



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

Office of the Governor

Shannon Valentine
Secretary of Transportation

October 5, 2020

Robert H. Jackson, President
David Wuehrmann, Chair, Transportation Committee
McLean Citizens Association
P.O. Box 273
McLean, VA 22101
By email to rhjackson10@verizon.net and david.wuehrmann@gmail.com

Dear Messrs. Jackson and Wuehrmann:

Thank you for reaching out to me regarding the 495 Express Lanes Northern Extension (Project NEXT) and sharing the Resolution adopted by the McLean Citizens Association (MCA). As someone who has worked in various aspects of Transportation since 2006, I am not aware of a more thoughtful or more engaging Resolution. Given your commitment to capacity relief at the American Legion Memorial Bridge and reduction of cut-through traffic in your neighborhoods, I understand the MCA's conditional support for Project NEXT, as well as the concerns you raise regarding the impact of COVID-19, financial considerations, and environmental responsibility.

Because I recognize a letter cannot resolve all of your questions, I am asking Rob Cary, Chief Deputy Commissioner of the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) and Chair of the Environmental Subcommittee of the Commonwealth Transportation Board (CTB), to work directly with you and to serve as a liaison with my office.

Transformative projects like Project NEXT are planned and designed to address projected regional growth decades beyond implementation. Since the pandemic emerged, VDOT has been presenting traffic volume trends to the CTB. At the September 16, 2020, meeting, it was reported that interstate traffic during peak periods continues to return to the network and is already at 90% capacity as compared to this time last year. As you may also be aware, in addition to our ongoing work with Maryland on the Capital Beltway Accord, Virginia and Maryland are conducting an independent, joint transit study of this corridor, which may help avert what could be even greater demand for single-occupancy driving.

Prior to the effects of COVID-19, this corridor could not meet the demand, experienced the longest rush hour period of any corridor in the Commonwealth, and was regarded as one of Northern Virginia's most significant chokepoints, which affects safety, quality of life, and economic opportunity. Given the resilience of the network and growing daily traffic volumes, Project NEXT will significantly benefit the capacity of this interstate, as well as provide critical

relief for the surrounding side streets. As the Commonwealth is advancing its economic recovery, this project will play an active role in how the region is being shaped for the future.

VDOT and Transurban are committed to working with the MCA to mitigate the impact of stormwater runoff. To address both water quantity and quality, our team evaluated more than 100 sites along the project corridor to place stormwater management basins, with 19 stormwater management basins currently incorporated into the design. These locations were determined in coordination with the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality to accomplish one or more of the following objectives: 1) preserving natural features, including streams and forested areas; 2) meeting offset requirements from the existing Dominion Energy transmission line along the western border; and 3) minimizing the movement of significant structures that are to remain along the corridor, including sound walls. Additionally, the team is evaluating 13 drainage outfalls along the corridor.

Your letter raises important concerns regarding the 118 acres of tree loss documented in the Natural Resource Technical Report. The Environmental Assessment (EA) reported a Limits of Disturbance (LOD) not only for Project NEXT, but also including future phases of development surrounding the Dulles Toll Road interchange. While Project NEXT represents Phase 1, with tree loss anticipated to be approximately 35 acres (including additional lanes and laydown areas), we support your recommendations of conducting a tree survey, minimizing impacts as much as possible, and working with the MCA on opportunities to replant where feasible. As part of the project's final design process, areas within VDOT right-of-way will be identified for revegetation and the use of native species will be required.

As documented in the EA, Scotts Run Nature Preserve is subject to regulations set forth in Section 6(f) of the Land, Water and Conservation Act. As a result, the project team will need to identify replacement land for impacts to Scotts Run Nature Preserve that is acceptable to the Fairfax County Park Authority (FCPA) and the Department of Interior (DOI), which has jurisdiction over Section 6(f) properties.

As you know, the initial design of Project NEXT had an impact to Scotts Run Nature Preserve of approximately 3.21 acres due to a utility easement Dominion Energy holds with the FCPA between the western edge of Scotts Run Nature Preserve and I-495 right-of-way. Extensive coordination among VDOT, FCPA, and Dominion Energy has resulted in an innovative design that currently does not require realignment of the power line, reducing the impact to Scotts Run Nature Preserve to approximately one acre. The design will be provided through the procurement process to the design-build teams as part of the technical requirements, and cannot be increased without coordination with all parties. Like other VDOT projects with similar impacts to Section 6(f) land, DOI and FCPA authorization is required, including the management of invasive species. VDOT is currently working with FCPA to establish suitable replacement land. Proposed mitigation measures are summarized in Appendix A of the EA.

In order for the design-builder to obtain a federal permit from the U.S. Army Corps of

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Engineers, impacts to threatened and endangered species and their habitats must be satisfied through the Endangered Species Act. It will be the responsibility of the design-builder for this project to obtain a federal permit and conduct all necessary surveys.

A natural resource inventory was completed as part of the EA within the study area that includes the entire LOD, which represents the largest likely project footprint. There are no project impacts anticipated outside of this LOD. As part of the natural resource inventory, surveys were conducted for the northern long-eared bat, little brown bat, tri-colored bat, and wood turtle. The project team conducted this research in coordination with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources (formerly, the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries), National Marine Fisheries Service, and the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation. Further, preliminary temporary construction easements are designed to minimize impacts, and the project team will ensure that the design-build contractor seeks additional ways to minimize impacts when establishing necessary construction easements and staging areas during the project's final design process, including existing paved areas within VDOT right-of-way.

Proactive public outreach and engagement is a top priority across the Transportation Secretariat, and an integral part of our major highway construction projects. Dedicated communications staff from VDOT and its project partners are tasked specifically with providing regular updates and advance notification of construction activities and impacts to neighboring residents and the traveling public. Property owners who may be affected by right-of-way impacts, including temporary easements or construction staging areas, will be notified and coordinated with directly during the right-of-way acquisition phase, and before and during construction. In addition, VDOT maintains a project website, www.495northernextension.org, where updates and notices are shared.

Your letter and Resolution will be added to the public record for the project's public hearing and, along with all other comments received, will be included in the documentation that the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) receives before issuing a decision on VDOT's environmental assessment and preliminary design of the project. My hope is that this letter provides you with an added perspective. Please know you can also expect further design refinements as the project progresses to reduce impacts and lower the overall project costs.

Members of our project team, including Chief Deputy Commissioner Rob Cary and Megaprojects Director Susan Shaw, are scheduled to meet with your association's Transportation Committee on October 13th, providing current information related to the project's environmental assessment findings and preliminary design work. This information will be presented at the virtual public hearing on October 5th, and at our in-person, by-appointment-only public hearing on October 8th. The public hearing comment period concludes on October 23rd. In addition, two informal, virtual Question-and-Answer sessions were held prior to the public hearings on the evenings of September 28th

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and September 30th. More information about upcoming hearings and the project can be found at www.495NorthernExtension.org.

Messrs. Jackson and Muehrmann, I thank you again for your letter, Resolution, support and thoughtful consideration of Project NEXT. The MCA is a valued community partner, and we look forward to continuing the work on this generational project together.

With warmest regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Shannon Valentine', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the left.

Shannon Valentine

cc: The Honorable Barbara Favola, Virginia Senate, 31st District
The Honorable Kathleen Murphy, Virginia House of Delegates, 34th District
John Foust, Fairfax County Board of Supervisors – Dranesville District
Tom Biesiadny, Director, Fairfax County Department of Transportation
Commissioner Stephen Brich, Virginia Department of Transportation
Chief Deputy Commissioner Rob Cary, Virginia Department of Transportation
Helen Cuervo, Northern Virginia District Engineer, Virginia Dept. of Transportation
Susan Shaw, Megaprojects Director, Virginia Department of Transportation
Abraham Lerner, Virginia Department of Transportation
Allison Richter, Assistant Northern Virginia District Administrator, VDOT
Brent McKenzie, Government Relations and Community Outreach Manager, Transurban
Amanda Baxter, Director of Project Development – North America, Transurban