

## FAIRFAX COUNTY FEDERATION OF CITIZENS ASSOCIATIONS

### COMMENTS ON VDOT'S CAPITAL BELTWAY STUDY (Approved by the Federation's General Membership 6/20/02)

**Background:** Pursuant to the process established by federal law, a Major Investment Study (MIS) on Beltway improvements was completed in early 1997. Following two citizen workshops and refinement of the MIS, the next step of the process has been completed—preparation of a draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The required location public hearings on the draft EIS were held in Fairfax County on May 28-30. The deadline for submission of written comments to VDOT has been extended from June 10 to June 30.

The draft EIS considered four alternatives: (1) no-build (considered a basis for comparison); (2) Concurrent HOV (add one lane in each direction with inside lane restricted to HOV); (3) express/local with HOV (add one lane in each direction but separate two local lanes from three through lanes with inside lane restricted to HOV); (4) barrier-separated HOV (add two lanes in each direction with two inside lanes separated and restricted to HOV). Maryland has no plans to increase their portion of the Beltway on and near the American Legion Bridge beyond its current eight lanes but is considering rail (Purple Line) on the Maryland side of the Beltway.

During the past two years, as a result of legislation sponsored by Delegate Albo and approved by the General Assembly, the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transit (VDRPT) has conducted a Beltway rail feasibility study addressing the area from the Springfield Transit Station to Bethesda, Maryland. A public hearing was held on eight possible alternatives about six months ago. The study recommended heavy rail, light rail and monorail as viable options.

The draft EIS analysis was based on 2020 volumes and patterns, an estimated 30-40% increase in demand.

#### **Proposed Federation Position:**

1. **American Legion Bridge** – The proposed widening of the Beltway in Virginia approaching the American Legion Bridge would create a funnel because of its inconsistency with the eight-lane bridge and adjacent Beltway in Maryland. This situation is exacerbated by the traffic entering the Virginia Beltway from the George Washington Parkway and Route 193 in Virginia not far from the bridge.
2. **Widening and/or Transit** – The MIS concluded that 14-16 lanes would be necessary to relieve congestion through 2020, but such a project would have unacceptable impacts on neighboring communities, commercial centers and the environment. The MIS also

recommended evaluation of further transit possibilities and coordination with other major studies. Therefore, it seems inefficient and ineffective to (a) propose investing \$2.5 to \$3.3 billion to widen the Beltway in a way that will result in a failing Level of Service (LOS) by the year 2020 and (b) consider widening the Beltway and the possible addition of some form of rail transit as two discreet studies and analyses. If rail is to be a serious consideration, then an EIS should address rail/transit and the possible Beltway widening as one comprehensive study. Mitigation of air pollution is and will remain a major factor in determining the blend of modes that will best resolve the Beltway congestion problem.

3. **Continuation of EIS Process** – Since VDOT recently announced a major reduction in availability of funding for implementation of the Transportation Development Plan (Six-Year Program), which will severely impact improvements to the Beltway or rail thereon/by for the foreseeable future, the current EIS process will serve only to provide a basis for a revised EIS when funding is assured for implementation of improvements.
4. **Impact on Nearby Communities** – No matter which alternative is chosen for the final EIS, between 200 and 300 residential properties will ultimately be taken for the Beltway widening. Since no funding for the widening is currently foreseen, proceeding to the final EIS will place a stigma on these properties, causing property values to decrease due to possible future VDOT action. This seems a heavy price for these property owners to pay for an extended indeterminate time, especially if they need to sell their properties in the meantime.
5. **Final EIS** - Further, we are concerned in general with the power of the Commonwealth Transportation Board to decide which alternative should be pursued in the final EIS. We realize this phase of the process is not within the power of VDOT to change, but it is curious that a Board with a majority of members from outside Northern Virginia will decide which alternative may be chosen for the final EIS. We will communicate our concerns to the Governor.
6. **Cost of Construction** – The current estimate for widening the Beltway is approximately \$3.3 billion and will result in a failing Level of Service (LOS F) by the year 2020.