

from: Ben Ross  
to: MCP-Chairman@mncppc-mc.org  
date: Mon, Jul 6, 2009 at 8:42 AM  
subject: I-270 Corridor Study

Dear Mr. Hanson:

The Action Committee for Transit urges the Planning Board to reject the priority-setting recommended by your staff for the I-270 corridor.

The staff wants to spend \$4 billion of taxpayer money on widening I-270. At the same time, the staff rejects light rail for the Corridor Cities Transitway because it would cost an additional \$200 million. And the Planning Board says it's impossible to find \$70 million in public money to improve Rockville Pike for bus riders, pedestrians and cyclists.

Widening I-270 will heavily burden tax-supported transportation budgets. The cost of building the proposed toll lanes will be paid almost entirely by taxpayers, not through tolls. In fact, it is not certain whether the road will generate enough revenue even to recover the cost of collecting the tolls. (The State Highway Administration projects that rush-hour traffic will move only 2 mph faster on the toll lanes than the free lanes - the toll, which on express toll lanes is set at the level that causes the toll lanes to be fully used but not congested, will need to be very low to attract enough customers to fill the pay lanes.)

Have we learned nothing from the transportation planning mistakes of the last half-century? Widening I-270 will only put more cars on the highways and create more traffic jams. It will fuel sprawl development of housing in Frederick County and beyond. It will promote the creation of office park wastelands in the Germantown and Gaithersburg West master plan areas.

Decades ago, the vision of Wedges and Corridors set Montgomery County on a path of planned land use that has given us lively downtowns in Bethesda and Silver Spring. Today, the failures of uncontrolled sprawl development in northern Virginia are clear to all as Fairfax County tries to remake Tysons Corner and the sprawl housing of Prince William County faces economic disaster. The I-270 express toll lanes would replicate Virginia's mistakes by pouring transportation dollars into the connection from mini-Tysons Corners in Gaithersburg West and Germantown to McMansions in Urbana.

Priority-setting is the essence of planning. Street and transit improvements that build livable communities must come ahead of mega-highways that create sprawl. The Planning Board should prioritize rail in the I-270 corridor - preferably, as we have written to you before, with a fast connection from Shady Grove to Germantown and Clarksburg, and with a stop in Kentlands. It should prioritize the rebuilding of Rockville Pike near White Flint with public money. It should reject the idea of wasting billions of dollars on widening I-270.

Ben Ross  
President  
Action Committee for Transit