

Update on I-495/I-270 Toll-Lane Plan

Presentation to Woodley Gardens Civic Association
July 25, 2020

Hello. I'm Janet Gallant, one of the coordinators of DontWiden270.org, which has over a thousand members. Thank you for inviting me back.

Here's a quick version of how things stand.

The Governor is forging ahead with the first part of his plan to add high-priced toll-lanes to I-495 and I-270.

- The first segment will be toll lanes on 270 from the ICC south to 495 and the American Legion Bridge. That's it. Upper 270 may be done later, if at all. The Beltway may be done later, if at all.
- In spring 2021, MDOT (that's the State Department of Transportation) expects to select the winning bid for a 50-year-contract to design, build, and manage the Lower 270 toll lanes.
- The contracting process alone is costing taxpayers tens of millions of dollars that won't be reimbursed.
- After the winning bid is selected, MDOT will seek approval from the three-person Board of Public Works. Governor Hogan always votes yes on this issue. The State Treasurer always votes no. That leaves Comptroller Peter Franchot as the deciding vote and the one we need to inundate with emails and calls.
- If the pre-pandemic timeline holds, and that's a big 'if', construction could start in October 2022.
- As for how the project will affect Woodley Gardens, a recent letter from MDOT to the City of Rockville said, and I'm quoting here, "Our analysis has shown that no homes, businesses, or community facilities will need to be relocated within Rockville." Per the letter, "Noise barriers will continue to provide required noise abatement for [Woodley Gardens and Regents Square]."

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- But the letter doesn't say how much other property along the highway might be required or if noise barriers will be coming down during construction.
- Carol Rubin, of Montgomery County's Department of Planning and Parks, says MDOT is underestimating the project's actual Limits of Disturbance.
- As for effects on our city, there's the reconstruction of the four bridges spanning I-270 in Rockville, increased traffic in the city, noise, pollution, and everything else that comes with years of construction misery and four more lanes on the highway.
- Unfortunately, none of the bills that might have helped with this situation passed in the State legislature this session.

But there are new developments and multiple opportunities for us to have an impact in the coming months.

First Development: Advocacy groups, local governments and elected officials, including our U.S. senators, are calling on the state to PAUSE the toll-road project.

- We're in the middle of an unprecedented health and financial emergency. As Washington Post columnist John Kelly said just two days ago, a pause is logical.
- All the project's key financials, including the all-important projected tolls, are based on assumptions that no longer apply.
- Nobody knows how many businesses will adopt telework, how many jobs won't come back, and what post-pandemic traffic patterns will look like.

Second Development: The Purple Line, a public private partnership with terrible financial problems, has become an ongoing lesson in the risks of privatized transportation projects.

- Montgomery County's Carol Rubin says you can't talk about the toll-lane plan without talking about the Purple Line, which she called the \$700 million elephant in the room.

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- The \$11 billion toll-lane project will be the biggest public private partnership in the U.S.
- And the Purple Line is showing everyone just vulnerable taxpayers will be with MDOT negotiating the 50-year toll-lane contract.

Third Development: MDOT just released the Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the toll-lane project, and it may provide the basis for lawsuits.

- The federally required document is over 18,000 pages long!
- It's supposed to detail the impact of toll-lanes on our air, water, health, homes, parks, historic sites, quality of life, and more.
- Preliminary reviews have already uncovered disturbing news. Governor Hogan promised the project wouldn't cost taxpayers a dime. But the document says that up to \$1 billion in state government subsidy might be required. That's taxpayer money.
- Another fact hidden in those 18,000 pages: northbound afternoon rush hour traffic on 270 will actually be **worse** with the toll-lanes than without them because of the unaddressed Upper 270 bottlenecks.
- The Sierra Club of Maryland is working with lawyers, technical experts, and an army of volunteer reviewers to identify any improper or inadequate analyses.
- They have to work fast, because the current public comment period is short. Public officials and advocacy organizations are pushing for an extension.
- I encourage every one of you to submit a comment for inclusion in the public record. It only takes a few minutes and it makes a huge difference. For guidance on how to do that, see the [MDOT website](#) or [DontWiden270.org](#).

Fourth Development: It's now clear from multiple angles that we're going to pay for this project.

- The Governor originally said we had to go with private toll-lanes instead of public transit because a toll-road would pay for itself and public transit wouldn't.

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- Earlier this month, the head of the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission said that, now that the toll-lane project will require taxpayer subsidy, there's NO justification for this massive, flawed undertaking.
- In March, the WSSC announced costs as high as \$2 billion to relocate its underground utilities for the proposed toll-lane construction. This is much higher than the \$900 million estimated by MDOT. Despite the efforts of local governments, the difference could show up in ratepayers' bills or elsewhere.
- Finally, the tolls will be enormous. The favorite to win the 270 contract is the same company that manages Northern Virginia's toll lanes. And we know how high those tolls are.

I'm hopeful that the insistent voices, involvement, and activism of our communities, taxpayers, organizations, and government officials can pause or stop this costly and destructive plan. Then we can reassess our transportation needs as the pandemic subsides, and plan fair, effective, multimodal transportation supported by evidence that it will actually work. DontWiden270.org favors reversible lanes on 270, expanded public transit, and solving the Upper 270 bottleneck first.

The most effective action you can take right now is to sign up for our mailing list at DontWiden270.org. That will plug you in to all the news and action items and all the ways you can make your voice heard.