

September 30, 2020

VDOT
495NorthernExtension@VDOT.virginia.gov

Dear VDOT:

VTA supports ensuring access and funding of multimodal transportation along the 495 Corridor through the 495 NEXT project. Extending the 495 Express Lanes North to the George Washington Memorial Parkway (GWMP) is the logical next step to reduce congestion in the Northern Virginia region. Extending the Express Lanes network will provide a new, more efficient travel choice, add much needed capacity to this section of I-495, reduce crashes in the area, and provide valuable benefits to the region and its transit agencies. Although the Express Lanes are not dedicated transit lanes, they do serve as a form of bus rapid transit lanes as the congestion pricing provides free-flow conditions for buses and HOV travelers at no cost, moving more people in fewer vehicles. The proposed bike/ped trail will also enhance the multimodal options throughout the corridor.

The key to a successful transit line is to provide the riders predictability and reliability. The Express Lanes have introduced (before the COVID-19 pandemic) exponential growth in bus trips on I-495 since the opening of the Express Lanes in late 2012. The ability for buses to skip the congestion and arrive on time has helped transit agencies grow their ridership, add new trips, and streamline their operations. We have every expectation that ridership will continue to grow as employees return to their workplaces.

The 495 NEXT project will help connect two of the most important economic hubs in the Commonwealth, Tysons Corner in Fairfax County and Crystal City in Arlington County. By providing this form of bus rapid transit, the Commonwealth will present Arlington County and Fairfax County the opportunity to introduce new bus routes and increase the frequency on existing bus routes between their localities. Ensuring increased access and on-time arrival for commuters will be a significant step toward restoring our workplace economy.

The Express Lanes also provide valuable environmental benefits. By incentivizing travel by HOV or by transit, the Express Lanes reduce the number of cars on the roads and the number of trips that travel through the corridor. Extending the Express Lanes to this important connection at the GWMP will help move more

people in fewer vehicles, thereby reducing greenhouse gases that affect our air quality and subsequently our health and our economy.

The Express Lanes have been a valuable asset for transit agencies in Northern Virginia as the goal of the Express Lanes is to move more people - not more cars. The Express Lanes provide an incentive for people to travel together in HOV and to utilize transit options. Expanding and funding multimodal options in the 495 NEXT project will optimize mobility and improve the region's economy.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide comment.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lisa M. Guthrie". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "L" and a distinct "M" and "G".

Lisa Guthrie
Executive Director