



**DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
AND ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES**

**P.O. Box 178 - City Hall
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703.746.4025

April 18, 2025

Nick Nies, AICP
VDOT 495 Southside Express Lanes Study Project Manager
9030 Stony Point Parkway, Suite 220
Richmond, VA 23235

Dear Mr. Nies,

Thank you for the opportunity for the City of Alexandria (City) to be involved in the Virginia Department of Transportation's (VDOT's) I-495 Southside Express Lane Study by inviting the City to attend the public information meetings and by providing feedback on the information available to date.

As noted in our letter regarding this project from October 2023, it is of utmost importance to the Department of Transportation and Environmental Services (T&ES) that the selected alternative minimizes adverse impacts on our residents, businesses, and visitors such as increased noise, air pollution, or cut-through traffic on our local roads. It is T&ES' desire that proposed alternatives are consistent with the goals of the City's Alexandria Mobility Plan and Environmental Action Plan 2040, which include reducing greenhouse gas emissions and vehicle miles traveled, promoting low carbon modes, improving and enhancing public transportation, and reducing fatal or serious injury crashes.

Based on our community's concerns, the City would like to raise the following issues with VDOT so that they may be addressed in a timely manner:

- 1) The preferred alternative will be selected by the Commonwealth Transportation Board prematurely in September after a public hearing in June. The traffic impacts on local streets, air quality impacts and noise impacts will not be available until November, which is critical information when selecting a preferred alternative. The City urges VDOT to postpone the selection of the preferred alternative until the analysis of impacts is complete. The impact on local streets is most likely to be significant, especially on Route

1 and South Van Dorn Streets, due to the potential of a HOT connection to these routes. Additionally, the added vehicles from four additional lanes will likely increase air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions, noise, congestion, and traffic safety risk.

- 2) The traffic models used to assess the success of the added express lanes do not consider induced demand, which will add more congestion and cut-through traffic. As such there are significant doubts about the model output as presented.
- 3) The City's plans are very clear to incentivize transit and active modes. With more highway capacity, there will be little incentive for travelers to use transit, undermining Alexandria's and Virginia's transit investments in Northern Virginia. If the two-lane option ends up being the preferred alternative, it will also be very difficult, politically and financially, to repurpose one of these lanes in the future for transit.
- 4) There has been very little discussion with staff about concrete mitigation measures such as active transportation and transit. These should be fleshed out before a preferred alternative is selected.
- 5) It has not been communicated how previous input from the City officials or residents was incorporated into this current phase or proposed alternatives.
- 6) There has been no safety analysis done to determine what impact these additional lanes have, which could undermine the progress of VDOT's Road to Zero efforts and the City's Vision Zero program.
- 7) The City also seeks assurances that agreements with toll concessionaires would not impact the City's ability to adjust City roads and facilities near the corridor in the future, including adjustments to road capacity. This is a major concern for the City, as this would impact the ability to address safety, transit, capacity, and other priority issues. This is consistent with what was shared in our previous letter and has not been communicated to us how this could be resolved.

The City wishes to make clear that it does not oppose operational techniques (such as tolls) to better manage *existing* infrastructure (in fact, we highly support it). However, roadway expansion, especially by 40%, will likely have tremendous impacts on Alexandria's transportation network, air quality, and quality of life for our residents.

The City looks forward to continuing to work with VDOT on this study and providing additional feedback as more analysis becomes available.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "H. Orr", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Hillary Orr

Nick Nies, AICP

October 2, 2022

Page 2

Deputy Director, Transportation

Transportation and Environmental Services

cc: James F. Parajon, City Manager

Emily A. Baker, Deputy City Manager

Christopher Ziemann, Division Chief, Transportation Planning, T&ES

Emilie Wolfson, Long Range Transportation Planner/Engineer, T&ES