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April 21, 2021

The Honorable Peter Franchot, Comptroller
Calvert Street
Goldstein Treasury Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21404-0466

Dear Comptroller Franchot:

Thank you and your staff for taking the time to meet with Mayor Newton and Councilmember Feinberg on March 24th, providing the City of Rockville another opportunity to share our ongoing concerns regarding the I-270 and I-495 Managed Lanes Project.

This letter is in response to your request at that meeting for the City to demonstrate why you should vote against this P3 and this project. We join the entire Montgomery County Council in our support of MDOT's No-Build Alternative (which still provides for multiple highway improvements) and urge you to do the same for the following reasons:

The Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) was begun prior to the COVID 19 pandemic, which has resulted in radical changes in daily lifestyles, commuting patterns and telework opportunities. The move to approve any portion of this P3 prior to a new DEIS being approved is unthinkable. Rockville and the County question the validity of the outdated Travel Demand Model used to project 2040 travel volumes and patterns. The wide acceptance of teleworking and extensive use of virtual meetings suggests that travel models must be revised taking into consideration these changes in order to accurately project future demand.

The proposal for I-270 is tone-deaf to environmental justice concerns and will cause further degradation of our efforts to reach the Washington Metropolitan Region's Council of Governments unanimously approved 2030 Climate Resiliency goals. According to the International Panel of Climate Change, GHG (global greenhouse gas emissions) must be reduced by at least 45% between 2010 and 2030 and reach carbon neutrality by 2050. The proposal is also inadequate in addressing environmental impacts to Rockville's natural resources and related systems, including critically important stormwater management.

Similarly, the proposal ignores social justice concerns. The proposed tolls will be unsustainable for those who have moved outside the Beltway to find more affordable homes. The exorbitant cost of tolls at peak periods, which are expected to be \$2 per mile for a 25-mile stretch during rush hour, and an average of \$0.77 per mile for other times, is simply unaffordable for most regional commuters. This does not support social equity, as required by NEPA, and is totally unacceptable.

The focus on increasing capacity in the southern portion before fixing north I-270 is equally concerning as currently there are only two lanes in each direction between I-370 and Frederick. The daily bottleneck is a result of that choke point and adding capacity on the northern part of the highway should be the first priority of any future project to address congestion.

MAYOR
Bridget Donnell Newton

COUNCIL
Monique Ashton
Beryl L. Feinberg
David Myles
Mark Pierzchala

CITY MANAGER
Robert DiSpirito

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COUNCIL OPERATIONS
Sara Taylor-Ferrell

ACTING CITY ATTORNEY
Cynthia Walters

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According to the Washington Post, when Maryland expanded the southern portion in 1991 (at a cost of more than \$200 million), the improvement disappeared within 7 years. What's going to be different this time?

There are nine City of Rockville neighborhoods abutting I-270, along with Julius West Middle School, Rockville Nursing Home, First Baptist Church of Rockville, Rockville Christian Church, and the Wee Center, a children's early learning program. Three of our bridges span I-270 and the traffic impacts caused by reconstruction and congestion will be monumental. The plan to convert Wootton Parkway and Gude Drive to toll lane access roads will further impact our residents with additional noise and air pollution and will be hazardous to those who use our bike/pedestrian paths, which run adjacent to these roads. Wootton Parkway and Gude Drive are already overburdened and are used as an alternative route to Rockville Pike when there are any incidents or congestion on I-270.

Further exacerbating congestion on our local roads, the I-270 managed lanes will function as a "highway within a highway," with no interconnections between managed and free lanes. Cars will have to exit the managed lanes onto local roads, and then take local roads to another ramp to get back on the managed lanes. I-270 will also lose one free lane in each direction, likely sending more drivers onto our roads to escape highway congestion.

In the City's official comments on the DEIS (attached), submitted in November 2020, we laid out our many concerns about the project and the deficiencies in the DEIS. I refer you to those comments and the accompanying list of 23 specific areas of concern. All of those issues as well as the ones described in this letter to you remain current and unaddressed.

Mr. Franchot, as Comptroller, you realize the long-term costs that taxpayers are willing to support for the potential benefit to the greater community. This P3 is a fifty-year financial commitment on a massive scale which offers no benefit to anyone except a private entity whose sole responsibility is to their shareholders. This puts your Maryland taxpayers at great risk. The negative impacts to the City of Rockville and Montgomery County residents, as well as regional commuters, must not be overlooked. By considering alternative approaches, such as the monorail which we discussed in our meeting, and other environmentally sustainable options, together we can find a solution that is environmentally, socially, and politically viable.

Please reconsider and vote NO when the approval for the Phase 1 American Legion Bridge I-270 Phase P3 Agreement comes before the Board of Public Works.

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Sincerely,

Bridget Donnell Newton

Bridget Donnell Newton
Mayor



Monique Ashton, Councilmember



Beryl L. Feinberg, Councilmember



David Myles, Councilmember



Mark Pierzchala, Councilmember

cc:

Senator Benjamin Cardin
Senator Christopher Van Hollen
Congressman David Trone
Congressman Jamie Raskin
Congressman Anthony Brown
Larry Hogan, Governor
Nancy Kopp, Treasurer
District 17 Delegation
Montgomery County Council President and Councilmembers
Montgomery County Executive