

June 18, 2024

The Honorable Christina Henderson, Chair
National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board
Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments
777 North Capitol Street NE, Suite 300
Washington, DC 20002-4239

RE: 2050 Air Quality Conformity Analysis & Southside Express Lanes

Dear Chair Henderson:

As representatives of the vast majority of private and nonprofit employers across the Greater Washington region, we are writing to share our strong support for inclusion of the Southside Express Lanes project submitted by Virginia for Visualize 2050's Air Quality Conformity Analysis.

While we believe this project represents a tremendous opportunity to relieve congestion, improve access to jobs and opportunities, and invest in our region's transit system, we are deeply concerned by the weaponization of the region's Air Quality Conformity process to halt potential projects before a fair evaluation can be completed.

The Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) is required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) to demonstrate that our region will still meet Air Quality Conformity once this project is completed. As the region's designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), the Transportation Planning Board (TPB) is responsible for conducting this analysis. Including the Southside Express Lanes on the TPB's list of projects DOES NOT approve the project for construction. It simply allows VDOT to complete the NEPA process.

In a letter to Prince George's County dated June 13, 2024, VDOT confirms, "The Commonwealth cannot and will not advance this project to implementation without the support of Prince George's County and the region." In other words, if the final evaluation of this project does not produce sufficient community benefits to earn support from Prince George's County and the region, VDOT has agreed not to move forward.

However, blocking a project from the TPB's Air Quality Conformity Analysis is neither the right time nor the right venue to make that determination. Refusing to even evaluate the air quality impacts of a potential project sets a dangerous precedent for future transportation projects and undermines the regional collaboration that the Transportation Planning Board is supposed to foster for our community.

Our region's economy is strongest when we work together. We urge you to consider this in your evaluation and allow for the inclusion of this project in the region's Air Quality Conformity Analysis.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this important matter.

Sincerely,



