer be a public-private partnership and we recently learned that Maryland intends to apply for federal grant money. These changes have raised questions and concerns about what Maryland intends to do and when they intend to do it. Among other things, there is confusion about the purpose of the ramps being built that previously were proposed to tie into High Occupancy Toll roads on the Maryland side. If these toll roads aren't constructed, are we building ramps to nowhere? Moreover, the Board has received no answer to the letter it sent in

September 2023 to the Virginia Secretary of Transportation regarding a written agreement between Virginia and Maryland.

I am also troubled by the numerous concerns from residents about the significant impacts on surrounding neighborhoods, including acres of tree loss along long stretches of I-495 and dramatic increases to neighborhood congestion resulting from peak-hour cut-through traffic.

At the December 12, 2023 meeting of the Board's Transportation Committee, representatives of VDOT, including Michelle Shropshire, Acting Director of VDOT Megaprojects, gave a presentation on the Project. Unfortunately, the response to concerns about coordination with Maryland was inadequate. Additionally, VDOT representatives were asked to share the details and timing of a necessary reforestation plan. They indicated that planning was underway but provided no clear commitment to a timeline or plan for community engagement.

At this late stage of the Project, the lack of information is troubling. We must understand how the uncertainty of Maryland's plans affects the benefits of this Project and know how the Project's negative impacts will be ameliorated.

Motion. Therefore, I move that the Board direct staff at the Fairfax County Department of Transportation (FCDOT) to draft a second letter to Secretary Miller requesting that VDOT address the concerns expressed in this Board Matter, including, but not limited to, concerns about the lack of coordination, questions about the ramps, and concerns about deforestation, and present the draft letter to the Board at the next Transportation Committee meeting to be held on February 13, 2024.

I further move that the Board direct FCDOT staff to present a plan at the next Transportation Committee meeting for future coordination with VDOT and MDOT and to consider future environmental coordination with appropriate County agencies regarding tree reforestation plans.