

HOT Lane Project

Delegate Vivian E. Watts – 39th House District:

I am submitting this written statement for the record of the Design Public Hearing of the I-495 Capital Beltway HOT Lanes project. I share my constituent concerns about:

(1) Significantly increasing the height of the soundwall between Noise Barrier Segment stations 568 and 578 which protects North Springfield Elementary School. This is a safety and noise impact issue that I have long been deeply concerned about and I trust that its resolution will stay on-track.

(2) Constructing a continuous soundwall between Noise Barrier Segment stations 729 and 737 to reduce the noise impact on the townhouses of Lafayette Village. It is my understanding that the noise study used 3 sites, none of which were in Lafayette Village. Furthermore, even this limited study was done in 2006 or early 2007 before the significant clear-cutting of the power line right-of-way that has taken place. Finally, these townhouses are 3-story homes with bedrooms on the 3rd floor; therefore, it is not appropriate to apply a noise-impact standard that I understand limits consideration only to the 2nd floor if there is a balcony. The 10- to 15-foot rise between stations 729 and 737 is inadequate to keep unbuffered noise from impacting the principal sleeping areas of these homes.

(3) Constructing higher soundwalls between and beyond Noise Barrier Segment stations 641 and 657 to address the same concern for the townhouses and third-story garden apartments located on or near Americana Drive.

(4) Landscaping between Leesville Blvd and the portion of the soundwall designated to be reconstructed from Noise Barrier Segment station 548 to 559. The current soundwall was just reconstructed as part of the Mixing Bowl project and while the meager trees that were planted were not in keeping with most other past highway plantings in Fairfax, they have begun to grow and offer some relief to the homes on the small lots directly across this 2-lane street, which is also a main street of this over 60-year-old community. At the very least, a tree-for-tree replacement standard should apply as it does for most other work in Fairfax County.

(5) Constructing soundwalls that would reduce the impact on residents of Chapel Square, a community outside I-495 that lies south of Little River Turnpike. Sound levels in this community have increased significantly with the dramatically increased beltway traffic that has occurred since the beltway was last widened and soundwalls were constructed.

(6) Keeping a construction schedule that will reduce the amount of time that Braddock Road traffic capacity is reduced. The amount of traffic on Braddock Road exceeds most interstates. There are site distance problems approaching the beltway from the west that already create the potential for rear end collisions. These factors should be considered in reducing the restriction of existing lanes to a minimum and in the safety measures established on Braddock Road to prevent accidents.

(7) Adding a second lane to the Braddock Road exit from the inner loop of the Beltway

designated for vehicles who are proceeding inside the Beltway to go East on Braddock. Most importantly, this will reduce the back-up of the collector lane onto the Beltway and also keep those going East from being tied up in the collector lane with the larger number of vehicles who are exiting West.

(8) Designing the most expeditious access to Fairfax Hospital from the Southbound hotlanes.

The whole concept of the hotlanes is that saving time is a value worth paying for. In no case is this more true than when saving time means saving a life.

(9) Assuring the quality of the soundwalls. While I welcome the use of the improved sound-absorptive soundwalls and a consistent appearance for the Beltway and I-95, I am very concerned about the rapid deterioration of walls used in the Mixing Bowl Project which are located on the Northbound lane of I-95 between Fullerton and Rt 7900, as well as those used north of Heming Avenue. The contractor who provides the soundwalls must be held accountable.

(10) Providing access to the HOT lanes from the Beltway. I also wish to go on record that I believe that the wrong standard has been applied to providing access to the HOT lanes. As I have understood in piecing together the information from the numerous briefings I have attended in the last month, the very limited number of access points to the HOT lanes reflects some sort of federal/national standard for toll facilities. Such severely limited access undercuts the value of the HOT lanes for many Fairfax County residents and basically creates a facility that is mostly for the use of those commuting on I-95 and I-66 from the west and south. In contrast, I believe an access standard should have been applied comparable to the HOV lanes on I-66 inside the beltway and I-395. The current design's limited access points – which do not include Rt-236 and Rt-50 – severely limits the HOT lanes HOV/express bus value in reducing congestion and air-pollution. The limited access points also will exacerbate neighborhood cut-through traffic on 2-lane roads such as those I am most familiar with: Heritage, Wakefield Chapel, and King Arthur, as well as on Edsall, Backlick, and Hummer.

The bottomline of these enumerated concerns and others I've heard expressed is that the citizens who will be most impacted by the construction of the HOT lanes will be the least served by them. As an elected representative who represents almost one-third of the HOT lane Beltway right-of-way and who has worked perhaps harder than anyone for years to obtain adequate transportation funding, I strongly petition that citizen concerns be addressed in what should be a **Public**/Private Partnership.