

I-495/I-270 Draft Environmental Impact Statement Factsheet

Prepared by: University of Maryland, Environmental Law Clinic*

What is the I-495/I-270 Project?

- Part of Governor Hogan's "Traffic Relief Plan."
- Aimed to address congestion, improve trip reliability on I-495 and I-270, and enhance existing and planned multimodal mobility and connectivity.
- Part of a Public-Private Partnership (P3), which allows a private entity to construct and maintain the project in return for proceeds generated from the new road (i.e. tolls).



What is the plan?

The government considered 15 distinct options and has narrowed it down to 7 options for the public to comment on. Other than the no-build option, the other 6 options all include some form of toll system, whether it be Express Toll Lanes (ETL) or High Occupancy Tolls (HOT).

What are the impacts?

The I-495 & I-270 expansion may result in substantial impacts to communities along the Beltway. The project may displace 25-34 households, and directly affect 1,500 properties along the Beltway, with low-income and minority communities bearing many of the project's negative impacts. The project would harm hundreds of acres of parkland and historic properties. 1,500 acres of forest canopy would be removed. 50 acres of wetlands and 30 miles of local streams, creeks, and rivers would be impacted. Additionally, the expanded carrying capacity of the Beltway would likely lead to increased levels of noise and air pollution, stormwater runoff, and heightened flash flood risks in local communities.

What is a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) and how does it affect me?

An environmental impact statement (EIS) is a document prepared by a lead agency (here, the Federal Highway Administration and Maryland Department of Transportation) that documents the purpose of the project, the alternative actions being considered, and analyzes the impacts of each alternative. Agencies publish a draft EIS (DEIS) to allow the public to review the agency's findings and provide meaningful feedback in the form of oral and/or written comments. Anyone with any concern about the project may submit comments to the agency. The agency must reply to *significant* comments in their Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS). Thus, a comment you write could shape how the project proceeds. The DEIS for this project can be found at <https://495-270-p3.com/deis/>.

How do I make my voice heard through a DEIS comment?

To make your voice heard, you need to write a strong comment. Anyone, including non-lawyers, can write a good comment. A strong comment identifies the issue(s) you care most about, explains why the issue(s) is important, and provides solutions to guide the agency toward your preferred outcome. Citizen input is as much about identifying problems as it is about suggesting possible solutions. As much as possible, include remedies to the problems you identify. While a blank page may appear daunting, with the help of this resource, writing your comment should be a simple and effective way to make your voice heard.

*This fact sheet is purely education and is not intended to provide legal advice.

How to draft your comment:

1. **Introduce Yourself**
 - a. Give your name, where you live, and how close you are located to the project.
 - b. Provide your occupation or background, especially if you have relevant expertise (i.e. engineering/law) that gives greater credibility to your assessment of the DEIS.
 - c. State if you are authorized to speak on behalf of an organization.

2. **State that you support the no-build alternative.** Supporting the no-build alternative does not necessarily mean you don't support *any* alternatives. Rather, by supporting the no-build alternative, you are telling the agency that you don't support the current slate of alternatives the agency has identified and studied.

3. **Explain how the proposed expansion project will impact your life and loved ones.**
 - a. Indicate if you have any particularized health concerns.
 - b. Describe how the project may negatively impact your personal property and/or community spaces you frequent, such as churches, schools, recreation centers.
 - c. State if your neighborhood is already burdened by other health impacts.
 - d. Explain how well informed you were about the project and the NEPA process.

4. **Identify the issue(s) you have with the current DEIS and why those issues make the no-build option the only appropriate alternative.** For each issue:
 - a. Clearly state what the issue is (i.e. failure to consider multi-modal transit) and, if possible, include a reference to the relevant sections, chapters, page numbers, and studies in the DEIS.
 - i. Identify any informational errors that underly basic assumptions;
 - ii. Identify any missing or confusing information critical to understanding or remedying the specific impacts identified by the agency.
 - b. Describe the importance of the issue as it relates to the environmental review process (i.e. what shortcomings result from the issue).
 - c. Explain how the agency can resolve the issue by recommending further analysis, alternatives, or factors for the agency to consider.
 - i. Identify new information that is relevant and could be helpful to review.
 - ii. Propose alternative approaches the agency ought to consider.
 - iii. Suggest additional studies an agency could complete.
 - iv. Recommend specific courses of action the agency could take.

Comments are due on November 9, 2020 by 11:59pm.

You can e-mail a written comment to: MLS-NEPA-P3@mdot.maryland.gov.

Please cc the following address if submitting email comments:

managed.lanes@montgomerycountymd.gov.

You can mail a comment to: Lisa B. Choplin, DBIA Director I-495 & I-270 P3 Office
Maryland Dept. of Transportation State Highway Administration
707 North Calvert Street
Mail Stop P-601
Baltimore, MD 21201

For more information contact 495cabe@gmail.com or transportation@mdsierra.org.