



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

4975 Alliance Drive
Fairfax, Virginia 22030

Stephen C. Brich, P.E.
Commissioner

March 26, 2021

William Canis
President, Great Falls Citizens Association
P.O. Box 27
Great Falls, VA 22066

RE: Comments on I-495 Express Lanes Northern Extension Project Draft Design Plans

Dear Mr. Canis:

Thank you for your letter from November 30th to Secretary of Transportation Shannon Valentine regarding Virginia's I-495 Northern Extension Express Lanes (NEXT) project. Secretary Valentine asked me to respond, and I am grateful for the opportunity to address the points and questions in your letter. Your letter also has been included in the official Public Comment for the I-495 NEXT project.

Your letter states that the Executive Board of the Greater Falls Citizens Association (GFCA) voted to revise and qualify its support for the I-495 NEXT project due to concerns about traffic impacts to your local roads, and the timing and alignment of Virginia's I-495 NEXT project with Maryland's separate managed lanes project on the American Legion Bridge, and I-495 and I-270 in Maryland. You referenced the need for additional public input and requested that we delay implementation of the I-495 NEXT project until the State of Maryland provides a firm commitment to move forward with their separate managed lanes project.

We recognize that collaboration is essential to a seamless, regional approach to providing managed lanes in the Washington Metropolitan region. The Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) continues to work closely with Maryland to ensure that Virginia's I-495 NEXT project and Maryland's I-495 and I-270 Managed Lanes Project are closely coordinated in terms of timing, as well as design and construction compatibility.

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In an effort to ensure that the public could provide their input and formal comments into the environmental assessment and design of the I-495 NEXT project, we did extend our formal comment period from its October deadline to December 4, 2020. This extended period provided opportunities for our team to do additional proactive outreach to surrounding communities, while ensuring that all stakeholders had adequate time to provide their input and formal comments.

VDOT understands GFCA's concerns regarding cut-through traffic and safety on local roads. As noted in the Environmental Assessment, our studies show that the I-495 NEXT project will provide benefits to the area's roadway network even prior to the completion of Maryland's separate project. These benefits include moving 7,600 more people per hour through the I-495 corridor due to additional capacity; providing new travel choices such as express lanes and better opportunities to carpool or ride a bus; improving operations on local roads due to a shift in travel demand off of congested local roads; improving safety on residential streets and the general purpose lanes; and decreasing traffic delays on local and neighborhood roads, especially at intersections along Georgetown Pike.

Regarding your concerns about increased traffic during construction of the I-495 NEXT project, VDOT is in the process of developing a Transportation Management Plan (TMP), which includes a construction-related operational analysis that will account for surrounding construction projects including the ones referenced above, which will provide input for future sequencing of construction activities and potential detour routes. This TMP study also will identify transit and transportation demand management strategies that will be employed during construction in an effort to provide options and keep traffic moving during construction. This TMP study will be shared with the public once it is completed.

VDOT remains committed to continuing to work with localities, businesses, and citizens of the Greater Washington Area to listen to and address their feedback on the I-495 NEXT project. The issues identified by the GFCA are important to VDOT and will continue to be an important part of the dialogue as we work together to solve one of the region's most congested transportation links. Through continued collaboration between VDOT and the Maryland Department of Transportation, we are confident that a multimodal transportation solution can be put in place, which will improve travel and make a positive impact on our Commonwealth.

Sincerely,



Robert H. Cary, P.E., L.S.
Chief Deputy Commissioner, VDOT

cc: The Honorable Shannon Valentine, Virginia Secretary of Transportation
Stephen C. Brich, P.E., Commissioner, VDOT
Jennifer Mitchell, Director, Virginia DRPT
Susan Shaw, P.E., Northern Virginia Megaprojects Director