

**STATEMENT OF ED RICH, PRESIDENT**

**GREATER FARMLAND CIVIC ASSOCIATION**

**IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 91 AND HOUSE BILL 102**

**March 7, 2019**

I am the President of the Greater Farmland Civic Association, which represents residents in the Old Farm, Tilden Woods, Hickory Woods, and Walnut Woods neighborhoods, located immediately south of Montrose Road and east of the twelve lanes of I-270. Because of our location, the contemplated significant expansion of I-270 will have a substantially negative impact on our vibrant community, which numbers close to a 1000 homes and an elementary school housing over 800 students daily. As a result, there is very strong opposition in our community to the proposed expansions.

**We strongly support House Bill 91 *Public-Private Partnerships—Presolicitation Reports—Environmental Impact Statement*** Requirement, sponsored by Delegates Korman and Carr. As residents who live adjacent to I-270, we have seen first-hand that building additional lanes leads to more cars, more traffic, and increased environmental degradation in our neighborhood and the surrounding areas. The focus of the Managed Lanes study on moving significantly more traffic on lanes built and operated through a P3, appears doubly flawed.

First, the Managed Lanes Study, which has narrowed the options to one mandatory-to-consider no-build option and six multiple additional lanes options, prefers adding traffic lanes at the expense of the natural areas and neighborhoods along the route. The state has the responsibility to assess and communicate to voters the significant environmental impact of the options it is considering. The public must be allowed to weigh in the decision with this critical information – concerning irreversible consequences – in hand. Therefore, we strongly support House Bill 91. This legislation will require a comprehensive study that complies with the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act regarding the environmental impact, including greenhouse gas emissions, of increasing the volume and size of I-270 and I-495 to be completed and submitted before any decision, let alone before any pre-solicitation report for a P3, can be made. Common sense, fairness, and transparency requires that the environmental impact study include all of the original 15 proposals that the public was asked to comment on in 2018, as well as options not considered, such as creation of new and expansion of existing public transportation systems, smart-growth development at major transit hubs and development of affordable housing options close to major employment centers located at major transit hubs.

Second, the proposed expansion options appear to focus on and benefit the wealthy commuters over the general population. If the privately operated toll lanes are built, only those who could afford to pay the tolls would drive on those lanes of the “public” highway. We oppose losing sections of our neighborhood, potentially even homes, and critically important

green and natural areas, to profit a private company while driving a wedge between commuters who can afford to pay tolls and those who cannot but who still have to pay state taxes to support the expansions.

We stress that the state can and must find a fair, comprehensive approach that makes other modes of transportation more accessible, affordable, reliable and viable alternatives to the private vehicle. Those can include expansion of the METRO and MARC systems, additional light rail options, and bus-rapid transit. In addition, the state can support employment centers and opportunities, along with affordable housing options, along the I-270 corridor at major transit hubs to reduce the need for numerous residents to drive to and from work.

For these reasons, **we also strongly support House Bill 102 *Toll Roads, Highways, and Bridges—County Government Consent Requirement—Expansion***, sponsored by Delegate Lierman and co-sponsored by, among others, our District 16 Delegates Korman, Kelly and Love. Currently, there is a prohibition on State agencies constructing toll roads, toll highways, or a toll bridge within the nine Eastern Shore counties without the consent of “a majority of the affected counties.” We support this prohibition and demand that it be extended to all counties within the State. All counties deserve the ability to secure the well-being of their residents by protecting their interests and quality of life in the case of toll lane or highway construction.

I thank you for your consideration and urge you to do right by the people of our community and the many other communities along I-270 and I-495.