Drafting a Written Comment on the I-495 and I-270 Expansion EIS
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**Background:** The Maryland Department of Transportation State Highway Administration (MDOT SHA) and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) issued a draft I-495/I-270 expansion Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) on July 10, 2020 under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). NEPA is a bedrock federal law that aims to ensure federal agencies consider potential environmental (physical, social, and biological) impacts and alternatives before making a decision on an infrastructure project.

**Public comments are critical.** Public comments alert agencies to unmet problems and, if they remain unmet in the final EIS, lay the foundation for future legal and political action to protect communities, the environment, and taxpayers. Strong comments identify specific problems with a DEIS, explain the importance of those problems, and (when possible) suggest remedies to mitigate those problems. Comments simply stating an opposition to the project and generalized concern with “significant environmental effects” will not help an agency make a better decision.

**MDOT is taking public comments until 11:59 pm on November 9th, 2020.**

**Who can comment?** Anyone concerned citizen can give comments. You do not need special expertise.

**How do I comment?**

You can e-mail a written comment to: **MLS-NEPA-P3@mdot.maryland.gov**.

You can mail a comment to:

Lisa B. Choplin, DBIA Director I-495 & I-270 P3 Office
Maryland Dept. of Transportation State Highway Administration
707 North Calvert Street
Mail Stop P-601
Baltimore, MD 21201

For more information contact **495cabe@gmail.com** or **transportation@mdsierra.org**.

*This document is purely educational and is not intended to provide specific legal advice.*
How to Write Your Comment

1. Introduce Yourself
   a. Give your name, where you live, and how close you are to the project.
   b. Provide your occupation or background, especially if you have relevant expertise (i.e. engineering/law) that gives greater credibility to your assessment of the DEIS.
   c. State if you are authorized to speak on behalf of an organization.

2. State that you support the no-build alternative. Supporting the no-build alternative does not necessarily mean you don’t support any alternatives. Rather, by supporting the no-build alternative, you are telling the agency that you don’t support the current slate of alternatives the agency has identified and studied.

3. Explain how the proposed expansion project will impact your life and loved ones.
   a. Indicate if you have any particularized health concerns;
   b. Describe how the project may negatively impact your own personal property and/or community spaces you frequent, such as churches, schools, recreation centers.
   c. State if your neighborhood is already burdened by other health impacts
   d. Explain how well informed you were about the project and the NEPA process.

4. Identify the issue(s) you have with the current DEIS and why those issues make the no-build option the only appropriate alternative. For each issue:
   a. Clearly state what the issue is (i.e. failure to consider multi-modal transit) and, if possible, include a reference to the relevant sections, chapters, page numbers, and studies in the DEIS.
      i. Identify any informational errors that underly basic assumptions;
      ii. Identify any missing or confusing information critical to understanding or remedying the specific impacts identified by the agency.
   b. Describe the importance of the issue as it relates to the environmental review process (i.e. what shortcomings result from the issue?).
   c. Explain how the agency can resolve the issue by recommending further analysis, alternatives, or factors for the agency to consider.
      i. Identify new information that is relevant and could be helpful to review.
      ii. Propose alternative approaches the agency ought to consider.
      iii. Suggest additional studies an agency could complete.
      iv. Recommend specific courses of action the agency could take.

Additional Tips for Effective Comments
- Effective comments are clear, concise, relevant, solution-oriented and provide specific examples.
- Effective comments are not generalized or conclusory; the provide substantive feedback for the agency to consider.
- If you plan to comment on multiple issues, choose only a few to keep your comment as simple and focused as possible. Substantive feedback on one issue is more valuable than generalized feedback on several issues.