

May 22, 2019

The Honorable Nancy Kopp
Maryland Board of Public Works
80 Calvert St.
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Ms. Kopp:

The Maryland Department of Transportation's (MDOT) plan to widen the Beltway will have a harmful effect on Kensington and surrounding communities. We, the undersigned residents of Rock Creek Hills in Kensington, Maryland, urge you to oppose the plan when the Board of Public Works considers it.

Under MDOT's plan, over 300 acres of parkland will be lost, including areas of Rock Creek Park between Rockville Pike and Connecticut Avenue. The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission anticipates that parts of Rock Creek itself will be directly impacted by the proposed expansion project at the southern border of our community and that there will be a significant loss of tree canopy. Rock Creek Park is an important source of recreation and exercise for Kensington residents and we treasure it. We cannot afford to lose parkland because MDOT has failed to consider modern solutions to traffic congestion.

Additionally, construction of additional traffic lanes on the beltway and destruction of park land that is currently the only buffer between the beltway and Kensington's Rock Creek Hills neighborhood will substantially worsen a serious noise-pollution problem already caused by beltway traffic. That part of the beltway already crosses bridges that elevate that highway over Jones Bridge Road, Kensington Parkway and Connecticut Avenue and, while sound wall barriers have been constructed along the southern side of that portion of the beltway, no such walls have been deemed warranted on the northern side of the beltway, which is where Rock Creek Hills is located. The result has been that the current bridges and walls act as giant sounding boards that magnify traffic noise and bounce it toward Rock Creek Park and homes in Rock Creek Hills. Even with windows shut the background noise of beltway traffic is audible at all times of the day and night. Adding additional, and possibly further-elevated, lanes of traffic and removing Rock Creek Park trees that provided the only noise mitigation currently in place promises to make the noise affecting Rock Creek Hills homes very much worse (as even the State's plans showing the excessive-noise-line effect of the proposed plans recognizes). This extra noise will ruin any remaining sense of tranquility and the park-like nature of the area for affected homeowners, depressing quality of life in the neighborhood and thus also home values.

The Montgomery County Park and Planning Commission also projects that MDOT's design will increase traffic congestion on Connecticut Avenue between Route 410 and University Boulevard. We already experience heavy congestion on Connecticut Avenue during rush hours and beyond. Moreover, with construction of the purple line and placement of a station on Connecticut Avenue just a short distance south of the beltway, Connecticut Avenue traffic is already expected to grow far worse than its currently-packed rush-hour worst. Expanding the beltway even more and placing special exits and entry points there for getting on and off toll lanes will make that traffic even worse. Adding that to the already difficult traffic back-ups where Connecticut Avenue travels through the town of Kensington will expand that gridlock for anyone who must use Connecticut Avenue all the way from Kensington to at least East/West Highway in North Chevy Chase and probably further.

All of the above does not even consider the fact that a new salt barn and beltway service area is currently being built on the north side of the beltway between Kensington Parkway and Connecticut Ave. This construction is already destroying much of the park area sound buffer space between the beltway and Kensington and replacing it with a new source of noise and congestion.

Too often in circumstances like this, objections of affected residents to transportation projects are lightly dismissed as "Not-in-My-Back-Yard" sentiments of people who do not want to bear their fair share of burdens necessary to provide for regional public transportation needs. The concerns of residents of Kensington and Rock Creek Hills cannot fairly be dismissed in that fashion. This community is already bearing far more than its fair share of inconvenience, local traffic congestion, air pollution and noise from exiting and in-progress transportation projects, many of which were sold in significant part as ways to avoid beltway expansion. In addition to everything listed above, Kensington and Rock Creek Hills are also already burdened with the impacts of accommodating Marc and freight trains and their associated tracks that run through the community. This also already affects mid-town traffic congestion -- by limiting roadways that can cross the railroad tracks -- and adds substantial heavy rail noise to the community.

Not every transportation project in this part of Montgomery County needs to come at evermore cost to Kensington and the Rock Creek Hills community. All the existing and approved transportation related projects that affect our area are already unduly and increasingly burdensome to the community. Expanding the beltway will do immeasurable damage to our community's standard of life. No serious consideration has been given in the proposed plans to address that issue. If at all possible, options other than evermore highway expansion should be considered and implemented. And, in any event, real mitigation of costs to neighboring communities must be made a genuine priority.

Of course, there are broader issues to consider with this \$15 billion highway project. The tolls on the new privately-owned lanes would have to be high to generate a profit for the builder. The experience with private lanes in Virginia indicates that few will be able to afford the tolls. In addition, there has not been an environmental study done. Until we know how this project will worsen pollution and climate change, it should not move forward.

When the Board of Public Works debates the MDOT plan, I respectfully urge you to reject it.

Respectfully yours,