

Comprehensive Smart Growth and Transit Alternatives to I-495/I-270 Toll Lanes

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MDOT has eliminated all transit alternatives from consideration, and the transit alternatives it previously had included were much too limited and were not integrated with, and failed to take into account, land use solutions. MDOT's modeling projections are flawed because they do not account for the benefit of land use changes, transit coming on line, and additional transit and demand-management approaches.

In 2001, the Montgomery County Transportation Policy Task Force modeled alternative land use scenarios which improved transit travel and reduced single-occupancy auto travel within the I-270 and I-95 corridors.¹ In 2017, the Metropolitan Washington Council of Government's Transportation Planning Board's Long-Range Plan Task Force studied ten packages of highway, transit, land use, and demand-management approaches to addressing the region's transportation challenges. The best performing scenario was Balanced Land Use, correcting the east-west jobs/housing divide, and providing for transit-oriented development (TOD), followed by demand management, bus rapid transit network, and Metro core capacity. Balanced land use and TOD far outperformed Express Toll Lanes.²

For these reasons, the state should study and partner with local governments in implementing land use changes near the 495/270 corridors as part of a comprehensive land use, transit and demand management alternative (a "composite alternative") that reduces driving demand.

It is well established that highway expansions in metropolitan areas just induce new driving demand that in turn fills up the new capacity, and that this occurs in as little as five years. Where toll lanes are built, any temporary capacity opened up in the general-purpose lanes will fill up again. Moreover, increased highway capacity will induce more driving and create congestion on connecting arterial roads.

In contrast, the composite alternative provides a way to absorb population growth in locations that generate far less driving, and maximize transit, walking and bicycling trips, while shortening the vehicle trips that are taken. A core element of this composite alternative would be build-out of mixed-use, mixed-income development at Maryland's transit stations in Prince George's and Montgomery Counties, and at lower levels at appropriate MARC stations. Also included is rural land protection and reduced auto-dependent sprawl.

¹ Balanced Land Use (BLU) modeled land use scenarios (housing and job centers) along the two corridors that were different from the auto-oriented Master Plan Land Use.

² Council of Governments, Transportation Planning Board, Long Range Plan Task Force, [Phase II Executive Summary](#), see Table E3, where Balanced Land Use outperforms express toll lanes on travel time for single occupant vehicles, vehicle hours of delay, jobs accessible by transit AND auto, mode share for bike and walk, daily vehicle miles of travel and per capita vehicle miles of travel, share of households and jobs with access to high-capacity transit, and VOC, NOX, and CO2 emissions.

In effect, the MDOT toll road proposal would lock in the jobs and housing location imbalance between the east and west sides of Maryland's DC suburbs, condemning east side residents of Montgomery County and residents of Prince George's County to long and more expensive commutes. It would be far more effective for Governor Hogan to partner with localities to invest in TOD buildout in Prince George's and Montgomery counties, additional transit, improved bicycle and pedestrian access, demand management, and fixing specific bottlenecks and deficient bridges.

Specifics of the composite alternative:

Land use:

- Mixed-use, mixed-income TOD buildout at 15 Prince George's Metro Stations, Montgomery's 12 stations, and Purple Line Stations.
- Mixed-use, mixed-income medium density at MARC stations that are not in rural areas like Montgomery's Agricultural Reserve.

Transit:

- Purple Line – complete current phase and add trainsets to increase frequency
- MARC – third track, additional trainsets, more frequent service, and all day and weekend service. New stations at Shady Grove, Twinbrook, and White Flint.
- Bus Rapid Transit:
 - Corridor Cities Transitway BRT
 - Route 355 BRT
 - Route 29/New Hampshire Avenue BRT
 - Veirs Mill Road BRT
 - Randolph Road BRT
 - White Flint to Montgomery Mall BRT (check)
 - Bladensburg and Takoma-Langley Park BRT (via Kenilworth Avenue, East-West Highway and Riggs Road)
- Express Bus:
 - I-270 Frederick to points south (dedicated bus/HOV-3 reversible lane)
 - I-495 from Montgomery Mall to Tysons (single dedicated bus/HOV-3 lane in each direction)
 - I-495 from White Oak Transit Center to Largo Town Center
- Later phase transit:
 - Purple Line – Phase 2 - across Beltway to Tysons Corner, and from New Carrollton to Largo.
 - Purple Line – Phase 3 – National Harbor to Alexandria
 - Purple Line – Phase 4 – Largo to National Harbor

Demand Management:

- Employer transit benefits and “parking cash out” (cash in lieu of an employer supplied parking space)
- Reduced transit fares
- Telework – increase telework and expand broadband access
- Flextime – variable work hours to reduce peak hour travel
- Parking pricing – full-cost accounting of parking and pricing accordingly. Free parking generates more traffic.
- Advanced Transit Signal Priority to improve bus and car movement, without compromising pedestrian and bicycle safety