



**495 EXPRESS LANES NORTHERN EXTENSION STUDY
COMMENT SUMMARY REPORT
JUNE 11, 2018 PUBLIC INFORMATION MEETING
*Federal: NHPP-0495(095), State: 0495-029-419, UPC: 113414***

The Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) held a public information meeting on June 11, 2018 at Cooper Middle School in McLean, regarding plans to extend the I-495 Express Lanes by approximately three miles from the Dulles Toll Road interchange toward the Maryland line in the vicinity of the American Legion Bridge. The meeting was held from 6:30 p.m. until 8:30 p.m., and featured an open house period for the public to review displays and ask questions, followed by a presentation at 7 p.m., and a question and answer session.

Meeting materials, including the brochure, presentation and exhibits, were posted on the project website (495NorthernExtension.org) on June 11, 2018. The public was invited to submit comments at the meeting in writing, individually to a court reporter, or verbally during the question and answer session. Written comments were also received by VDOT through the comment period by mail, email or online. The public comment period ended on July 11, 2018.

Meeting Attendance:

- Approximately 76 people attended the meeting
- 48 people signed the attendance sheet
- Elected officials in attendance included Delegate Kathleen Murphy, Delegate Jennifer Boysko, Delegate Mark Keam, Fairfax County Supervisor John Foust, and an aide to U.S. Senator Mark Warner
- A representative from one media outlet attended the meeting

Comments Provided at Meeting:

- Nine comment sheets were submitted at the meeting
- 12 people spoke during the question and answer session
- No individual comments were provided to the court reporter

Comments Provided by Mail, Email or Online:

- 11 comments were received through regular mail, email or online, including:
 - One email was from staff for Delegate Murphy requesting additional information for a community meeting.
 - One letter was received via email from the Southern Environmental Law Center.
 - The other nine comments were from individuals.

Comments Received and Responses:

The table below summarizes and responds to comments received during the comment period. Attachment A includes the actual public comments received during and after the meeting, and attachment B is a transcript of the Public Information Meeting presentation and question and answer period.

Summary of Comments Received About the Study		
	<i>Public Comment/Question</i>	<i>Response</i>
<i>Coordination with Other Jurisdictions</i>		
	<p>What is the status of Maryland’s project? How does it relate to this study?</p>	<p>The Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) launched its Traffic Relief Plan to reduce traffic congestion, increase economic development, and enhance safety for Maryland commuters. The largest initiative in the Traffic Relief Plan involves evaluating improvements in the I-495 and I-270 corridors. The I-495 and I-270 Managed Lanes study is the first element in Maryland’s efforts to improve traffic congestion. An Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is underway to identify alternatives and assess potential impacts. The Study limits extend along I-495 from south of the American Legion Bridge to east of the Woodrow Wilson Bridge and along I-270 from I-495 to I-370, including the east and west I-270 spurs. The study is expected to be completed by Spring 2020.</p> <p>VDOT is conducting an Environmental Assessment, which is independent of Maryland’s study, of the option to extend the existing I-495 Express Lanes by three miles to the vicinity of the American Legion Bridge. VDOT also is producing a project implementation and procurement plan, which also would be conducted independent of Maryland’s plans.</p> <p>However, to ensure that both state’s efforts are closely coordinated, project leaders from VDOT and Maryland are meeting and sharing information on a regular basis.</p>
	<p>What does Maryland’s project include? Will Maryland allow high occupancy vehicles? Will the Maryland study include adding lanes to the American Legion Bridge?</p>	<p>In Maryland’s EIS, the Preliminary Range of Alternatives includes fifteen alternatives for consideration in the I-495 and I-270 Managed Lanes Study, which will include the No-Build alternative and corridor-wide solutions that are intended to address congestion along I-495 and I-270, offer more travel mode choices, and enhance travel efficiency. A wide range of alternatives are being evaluated and will include adding general purpose lanes, managed lanes, and transit alternatives. More information on Maryland’s efforts can be found at https://495-270-p3.com/.</p>

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	American Legion Bridge congestion needs to be addressed. Pushing traffic faster toward the bridge without addressing the bridge will accomplish nothing. Are studies being done of ways to add extra lanes to the American Legion Bridge? Is this a priority? Who would be responsible for expanding or rebuilding the American Legion Bridge?	<p>Maryland has primary responsibility for the American Legion Bridge, and its current environmental study limits include I-495 from south of the American Legion Bridge to east of the Woodrow Wilson Bridge and along I-270 from I-495 to I-370, including the east and west I-270 spurs.</p> <p>Any bridge improvements resulting from current studies or otherwise would be coordinated with both Virginia and the Federal Highway Administration.</p>
	The focus should be on working with Maryland on a new bridge or another bridge near White's Ferry.	The Maryland Project is evaluating the operations of the existing bridge and assessing the need to widen or replace the existing American Legion Bridge. The extension of the 495 Express Lanes is one of the regional projects being considered by the Commonwealth of Virginia to provide additional capacity, enhance trip reliability, provide trip choices and improve safety. In addition to this project, regional jurisdictions have developed transportation plans that include a variety of other projects to accomplish these goals. These plans are revised frequently and an additional Potomac River crossing near White's Ferry or elsewhere may be included in future revisions.
	Is the construction of VDOT's proposed express lanes contingent on the approval and completion of construction of Maryland's HOT Lanes and a second American Legion Bridge?	VDOT's Environmental Assessment study is independent of Maryland's study and will produce an implementation plan that will consider options to implement in coordination with Maryland or separately from Maryland, if appropriate. VDOT is meeting regularly with Maryland to share information related to both states' studies as well as the schedule for what Maryland plans to implement. Virginia's decision will be made independent of what Maryland decides.
	Any express lane extension Virginia implements should maintain the current HOT-lane approach that allows carpoolers to use the lanes for free. Virginia officials should encourage Maryland officials to implement HOT lanes so the two states' plans will be compatible.	At this point in the study, VDOT expects an extension would follow the same policies for carpooling that are in place for the existing 495 Express Lanes. VDOT and the project team are coordinating with Maryland to ensure implementation on both sides of the project is as seamless for drivers as possible.

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	The District of Columbia should be included as an agency stakeholder, as the condition of Canal Road impacts the use of the American Legion Bridge.	Given the regional nature of I-495, additional jurisdictions will be included as needed as the study and any subsequent project progresses.
<i>Environmental</i>		
	Concern regarding the loss of hiking trails, specifically between the Live Oak area and I-495.	VDOT will work with partner agencies to preserve as much of the existing trail network as is possible in any project design.
	Site-specific requests for noise monitoring, to include Cooper Middle School and Langley Swim and Tennis Club.	A noise analysis will be conducted during the preparation of the Environmental Assessment. Monitoring sites that are representative of land uses within certain areas will be selected. Monitored sites are simply used to calibrate the noise model, which is used for predicting future noise levels. A noise monitoring plan is typically developed prior to the study and Cooper Middle School may be included as one of the monitoring sites.
	Where will pollution sensors be located? There are three other schools nearby; parkland with hiking trails is adjacent to the Beltway; the health and safety of our children and residents are essential.	The Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (VDEQ) is responsible for the statewide air quality monitoring network; VDOT does not conduct air monitoring. The proposed project site is located between two regional air quality monitors, one in Arlington, the other in Ashburn. There is also a near-road monitor in Springfield, considered to be a worst-case location based on traffic. As necessary, VDOT runs models to estimate peak concentrations at worst-case locations in the air study. If VDOT can demonstrate that the project won't cause or contribute to air quality violations at worst-case locations, then the project will also be compliant at all other locations within the project corridor.
	Will VDOT's NEPA studies coordinate with Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) guidelines and Governor Northam's Executive Order for enhanced DEQ this year? If so, when and how?	Yes. This coordination has begun and will continue throughout the study.
	Are there currently known levels of pollutants higher than allowed in our area? What are they? Must VDOT consider DEQ studies before building more HOT Lanes in our area?	The Northern Virginia region is in non-attainment status for EPA's 8-hour ozone standard. Ozone is a regional pollutant and not a localized pollutant, since it is not directly emitted from motor vehicles. There are no project-level requirements for ozone that need to be met.

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	How long are VDOT's study results allowed to be used for HOT Lanes decision making?	Under the regulations developed for implementation of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), an environmental assessment remains valid for three years. After that period, a re-evaluation would be required before any project could proceed. This practice is common for large transportation projects.
	The proposed expansion provides an opportunity to improve stormwater treatment on the existing portion of I-495.	Any roadway design would be required to meet current state regulations and requirements for stormwater management.
<i>Design</i>		
	What are potential right of way impacts? Will houses be impacted?	<p>This VDOT study will identify potential right of way impacts for design alternatives to extend the express lanes. VDOT strives to minimize right of way impact, but it's expected that there could be some right of way impact due to the space constraints in this part of the I-495 corridor.</p> <p>Additional information regarding potential right of way impacts will be provided as the study progresses and more information becomes available. Information about right of way acquisition is discussed in VDOT's brochure, "Right of Way and Utilities: A Guide for Property Owners and Tenants", which is available online.</p>
	What do build, no-build, 2025 opening year and 2045 design year mean?	The technical studies will look at conditions under different scenarios, including whether VDOT does or does not build the project (build or no build). In addition, in order to evaluate and compare conditions, the studies will look at an interim year (2025) and a forecasted year (2045) to ensure that the project meets regional transportation needs for a significant time horizon (typically 20 years).
	Can express lanes be built within the existing right of way without reducing the existing general purpose lanes? Taking space away from the general purpose lanes would make it worse for people who are dealing with congestion.	<p>As part of this study, VDOT will conduct a preliminary assessment of potential right of way impacts. At this time, the specific details of potential individual property impacts are undefined. This study will identify a potential project footprint to provide a better idea of the right of way required to construct the project.</p> <p>The design will not take away the existing general purpose lanes.</p>
	Will the project fix the bottleneck at the intersection of Georgetown Pike (VA 193) and the 495 Express Lanes?	Project goals would include reducing congestion and improving safety on I-495 between Tysons and the American Legion Bridge. This would include the congestion where the 495 Express Lanes currently end near Georgetown Pike.

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	The project should consider direct access to the express lanes or I-495 from Old Dominion Drive. Can this be included in the EA for further study?	Establishing additional access points to I-495 is not a primary objective of the study, but will be evaluated by the team
	Concern expressed regarding safety and the widths of travel lanes and shoulder lanes; request for 12' lanes.	The project will attempt to use standard 12-foot lanes where possible. There may be some design exceptions where narrower lanes are necessary to mitigate other impacts.
	Concern that the I-495 Express Lanes Northern Extension will exacerbate existing problems with congestion and cut-through traffic near the Balls Hill Road and Georgetown Pike intersection associated with the nearby I-495 access ramps. Request to study and determine the potential impacts and mitigations of a proposed extension. Request for a single northbound lane and restriping at the intersection of Balls Hill Road and Georgetown Pike.	The study includes a traffic analysis that will model traffic operations both on I-495 and on nearby roadways. VDOT is working separately with McLean-area communities on various traffic and congestion concerns in that area. Learn more at: http://www.virginiadot.org/projects/northernvirginia/mclean_traffic_analysis.asp
	Design plans should consider a future shared use path along the American Legion Bridge like was done on the Wilson Bridge.	VDOT is coordinating with Maryland, which is looking at a variety of design options for its portion of I-495 and the American Legion Bridge.
	Adding more lanes will increase traffic, accidents, and drivers looking for alternative routes/bypasses through local and neighborhood streets. Instead, consider: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Additional Potomac River crossings to support growth in Loudoun County and commuters from Maryland • Conversion of some existing lanes to “through lanes” to separate interstate drivers from local traffic 	This study is looking at adding capacity and travel options for users of the Capital Beltway by extending the existing 495 Express Lanes Network. It is anticipated that adding capacity and keeping traffic moving on I-495 will help minimize cut-through traffic on local streets. In addition to this project, the regional jurisdictions have developed transportation plans that include a variety of other projects to address regional transportation needs. These plans are revised frequently and additional Potomac River crossings may be considered separately in the future.

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	Incorporate appropriate safe areas for police access and assistance, specifically from Georgetown Pike to River Road.	VDOT will explore design options to accommodate safe areas for police as the design of the facility evolves.
	Residents in the Live Oak area rely on the bridge to access their homes. Replacing the bridge while maintaining access will be tricky.	If a construction project were to impact this community, VDOT would have a coordinated traffic plan to ensure access to this community.
	VDOT should coordinate with transit agencies and Maryland to consider how a project could support expanded mass transit use, to include possible future bus rapid transit along I-495. Consider adding park and ride lots to the project area to improve accessibility and viability of transit for the area.	Multimodal solutions are a top priority to the Commonwealth of Virginia and are key components in many of the major transportation improvements underway in Northern Virginia. The Commonwealth has made a strong investment in ensuring that alternative commute options such as transit enhancements, commuter bus service, park and ride facilities, and transportation demand strategies are part of its recent express lanes projects. As part of this project's procurement and implementation planning, the inclusion of multimodal and other transit improvements as part of the project's scope will be fully considered.
	VDOT should consider additional build alternatives that could reduce the project's footprint, including reversible express lanes or adding one express lane in each direction.	This study is currently focused on an alternative and options with two new express lanes in each direction, but might examine other options as the study progresses.
	VDOT should provide an estimate of the range of toll amounts that drivers can expect to pay to use the express lanes.	Tolls on express lanes are dynamic; prices change based on real-time traffic volumes and speeds in order to manage demand for the lanes and keep traffic moving. As traffic volumes climb, the system responds by raising the toll price to help manage the number of vehicles getting on the roadway and to keep traffic moving at highway speeds.
<i>Traffic</i>		

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	<p>Are there comprehensive traffic studies for I-495 and surrounding neighborhoods?</p> <p>Are there studies that show that the HOT lanes reduce congestion in Virginia, both on I-495 and on neighborhood streets?</p>	<p>Traffic studies were completed as part of the environmental study for the I-495 Express Lanes, as well as the I-495 Shoulder Lane Project. These traffic studies can be found at 495NorthernExtension.org. Additionally, the Environmental Analysis (EA) that is underway for this project will provide a comprehensive study of traffic on I-495 and in surrounding neighborhoods.</p> <p>About 40,000 vehicles use the I-495 Express Lanes each day, and about 40 percent of these vehicles are traveling as carpools with three or more occupants. Since the first year of operations, there are four times as many carpool trips and 75 percent more bus trips during average weekday trips on the 495 Express Lanes. According to VDOT data, Express Lanes are benefitting all commuters, and have helped to reduce congestion in the general purpose lanes on sections of I-495. Additionally, a National Capital Region Congestion Report produced in the first quarter of 2014 by the National Capital Region's Transportation Planning Board shows that congestion on the region's Interstate System, which includes I-495, was greater in 2010 compared to 2013 and 2014, after the I-495 Express Lanes opened.</p>
	<p>Cut-through traffic in neighborhoods near the Beltway puts local school kids, joggers, and dog walkers at risk. The costs of the stress on the locals, the drivers, and business due to this environment is very much over looked and goes unaccounted for in the addition of lanes.</p>	<p>The study includes a traffic analysis that will model traffic impact both on I-495 and on nearby roadways. VDOT anticipates that adding capacity and managing traffic on I-495 will mitigate cut-through traffic issues.</p>
	<p>Do traffic models consider projected economic growth in Northern Virginia (especially Tysons) and Maryland?</p>	<p>Yes. Traffic models include current information and projections about employment and population growth across the metropolitan region with a planning horizon of 2045. These forecasts are coordinated at the regional level by the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (MWCOC) in a cooperative effort with local jurisdictions.</p>
	<p>Will traffic studies capture traffic counts before the end of the school year when there is less traffic?</p>	<p>Yes, the counts were taken in May 2018, prior to the end of the school year.</p>

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	Will construction traffic impact studies be conducted?	Construction traffic impact studies occur as part of project design, but are not part of this environmental study. The study team’s preliminary engineering assessment will take constructability and traffic impacts under consideration.
	Growth in Tysons will impact traffic on local streets and needs to be considered as part of a systematic approach.	The traffic models will take into consideration expected growth in Tysons. The study will evaluate traffic conditions on I-495 and local streets in the vicinity of I-495.
	Desire for relief from the morning congestion on the inner loop approaching the American Legion Bridge.	Adding lanes and capacity to I-495 is expected to reduce congestion in the general purpose lanes as well as provide reliable travel times in the Express Lanes.
<i>Express Lanes</i>		
	Why was the decision made previously to not extend the express lanes to the George Washington Memorial Parkway when the Capital Beltway Express Lanes were built?	The Capital Beltway Express Lanes project stopped around the Dulles Connector Road due to uncertainty about future construction around the American Legion Bridge and in Maryland. Instead, the state took a phased approach.
	Toll roads create demand and cause increased congestion.	Dynamically-tolled Express Lanes are designed to manage demand for the road and keep traffic moving congestion-free and at highway speeds. Solo drivers who choose to pay a toll and use the lanes, and carpoolers who can travel the lanes for free, benefit from a faster and more reliable trip on the Express Lanes. These managed lanes are designed to meet current and projected demand, while providing increased options for drivers.
	The simple solution would be to eliminate the express lanes and add more general purpose lanes.	In the past, partnering with the private sector to build express lanes has given the Commonwealth the ability to build and deliver projects like this in a more timely manner. Eliminating the existing 495 Express Lanes is not feasible because the Commonwealth is in a long-term partnership with a private sector partner.
<i>Procurement</i>		
	Who would operate the express lanes?	VDOT will conduct a separate project implementation and procurement study that will consider multiple options for express lanes operation, including state and private operation.
	Will Transurban receive a bid contract or no competition contract to build the extension?	The comprehensive agreement between VDOT and Capital Beltway Express (Transurban) does not require VDOT to offer Transurban first right-of-refusal to build an express lanes extension.

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	Would it violate the fair procurement rules for public contracts if a contract is awarded to Transurban?	<p>If a determination is made to proceed with a 495 Express Lanes Northern Extension project, VDOT will explore all options for delivering and financing the project. As with other critical transportation projects, VDOT's top priority is to ensure that taxpayers are protected and that the right project with the right financing is delivered.</p> <p>If a public-private partnership is determined to be the best project-delivery method, this process will be governed by the Virginia Public-Private Transportation Act. If it is determined that Transurban, the Commonwealth's private partner and operator of the 495 Express Lanes, would receive the first right of refusal to deliver this project, Transurban would still be required to meet specific project-delivery and financial criteria as outlined by the Commonwealth in order to proceed.</p>
	How much does the Commonwealth of Virginia pay Transurban to supplement traffic revenue on the 495 Express Lanes?	VDOT does not pay Capital Beltway Express (Transurban) to operate the 495 Express Lanes.
	General statements opposing public-private partnership (P3) toll roads, private investors, and foreign corporations.	<p>Virginia has had several major express lanes improvement projects in Northern Virginia that were delivered and are being operated by private sector partners to the Commonwealth. Public-private partnership transportation projects are governed under Virginia's Public-Private Transportation Act of 1995. These public-private partnership projects were able to move forward because of their demonstrated ability to provide the best value to Virginia taxpayers while delivering needed transportation improvements. As part of the project's procurement process, it will be determined whether the public-private partnership model will be considered as a possible project delivery method.</p> <p>Although some may oppose paying tolls for various reasons, other travel options will remain on this section of I-495 including general purpose lanes that are free at all times for all travelers.</p>
	Concern regarding compensation events and lack of public control (e.g., Transform 66 Inside and Outside the Beltway).	VDOT's top priority is to ensure that taxpayers are protected and that the right project with the right financing is delivered. VDOT intends to make the procurement process as transparent as possible.

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Process		
	How did VDOT get \$6 million for the study without holding public information meetings? Who backed it?	The Commonwealth Transportation Board, which governs transportation funding in Virginia, allocated the study funds at its April 17, 2018 meeting.
	How can the public provide input? Additional public input and transparency are necessary. Residents should be invited and engaged more in the process. VDOT should hold additional public information meetings, specifically, during the comment period for the Environmental Assessment (EA).	A public information meeting was held on June 11, 2018. An additional public information meeting will be held in early 2019. Based on the current schedule, a Location Public Hearing will be held in mid-2019, which will include the opportunity for the public to review and comment on the study findings. More information and a comment submission form can be found on the project website www.495NorthernExtension.org . Comments can also be provided by emailing 495NorthernExtension@VDOT.Virginia.gov or mailing VDOT's Northern Virginia District, Susan Shaw, P.E., 4975 Alliance Drive, Fairfax, VA 22030.
	What is the public process for this study? Who will have final approval?	Based on the current schedule, a Location Public Hearing will be held in mid-2019, which will include the opportunity for the public to review and comment on the study findings. The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) will have final approval of the environmental analysis (EA) and traffic studies. After FHWA approval has been received, the Commonwealth Transportation Board will review the study's findings.
	Prior studies should be made available online.	Find reports and other documents from previous I-495 studies are available at www.495NorthernExtension.org
	Were there regional public meetings discussing alternative Potomac River crossings? Additional crossings need to be considered.	A task force established by the National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board (TPB) evaluated a set of 10 initiatives with potential to improve the region's transportation system. An additional northern bridge crossing was considered, but ultimately not included among the five initiatives that the task force recommended for further study and incorporation into the region's long-term transportation plans in 2017. To learn more about the TPB's recommended initiatives for further study, see https://www.mwcog.org/newsroom/2017/12/06/task-force-recommends-five-initiatives-to-improve-regions-transportation-system-tpb/ .
Other		

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	<p>The I-495 North Shoulder Lane Use Project caused gridlock by adding another merge area and simply moving the chokepoint closer to before the American Legion Bridge.</p>	<p>The I-495 North Shoulder Lane from the Old Dominion Drive overpass to the George Washington Memorial Parkway off-ramp provides congestion relief for the northbound Beltway by providing additional merge area for the I-495 northbound Express Lanes. The addition of this lane, which is open to traffic only during peak travel times, has not caused gridlock in this area.</p> <p>Based on VDOT's I-495 Auxiliary Lane Study, removing the I-495 North Shoulder Lane would result in minimal change in vehicle throughput on I-495 between Old Dominion Drive and the American Legion Bridge. According to the study, removal of this lane would result in increased delays on the I-495 Express Lanes prior to the area where the Express Lanes merge into the general purpose lanes, as was the case prior to the implementation of the shoulder lane.</p> <p>To improve traffic operations in this section and provide additional congestion relief, the I-495 Northern Extension project would extend the Express Lanes by approximately three miles toward the Maryland line in the vicinity of the American Legion Bridge. This extension would provide additional express lanes in the roadway section where there is currently a shoulder lane.</p>
	<p>Will heavy trucks be permitted to use the 495 Express Lanes? Disappointed with the decision after the NEPA hearings to allow heavy trucks on the express lanes on I-66 outside the Beltway; done very quietly and last minute after the public process.</p>	<p>The study will assess allowing trucks to use this section of express lanes, but a decision has not been made.</p>
	<p>Request for information regarding House Bill 662, including how it originated and potential impacts on residents.</p>	<p>Virginia HB 662 was sponsored in 2018 by Delegate Kathleen Murphy (District 34) and relates to VDOT study and assessment of American Legion Bridge remediation if Maryland were to proceed with bridge improvements. Read more on the General Assembly's website: https://lis.virginia.gov/cgi-bin/legp604.exe?181+sum+HB662</p>