

ITEM 9 – ACTION
October 15, 2025

Visualize 2050 Finalization of Project Inputs for the
Air Quality Conformity Analysis

Action: TPB will consider adopting one of the following resolutions: Resolution R1-2026 includes the construction of the I-495 Southside Express Lanes project in Visualize 2050 and its air quality conformity analysis, and R2-2026 does not include the project.

Background: At this meeting, the TPB will finalize the regionally significant projects to be included in Visualize 2050 by taking action to include OR to defer VDOT's I-495 Southside Express Lanes (SEL) project in the Visualize 2050 Plan and air quality conformity analysis. Due to unresolved issues and the timing of project development, in June 2024, the Board requested two sets of conformity analysis be conducted, one with and another without the project, so the Visualize 2050 Plan could proceed on time. The results of the analyses were shared with the TPB at its July 16, 2025 meeting. The TPB will receive a brief recap of the process and status, members will then have an opportunity to speak or ask questions, and the TPB will then be asked to vote on whether to include the project in Visualize 2050 at this time or not.

MATERIALS

- Resolutions R1-2026 and R2-2026
- Attached VDOT response letters referenced in R1-2026
- Background memo with FAQs



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

Stephen C. Brich, P.E.
Commissioner

1401 East Broad Street
Richmond, Virginia 23219

April 30, 2024

The Honorable Christina Henderson, Chair
National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board
Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments
777 North Capitol Street, N.E., Suite 300
Washington, DC 20002-4201

RE: I-495 Southside Express Lanes Study

Dear Chair Henderson:

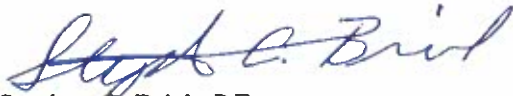
The Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) continues to value the partnership with the Transportation Planning Board (TPB) as we collectively seek to update the Visualize 2050 Constrained Long Range Plan (CLRP). The efforts and collaboration amongst TPB and its member states, jurisdictions, legislative representatives, and regional authorities is critical to the support of regionally significant projects. As you are aware, project submissions for Visualize 2050 by VDOT include the I-495 Southside Express Lanes project. This critical project seeks to develop a multimodal solution with a goal of moving the most people as efficiently as possible through this congested segment of the Capital Beltway. The project presents the opportunity to create and expand transit connections within the region while also providing congestion relief and increased travel reliability. The project is consistent with the TPB's adopted goals for the development of Visualize 2050, specifically through its objective to reduce travel times for transit services and the free use of the express lanes network by these services and other high occupancy vehicles.

Over the last several months, we have heard concerns regarding the preservation of space on the Woodrow Wilson Memorial Bridge (WWMB) for future rail transit. The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) study completed in 2000 delineated the inside lanes of the bridge for future rail transit and its ensuing Record of Decision memorialized this requirement. I am writing to clearly state that VDOT is fully supportive of future rail transit over the WWMB and as such is continuing to pursue rail preservation by advancing alternatives that can be pursued in the near term while including flexibility for the long term, are cost effective, and can be built largely within the footprint of the existing corridor. The concepts under NEPA review incorporate rail preservation either through retaining existing, unoccupied space or by incorporating a commitment to convert necessary space to rail transit in the future when Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) and the region are positioned to implement service across the WWMB. Incorporating this commitment as part of the NEPA process and its ultimate federal approval means this requirement is legally enforceable. VDOT's adherence to this requirement will not result in costs for WMATA to convert the space when they are ready to implement service. Further, VDOT has stated, and I reiterate, that terms within any future contract or concessionaire agreement would similarly incorporate a requirement for conversion to rail transit in the future consistent with the preferred alternative approved through the NEPA process. This means a future agreement would make clear the need for the concessionaire to vacate the space necessary to operate heavy rail.

The Honorable Christina Henderson
April 30, 2024
Page Two

Regarding transit investments, it has been the practice of the Commonwealth to incorporate on-going transit payments from express lane projects in Northern Virginia to enhance multimodal options in the respective corridor. It is VDOT's intent to continue the advocacy for our established practice with this project. However, since this project is still at preliminary stages, we are not able to identify the amount nor the nature of funding for transit investments in the corridor at this time. To underscore the Commonwealth's commitment to this approach, it is worth noting that since 2017 VDOT alone and in conjunction with our express lane partners have provided \$156 million to the Commuter Choice Program which has been used to fund park and ride lots, bus purchases, shared use paths, and transit stations.

In closing, we understand the importance of future rail transit on the Woodrow Wilson Bridge and are committed to ensuring the space will be available. I hope you will continue to support the Commonwealth's efforts to solve the region's most challenging congestion in the near term while also retaining the flexibility necessary to adjust our problem-solving approaches in the future.
Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Stephen C. Brich".

Stephen C. Brich, P.E.
Commissioner of Highways

C: The Honorable W. Sheppard Miller, III, Secretary of Transportation
 Mr. Kanti Srikanth, TPB, Executive Director
 Ms. Cathy McGhee, P.E., VDOT, Chief Deputy Commissioner
 Ms. Angel Deem, VDOT, Chief of Policy
 Mr. Bill Cuttler, P.E., VDOT-NoVA, District Engineer
 Ms. Maria Sinner, P.E., VDOT-NoVA, ADA Planning and Investment



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
1401 EAST BROAD STREET
RICHMOND, VIRGINIA 23219-2000

Stephen C. Brich, P.E.
COMMISSIONER

June 13, 2024

Mr. Floyd E. Holt
Deputy Chief Administrative Officer
Prince George's County, Maryland
1301 McCormick Drive
Largo, MD 20774

Dear Mr. Holt:

Thank you again for our recent discussion and Prince George's County's continued engagement with the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) team working on the Commonwealth's project submissions for the Visualize 2050 Constrained Long Range Plan (CLRP) update. As we discussed and I reiterated on a call with your team on June 7, 2024, the I-495 Southside Express Lanes Project is a regionally significant project intended to address the remaining segment of interstate along the Capital Beltway in Virginia without an Express Lanes component. Inclusion of an Express Lanes component along this critical segment from the Springfield Interchange across the Woodrow Wilson Memorial Bridge (WWMB) to MD 210 in Prince George's County provides a generational opportunity to deliver near-term congestion relief to Virginia and Maryland commuters, create and expand transit connections in the region, and increase travel reliability throughout the National Capital Region.

In 2021, the I-495 Southside Express Lanes study area was identified in the Commonwealth Transportation Board's adopted I-95 Corridor Improvement Plan as an area for additional study. As a result, the study was included in VDOT's Six Year Improvement Program and the National Capital Region's Visualize 2045 CLRP and VDOT is underway with the NEPA analysis to identify a preferred alternative for the corridor. The upcoming action by the Transportation Planning Board (TPB) to include the project in the air quality conformity analysis is a critical next step that is a requirement of the NEPA process. For purposes of this air quality analysis the project is proposed as the addition of two Express Lanes to represent the maximum cross section with potentially the highest impact on air quality. The preferred alternative approved through the NEPA process may or may not match this assumption. Modeling this maximum cross section, or worst-case scenario, ensures the air quality analysis does not underestimate mobile source emissions.

Importantly, the NEPA process cannot conclude and VDOT cannot receive NEPA approval from the Federal Highway Administration until the project has been included for construction in the CLRP and its approved air quality conformity analysis. VDOT's timeline for the advancement of this critical project is linked to this requirement and any delay of its inclusion in the CLRP will result in a delay of over two years, further delaying the delivery of tangible benefits to the region. In addition to the time delay, a decision to not include the project now will result in the Commonwealth expending additional resources to update analyses that inform the NEPA study to ensure its validity upon its inclusion in the CLRP. In response to the suggestion that the I-495 Southside Express Lanes project is not ready for inclusion in the CLRP, I would point out that it is both appropriate and acceptable for projects included in a CLRP update to have either not begun NEPA or to have the NEPA analysis underway. The projects approved by the TPB in May 2024 evidence this.

As the Commonwealth advances the NEPA study, potential project benefits specifically for needs identified for Prince George's County, along with traffic analysis and resource impacts will be vetted with environmental agencies, the public and key stakeholders. As we advance, we are confident the project will demonstrate a considerable opportunity to unlock congestion and increase transit investments in the corridor. The project provides a foundation to establish robust transit ridership that will serve as a customer base for the future extension of Metrorail across the WWMB. The Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT) completed the I-495 Southside Transit/Transportation Demand Management Study in April 2023 for the purpose of identifying a range of multimodal solutions in the corridor to inform VDOT's NEPA study. As you are aware, the only transit service between Virginia and Maryland across the WWMB is the Metrobus NH2 route connecting Alexandria and National Harbor, however the current levels of congestion across the bridge result in little to no travel time savings for this service. The DRPT study recommendations include investments for transit service across the bridge such as express bus routes from Prince George's County to Tysons. Should the I-495 Southside Express Lanes project advance under a concessionaire agreement as currently anticipated it could provide a dedicated source of revenue for such investments as well as a dedicated route for buses to take increasing their reliability and ridership. The long-standing practice of the Commonwealth to incorporate on-going transit payments from express lanes projects to enhance multimodal options in the respective corridor clearly demonstrates the importance the Commonwealth places on reliable and robust transit investments. The I-495 Southside Express Lanes project presents the opportunity to deliver on enhanced multimodal options in this critical corridor.

Let me assure you again that VDOT is fully committed to preserving capacity for future rail on the WWMB and has only advanced alternatives that meet this requirement. VDOT is also fully committed to continue pursuing transit investment opportunities as part of our Express Lanes program. These assurances underscore our demonstrated intent to work collaboratively to solve the region's transportation challenges. Simply stated, the Commonwealth cannot and will not advance this project to implementation without the support of Prince George's County and the region. Further delay is not in the best interest of the citizens and visitors that travel the I-495 corridor. The time to act is now.

Mr. Floyd E. Holt
June 13, 2024
Page 3 of 3

I trust the clarifications provided here along with the April 30, 2024, letter provided to TPB Chair Henderson (attached here for your reference) address the questions and concerns of Prince George's County and I ask for your support for the inclusion of the I-495 Southside Express Lanes project in the Air Quality Conformity Analysis project inputs for Visualize 2050.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Stephen C. Brich". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Stephen" and last name "Brich" clearly legible.

Stephen C. Brich, P.E.
Commissioner of Highways

C: Ms. Oluseyi Olugbenie, Deputy Director, Public Works & Transportation,
Prince George's County, Maryland
Mr. Eric Olson, County Council, Prince George's County, Maryland
Ms. Christina Henderson, Chair, National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board
Mr. Kanti Srikanth, Executive Director, Transportation Planning Board
Mr. Jeffrey C. McKay, Chairman, Fairfax County Board of Supervisors
Ms. Cathy McGhee, P.E., VDOT Chief Deputy Commissioner
Mr. Bill Cuttler, P.E., VDOT Northern Virginia District Engineer
Ms. Angel Deem, VDOT Chief of Policy



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

Stephen C. Brich, P.E.
Commissioner

1401 East Broad Street
Richmond, Virginia 23219

June 13, 2024

Mr. Thomas J. Webster
Executive Vice President and Chief Planning Officer
Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority
300 7th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20024

Dear Mr. Webster:

On behalf of the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT), thank you for your letter on May 31, 2023, regarding the I-495 Southside Express Lanes Study (495 Southside Study). We greatly value our continued partnership with the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) regarding the 495 Southside Study, which began when the Study was initiated in 2022.

VDOT continues to lead a robust agency coordination effort to ensure key regional partners such as WMATA are informed and have many opportunities to provide input on the 495 Southside Study. This coordination with agency and regional partners involved establishing a Stakeholder Technical Advisory Group (STAG). To date, three STAG meetings have been held, in which WMATA staff attended and provided input. VDOT also invited WMATA to participate with other stakeholders and agencies in our monthly agency meetings, referred to as NEPA Day, which provide additional opportunities to engage on the 495 Southside Study. VDOT has presented the 495 Southside Study eighteen (18) times at NEPA Day and WMATA has participated in several of these meetings.

Following our 495 Southside Study public information meetings held in fall 2023, WMATA provided written comments (dated October 10, 2023) responding to the information presented at the meeting. VDOT is appreciative of those comments, as they provided needed information and offered support for the alternatives under consideration, noting the need for these alternatives to support transit options across the WWMB including buses in the shorter term and rail transit in the longer term.

In the May 31, 2024, letter several specific questions were raised regarding the 495 Southside Study. Responses that will provide clarity to the study, our processes, and commitments moving forward are included below.

1. Based on the potential future Metrorail concept alignment and typical section

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documentation provided to VDOT in February 2024, please provide documentation that details that sufficient space will exist within the I-495 SEL Beltway corridor to accommodate future rail transit, including access onto the Beltway and across the Woodrow Wilson Bridge.

The existing WWMB is 52' wide in the local lanes (outer span), and 52' wide in the through lanes section (inner span) in each direction. A typical section across the bridge that includes one, new express lane and barrier-separated rail transit in each direction can be accommodated within this available space through utilization of the existing 18' inside shoulder in the through section. Discussions of space needs for rail transit in November and December 2023, along with WMATA's February 2, 2024, correspondence to VDOT confirmed the adequacy of the 18' rail typical section assumption. Based on the width of the through lanes section on the WWMB, there is enough room to provide two Express Lanes in the near-term, or to accommodate one Express Lane and space for rail transit in the long-term. The difference would be a shift of one through lane into the local lanes section.

- 2. Please describe in detail how VDOT believes future construction and operation of a rail line (light rail or Metrorail) would occur once the current alternative concepts of one or two Express Lanes in each direction are constructed and operational.**

While construction and operations details will be evaluated later in the project development process, common practices employed within confined work areas and complex construction activities include temporary reductions to lane and shoulder widths to accommodate work areas, temporary lane closures, and reduction of speed limits. Additionally, there may be opportunities to shift lanes between the local and through sections (barrier separated) on the WWMB, subject to final engineering details, along with means and methods of construction.

- 3. Please provide near-term commitments VDOT will make prior to final Commonwealth Transportation Board approval of a I-495 SEL project to ensure future rail transit can be constructed efficiently with no additional cost burden to a future rail project?**

Please see Commissioner Brich's correspondence to TPB members dated April 30, 2024, for an outline of VDOT's commitments to rail preservation on the WWMB. This letter makes clear that the alternatives under construction in the ongoing NEPA process incorporate rail preservation, therefore, selection of a preferred alternative by the Commonwealth Transportation Board will be one that provides the opportunity for future rail transit. Further, the letter states regarding the federal approval of the preferred alternative, "VDOT's adherence to this requirement will not result in costs for WMATA to convert the space when they are ready to implement service."

- 4. Is the future conversion of Express Lanes to rail transit use contingent on agreement by a concessionaire in a future solicitation? Can VDOT commit to making this term non-negotiable?**

As stated in the April 30, 2024, letter, the concepts included in the 495 Southside Study incorporate rail preservation either through retaining existing, unoccupied space or by incorporating a commitment to convert necessary space to rail transit in the future when

WMATA and the region are positioned to implement service across the WWMB. Terms within any future contract or concessionaire agreement would incorporate a requirement for conversion to rail transit in the future consistent with the recommended, preferred alternative approved through the NEPA process. The future procurement process and resulting agreement would make clear the need for the concessionaire to vacate the space necessary to operate heavy rail. As such, a separate solicitation for the conversion will not be required.

- 5. If an Express Lanes concessionaire is selected to build and operate a future I-495 SEL project, would the concessionaire also be required to provide temporary access to enable adjacent construction of a future rail project? Would there be any cost (to the entity requesting access) or penalty (to VDOT in terms of reduced revenue or concessionaire payment or otherwise) for such construction access to be granted?**

A comprehensive agreement with a concessionaire could include provisions to coordinate construction activities with the rail contractor. The efforts associated with this coordination along with vacating the space for rail will be the subject of future negotiations between the Commonwealth and a potential concessionaire. As we have stated, VDOT is fully supportive of future rail transit over the WWMB at such time WMATA and the region are positioned to implement service.

- 6. Please provide a construction cost estimate for the conversion of the two I-495 SEL Express Lanes (one in each direction) from operating highway travel lanes to a fully available rail transit right-of-way for future rail construction (not the rail construction itself). Please describe what is included in those costs, and which organization (between VDOT and Metro) would be responsible for which costs.**

Construction cost estimates are not available. Detailed engineering and the associated cost estimating will follow the NEPA study as part of VDOT's project development process. As stated in the April 30, 2024, letter to TPB members from Commissioner Brich, "VDOT's adherence to this requirement will not result in costs for WMATA to convert the space when they are ready to implement service."

- 7. Please provide examples of where a successful conversion from managed highway lanes to rail transit has been completed, including the interplay with a concessionaire.**

The Department is not aware of a managed lane highway project that was converted to transit. VDOT's Transform 66 is an example of a managed lanes project that successfully includes provisions for transit, BRT and the Orange Line, from the beginning. More specifically, the Orange Line is listed as an Alternative Facility in the contract, which states that only the opening of the Orange Line within 10 years from project completion of the Transform 66 project would constitute a compensation event.

8. How does VDOT plan to integrate bus service into the I-495 SEL Project? At what point in the project development processes will bus service planning and decision making begin? When does VDOT expect that bus service funded by the project would begin?

It has been the practice of the Commonwealth to incorporate on-going transit payments from express lanes projects in Northern Virginia to enhance multimodal options in the respective corridor. The Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT) completed the [I-495 Southside Transit/Transportation Demand Management Study](#) in April 2023 for the purpose of identifying a range of multimodal solutions in the corridor to inform VDOT's NEPA study. Should the I-495 Southside Express Lanes project advance under a concessionaire agreement, as currently anticipated, it could provide a dedicated source of revenue to implement the types of investments identified in the DRPT study which include express and local bus routes, as well as commuter assistance programs and technology enhancements.

9. Please provide documentation, assumptions, and analysis from the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation study that was completed in 2023 that recommended four new bus routes and estimated 8,000 daily riders.

For reference, the DPRT study can be found at the following link: <https://drpt.virginia.gov/studies-and-reports/i-495-southside-transit-tdm-study/>. Specific sections in the study that describe the assumptions and methodology for the transit recommendations are on pages 88-149, with pages 134-136 summarizing the data for the refined transit recommendations. Additionally, within the study, eight new bus routes are recommended in the refined transit recommendations that are estimated to generate 7,875 daily riders by 2045. Appendix E also provides information on each new bus route. If there are additional questions regarding the DPRT study, a direct contact with DPRT can be provided.

10. Assuming buses are integrated into the future I-495 SEL project, would the concessionaire be required to directly fund the full operational cost of new Metrobus service between Virginia and Maryland? Would existing service be eligible for funding? What would the start and end of such an agreement be? Please provide confirmation that no transit provider will be required to pay to use the Express Lanes.

Multimodal solutions, including bus service and transit funding, have been a focal point of negotiations for all concessionaire-operated facilities in Northern Virginia. Since 2017, the Commuter Choice program has received \$156 million, which has funded 42 buses, 29 bus service improvements, 14 new express bus routes, 6 commuter incentive programs, 4 rail station enhancements, 3 park and ride lots, and 1 BRT line. VDOT intends to continue our established practice to incorporate on-going transit payments for the I-495 SEL project. Since this project is still in the study phase, VDOT is not able to identify the amount nor the nature of funding for transit investments in the corridor at this time. The tolling policy for the I-495 SEL project will

Mr. Thomas Webster
June 13, 2024
Page Five

be consistent with the existing express lanes in Northern Virginia, which include free use by buses and vehicles carrying 3 or more travelers.

11. Will the I-495 SEL alternative study concepts include Express Lane access points at Telegraph Road and I-295 in Maryland? Current and future Metrobus service- notably the current NH2 and future P94 route- would benefit from direct Express Lane access including to National Harbor.

Both build alternatives under consideration in the 495 Southside Study assume access at the I-295 interchange. These build alternatives also assume access just East of the Springfield Interchange for entering and exiting the Express Lanes, at the interchanges of Van Dorn Street, US Route 1, MD 210, and just east of MD 210 for entering and exiting the Express Lanes. Key consideration for access is based on spacing, geometry, and potential impacts. Access was reviewed for the Telegraph Road interchange and dismissed from further consideration due to its close proximity to Route 1, existing complex CD roads through the interchange, existing flyover ramps/bridge piers, adjacent development and limited right of way.

We look forward to a continued partnership as the 495 Southside Study advances. I hope WMATA will support our efforts to bring near-term solutions to solve the region's complex transportation challenges while maintaining a long-term goal of accommodation of rail transit.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bill Cuttler', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Bill Cuttler, P.E.
Northern Virginia District Engineer