June 4, 2019

The Honorable Larry Hogan
Governor
80 Calvert Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

The Honorable Nancy Kopp
Treasurer
80 Calvert Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

The Honorable Peter Franchot
Comptroller
80 Calvert Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

I am writing to share some concerns regarding the Board of Public Work’s vote on the I-495 & I-270 P3 Program (Program), item 19-GM on the agenda for June 5; and to request that the Board of Public Works not certify this project as a P3 before both the Environmental Impact Statement and the full financial impact analysis are complete.

Baltimore understands that improving transportation infrastructure is one of our most critical challenges. We need solutions that help people reach jobs, foster economic development, and connect our communities in ways that do not harm our health or the environment.

From what we know about highway widening projects in Maryland and around the country, these projects are detrimental to the environmental and economic health of dense, urban environments like Baltimore. Their negative impacts reverberate for decades to come.

In light of these concerns, and the lack of transparency in this process, we urge the Board of Public Works to delay or deny item 19-GM on the June 5 agenda.

While this project does not run through the Baltimore region, it will have a significant impact on our constituents in several ways. First, despite MDOT’s dubious claims that this project will be delivered at no cost to the state, the state has already committed and will continue to commit resources that could otherwise be spent on solutions that produce better outcomes. MDOT resources that could be directed toward addressing Baltimore City’s urgent transportation needs will be committed instead to these projects. What else could the state be pursuing that would produce better outcomes for Baltimore? MDOT has claimed it has held over 70 public meetings in Montgomery County and Prince George’s to discuss this project. How many meetings have
been held in our region? In fact, legislation (HB1281) that would have required a more robust input process to guide the development of a Central Maryland Transit Plan was vetoed.

Second, this P3 toll lane approach will perpetuate inequities in our transportation system by providing special benefits to those who can afford them, and are limited to those with private vehicles. In Baltimore City, about one-third of residents do not have access to a car. In certain neighborhoods that are historically disinvested and under stress, that number is even higher with many where over 50% of households have no access to a vehicle. The proposed projects will continue patterns that harm Baltimore households.

Third, the environmental impacts of this project will affect all Marylanders. We strongly urge the BPW to delay any vote on this P3 until the completion of an Environmental Impact Study, as well as a climate study. A project of this scale costs tens of millions of dollars simple to do the procurement process. Given the significant environmental concerns raised, it would seem financial prudent to not spend that money until we know the full extent of the impacts.

The entire region from Baltimore down to Richmond is in violation of the Clean Air Act 8-Hour Ozone Standard, which basically means we are often breathing dirty, smog-filled air. Baltimore has the highest rates of childhood asthma in the state and one of the highest rates on the county. While we see MDOT is claiming that this highway expansion will improve air quality because it will get cars out of congestion, this is hard claim to accept without any data. This is another reason we urge the BPW to not certify this project as a P3 before the Environmental Impact Statement is complete, so we can actually get the facts.

Finally, a reliance on road expansion, when extended to the Baltimore region, will encourage trends that have led to population loss for our city. Prioritizing roads over transit will encourage more development in suburban and exurban Maryland in ways that draw people and families farther away from Baltimore, worsening a trend that has been ongoing since the first highways enabled suburban sprawl and white flight from the City.

We urge the Board of Public Works to delay or deny the vote until the full scope of the financial risk to Maryland taxpayers are better understood, engagement with local government is vastly improved, and until the completion of an environmental impact statement.

Sincerely,

Brandon M. Scott  
President  
Baltimore City Council