



## **The Mount Vernon Council of Citizens Associations, Inc.**

**P.O. Box 203, Mount Vernon, VA 22121-9998**

Mr. Nick Nies, AICP  
VDOT 495 Southside Study NEPA Project  
9030 Stoney Point Parkway, Suite 220  
Richmond, VA 23235

September 30, 2023

Dear Mr. Nies:

The Mount Vernon Council of Citizens' Association (MVCCA) was formed as a 501 c 4 in 1972 and represents condo, HOA and civic associations and their community members in the Mount Vernon Magisterial District of Fairfax County, Virginia. Our members utilize the road networks in and around the beltway as well as the Route 1 corridor on a daily basis. Our members are very concerned with the current status of the VDOT 495 Southside Study NEPA Project.

The information presented at the public meetings held in May 2022 and then again on September 12, 2023, were unsettling in direction and continue to be vague. While we understand that this is a work in progress, we feel that our concerns have not been seriously considered since the May 2022 meeting. We therefore raise these concerns:

1. In May presenters stated that you would be building within your right of ways. You made that same statement at the September meeting. However, on both occasions you were asked about the locations of your right of ways, and you continue to be unable or unwilling to answer the question. It is difficult for us to believe that someone in VDOT does not know where your right of ways are. Please put a graphic map location of your right of ways and/or easements along the stretch of 495 from Van Dorn to the Woodrow Wilson Bridge on your website.
2. We are greatly concerned that any expansion of the 495 roadway or the development of a Route 1 interchange will encroach into Fairfax County plans for redevelopment of North Gateway (Fort Hunt Road, Route 1 and WW bridge area) and the resource protection area (RPA) at that location. The County Government and the citizens have a right to know where your right

of ways and easements are located so we can make more informed decisions as to the value of your project.

3. Perhaps most important is what happens to the traffic from MD Route 210 if Maryland does not extend the express lanes around the beltway? There will still be the inevitable blockage at that point with backups westward on 495 into Virginia. Your presenters acknowledge rush hour backups on the free “express” lane that often reach the Van Dorn exit. However, in neither your May nor your September presentations did your presenters answer the simple question of whether or not Maryland plans to build express lanes on the beltway.

4. Presenters did note the obvious fact that vehicular congestion was extremely bad on Route 1 with vehicles waiting to go east on the bridge, but there was no plan to address that problem since the bridge congestion is unlikely to change. And building any sort of Route 1 interchange near the Woodrow Wilson Bridge will only damage redevelopment plans for North Gateway and the RPA (see item 2 above).

5. We are curious about your vehicle count. Michelle Shropshire said that volume has risen to pre-pandemic levels. As workers return to commuting, that number is sure to rise. We wonder if you are correctly incorporating projections for vehicle growth, both on the Beltway and on Route 1 and we are worried that your volume numbers may be too low. Therefore, traffic congestion will not decrease with this expansion of express lanes. We believe that the VDOT mission needs to refocus itself on mass transit and not the continued asphalt building for motor vehicle usage that brings increased heat island impacts in this climate change environment (see item 7).

6. We are confused about where the new express lanes would go. The briefing said the Wilson Bridge cannot be widened, and any added lanes (in addition to the two existing express lanes) must occur between the fixed barriers. The addition of two more express lanes each way would in one of the options (making four express lanes each way) would require narrowing the lanes by as much as 25%. Narrower lanes lead to a higher rate of traffic accidents and 25% is a significant narrowing. It makes no sense to make four lanes to the blockage point when two lanes currently have no place to go!

7. We are very disturbed that WMATA is not a partner on this project. While we understand that planning, funding, and construction of rail service may take longer, it has been the intent as far back as the agreement to build the new Wilson Bridge that Metro would cross it. Metro included crossings on the bridge in its proposed future expansion plans. Ignoring WMATA during the planning phase seems foolish and narrow minded. We believe the funds to build the proposed express lanes could be used to help WMATA bring rail to the beltway.

8. Why should Virginia build new paid express lanes at all if Maryland does not build them to continue on the beltway. Millions of dollars and years of construction with concomitant traffic delays would, in our view ultimately accomplish nothing. It seems obvious that VDOT favors partnering with Transurban to finance and operate these express lanes as a means to building express lanes in order to secure funds from Transurban toll collections. But there seems to be no mention of how Fairfax County will benefit from these collected funds.

Unfortunately, your briefings to date have done nothing to justify the cost and disruption caused by the project and is lacking in forward thinking to mitigate air pollution - climate change from vehicle exhausts.

*Katherine Ward*

Katherine Ward  
Cochair  
MVCCA

CC: Senator Scott Surovell  
Delegate Paul Krizek  
Supervisor Dan Storck