



City of Alexandria, Virginia
301 King Street, Suite 2300
Alexandria, Virginia 22314



Alyia Gaskins
Mayor

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April 21, 2025

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

Dear Mr. Nies:

I am writing to you on behalf of the residents, businesses, and visitors of the City of Alexandria regarding VDOT's I-495 Southside Express Lanes Study. The City of Alexandria has appreciated the opportunity to participate in the study process and to attend the public information meetings. However, what is being proposed presents serious concerns for our community.

As you may know, the City of Alexandria, through our Environmental Action Plan and our Vision Zero Initiative, has launched a robust commitment to reducing greenhouse gas emissions, promoting sustainable travel options, and eliminating traffic deaths. This project appears to be moving forward with significant blind spots. A 40% expansion of highway capacity will bring substantial consequences to our local neighborhoods. Alexandria residents and businesses have written to the Council to express concerns about worsening air quality, added noise, increased traffic on city streets, and a diminished quality of life for our residents.

We also have concerns that a preferred alternative was selected in September before the full analysis of noise, traffic, and air quality was complete. We strongly urge VDOT to delay this decision until those analyses are available in November. Without that information, VDOT, the public—and local governments like ours—cannot make informed decisions about the future of their communities.

We also have several additional concerns, including:

Local Traffic and Induced Demand: The potential High Occupancy Toll (HOT) connections to Route 1 and South Van Dorn Street will place new pressure on local streets already struggling with congestion and safety. The traffic models VDOT is relying on fails to account for induced demand—an omission that leads to overly optimistic projections and risks encouraging more cut-through traffic in our neighborhoods.

Transit and Long-Term Flexibility: This project runs counter to Alexandria's long-standing plans to encourage public transit and active transportation. The added highway capacity makes transit less attractive to commuters. And if the two-lane option moves forward, it may be politically and financially impossible to reclaim that space for transit in the future, including transit improvements or pedestrian and bike infrastructure.



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Safety Impacts: No safety analysis has been conducted to determine the impact of these additional lanes. This omission threatens to undermine both VDOT's Road to Zero initiative and Alexandria's own Vision Zero program—efforts our community takes very seriously.

Concessionaire Agreements and Local Authority: The City must receive assurances that future agreements with toll operators will not tie Alexandria's hands when it comes to managing or modifying our own roads and facilities near the corridor. This concern has been raised before, and we have not received a clear response.

The City is not opposed to operational strategies like tolling to manage congestion. We support smart, effective use of existing infrastructure. But the scale of expansion under consideration here risks serious harm to the very communities this infrastructure is meant to serve.

We call on VDOT to prioritize the health, safety, and mobility of local residents by postponing selection of a preferred alternative until a full analysis is available and by working more transparently and collaboratively with impacted jurisdictions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Alyia Gaskins".

Alyia Gaskins
Mayor
City of Alexandria