



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
4975 Alliance Drive
Fairfax, Virginia 22030

Stephen C. Brich, P.E.
Commissioner

March 26, 2021

JB Holston
Chief Executive Officer
Greater Washington Partnership
1200 17th St NW, Suite 550
Washington, DC 20036

RE: Public Comment for Maryland's I-495 and I-270 Managed Lanes Project,
Virginia's I-495 NEXT Project, and the joint I-495/American Legion Bridge
Transit and TDM Project

Dear Mr. Holston:

Thank you for your letter to Secretary of Transportation Shannon Valentine regarding Virginia's I-495 Northern Extension Express Lanes (NEXT) project, Maryland's I-495 and I-270 Managed Lanes Project, and the joint I-495/American Legion Bridge Transit and Transportation Demand Management (TDM) Study. Secretary Valentine asked me to respond, and I am grateful for the opportunity to address the points and questions in your letter. Your comments also have been included in the official Public Comment for the I-495 NEXT project.

VDOT continues to work closely with Maryland to ensure compatibility among the I-495 NEXT project, Maryland's I-495 and I-270 Managed Lanes Project, and other managed lanes projects in both states. Collaboration is essential to a seamless, regional approach to providing managed lanes in the Washington Metropolitan region. One area of strong coordination is the I-495/American Legion Bridge Transit/TDM Study, which is identifying a range of current and future multimodal solutions that can be implemented to reduce congestion, improve trip reliability and regional connections, and enhance existing and planned multimodal mobility and connectivity.

In congested corridors such as this, it is essential to move the greatest number of people possible. The I-495 NEXT project is designed to result in increased person throughput. Virginia's managed lanes system allows HOV-3+ and transit vehicles to travel for free, encouraging transit use, carpools, and vanpools. With the implementation of the I-495 NEXT project, it is anticipated that 7,600 more people per hour would move through the corridor. The separate joint study between Virginia's Department of Rail and Public Transportation and Maryland Department of Transportation's Maryland Transit Administration is focused on enhancing existing and planned multimodal mobility and connectivity to carry the greatest number of people through the corridor.

Our multimodal transportation network connects Virginians to jobs, education, and health care across the Commonwealth and serves as the platform for Virginia's economy. Ensuring that all Virginians can access economic opportunity underlies our transportation planning efforts. VDOT is committed to the principles of environmental justice and is assessing and documenting the impacts of transportation projects on minority and low-income populations as a normal part of its environmental analysis efforts. The I-495 NEXT project would take place primarily within the existing right-of-way, with no residential or commercial relocations required in Virginia, and the project would not result in new fragmentation or isolation of any communities within the study area. Using methods of identifying Environmental Justice (EJ) populations established by VDOT, FHWA, and EPA, VDOT has determined that there are no concentrated low-income populations within the study area. While one block group with a minority population was identified, it is located outside the area of direct impacts. Based on the lack of anticipated direct impacts and the nature of the potentially affected community, VDOT concluded that the I-495 NEXT project would not result in a disproportionately high or adverse impact to EJ populations. More detail about the EJ analysis can be found in the I-495 NEXT Socioeconomic and Land Use Technical Report.

The I-495 NEXT project would increase traveler options that would positively affect all communities, including EJ travelers. Since the tolled lanes are being added and not converted from existing general-purpose use, the project is anticipated to benefit users of both the Express Lanes and general purpose lanes through reduction in congestion, additional capacity for transit and carpools, and improvement in travel time reliability.

The Commonwealth is committed to providing dedicated, ongoing support for transit services along the corridor as part of the I-495 NEXT project. This commitment ensures that the I-495 NEXT project, together with the existing 495 Express Lanes, provide multimodal solutions to move more people through the corridor. The implementation of new transit service in the corridor would be made possible by the provision of express lanes that allow buses to provide fast and reliable service and to travel on this facility without having to pay for its use, greatly benefitting transit users along the corridor. Virginia's commitment also includes investing funding generated from toll revenues toward the benefit of the users of this corridor, which creates the opportunity for future transit expansion along the corridor.

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VDOT's Civil Rights Division has a long history of ensuring that Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) and Small, Women- and Minority-owned (SWaM) businesses have a role to play in project development, engineering, construction, and management. The agency's Business Opportunity and Workforce Development Center's DBE Supportive Services Program helps DBE firms become more sustainable, competitive, and successful.

On the I-495 NEXT project, the Design-Build contract requirements stipulate that during performance of the Design-Build work for project, the Design-Builder shall achieve the following goals with respect to small and minority business participation, on-the-job training, and workforce development:

1. Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) participation equal to fifteen percent (15%) of the Adjusted Contract Value after amounts for the project elements listed below are excluded, plus Small, Women-, and Minority-owned (SWaM) firm participation equal to twenty-five percent (25%) of the Adjusted Contract Value. For clarity, the total DBE/SWaM percentage is forty (40%) of the Adjusted Contract Value, and no funds paid to qualified firms shall be double-counted toward this goal.
2. Providing at least twenty-seven (27) on-the-job trainee positions in accordance with VDOT's trainee and apprenticeship program.

One of the questions you raised dealt with how these projects, collectively, would enhance public transportation and other mobility options. The I-495 NEXT design includes a shared use path (i.e., "multi-use trail") that can connect to a future trail crossing on the American Legion Bridge. The first phase of the I-495 NEXT project would carry the paved path to Live Oak Drive. In the future, the path would be connected to the path on the American Legion Bridge that would be constructed in conjunction with the Maryland Managed Lanes project.

Your letter also specifically inquires about the possibility of designing the American Legion Bridge for future rail transit options. While the American Legion Bridge improvements would be constructed as part of the Maryland Managed Lanes project, I can tell you that support for and expansion of passenger and commuter rail is extremely important to the Commonwealth.

Certainly, commuter behavior plays a significant role in travel patterns and traffic congestion. The Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation is conducting an I-495/American Legion Bridge Transit and Transportation Demand Management (TDM) Study in coordination with the Maryland Department of Transportation's Maryland Transit Administration (MTA). The recommendations resulting from this study will include transit enhancements as well as TDM strategies that may be implemented to encourage alternatives to the use of single-occupant vehicles.

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VDOT remains committed to continuing to work with the localities, businesses, and citizens of the Greater Washington Area to listen to and address their feedback on the I-495 NEXT project. The issues identified by the Greater Washington Partnership are important to VDOT and will continue to be an important part of the dialogue as we work together to solve one of the region's most congested transportation links. Through the continued collaboration among the staff of VDOT and the Maryland Department of Transportation, we are confident that a multimodal transportation solution can be put in place, which would improve travel and make a positive impact on our Commonwealth.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert H. Cary". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "R".

Robert H. Cary, P.E., L.S.
Chief Deputy Commissioner, VDOT

cc: The Honorable Shannon Valentine, Virginia Secretary of Transportation
Stephen C. Brich, P.E., Commissioner, VDOT
Jennifer Mitchell, Director, Virginia DRPT
Susan Shaw, P.E., Northern Virginia Megaprojects Director