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**Cc:** [Johnson, Michael D.](#); [Weissberg, Victor](#)  
**Subject:** Comments to the VDOT SEL project  
**Date:** Tuesday, October 10, 2023 9:45:29 PM

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Dear Mr. Nies,

This is in response to the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) I-495 Southside Express Lanes Study. The Prince George's County Department of Public Works and Transportation (DPW&T) appreciates the opportunity to provide a response to the VDOT Study.

We offer the following:

- The Woodrow Wilson Bridge (WWB) Project Record of Decision (ROD) stated that the "HOV lanes and a shoulder are of a sufficient width and structural strength to allow for their future conversion to WMATA rail transit use." To be more fully consistent, it is imperative that Rail should not be eliminated as an option. Otherwise, it would run contrary to the language in the WWB ROD.
- While the VDOT team has insisted that a future rail option would not be precluded, it appears that designation of the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> lanes as HOV lanes and any related ramp and approach roadway reconfigurations to accommodate the HOV lanes would virtually eliminate the possibility of rail across and through the Woodrow Wilson Bridge. Unless it can be shown that the proposed HOV improvement could easily be re-adapted to allow for rail construction across the Woodrow Wilson Bridge and the connecting approach roadways, then this proposal is strongly opposed by Prince George's County DPW&T.
- It has been stated that the intent, if this project were to implement some variation of toll lanes, it would be executed through a Public Private Partnership (P3). While the VDOT team has stated that a contract could be developed for a shorter term to allow for conversion to rail, that seems highly suspect, as most P3 terms are for extended periods. The flexibility to accommodate future transit seems highly incompatible with known P3 models. While on the surface it could be said that a rail option would not be precluded, practically speaking, once a P3 contract has been executed and toll lanes are in operation, conversion would be presented with new obstacles that likely would be insurmountable.
- As Alternative 4, Blue Line to National Harbor (via the Woodrow Wilson Bridge), of the WMATA Blue, Orange, Silver Line Capacity and Reliability Study of the rail options studied, based on the cost-benefit analysis, would provide the **highest level of benefits**. It was the only alternative that met all four of the stated goals of the study and was the only one that was deemed best performing for two of those goals. The WMATA Study is being performed as additional capacity in the system is almost certainly going to be needed.

- The WMATA system is the lifeblood of the Washington Region and Alternative 4 from their study scores highest for capacity, equity and sustainability. As climate change must be addressed aggressively, and equity is a paramount need in a region with a widening gap between east and west on most measures, any obstacle that would prevent or hinder advance of the most viable option to address this regions' most pressing needs, as we believe any of the toll options of the SEL Study would, Prince George's County finds that unacceptable.
- Any future use of the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> lanes of the WWB must prioritize, sustainability and equity. Advancing a project designed to enable greater vehicular capacity while taxing those in the region who already have the longest commutes (in terms of time), with MWCOG projects showing those impacts increasing and to be greatest for those traveling from Prince George's County, adding toll lanes is in direct conflict with addressing equity and climate change.
- The SEL Study ends just east of the I-495 interchange with MD 210 which will likely worsen bottlenecks on the Maryland side of the region. As the history of these sort of projects would indicate, the end points of a capacity project of this sort almost always creates significant congestion. Perhaps to the extent that any time savings or benefit of the toll lanes would be realized, they would likely be negligible if at all once factoring in the congestion created at the end or beginning of the project. Unless it can be demonstrated otherwise, Prince George's County is under the assumption that would be the case.
- Prince George's County is very supportive of greater use of Transportation Demand Management and Transit and would be open to further exploration of how those alternatives and the recommendations of the Virginia Department of Rail and Public transportation (DRPT), including comments that Prince George's County provided to that Study are proposed to be integrated into this project.
- The County would also like to better understand how the alternatives presented in this study would connect into National Harbor. A connection to I-295 South is made evident, but connecting into National Harbor was not clear in review of the document. Not having a direct connection to National Harbor would be unacceptable to the County.
- The County has already expressed concern that the Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT) I-495 Southside Capital Beltway Transit and TDM Study ("Transit Study") was broken out as a separate study from the I-495 SEL Study. We feel strongly that there should have been one comprehensive study to entertain all options, transit, TDM and toll lanes on equal footing as part of the same study.

The County does wish to thank VDOT for the opportunity to comment and appreciates in advance of your consideration. Please do not hesitate to contact Special Assistant, Victor Weissberg at [vweissberg@co.pg.md.us](mailto:vweissberg@co.pg.md.us) with any further communication.