

PRESS RELEASE – CORRECTED (to identify the correct motion maker)

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## **Concern about Climate Change Leads to Historic Vote at the Region’s Transportation Planning Board**

### **Vote removes 495/270 toll lanes from the long-range plan, requires next plan to meet climate goals**

Today, in the latest of several significant debates at the Transportation Planning Board, the regional body of local and state officials charged with creating a regional long-range transportation plan Visualize 2045, the body voted to remove the I-495/I-270 toll lanes from the draft plan and to require the development of a climate-friendly plan by 2024.

Gary Ehrenrich, representing Montgomery County Executive Marc Elrich made the motion to remove the I-495/I-270 toll lane project from the plan and it passed 16 to 12 with 6 abstentions. Mayor Bridget Newton of Rockville and other Maryland leaders spoke firmly about the reasons for removing the project, with the vote attracting near universal support from local Maryland jurisdictions as well as support from DC and some Virginia jurisdictions. This was followed by a vote on the draft 2022 long-range transportation plan – now minus the toll lane project, and with provisions advanced by Montgomery County Councilmember Evan Glass to commit the TPB to create a new plan by 2024 that significantly reduces greenhouse gas emissions. The TPB voted 26 to 4 with 4 abstentions on the measure.

“The unifying theme in today’s vote was the overwhelming concern of elected officials about climate change. It motivated the vote to remove the toll lane project and to do more to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from our region’s transportation sector,” said Stewart Schwartz, Executive Director of the Coalition for Smarter Growth.

A number of outer Virginia jurisdictions thought it was too late to change the current draft plan which will move forward into air quality modeling and adoption in the spring of 2022, but they ultimately also joined Maryland and DC in voting to begin work to adopt another more climate-friendly plan by 2024. “We wish the TPB would have acted this cycle to fundamentally reform the current plan because we have no time to waste,” said Schwartz. “Nevertheless, they made an important commitment today to adopt a more climate-friendly plan by 2024.”

- The scientific consensus is that we must slash our emissions by 2030. The Biden Administration and our regional Council of Governments have each set a goal of cutting CO2 emissions 50% below 2005 levels by 2030.
- Transportation is this region’s and the nation’s largest source of CO2 emissions.
- Recent studies show that electric vehicles will not be enough, therefore the region will need to use transit-oriented development, transit, and demand reduction solutions to reduce vehicle miles traveled and associated emissions.

- The Council of Governments' recent Voices of the Region Survey found that 84% of the region's residents want elected officials to prioritize climate change in transportation plans.
- Public comment on Visualize 2045 has overwhelmingly supported a plan that addresses climate change.

"Removal of the I-495/I270 project from the draft plan means it will not be included in the federally mandated air quality conformity modeling, a huge roadblock for the controversial project," said Schwartz. "I believe the many flaws in the Hogan Administration's approach to the project including failure to analyze more sustainable and less destructive alternatives, failure to hear the public outcry or account for the strong opposition of nearly every local jurisdiction, and rush to commit the state to a long-term contract before finishing all of the environmental impact studies, contributed to the resounding rejection of the project today at the TPB."

"There may also be implications for Virginia's 495Next HOT lane extension contract with Transurban but that would have to be confirmed with VDOT," said Schwartz. "Many of us had urged Virginia not to rush into that deal because of the controversy in Maryland and the similar failure in Virginia to consider alternative approaches. We want to see solutions for the American Legion Bridge and 495, and the best solutions lie in addressing the east-west jobs/housing imbalance, focusing jobs and housing near transit, and in the growth in telecommuting."

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