SIERRA CLUB
MARYLAND CHAPTER

P.O. Box 278
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October 20, 2026

Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments
777 North Capitol Street NE, Suite 300
Washington, DC 20002

Re: Item 9 - I-495 Southside Express Lanes (SEL) - Updated Project Concepts and Commitments

Dear Transportation Planning Board Members,

We write to ask you to delay the planned vote scheduled for November 2026 on whether to include the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT)'s updated concept on the Southside Express Lanes project in the air quality conformity analysis. This updated proposal would add two express lanes in each direction over the Woodrow Wilson Bridge from Oxon Hill, Maryland to Springfield, Virginia, utilizing shoulder space for metrorail. VDOT should not advance any proposal that lacks key information related to concerns that have continually been brought forward by TPB members regarding the traffic bottleneck, local traffic impacts, tolls, and environmental damages. Instead, we urge VDOT to work collaboratively with Prince George's County and impacted communities along the corridor to advance a range of transit and Transportation Demand Management (TDM) alternatives in the air quality conformity report.

VDOT's updated proposal has not been informed by community input and continues to lack critical information that has been requested for years.

In October 2025, the TPB voted to exclude the Southside project from Visualize 2050 and the resolution indicated VDOT and MDOT should "explore project options and work with local jurisdictions towards securing a consensus on this important regional corridor." VDOT's updated proposal acknowledges the lack of "trust and communication between Virginia and Maryland" contributed to the proposal being removed. Yet, VDOT and MDOT **have offered no new public engagement and comment opportunities in Prince George's County** to gather input on options or collect feedback on this updated concept that VDOT is seeking a vote for at **TPB less than 30 days from now.** VDOT has indicated it would analyze the traffic impacts from the additional vehicle traffic from the Beltway on local roads and on the new bottleneck that would be created in Prince

George's County where the toll lanes end. But after more than two years of requests from local officials, VDOT has still not provided this analysis.

VDOT's concept would not result in meaningful transit improvements. It would still impede metrorail expansion. Virginia is proposing to commit $15 million in annual transit payments as part of its proposal. This amount would not cover the cost of any significant transit improvements and is certainly nowhere near the cost of rail on the bridge. VDOT's presentation to the planning board also notes that "these funds cannot be redirected to pay for Metrorail as they only exist with the project." Additionally, even though VDOT has proposed it would reserve Metrorail by utilizing the shoulder space, the proposal would still create a financial burden to Metrorail expansion. This is because under a public-private partnership model, Metrorail would compete directly with the toll lanes for users, impacting the profit of the project concessionaire.

VDOT's updated concept fails to address environmental, safety, and traffic concerns.

The Maryland Department of Environment's EnviroScreen tool currently identifies the areas that would be impacted by the project (in Forest Heights and Oxon Hill) as being disproportionately burdened with high levels of particulate matter pollution, diesel pollution (soot pollution), a hazardous waste landfill, and many other pollution sources. VDOT's proposal for two new express lanes in each direction would result in additional vehicle traffic, adding further environmental and health burdens in surrounding communities.

Additionally, Prince George's County has the highest numbers of motor vehicle and pedestrian deaths in the state. Route 210 where the toll lanes would end, has been labeled as the "highway of death" due to traffic safety concerns. VDOT's updated proposal for two express lanes in each direction fails to address these safety concerns, especially given that adding additional lanes and traffic increases the risks of these conflicts.

VDOT should instead study alternatives that work for more residents and commuters.

VDOT should not advance the Beltway expansion project with express lanes. Instead, the focus should be to pursue strategies that will effectively address congestion over the long term, including shoulder and bus lanes combined with expanded carpool and transit incentives, transit-oriented development, future Metrorail expansion, and robust transportation demand management. VDOT has not seriously considered any alternatives to highway widening. The purpose of the study has been to "extend and

provide continuity of the express lanes system.” At a time where there is high inflation and costs to households, and high tariffs and fuel prices are increasing the cost of car ownership, it is important to give residents of the region access to more affordable clean transportation choices and invest in sustainable transit-oriented development.

Sincerely,

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