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October 28, 2021

Ms. Jeanette Mar
Environmental Program Manager
Federal Highway Administration
Maryland Division
George H. Fallon Federal Building
31 Hopkins Plaza, Suite 1520
Baltimore, MD 21201

Mr. Jeffrey T. Folden
Deputy Project Director
I-495 and I-270 P3 Project Office
Maryland Department of Transportation
State Highway Administration
707 North Calvert Street, Mail Stop P-601
Baltimore, MD 21202

Dear Ms. Mar and Mr. Folden:

We write with respect to the Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement (SDEIS) on the proposed Managed Lanes I-495 & I-270 Public-Private Partnership (P3) for the Preferred Alternative 9 - Phase 1 South. In May, the preferred alternative was substantially altered, triggering the need for the SDEIS which was issued on October 1. Given the significant changes to the project, the length of the SDEIS and the ongoing difficulties with the COVID-19 epidemic, we urge the Maryland Department of Transportation State Highway Administration and the Federal Highway Administration to extend the public comment to at least 90 days and to add an additional day of hearings to ensure that the public has adequate time to review and comment on the SDEIS. The extension should be sufficient for the agencies to address the traffic model issues and give the public the time and opportunity to provide meaningful public review and comment on all aspects of the SDEIS.

The National Environmental Policy Act is designed to ensure the discovery and disclosure of the environmental and public health impacts of a project before construction is allowed. Transparency by agencies and meaningful public participation are essential to the environmental review process. This is a substantial project that would stretch 12 miles through many communities as well as environmentally sensitive and culturally significant areas. The SDEIS is 288 pages with just over 7,400 pages of technical reports. While lengthy in itself, the document draws on the original DEIS, which is more than 18,000 pages in total. Given the volume of material that the public and local agencies must review the 45-day comment period is not sufficient to allow for meaningful participation.

As you know, COVID-19 creates significant challenges for many stakeholders. Some stakeholders have additional challenges when accessing the materials. Reviewing materials at local libraries is risky for those who are older and immunocompromised and virtual hearings create differential access for communities with lesser access to internet.

To ensure the broadest engagement by the public, we urge the agencies to extend the comment period. This project will cost billions of dollars in taxpayer money and will affect the lives of Maryland residents and their communities, lands, and water for generations.

We therefore request that the agencies extend the public comment period to at least 90 days and add an additional day of hearings later in the process on the Managed Lanes I-495/I-270 P3 SDEIS. We look forward to your response and thank you for your serious attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Anthony G. Brown
Member of Congress



Benjamin L. Cardin
U.S. Senator



Chris Van Hollen
U.S. Senator



Jamie Raskin
Member of Congress