

SOECA MEETING MINUTES: MAY 8, 2019

Prepared by Kristen Conte

Meeting agenda was approved by unanimous vote.

Minutes of last meeting were approved by unanimous vote.

Treasurer's Report: Balance in checking account is \$10,317.56. Expenses in March and April were \$275.72 for printing the bylaws and newsletter and meeting room rental and \$382.40 for food for the last happy hour. SOECA also paid for the license for Quickbooks and gifts for outgoing officers. The Treasurer's Report was approved by unanimous vote.

Announcements: David Hartmann briefed the group on the Social Committee's plans for the rest of 2019 and provided an update on the Mosquito Abatement Project. Michael Bufalini reviewed the improvements planned for Sligo Creek Parkway at its intersections with Worth Avenue and Three Oaks Drive. He doesn't believe those measures are enough to address the safety issues at the intersection with Worth and has a meeting planned with County officials to make the case for installation of Stop Signs.

Election of Officers: Mr. Bufalini presented a slate of officers and called for nominations from the floor. Mr. Bufalini was nominated for the role of President, and the following slate was then elected by unanimous vote:

President – Michael Bufalini
Vice President – Chris Reynolds
Treasurer – David Hartmann
Secretary – Clair Zietz

Appreciation gifts were given to the outgoing officers.

First Guest Speaker: Officer Joy Bartholomew from Montgomery County Police discussed recent crimes in the neighborhood:

1. There was a home invasion/burglary that resulted in an arrest.
2. There were a couple thefts from vehicles.

She encouraged people to lock their home and car doors and noted that having a dog is a good deterrent for thefts/break-ins. She reminded the group that these types of crime often increase during warmer weather. The Police will conduct a home security survey at no cost to a homeowner. She also noted that the Police are on the app "Next Door" and encouraged residents to use that app.

Residents complained about noise from cars and motorcycles, especially cars and motorcycles that had been altered to produce excessive noise. Officer Bartholomew indicated that officers are not allowed to pursue vehicles for noise violations alone so if a car/motorcycle does not stop the police cannot chase them. This can embolden violators. The police can issue a noise citation but violators often fix the problem but then alter the vehicle again. Police also encounter this type of

problem in the Long Branch and Briggs Chaney neighborhoods. Residents should report noise violations and provide a license plate number if possible and the Police will follow up.

Mr. Bufalini thanked Officer Barthlomew for joining the meeting.

Second Guest Speakers: Jeff Folden and Caryn Brookman from Maryland’s Department of Transportation/State Highway Administration and Carol Rubin of the Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission, as well as technical experts and department heads from the State Highway Administration, joined the meeting to discuss Governor Hogan’s project for expanding capacity and providing other improvements to the Beltway and I-270.

The problem being solved: The purpose of the project is to address congestion on both roads, which limits economic growth and diminishes the quality of life for motorists and residents. Many sections experience average speeds less than 15 mph under existing conditions and traffic is expected to deteriorate in the years ahead. The average commuter in the National Capital Region loses 87 hours and over \$2,000 to congestion annually.

The benefits of the alternatives under consideration to solve the problem: Express Toll Lanes (ETL) and High Occupancy Toll (HOT) Lanes provide travelers an option to choose to pay a toll that varies to maintain free flow travel at or above 45 mph. All unrestricted free lanes will remain free, and diverting toll-paying vehicles to the HOT/ETL lanes should result in reduced travel times for those who continue to use the free lanes. New bridges and smoother pavement will be provided for all users at no cost to the Transportation Trust Fund, allowing funding that would have been needed to maintain roads to be used for other transportation improvements. Overall, local roads outside the interstates will have less traffic.

Each alternative will include improved access to existing transit stations and transit-oriented developments. In addition, public bus usage of managed lanes will be allowed to enhance transit mobility and connectivity to existing and planned transit facilities. MDOT has committed to working with WMATA to consider the results of the Washington Area Transformation Bus Study in the MLS improvements.

The proposed method for solving the problem: Under a public-private partnership (P3), the state will partner with the private sector to design, finance, build, operate, and maintain improvements for over 70 miles of I-495 and I-270.

The ARDS (i.e., “alternatives retained for study”):

1. Add one HOT managed lane in each direction on I-495 and convert one existing HOV lane in each direction to a HOT managed lane on I-270
2. Add two ETL managed lanes in each direction on I-495 and add one ETL managed lane and retain one HOV lane in each direction on I-270
3. Add two HOT managed lanes in each direction on I-495 and convert one existing HOV lane to a HOT managed lane and add one HOT managed lane in each direction on I-270
4. Add two ETL managed lanes in each direction on I-495 and on I-270 and retain one existing HOV lane in each direction on I-270 only
5. Add two HOT managed lanes in each direction on I-495 and convert existing HOV lanes to two HOT managed reversible lanes on I-270 while maintaining General Purpose lanes

6. Add two ETL managed lanes in each direction on I-495 and add two managed, reversible ETLs on I-270 while retaining HOV lanes adjacent to General Purpose lanes

Next Step in the Process: The State will go through a process established by the National Environmental Policy Act, which includes development of an Environmental Impact Statement. This step also includes identifying MDOT SHA’s recommended preferred alternative and holding additional public hearings.

The public can provide feedback and stay connected:

1. Visit the website at <https://495-270-p3.com>
2. Email questions and comments to 495-270-p3@sha.state.md.us
3. Mail Maryland Department of Transportation State Highway Administration I-495 & I-270 P3 Program Office 707 N. Calvert Street Mail Stop P-601 Baltimore, Maryland 21202
4. Call Toll-Free 833-858-5960
5. Provide a hard copy comment form that can be dropped off at the workshops or in the mail
6. Provide oral comments to the verbatim recorder

A Q&A session followed the presentation. This is a summary of the questions asked and the answers given by the State; it is not a verbatim transcript.

Question	Answer
What do other cities do to solve these kinds of problems and did SHA consider those solutions?	SHA looked at similar traffic situations in several large cities and is looking for creative solutions that deliver the best results with the least amount of disruption to adjacent properties as possible. Virginia saw significant increase in travel times after it implemented HOT lanes and motorists spent less time on the road and realized savings in the cost of gas.
Is it true the State will take 330 acres of green space for this project?	No; that number is too high. The State estimates 50 acres of green space will be needed. Carol Rubin of MNCPPC agreed that 330 acres is too high but stressed that 50 acres is highly likely to be too low.
Since Colesville Road will be a major access point to the HOT/ETL lanes, is SHA studying neighborhood streets to understand and mitigate impact on them?	Yes. We’re looking at it. Studies show less total traffic on streets, but there may be an increase on some with an associated decrease on others.
How will SHA mitigate noise?	Sound barriers will be provided; in some cases the sound barrier may be mounted on the highway (rather than on the right-of-way). There will be a noise analysis on the final plan and other noise mitigation measures may be taken.

Will homeowners who experience increased noise be compensated?	No. But the State will include noise mitigating solutions to the extent possible.
Will the new lanes be elevated/cantilevered?	No. the State looked at elevating the road but cost, maintenance, and aesthetics are all problems that could not be overcome.
To what extent does the State have control over the design?	The State is trying to not be restrictive and wants to be flexible, but the State will write the specifications for the project and will be responsible for ensuring adherence by the P3 to the specifications.
How integrated will the project be with public transit?	Public transit is an important part of the overall solution to traffic problems in this area. While improvements to I-495 and I-270 will not directly support public transit, the improvements will help by allowing buses to use the HOT/ETL lanes. There will be indirect benefits too.
Air quality in Maryland is very low. How much will this project contribute to poor air quality?	Transportation contributes to air quality problems. However, idling cars and trucks contribute more ozone than traffic that is free flowing. Air quality studies will be part of the planning for this project.
Are you working with employers to understand how the project can help their employees, customers, and others?	Yes. SHA is starting to talk to employers about where their employees live, where their customers come from, and how this new capacity can make trips shorter and more efficient.
Did the ICC work?	Yes; studies show the ICC has saved drivers more than 50% in travel time compared to likely alternatives and traffic is free flowing on that highway.
How will the State incentivize the P3 to take the least amount of private property for this project?	That is not determined yet, but the State is looking for a final design that takes the least amount of property possible.
Bidders will require predictable income. Will the final contract with the P3 allow the P3 to interfere with other projects that might end up limiting traffic on I-495 or I-270?	No. The State will write the specifications for this project and having the P3 participate in other Department projects is not envisioned.

Are there smaller, traditional improvements that can be made instead of this huge project?	Yes, but smaller, incremental improvements will not solve the traffic problem and will not provide some of the other benefits discussed here tonight.
Won't this project just fill up with cars in a few years and result in the State having to propose another expensive solution?	There are technological solutions that could allow for an increase in traffic for many years into the future. For example, if the technology lives up to its promise, driverless cars might allow for a narrowing of lanes with an increase in number of cars/trucks and no negative impact on safety or free flow of traffic.
One of the first slides in the State's presentation indicated just two goals for the project: financial viability and environmental responsibility. What about limiting noise, improving safety, and other important things?	Those things are inherent in what the State does and what this project is being designed to accomplish. This project will comply with all federal and state regulations, which address the issues just raised.
The State has designated 66 decibels as an acceptable level of noise from this project. How loud is that?	It is the level at which you must raise your voice in order to be heard by someone in your immediate vicinity.
What about telecommuting? What can SHA do to support that, which would reduce the amount of traffic without having to increase road capacity?	The SHA is tasked with improving roadways. There are efforts by the public and private sector that support telecommuting, but this project does not directly address telecommuting.
Shouldn't SHA better integrate this project with public transit?	The project includes benefits to public transit but even with currently planned transit improvements, such as the Purple Line, the Beltway and I-270 must be fixed.

No one is thinking about how to get away from the car culture. This project accepts that we must accommodate more cars.

We need many different solutions. Fixing the highways is part, but not all, of the solution.

What about forest loss?

SHA doesn't know yet how much forest land will be taken and how that will be mitigated. The Beltway is very old and there are parts that are extremely constrained, making all solutions challenging and difficult. The area of Montgomery County the Beltway runs through is already very developed so there are not many ways to add forest land in the area impacted by this project.

Mr. Reynolds, SOECA Vice President, thanked SHA and MNCPPC for coming to speak to us.

There being no further business, Mr. Bufalini adjourned the meeting at 9pm.