

Hi, my name is Barbara Coufal. I'm co-chair of Citizens Against Beltway Expansion. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

The priorities letter from the Planning Board assumes that MDOT's toll lanes plan will proceed.

The Elrich administration has redrafted the letter to reflect concerns about the toll lanes and to urge MDOT to work with the County on a better plan to address congestion.

In a letter to MDOT in November 2021, the Park and Planning Commission expressed concern that toll lanes would not resolve congestion, only move the bottlenecks. They stated, and I quote, "The Preferred Alternative does not eliminate congestion in the corridors studied but instead shifts it from the vicinity of the American Legion Bridge to other areas in Maryland. End quote. They go on to note that the congestion would be severe on I-270 north of I-370 and on the Inner Loop at the top side of the Beltway.

For decades, studies have shown that expanding highways causes people to change their behavior. As a result, widening a highway only reduces congestion for a few years before traffic builds back up. Widening the Bridge, the Beltway and I-270 would only be a short-term fix at considerable cost to the environment and our communities.

Widening this corridor would increase the emissions that pollute our air and increase global warming. The expansion would damage Plummers Island and could impact burials at the historic Moses Cemetery in Cabin John. It would also increase the flow of polluted stormwater into our local waterways. In fact, MDOT's plan relies heavily on improving water quality in Frederick County, rather than treating stormwater entering local waterways.

Rather than widening these highways, we urge the Council to press MDOT to explore more sustainable alternatives. My written testimony includes a number of options. One is to consider incentives to employers to increase telework. During the pandemic, the Maryland Transportation Institute found that just a 5% reduction in vehicles could reduce congestion by 32% to 58% on area highways and that a 15% reduction in vehicles would nearly eliminate peak hour congestion. Telework could be a key component of a congestion reduction plan.

We urge that the priorities letter reject private toll lanes specifically and widening of the Bridge, Beltway and I-270 generally.

Thank you.