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JEFFREY C. MCKAY
CHAIRMAN

June 24, 2025

The Honorable W. Sheppard Miller III
Secretary of Transportation
P.O. Box 1475
Richmond, Virginia 23218

Reference: Fairfax County Comments on the Recommended Preferred Alternative of the I-495 Southside Express Lanes Study

Dear Secretary Miller:

On June 24, 2025, the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors (Board) approved comments regarding the I-495 Southside Express Lanes (SEL) Study's preferred alternative and on the most recent technical reports received. The Board appreciates VDOT's efforts in selecting the preferred alternative to improve system continuity and travel reliability on this segment of the Capital Beltway. It is of critical importance to the County that the preferred alternative provides multimodal travel choices for local and regional commuters while minimizing impacts on local communities.

The Board acknowledges the Commonwealth's efforts to host public hearings on the preferred alternative. However, the Board remains concerned that the preferred alternative requires additional analysis to understand its full implications. According to the timeline provided by VDOT, the impacts to traffic on local streets, air quality and noise will not be available prior to the decision from the Commonwealth Transportation Board (CTB). These analyses are essential for making an informed decision and should be included before any action is taken by the CTB.

The Board looks forward to continued collaboration to ensure the preferred alternative meets the purpose and need for this study and to ensure consistency with the Fairfax County Comprehensive Plan. To that end, the Board offers the following comments regarding the information shared during the I-495 SEL Study public hearing meetings held in June 2025. The following comments should not be construed as a Fairfax County endorsement of the I-495 SEL Study:

Traffic:

- The County has significant concerns regarding traffic impacts on secondary streets along the study corridor, especially near the I-495 interchanges with South Van Dorn Street, Telegraph Road and Richmond Highway. The surrounding areas of these interchanges, such as intersections at Richmond Highway, Fort Hunt, and Huntington Avenue, frequently experience heavy traffic congestion due to motorists entering and exiting I-495. The County urges VDOT to include the traffic impact analysis on secondary streets prior to the public hearings for the Environmental Assessment (EA). Mitigation plans should be included to address secondary streets that are adversely impacted. As part of these efforts, VDOT should ensure that interchange and lane configurations do not require short weaving movements or abrupt merges to access express lanes, as these can intensify congestion and pose additional safety concerns for local traffic. Recommendations from previous and current studies along the south side of I-495, such as the Huntington Area Transportation Study (HATS), North Gateway Study and Strategically

Targeted Affordable Roadway Solutions (STARS) Study pertaining to South Van Dorn Street, should also be considered for mitigation purposes.

- The Board remains concerned about the continued traffic congestion in the peak hours on the general-purpose lanes in the vicinity of the interchanges at Springfield, South Van Dorn Street, Telegraph Road, and Richmond Highway. Severe congestion is indicated in 2050 for eastbound traffic during PM peak hours under the preferred alternative. Westbound traffic during the AM peak hours appears to worsen at the Springfield interchange in 2050 when compared to the No-Build alternative. One critical element of the Purpose and Need section for this study is to reduce congestion and improve travel reliability. The traffic congestion at these interchanges should be further analyzed and mitigation plans should be included in this study. The Board urges VDOT to coordinate mitigation plans with Fairfax County and ensure that critical infrastructure, such as ramps and connections through these interchanges, is addressed with the addition of the express lanes recommended in the I-495 SEL study. The Board recommends a more robust comparison between the preferred alternative and the No-Build scenario, particularly under high-traffic conditions, to assess the extent to which proposed improvements reduce or exacerbate congestion. Such comparisons should also inform whether alternative transit investments, including rail, could better address peak-hour demand.

- The County acknowledges that a separate, ongoing analysis is being conducted to evaluate potential modifications to signage and striping at the Springfield interchange to improve safety and enhance wayfinding for drivers. However, with the additional traffic movements introduced by the I-495 SEL Study, the County remains concerned that the already complex and heavily used interchange may pose even greater navigational challenges for drivers unfamiliar with the area as well as for local motorists. These compounded factors may increase the risk of driver confusion, operational conflicts, and safety concerns that warrant further attention as the project advances. The Board respectfully requests that VDOT closely coordinate this analysis with Fairfax County staff and ensure that any mitigation measures proposed at the Springfield interchange are fully integrated with and informed by the I-495 SEL Study.

Bicycle and Pedestrian Facilities:

- The bicycle and pedestrian trail system proposed in this study does not comply with Fairfax County's Comprehensive Plan. A continuous, high-quality shared use path along the I-495 corridor has long been envisioned as part of a regional active transportation planning effort. The proposed trail does not include facilities along I-495 and most of the off-corridor trails are shown on the north side of I-495 in Alexandria. While we understand the right-of-way constraints along the southern edge of the Beltway, the current proposal significantly reduces accessibility for Fairfax County residents by placing key trail segments further away from population centers on the southern side. The Board urges VDOT to further evaluate the feasibility of a shared-use path along the southern side of I-495 wherever practicable and to enhance bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure on adjacent local streets to ensure safe and equitable access for County residents to both the I-495 SEL trail system and the regional trail network.

- As stated in our letter dated July 19, 2022, the Board of Supervisors requested that the I-495 SEL Study assess the bridge connection from Oakwood Road to Vine Street, which is included in the Fairfax County Comprehensive Plan. The Board reiterates its request for this critical improvement for pedestrian and bicycle facilities, which is essential to the future success of Transit-Oriented Development, hinging on strong pedestrian and bicycle accessibility across I-495.

- The County recommends that additional bicycle and pedestrian improvements be evaluated along Huntington Avenue to enhance access to the Huntington Transit Hub to connect to the trail system

identified in I-495 SEL study. Targeted bicycle and pedestrian safety improvements and upgrades, including crosswalks and pedestrian signals, will be needed at intersections and along local roads that will experience increased traffic due to GPS-based toll avoidance. VDOT is urged to evaluate and identify a potential trail connection along Cameron Run under Richmond Highway to provide a critical linkage to the Mount Vernon Trail system.

Transit Opportunities and Funding:

- In the public meetings held in April 2025, VDOT presented a new bus route from central-west Prince George's County to Tysons, which was proposed as a new near-term bus route to be implemented in collaboration with the project. This new bus route as well as other proposed routes were studied and documented in the I-495 Transit/TDM study that was conducted by the Department of Rail and Public Transit (DRPT). The County seeks further clarity regarding the stop locations (including the Springfield CBC Commuter Garage), the recommended level of service, and the operating agency of the route, as well as opportunities for improvements of park and ride facilities along this corridor. Additionally, the County is interested in the proposed bus route from Huntington to Tysons, as identified in the County Transit Strategic Plan, and the I-495 Southside Transit/TDM Study. Further coordination with the County is needed to address both funding and implementation timelines for these and other transit services.

- The County echoes community concerns regarding the insufficient evaluation of long-term rail transit options, particularly Metrorail, as a viable alternative to express lanes. Given the prior reservation of capacity on the Woodrow Wilson Bridge for rail, along with high occupancy vehicle and express bus, the Board recommends formal studies comparing rail and bus options, considering potential connections to Huntington and Van Dorn Metro stations, and alignment with long-term regional transportation goals. The County considers it essential that the Commonwealth establish a legally enforceable framework or right-of-way preservation plan to enable future Metrorail conversion, to ensure flexibility for high-capacity transit development.

- The County recommends VDOT pursue the addition of express lane ramps at the interchange of Telegraph Road and I-495 to allow efficient bus access from/to the Huntington transit hub and to improve connectivity to Metrorail and the planned Richmond Highway Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system.

Parks:

- The proposed preferred alternative directly affects natural resources in four Fairfax County Park Authority (FCPA) parks: Huntington, Burgundy, Grove Point, and Backlick Stream Valley Parks. However, the current level of detail in the study materials is insufficient for FCPA to fully assess the potential impact to natural resources within these parklands. To properly evaluate the scope of disturbance, a comprehensive tree inventory is needed, cataloging all woody species greater than 6 inches in diameter whose main trunk or critical root zone lies within the proposed limits of disturbance. As the study progresses, FCPA should be provided with a detailed tree survey and wetland assessment to better understand the loss to natural resources within its parkland.

- FCPA's priority is avoidance of any adverse impact to natural resources within park property. Where avoidance is not feasible, the County strongly supports implementation of mitigation strategies, with compensation measures as a final resort.

- The Board recommends a collaborative approach involving the community, VDOT, FCDOT and FCPA to explore trail realignment alternatives that maintain bicycle and pedestrian connectivity while minimizing disturbance to natural resources within the affected parks.

Environmental:

- The County has provided detailed comments in Attachment A emphasizing the need for a more comprehensive and integrative approach to evaluating environmental and community impacts along this corridor over time, including the conversion of land use and the resulting effects on natural resources. Recommendations call for a clearly defined design process that addresses community and environmental priorities, such as connectivity, public health, and ecological resilience.

- Fairfax County has concerns about the extent and impact of impervious surfaces, the effectiveness of existing and proposed stormwater management systems, and the health of receiving water bodies. The County also stresses the need to address adverse effects related to light, noise, and construction activities, and recommends proactive mitigation strategies such as native plantings, soil remediation, and improved infrastructure assessments. Additional priorities include maintaining habitat and community connectivity, evaluating floodplain and wetland impacts, and ensuring transparency through the sharing of survey data.

The County has provided additional comments in Attachment A to be considered as the I-495 SEL study and project progresses.

Fairfax County appreciates VDOT's advancement of this project and the opportunity to provide comments. We also look forward to working closely with the Commonwealth and developing a mutually beneficial project for County residents and the region. If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact Sean Schweitzer of the Fairfax County Department of Transportation at: Sean.Schweitzer@fairfaxcounty.gov or 703-877-5843.

Sincerely,

Jeffrey C. McKay
Chairman

Enclosure:
Attachment A: Fairfax County Comments on the Preferred Alternative

cc: Members, Fairfax County Board of Supervisors
Bryan J. Hill, County Executive
Jennifer L. Miller, Deputy County Executive
Gregg Steverson, Director, Fairfax County Department of Transportation (FCDOT)
Martha Coello, Deputy Director, FCDOT
Bill Cuttler, District Administrator, VDOT, Northern Virginia
Michelle Shropshire, Director, VDOT Megaprojects
Christopher Herrington, Director, Fairfax County Department Public Works & Environmental Services