



THE GREATER BETHESDA
CHAMBER of COMMERCE

Smart Business, Bright Future

Ginanne M. Italiano, IOM, President & CEO
The Greater Bethesda Chamber of Commerce
7910 Woodmont Avenue, Suite 1204
Bethesda, MD 20814
T (301) 652-4900 F (301) 657-1973
gitaliano@greaterbethesdachamber.org
www.greaterbethesdachamber.org

**STATEMENT BY
THE GREATER BETHESDA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
REGARDING
SB229 - TOLL ROADS, HIGHWAYS, AND BRIDGES - COUNTY GOVERNMENT CONSENT
REQUIREMENT - EXPANSION
SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE
JANUARY 29, 2020
POSITION: UNFAVORABLE REPORT**

On behalf of our 550-member businesses and more than 45,000 employees in Montgomery County, this statement is in **Opposition of SB229 - Toll Roads, Highways, and Bridges - County Government Consent Requirement - Expansion**. We feel this legislation is misguided for many reasons.

This bill would cause further delay of State and federal investments that are urgently needed to provide real traffic relief for Montgomery residents and businesses. Giving one or more Counties unilateral veto power over the State and federal agencies responsible for planning and maintaining our Interstate Highway system is nonsensical and has as its intent to delay improvements most of the public supports and a loud minority opposes. These are improvements that have already been found to be effective, are in our region's approved long-range plans, will happen at some point because they are needed and there is no viable alternative.

I-495 is already severely congested for an average of 10 hours a day, giving us some of the worst traffic congestion in the nation. I-270 is a parking lot for an average of 7 hours a day. Studies show this congestion will get much worse without the Traffic Relief Plan (TRP) this bill is intended to block. This is not a sustainable approach, from a transportation, fiscal, economic or environmental standpoint, because congestion hurts us on all these levels. The real impact of delaying the I-495 and I-270 improvements is to condemn all of us to many more years suffering with the nation's worst congestion.

While proponents may claim this bill is like legislation in place on the Eastern Shore, that is not exactly accurate. The key difference is that the Eastern Shore law was approved to block a NEW toll highway the State was proposing at the time, while the language in this bill is broad enough to effectively block the State from carrying out its responsibilities for improving two EXISTING INTERSTATE HIGHWAYS THAT ARE ALREADY BUILT. This is an important distinction.

Neither the affected Counties, or any of the advocacy groups promoting this legislation have ever come up with ANY realistic alternative plan that would reduce the severe traffic congestion we're facing on I-495 and I-270 that do not involve adding new managed lanes. It is the only approach that offers a built-in financing mechanism using a P3 structure so it could be funded and built right now.

Now is **not** the time to go back to square one with a change of this magnitude to the approval process, after years of effort and investment have already been made at the state and federal level and by private sector firms interested in the P3 program. A full Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) is due on this in the Spring and it will contain much more detailed information on all the alternatives this study (and many previous studies) have examined. The economic effects of this legislation are significant and extremely costly.

Instead, we respectfully urge legislators to get behind the P3 Program to add new managed lanes, and new express-bus transit, especially now that major compromises have reached with several of the local counties. The P3 Program is now focusing on the American Legion Bridge and all of I-270 first, and that is the only phase approved

yet by the Board of Public Works (BPW), exactly as called for in Montgomery County and Frederick Counties' recent priorities letters to MDOT.

We believe this bill is a recipe for continued gridlock (literally and figuratively), costing hundreds of millions a year in delay-related costs, and adding yet more steps to an already cumbersome and decades-long study and review process. The TRP will bring lasting traffic relief, better transit, and tens of thousands of good jobs to our region.

For these reasons, we request an **unfavorable report on Senate Bill 229**. Thank you for your consideration of our remarks.