



SILVER SPRING CITIZENS ADVISORY BOARD

April 13, 2021

Marc Elrich, County Executive
Montgomery County

[Delivered via e-mail]

Advice from the Silver Spring Citizens Advisory Board re:

OPPOSITION TO 495/270 MANAGED LANE PROJECT

Dear County Executive Elrich,

The Silver Spring Citizens Advisory Board (SSCAB) has been monitoring the progress of the Maryland Department of Transportation's 495/270 Managed Lane Project since its inception, and now more than ever, we believe it necessary to express our strong advice opposing the project as currently proposed. We agree that mitigating congestion is critical, but we believe that there are alternative solutions that are longer-lasting, more cost-effective, far less disruptive, and much more environmentally sound. These alternative solutions need to be evaluated prior to undertaking a project of this magnitude and to date, they have not been seriously considered. **We wholeheartedly support the strong stance the County Executive and the County Council have taken in opposing the proposal.** Our major objections to the Managed Lane Project are enumerated below, and they align closely with views already expressed by County and State representatives, officials at Maryland National Capital Parks and Planning, environmental groups, neighborhood associations, community leaders, local businesses, and residents of the Silver Spring area:

- 1) Severe, irreversible neighborhood impacts. The proposal negatively impacts neighborhoods in the Silver Spring area, demolishing homes and local businesses, destroying parkland, including significant portions of Sligo Creek Golf Course, impacting recreation centers, historic buildings, and Montgomery Blair High School property.
- 2) Increased traffic volumes. The predicted additional traffic will reduce the quality of life in the region, creating additional noise and further reducing air quality, most significantly in the areas adjacent to the highways, but also throughout much of Silver Spring and the down county area.
- 3) Uncertain congestion reduction coupled with unreliable revenue predictions. Related to 2) above, the Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) has yet to provide specific origin and destination data or corresponding revenue models to the public, without which we cannot possibly know if, where or how adding lanes will achieve the desired results of improving traffic flow and generating the income needed to recoup construction costs and pay for future roadway maintenance.
- 4) Untenable environmental impacts. The project negatively impacts creeks and rivers that flow through our region, and the fact that an RFP has been issued prior to the conclusion of a Federal National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) study is appalling if not illegal, as alleged by the Sierra Club in November 2020.
- 5) Deepening already deep-seated inequities. Managed lane solutions create inherent economic disparity and advantages affluent drivers who are in a much better financial position to benefit from the for-fee lanes.
- 6) Significantly worse congestion off the beltway. At major local arteries where managed lane interchanges have been proposed, among them at Colesville Road (US 29), congestion is among the highest in Montgomery County. There can be no doubt that new lanes will further exacerbate existing conditions along these thoroughfares; however, MDOT has yet to assess the impact of managed lanes on local traffic on arterial roads or – and this is even more critical given the State's commitment to Vision Zero -- on neighborhood cut through traffic.

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- 7) Changing conditions that undermine the project need. Overall congestion has been significantly reduced by the pandemic, and prior to moving forward with this project, new traffic projections are required that are based on models that reflect the significant increase in telework. Commuting is unlikely to ever reach pre-pandemic levels moving forward. The office-centric workforce paradigm that existed pre-Covid is no longer a valid predictor of future traffic patterns. Employers and their employees have recognized the efficiencies and other benefits made possible through telework, necessitating a rethinking and reshaping of the workplace of the future. Many urban areas are already transforming as downsized or vacant commercial properties are rezoned and subsequently, repurposed for residential use.
- 8) Severe budget consequences. Despite the Governor's assurances to the contrary, there are clear financial implications for Maryland taxpayers should construction costs balloon, contract disputes ensue (both of which occurred during construction of the Purple Line), or additional initially unforeseen issues arise (e.g., the significant work which will be required to relocate the WSSC infrastructure along I-270).
- 9) Possible Federal government assistance. President Biden has recently announced a multi-trillion dollar infrastructure program. With the federal government poised to invest heavily in rebuilding and likely transforming current modes of transportation, it is premature to look to private companies to build (and to Maryland taxpayers to likely supplement the cost of) tolling solutions until we know how the DMV plays into this massive initiative.

There are many alternatives to building or widening roads, which primarily accommodate single-occupancy vehicles. Other solutions to moving people safely and efficiently include light rail (e.g., the Purple Line), Bus Rapid Transit (e.g., Flash BRT) and traditional forms of express buses, public and private on-demand transit (e.g., Flex, Uber, Lyft), Personal Rapid Transit (PRT), high-speed rail, or a monorail (e.g., along I-270). There are even inexpensive, easy-to-implement solutions that can improve existing Beltway traffic right away, including ramp metering, condition-specific speed limits, traffic-safety legislation (e.g., keep right except to pass, prohibit passing on the right, license renewal retesting), automated traffic enforcement, limiting trucks to two right lanes, etc. These and possibly other options need to be further explored as possibly much more effective, economically equitable, and environmentally friendly alternatives to widening the Beltway and I-270. The SSCAB and the Silver Spring community overall would welcome the opportunity to work with MDOT to improve congestion in the area, incorporating these goals into a viable solution to what we all agree is a problem we must address. And in closing, we reiterate our thanks and our support for the hard work of the County Executive, County Council, and other County staff, all of whom have worked long and hard to reshape the project into a form that truly meets its stated objectives.

One final note: Although as a Silver Spring advisory board our focus is necessarily on the area we represent; however, the adverse effects enumerated above extend to communities along the entire project corridor, and we are sympathetic to and fully supportive of all initiatives throughout the region that oppose the 495/270 Managed Lane Project. That said, some of the most severe negative impacts would be on the SS Regional area.

As always, we appreciate your consideration of the advice that we send.

Lysette House*
Chair

Sofia Bushen*
Vice-Chair

Parliamentarian
Melanie Funder Kaye*

Secretary
Katherine Lucas McKay*

(*Signatures on file)

CC:

Montgomery County Council Members
Reemberto Rodriguez, Silver Spring Regional Area Director
Members of the SSCAB