



## Press Release

### For Immediate Release:

April 9, 2021

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## Environmental Advocates Release “Best Smart Growth Plan” for American Legion Bridge and Capital Beltway

### Sustainable, Equitable, and Effective

Today, in advance of pending decisions in Virginia and Maryland, leading environmental organizations released a “Best Smart Growth Plan” for the American Legion Bridge and Capital Beltway. The document reviews the current situation and summarizes the consensus recommendations of the groups.

Citing the rush by Governor Hogan and Governor Northam to a pre-ordained conclusion to widen the bridge and the Beltway, including Hogan’s push for a premature development contract with TransUrban and his YouTube video trumpeting the Maryland toll lanes, the groups are calling for an immediate pause in the projects and offering a comprehensive land use, transit and demand management solution that will be more sustainable, equitable, and effective.

“Governor Hogan has not kept faith with his public promises to complete a solid environmental study of impacts and alternatives before moving forward with private toll lanes,” said Eliza Cava, Director of Conservation, Audubon Naturalist Society. “He has instead pressed forward with a proposal that ranks as highway robbery -- not just high tolls, but the theft of national and local parks, historic sites, community peace, wildlife, and a sustainable planet.”

Meanwhile, the powerful TransUrban corporation, a major donor to politicians on both sides of the river, has been sending out expensive mailers to thousands of Northern Virginia households as part of their lobbying push for the lucrative private toll lanes deal.

The Fairfax County Board will be meeting on April 13 to discuss their position on 495Next and the Virginia Commonwealth Transportation Board will act on the proposal at their April 21 meeting. The Maryland Board of Public Works is scheduled to meet in May to approve the pre-development contract for 495/270, even though the environmental studies are not yet complete.

“We are calling for a pause on the interconnected Maryland and Virginia toll lane projects, and are setting forth a sustainable, equitable and effective alternative that should be studied and ultimately adopted,” said Douglas Stewart, Transportation and Smart Growth Co-Chair of the Sierra Club Virginia Chapter. “This project should not move forward without plans for high-capacity transit and robust, dedicated transit funding from both Maryland and Virginia, in order to reduce congestion and help jurisdictions meet their goals to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.”

“We decry the conclusions-first approach of Virginia and Maryland and the way the state’s Public-Private Transportation Acts undermine fair and objective alternatives analysis,” said Stewart Schwartz, Executive Director of the Coalition for Smarter Growth. “Our groups offer here, and have offered before, a comprehensive, integrated land use (transit-oriented development), transit, and demand management alternative, but both states have refused to consider such an alternative.”

“The DMV needs more green space, not less. Governor Hogan’s proposed toll lanes could bulldoze valuable national parkland and damage delicate ecosystems just to make room for more fumes, noise, and cars. This proposal threatens local communities of color and a historic African-American church cemetery. This is not a solution to traffic congestion in the area; it’s another problem,” said Kyle Hart, National Parks Conservation Association.

“We have the time and must take the time to build the best bridge for people and wildlife. This is a decision that will affect our environment and climate for the next hundred years.” said Cava.

“Our plan would improve transportation and reduce traffic, while directly addressing the racial and socio-economic inequity that continues to mark our region. Investing in transit-oriented

development, particularly in the underinvested east side of the region would reduce long commutes for residents and also create jobs and generate revenue for schools and fund other community benefits, unlike Gov. Hogan's toll lane proposal," said Josh Tulkin, Director, Sierra Club Maryland Chapter.

"WMATA's [Connect Greater Washington study](#) showed that building out transit-oriented development would reduce driving and traffic on the Beltway, while increasing transit ridership and converting WMATA's rail operating subsidy to a surplus." said Schwartz. "We are calling on all of our elected officials to support a pause, and analysis and adoption of our more sustainable, equitable and effective alternative," concluded Schwartz.

The "Best Smart Growth Plan" can be found [here](#).

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