



McLean Citizens Association Resolution
Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT)
I-495 Express Lanes Northern Extension Environmental Assessment (February
2020)

September 2, 2020

Whereas, in 2011, the Transportation Planning Board for the National Capital Region (TPB) approved a Constrained Long Range Plan (CLRP) that included the widening of the Capital Beltway (I-495 or Beltway) to include a system of high-occupancy toll lanes (HOT Lanes or Express Lanes) from the American Legion Memorial (ALM) Bridge to the Backlick Road underpass; and

Whereas, in 2012, the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT), in conjunction with Transurban, a private company, completed the widening of I-495, including construction of HOT Lanes in its center, from the I-95/I-495/I-395 interchange in Springfield to a point between the I-495 interchange with the Dulles Toll Road (Route 267) and Old Dominion Drive, approximately three miles south of the ALM Bridge over the Potomac River, but continued its plans to extend the HOT Lanes to the vicinity of the ALM Bridge; and

Whereas, in April 2018, the Virginia Commonwealth Transportation Board approved funding to conduct an environmental study of a plan to extend the I-495 Express Lanes from their present northern terminus to the vicinity of the ALM Bridge and the Maryland state line; and

Whereas, this I-495 Express Lanes Northern Extension (495 NEXT) study was to be developed as an independent, stand-alone project that would be coordinated with a study being developed by the Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT), known as the I-495 and I-270 Managed Lanes Study, to examine reduction of roadway congestion from the George Washington Memorial Parkway (GW Parkway), including improvements to the ALM Bridge, to west of MD 5, and along I-270 from I-495 to north of I-370; and

Whereas, in January 2019, Virginia Governor Ralph Northam announced that the Commonwealth of Virginia had signed a Project Development Agreement with Transurban, which operates the existing I-495 Express Lanes, to extend the Express Lanes to the ALM Bridge; and

Whereas, in February 2020, VDOT and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), as the lead federal agency, issued for public review and comment an Environmental Assessment (EA), prepared pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, along with proposed design plans and technical reports, for the 495 NEXT Project, and the VDOT website advises that the comment period for the EA remains open; and

Whereas, in March 2020, the TPB approved the inclusion of the 495 NEXT Project in the 2021 to 2024 Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP), which makes the project eligible for federal funding; and

Whereas, the EA examines conditions under only a Build Alternative and a No Build Alternative, and

Whereas, the Build Alternative would consist of: extending the existing four I-495 Express Lanes from their current terminus; providing new access ramps connecting the Dulles Toll Road and the I-495 Express lanes; adding new Express Lane access to and from the GW Parkway; rebuilding the overpasses for Live Oak Drive, Georgetown Pike, Old Dominion Drive, and I-495 North over the Dulles Toll Road; and adding an approximately 3.1-mile, 10-foot-wide shared-use path for pedestrians and bicyclists starting near the south end of the project corridor at Timberly Lane near Lewinsville Road and continuing generally north along I-495 and the west side of Balls Hill Road to the GW Parkway interchange; and

Whereas, the No Build Alternative would retain the existing lane configuration through the study area except for modifications to the roadway network that have been approved for implementation by 2045, as identified in the most recent (October 2018) CLRP approved by the TPB, and the No Build Alternative assumes that the planned transportation projects within the study area that are included in the CLRP would be in place, including the expansion of capacity at both the ALM Bridge and the stretch of I-495 from the Bridge to I-270 pursuant to Maryland's Managed Lanes Study; and

Whereas, the EA contains a detailed description of the purposes of the 495 NEXT Project and concludes that the Build Alternative would: (1) reduce congestion by optimizing traffic volumes and travel demand, improving traffic operations, and increasing the number of persons moved; (2) provide additional traffic choices by adding Express Lanes as an alternative travel option for high occupancy vehicles and van pools or those wishing to pay a toll, increasing the potential for future regional bus service through dedicated or managed lanes that would allow buses to travel more efficiently, and adding a shared-use path to provide a bicycle and pedestrian option for local travelers; and (3) improve travel time reliability, because, although congestion would still exist during peak hours in the general purpose lanes, overall travel speeds would increase and travel times would decrease compared to the No Build Alternative; and

Whereas, the EA asserts that, in contrast, under the No Build Alternative (post-MD Managed Lanes project implementation), the existing traffic congestion on I-495 near the ALM Bridge would be exacerbated given the substantial growth in population and employment projected for the area, which would additionally strain highway capacity; and

Whereas, on July 10, 2020, the FHWA and the MDOT issued a draft environmental impact statement (DEIS) for the Managed Lanes Study, which, after considering a number of alternatives, retained for further consideration a No Build Alternative and several Build Alternatives, all of which would involve replacement of the ALM Bridge and expansion of I-495 from the GW Parkway to I-270 by adding two lanes in each direction that would be either HOT Lanes or Express Toll Lanes (ETL); and

Whereas, the McLean Citizens Association has long been aware that traffic backs up each weekday on the inner loop of I-495 between Tysons and the ALM Bridge during the afternoon and evening rush

hours, causing many commuters to bypass this backup by cutting through local McLean residential streets and intersections to access I-495 north toward Maryland from the Georgetown Pike onramp, which creates significant congestion on local roads in the vicinity of that on-ramp and access and safety problems for residents of those neighborhoods; and

Whereas, the McLean Citizens Association has recognized that a long-term solution to this congestion and cut-through traffic problem is likely to come only with elimination of the bottleneck at the ALM Bridge, has consistently been on record as supporting additional capacity at the ALM Bridge and on connecting roadways, and has expressed its position in resolutions dated February 2, 2011, and January 6, 2016; and

Whereas, in light of Maryland's intention to implement its Managed Lanes Study as described above, the 495 NEXT Project would provide a crucial link between the existing expanded stretch of I-495 in Virginia ending near the Dulles Toll Road and the proposed expansion of I-495 by Maryland extending to the GW Parkway, and the resulting integrated, expanded highway is predicted to reduce the cut-through traffic problem; and

Whereas, the EA and its accompanying Traffic and Transportation Technical Report contain projections concerning the potential impact of the 495 NEXT Project on traffic in year 2025 (including a scenario in which the expansion of the ALM Bridge and I-495 from the Bridge to I-270 has not yet occurred) and in 2045, which show that results will be mixed, but that the project will improve certain transportation times on I-495 between I-267 and the ALM Bridge by 2025 and will bring about more consistent and significant improvements in transportation times in this section of I-495 by 2045; and

Whereas, even though the 495 NEXT Project is anticipated to be completed several years before Maryland completes its improvements to the ALM Bridge and portion of I-495 between the GW Parkway and I-270, based on its traffic study, VDOT predicts that, even in the absence of any action by Maryland, the Build Alternative will reduce cut-through traffic on local roads by increasing the person-carrying capacity of I-495 and improving trip time and travel reliability on I-495, thereby reducing the incentive to use local roads; and

Whereas, it appears that the 495 NEXT Project would also produce other independent benefits, such as improved pedestrian and bicycle paths that could be connected to future paths included in Maryland's improvements, improved connections with Route 267, and other ramp improvements; and

Whereas, in preparing the EA, VDOT with the FHWA consulted with a number of local, state, and federal agencies, whose comments about environmental impacts and mitigation are included in Appendix B to the EA, and, in consideration of these comments, the EA assessed and documented the potential environmental impacts of the Build Alternative on a number of resources; and

Whereas, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) recommended in a July 23, 2018 email summarized on page 4-5 of the EA that VDOT should explain why only one build alternative is being evaluated, but the EA does not provide such an explanation for why it is considering only one build alternative; and

Whereas, the EA, at pages 3-54 to 3-55, states that an estimated 118 acres of trees that provide visual and sound barriers as well as stormwater benefits are scheduled to be cleared to make way for the

widening of the roadway, ramps and interchange re-configurations, noise walls, stormwater management facilities, and other structures; and

Whereas, the EA describes potential impacts to public parkland, the GW Parkway, the Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail, Scott's Run Nature Preserve, and adjacent neighborhoods; and

Whereas, the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) recommended to VDOT, as summarized on page 4-5 of the EA, that VDOT undertake an inventory for the resources within areas proposed for disturbance, including stormwater management ponds and equipment staging areas to obtain survey results that can more accurately evaluate potential impacts to natural heritage resources and offer specific protection recommendations for minimizing impacts to these resources; and

Whereas, the EA states that there is no stormwater management plan, but we note that there is one badly eroded drainage channel adjacent to the GW Parkway ramps and the Outer Beltway approaching the ALM Bridge that drains directly into the Potomac River, and properties in the vicinity of Live Oak Drive and the Langley Swim Club have unresolved drainage issues; and

Whereas, the EA states that the Potomac River, within the jurisdiction of Maryland, is not within the Limits of Disturbance (LOD) and is not expected to be impacted, but the already degraded Dead Run and Scott's Run, which are within the study area, drain directly into the Potomac, and

Whereas, under present conditions, traffic from Georgetown Pike can enter the existing southbound Express Lanes by entering the general purpose lanes and merging across several lanes of traffic over the course of about 0.8 mile to the current beginning of the southbound Express Lanes, but under the 495 NEXT Project, there will be no means of entering the extended southbound Express Lanes for traffic entering the Beltway at Georgetown Pike, so that such traffic will have no opportunity to enter the southbound Express Lanes until ramps in Tysons at Scott's Crossing Road or Westpark Drive; and

Whereas, the proposed new Georgetown Pike bridge over the Beltway is planned to have a pedestrian walkway only on the south side, not on both sides as was the case with all the other bridges that were rebuilt over the Beltway as part of the past addition of I-495 Express Lanes from I-95 at Springfield to the Dulles Toll Road, and this will require those living on the north side of Georgetown Pike and east of the Beltway to cross and then re-cross Georgetown Pike to reach Scott's Run Preserve, on the north side of Georgetown Pike, west of the Beltway;

Now, therefore, be it resolved, that the McLean Citizens Association supports implementation of VDOT's 495 NEXT Project for the reasons indicated above, conditioned on VDOT's addressing the environmental impacts of constructing the project discussed above and in accordance with the following Resolved clauses of this resolution.

Be it further resolved, that the McLean Citizens Association believes that residents have a right to, and should be provided with, information on any construction activity that impacts private and public property in the McLean area, including timely and advance notification of all significant activities associated with the project, including advance notice of the location of and impact on temporary easements or staging areas.

Be it further resolved, that the McLean Citizens Association urges that VDOT respond to the EPA comment and explain why only one build alternative is being evaluated.

Be it further resolved, that the McLean Citizens Association is concerned about the loss of 118 acres of trees, as reported in the EA, and the fact that VDOT has not proposed any mitigation measures to offset this tree loss, and urges VDOT to commit to the following, including making related information available to the public: (1) undertaking a tree survey as to the numbers and species of trees to be removed, (2) minimizing impacts to mature and healthy trees, if at all possible, (3) identifying mitigation efforts it will undertake to offset the environmental loss resulting from this tree removal, including replanting of suitable native species and generally comparable numbers of trees within the areas affected by the project, and (4) implementing and monitoring a replanting program to ensure that these trees are healthy and growing in years going forward.

Be it further resolved, that since the greatest impact of the project will fall on Scott's Run Nature Preserve and GW Parkway, every effort should be made to minimize the footprint of the facility and to avoid temporary use of parkland during construction.

Be it further resolved, that the McLean Citizens Association requests that VDOT undertake a resource inventory along the Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail and along the steep bluff on the eastern side of I-495 by the river in order to adequately estimate the impact of the project on these resources.

Be it further resolved, that the McLean Citizens Association urges VDOT and Transurban to use already paved areas for temporary construction easements like the three acres at the intersection of Georgetown Pike and I-495 instead of impacting parkland to the extent feasible.

Be it further resolved, that in order to mitigate the overall impact on natural resources, the McLean Citizens Association requests that the Design/Build contract include a provision requiring (1) that native species including grass seed mixtures be used in mitigation and (2) that the public be provided with a proposed landscaping plan during the mitigation phase, and opportunity to comment on such plan.

Be it further resolved, that surveys of the natural resources and diverse ecology within areas of Scott's Run Nature Preserve proposed for disturbance, including Potomac Gorge rare and endangered species, be conducted as recommended by DCR, and made available to the public as soon as possible and before finalization of contracts, so that potential impacts can be more accurately evaluated.

Be it further resolved, that, to attempt to mitigate the impact on Scott's Run Nature Preserve, the McLean Citizens Association urges VDOT to commit to making a cash contribution to the Fairfax County Park Authority (FCPA) for removal of invasive plants and for the planting of new native plants in the Preserve.

Be it further resolved, that the McLean Citizens Association requests that VDOT and Transurban adopt and implement a comprehensive stormwater management plan for the entire study area and including adjacent private properties to mitigate the impact of stormwater runoff from the completed project on those properties, the adjacent streams, and the Potomac River, and such plan should consider extreme weather events that could have an adverse impact on those resources.

Be it further resolved, that the McLean Citizens Association urges VDOT to carefully consider the financial impacts and uncertainties related to increased use of telework and reduced commuting traffic patterns resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic prior to signing a contract for the project or beginning construction-related activities, such as utility relocation.

Be it further resolved, that the McLean Citizens Association urges VDOT to investigate the possibility of including in the project a single access ramp providing access from Georgetown Pike to the southbound Express Lanes, and from the northbound Express Lanes to Georgetown Pike.

Be it further resolved, that the McLean Citizens Association urges VDOT to include a sidewalk on the north side as well as the south side of the reconstructed Georgetown Pike bridge over I-495.

Be it further resolved, that the McLean Citizens Association reaffirms its longstanding support for expansion of capacity at the ALM Bridge as a vital part of completing any solution to divert Beltway commuter traffic from the McLean area neighborhood roads, and further urges the Commonwealth of Virginia and the State of Maryland to work effectively and vigorously to expand capacity at the ALM Bridge and I-495 north of the GW Parkway to I-270.

September 2, 2020

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