



Best Smart Growth Plan for the American Legion Bridge and Capital Beltway

This is a 100-Year Decision – Let’s Take Time to Create the Most Sustainable, Equitable, and Effective Solution

Introduction:

As our metro area continues to grow, we must address the transportation issues at the American Legion Bridge and the Capital Beltway. Contrary to road booster’s hopes, however, an upper Potomac Bridge is not the answer, as demonstrated by previous studies. Further, while Maryland and Virginia are right to be focused on improving the American Legion Bridge and the Capital Beltway corridor, they have been rushing to implement a pre-ordained conclusion as to the best approach, and the resulting proposal--adding four toll lanes with massive connecting (double) interchange ramps and doubling the size of the American Legion Bridge -- will harm adjacent communities and the environment. The two states have so far refused to study a comprehensive, integrated land use (transit-oriented development), transit, and demand management alternative, and they have failed to develop a sustainable, equitable, and effective solution.

As leading conservation organizations, we have come together to bring clarity to the issues at stake, and to make the case once again for a more sustainable, equitable, and effective approach. This is a multi-billion dollar, 100-year + decision, and we face a climate emergency, so officials must take a second look.

Why an upriver Potomac River bridge crossing is not the answer:

1. The [VDOT 2015 Potomac River Crossings Study](#) showed that less than 4% of trips that currently use the American Legion Bridge might benefit from a potential upriver bridge.
2. The [2003-2004 VDOT/TPB origin-destination study](#) showed similar results.
3. A 2001 proposal for an upriver bridge prompted outcry on both sides of the river because of impact on neighborhoods, environmental and historic resources, prompting cancellation of the study.

Why the American Legion Bridge crossing should be addressed:

1. The VDOT 2015 Potomac River Crossing Study showed that the American Legion Bridge is the most important crossing in need of investment outside of the Rosslyn Metro tunnel crossing into DC.
2. Reportedly due to age, the American Legion Bridge needs significant rehabilitation or replacement by 15 years from now.

Why there should be analysis of a comprehensive, sustainable and equitable land use, transit, and demand management alternative to the public-private toll lane proposal:

1. There is time to conduct a thoughtful analysis of alternatives since [MDOT has confirmed](#) that we have 15 years before the bridge structure needs replacement.
2. Virginia and Maryland have used a conclusions-first focus on high-occupancy (HOT) toll lanes via public-private partnerships, without full alternatives analysis or completion of all environmental studies. In Maryland, a series of very limited, isolated transit alternatives were assessed, but not a comprehensive, integrated land use (transit-oriented development), transit, demand management alternative.
3. There are environmental and historic resources that must be considered at the American Legion Bridge crossing including the Potomac River, and National Park sites at Plummer's Island research center, the C&O Canal, Potomac Heritage Trail, and GW Memorial Parkway.
4. With just 10 years to dramatically reduce the emissions that cause climate change, highway expansion is exactly the wrong way to go, as studies show that metropolitan regions must significantly reduce vehicle miles traveled in addition to achieving a dramatic increase in electric vehicle use by 2030.
5. The significant increase in telecommuting expected post-pandemic by those who work in offices will lead to a significant drop in peak hour demand for road space.
6. A strategy of buildout of transit-oriented development at our Metro, Purple Line and Bus Rapid Transit corridors, especially on the east side of the region, would be more equitable and would reduce vehicle miles traveled and greenhouse gas emissions compared to high-priced private high-occupancy toll lanes.
7. The increase in flooding and stormwater runoff from highway expansion — adding more pavement, even treated to current standards, will degrade the water quality in the Chesapeake Bay watershed, preventing the region from meeting its water pollution reductions by 2025, as required by the Chesapeake Bay Total Maximum Daily Load.

Summary of our Alternative for the American Legion Bridge and Capital Beltway:

1. We support appropriate investment at the American Legion Bridge crossing.
2. We oppose any efforts to revive proposals for an upriver bridge.
3. We urge all efforts to reduce vehicle miles traveled and single-occupant vehicle trips in order to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from surface transportation by at least 45% below 2005 levels by 2030, and 100% by 2050.
4. We urge an immediate pause in pursuit of the 495Next HOV extension and American Legion Bridge/495/270 toll lane proposals and P3 contracting until evaluation of a comprehensive land use/transit/demand management alternative, and we urge adoption of a less destructive and more sustainable and equitable solution.
5. We request evaluation and adoption of a land use, transit, and demand management alternative to include:
 - a. Buildout of transit-oriented development at Metro stations, Purple Line stations, and BRT corridors. The WMATA Connect Greater Washington Study shows that TOD buildout – particularly in Prince George’s – would help correct the east-west jobs/housing imbalance, increasing transit trips, reducing vehicle miles traveled, and reducing demand on the Beltway in both Maryland and Virginia.
 - b. Prioritization of a dedicated “Purple Line” transit connection across the river including Metrorail or light rail connecting between the Silver Line and Red Line and Maryland Purple Line, along with dedicated bus-only or bus-HOV3 lanes.
 - c. Demand management tools: parking pricing, employer transit benefits and parking cashout, telecommuting, and (potentially) pricing existing lanes rather than expansion with priced lanes.
 - d. Inclusion of well-designed bicycle and pedestrian connections to and across a rehabilitated or new American Legion Bridge.
 - e. We seek clear environmental justice considerations to be brought into the highway expansion planning.
6. Should officials proceed with the HOT proposal for the American Legion Bridge and connections at each end, AFTER full and objective consideration of our comprehensive alternative, then the project must:
 - a. Include bike/pedestrian connections.
 - b. Provide significant funding for transit operating and capital needs to ensure frequent, high-capacity transit.
 - c. Incorporate a bridge design that supports Metrorail.
 - d. Incorporate a bridge design that minimizes impacts to the sensitive natural and historic assets in the Potomac Gorge including water quality, forests, native species, National Park sites like Plummer’s Island, and historic assets. In contrast to the significant widening required by four HOT lanes (as much as 80 feet or more), other alternatives such as pricing existing lanes, converting existing lanes to bus-only or bus/HOV3-only lanes, and vertically separated rail could result in less impact.

- e. Furthermore, while we do not recommend private tolled HOT lanes, if new lanes are added, they should be added to the upriver side of the bridge so as not to require use of Plummers Island for the construction, and additional mitigation measures should also be taken to protect this historically important site of ongoing, long-term research