

I-895/Baltimore Harbor Tunnel Toll Plaza and Interchange Improvements Project December 16, 2020 Virtual Public Meeting FAQs

GENERAL PROGRAM

1. Why is MDTA installing toll gantries at this location?

Removing the toll booths and constructing toll gantries will allow for traffic to flow seamlessly as tolls are collected electronically, satisfying the Project purpose and need of improving travel speeds by eliminating vehicle queues and maintaining a consistent number of travel lanes on I-895 between the K-Truss bridge west of Frankfurst Avenue and the Baltimore Harbor Tunnel.

2. Has the MDTA taken into consideration post pandemic traffic changes and what they will mean to highways, toll collection, and related projects (like the proposed Project)?

We understand that COVID-19 is impacting all Marylanders today – in how we work, in how we spend our free time, and in how we travel. While our number one priority is the health and safety of Marylanders, the MDTA will continue with efforts to ensure transportation improvements are being developed to meet our State's needs not only for today but for the next 20-plus years. The MDTA has updated traffic forecasts, considering post-pandemic conditions, and we do anticipate some sustained traffic volume reductions in the near-term. However, these near-term declines are not anticipated to offset the long-term traffic growth anticipated out to the 2045 design year. Furthermore, traffic volumes quickly rebounded from the lows experienced at the onset of the pandemic. As of July of this year, traffic volumes on MDTA facilities have returned to approximately 80 percent of the pre-COVID-19 volumes, even with current restrictions still in place. The Project remains necessary to address today's safety and congestion issues, which will only be exacerbated with long-term traffic growths.

3. What level of planning went into determining a toll gantry is appropriate at the I-895 Baltimore Harbor Tunnel Toll Plaza?

The MDTA completed an All Electronic Tolling (AET) Conversion and Prioritization Study back in 2012, that analyzed all MDTA facilities. The results of the Study found that AET would improve operations at the I-895 Baltimore Harbor Tunnel by decreasing average peak travel times by 15 to 24 percent and decreasing average peak delays by 11 to 14 percent. Now that electronic tolling is in place permanently at the I-895 Baltimore Harbor Tunnel toll plaza, a National Environmental Policy Act, or NEPA, study is underway to evaluate the proposed toll booth removal, overhead gantry installation, and associated interchange ramp improvements.

4. Is this Project intended to be a design-build or bid-build?

The type of project procurement has not been determined at this point in the Project. That's usually a decision that's going to happen once the MDTA gets into the completion of the final design phase, so one would expect the MDTA to make that decision later next year or going into 2022.

5. How is this Project being funded?

Projects and services to operate, preserve, maintain, improve, and protect MDTA's nine toll facilities are funded through the tolls customers pay to use the agency's facilities. The MDTA combines toll revenues from all facilities to pay operating costs and the debt on bonds that are issued to fund major projects. The proposed Project is listed with project ID 2487 in the draft fiscal year 2021 through 2026 Consolidated Transportation Program, Maryland's six-year capital budget for transportation projects.

6. Will there be another public meeting before construction starts?

Public outreach will continue throughout the Project. At this time, the MDTA hasn't scheduled another public meeting, but that certainly doesn't mean that one will not be held before construction starts.

7. What information is available on the Project webpage?

The webpage contains a project area map; anticipated project schedule; downloadable copies of the project Fact Sheet, Virtual Public Meeting Flyer, and Press Release; details on how to join virtual public meetings, including the video shown; a downloadable copy of the script that accompanies the presentation video; downloadable copies of the presentation video slides; information on how to comment, including an electronic comment form; and Title VI compliance information and survey form. The webpage also includes a link to download the Free Adobe Acrobat Reader, which is needed to view PDF documents.

TOLLING

8. What is a toll gantry?

A toll gantry is simply an overhead steel structure with sensors and cameras to scan *E-ZPass*® transponders and collect license plate numbers for vehicles which do not have an *E-ZPass*® transponder. You will recognize these gantries from other MDTA facilities, including the Intercounty Connector (ICC), I-95 Express Toll Lanes (ETL), and recent conversions at the Thomas J. Hatem Memorial Bridge and the Francis Scott Key Bridge.

9. Will cash toll payments be an option after construction of Project?

No. Cash payments are no longer utilized at the I-895 Baltimore Harbor Tunnel or any other MDTA tolling facility, and they will not return in the future. The electronic-toll-collection system is currently being used at the Baltimore Harbor Tunnel and will continue to be utilized after the construction of the Project. With AET, drivers do not stop to pay tolls. Instead, tolls are collected through *E-ZPass*® and video tolling. The system provides convenience for motorists, less engine idling for better fuel efficiency and reduced emissions, decreased congestion, and increased safety.

10. How will the installation of an electronic toll gantry change the way tolls are collected?

Toll collection at the I-895 Baltimore Harbor Tunnel will remain electronic after construction of the proposed toll plaza and interchange improvements, and will not be affected by the Project.

11. How will the installation of an electronic toll gantry change toll prices?

Toll prices will not be affected by the construction of this Project.

ROADWAYS AND RAMPS

12. Where will the proposed I-895 Baltimore Harbor Tunnel Toll Plaza electronic toll gantry be located?

The exact location of the electronic toll gantries will be finalized during Final Design between Summer 2021 and 2023, however one is anticipated to be located east of the I-895 bridge over Childs Street.

13. Will toll collection patterns change with the installation of the toll gantries near the Baltimore Harbor Tunnel? And why are there gantries proposed on the Child Street ramps?

The Project was planned and designed to maintain the same toll collection patterns in the future as are out there today. This means that any car currently driving through this area that is currently tolled will continue to be tolled in the future. MDTA is required as part of our bond agreements to maintain toll collection patterns.

14. If the I 895 bridge just west of the Baltimore Harbor Tunnel toll plaza is being removed, what will be supporting the roadway?

As part of the study, it was determined that the current bridge is no longer required. In this case, the roadway will be securely supported by backfill embankment and stabilized by retaining walls.

15. What will the collector-distributor roads be used for once constructed?

Each collector-distributor road will be utilized by traffic to enter and exit I-895. The collector-distributor road along Southbound I-895 will have two on-ramps, one slip ramp from Southbound I-895 and the other from Childs Street, which will merge and give drivers the option to exit via an off-ramp either to Eastbound Frankfurst Avenue or a slip ramp to I-895 Southbound.

The collector-distributor road along Northbound I-895 will have two on-ramps, one slip ramp from Northbound I-895 and the other from the intersection between Frankfurst Avenue and Shell Road, which will merge and give drivers the option to exit via an off ramp either to Childs Street or a slip ramp to Northbound I-895.

16. Why are ramps being removed from the interchanges?

Since the toll booths will be replaced with toll gantries, vehicles will be traveling at higher and more consistent speeds. The current ramp locations are not spaced to accommodate the higher vehicle speeds. Therefore, some of the ramp movements are being combined, which will also reduce the number of conflict points along I-895 and the local roadway system.

17. Why are the I-895 bridges over Frankfurst Avenue and Childs Street being replaced?

The age of these bridges qualify them for replacement as compared to the increasing costs of continued repair and maintenance. In addition, these bridges will be widened to accommodate the revised ramp movements, which provides an opportunity to address both of these bridge improvement needs at the same time.

18. How will the improvements at the I-895 Baltimore Harbor Tunnel Toll Plaza ensure safety while traffic is allowed to reach higher speeds?

The proposed improvements actually reduce crash risk by removing the toll booths from the roadway and maintaining a consistent speed for vehicles on I-895 through the toll plaza area. The proposed improvements also modify ramps at the Frankfurst Avenue and Childs Street interchanges to allow traffic to safely move on and off of mainline I-895 at highway speeds. The consolidation of ramps reduces the number of vehicle conflict points along I-895, while weaving movements will occur along the lower speed collector-distributor road, not along the mainline lanes of I-895. Additionally, the removal of toll booths eliminates the need for MDTA employees to work directly in high traffic conditions.

19. Will removal of the existing toll booths allow room for the addition of travel lanes?

This Project will maintain the number of lanes on I-895 outside the toll plaza area, with two in each direction. Traffic projections for current and future traffic do not necessitate the need for additional lanes on I-895. With the construction of this Project, there will be new adjacent collector-distributor roads to make weaving to and from I-895 via the proposed ramps safer in the future.

20. What impact will the Project have on traffic volumes and patterns on Frankfurst Avenue, Shell Road, and Childs Street?

The proposed improvements maintain the current access movements between I-895 and the local roadway network. The main changes will occur along Frankfurst Avenue. Particularly the replacement of the merge ramp from southbound I-895 to westbound Frankfurst Avenue with a spur ramp from the existing loop ramp to eastbound Frankfurst Avenue, and the revision of the three-legged intersection of Frankfurst Avenue and the entrance to the Masonville Cove Environmental Center to a four-legged intersection with the addition of the new ramp spur.

In addition, the current three-legged intersection of Shell Road and Frankfurst Avenue will be reconfigured into a four-legged intersection with the consolidation of the existing two entrance ramps to northbound I-895 into a new ramp at this intersection.

21. What will the new speed limit be once the Project is constructed?

With construction of the proposed improvements, the speed limit within the vicinity of the toll plaza will be raised from 10 miles per hour to 50 miles per hour for consistency with the mainline I-895 speed limit.

ENVIRONMENT AND IMPACTS

22. How will I know if my home, business, or property will be impacted?

This Project is being designed to minimize property impacts. Residential property impacts are not anticipated, however should MDTA identify any Right-of-Way needs, property owners will be contacted accordingly.

23. What is a National Environmental Policy Act study?

The national commitment to the environment was formalized through the passage of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, also referred to as NEPA. NEPA establishes a national environmental policy and provides a framework for environmental planning and decision making by Federal agencies.

NEPA directs Federal agencies, when planning projects or issuing permits, to conduct environmental reviews to consider the potential impacts on the environment by their proposed actions. The Project will require Federal Highway Administration approval to be constructed due to the interchange upgrades along the interstate highway. As such, a study is under way to evaluate potential environmental impacts of the proposed action.

24. Why is a NEPA study being completed for this Project along I-895, when projects involving AET conversion at the Francis Scott Key Bridge, Thomas J. Hatem Memorial Bridge and William Preston Lane Jr. Memorial, or Bay, Bridge have not involved a NEPA study?

This Project at the Baltimore Harbor Tunnel involves not only installing toll gantries, but also interchange improvements and bridge replacements which include removing and altering ramps along I-895 to meet standards for vehicles traveling at highway speeds. Altering access to and from an interstate requires Federal Highway Administration approval, which necessitates completion of a NEPA study. The NEPA study for this Project will be completed in the Spring of 2021, at which point the Project will begin final design and permitting. The current schedule has the Project starting construction in Summer 2024.

25. What environmental studies have been completed for the Project?

To assist in the identification of natural environmental and cultural resources, coordination was initiated early in the NEPA study with resource agencies including the Maryland Department of Natural Resources, US Fish and Wildlife Service, Maryland Department of the Environment, US Army Corps of Engineers, and the Maryland Historical Trust.

Field investigations were also completed to identify boundaries of wetlands and streams, and locations of large trees within the study area. Agency coordination will continue throughout the Project, and the proposed design will avoid and minimize environmental impacts to the maximum extent practicable.

26. Are any major utilities expected to be impacted?

While utilities have been identified in the Project area, such as electric and communications, no major utility impacts are expected. Coordination will continue with utility companies as the Project progresses.

TRAFFIC AND CONSTRUCTION

27. What are the traffic volumes at the I-895 Baltimore Harbor Tunnel Toll Plaza and will they change due to the proposed Project?

Average daily traffic at the Baltimore Harbor Tunnel toll plaza as of 2018 is 78,250 vehicles per day. The estimated 2045 average daily traffic is 90,000 vehicles per day in both the Build condition and No Build condition. The proposed improvements will not affect traffic volumes.

28. Will my commute be interrupted/detoured during construction?

A sequence of construction is being pursued that would avoid or minimize the need for detours and increased travel distance to and from I-895. Should a detour be required, travelers will be notified via messaging signs, as well as the Project webpage and e-mail

29. When is construction anticipated to start, and what will the duration be?

Phased construction is anticipated to start in 2024 and to be completed in 2027. Since this Project includes the replacement and widening of two bridges and the removal of a third, the design process is expected to last over two years. Similarly, the Project construction will be phased as the gantry installation, toll booth removal, bridge work, and road work operations are separately undertaken all while maintaining traffic along I-895 and through the interchanges.

The preliminary sequence of construction will maintain two lanes in each direction along I-895. It is anticipated that one travel lane for two-way travel will be maintained during construction along the local roadways, which will be coordinated with Baltimore City.

30. Does this mean single lane travel on I-895 will not be used similar to the project north of the Harbor tunnel?

That is the current idea and how the MDTA is planning the design and construction sequencing for this Project. The MDTA recognizes how challenging it was dropping the lane for the project north of the Harbor tunnel, the I-895 Bridge Project, even though of course it was very important for the MDTA to do that in order to get the construction schedule on the realized timeline. For this Project the MDTA is looking to maintain two lanes in each direction to continue with unimpeded traffic flows.

OTHER PROJECTS

31. How is this current Project related to the I-895 Bridge Project?

These are separate projects, each with independent utility, and each running on different timelines. The I-895 Bridge Project is a major ongoing construction project being completed north of the Baltimore Harbor Tunnel. Although all lanes are now open to traffic during peak times on I-895, in the near-term, the I-895 Bridge Project has had a significant impact on traffic moving through the toll plaza due to long-term lane closures that were implemented in late 2018 to facilitate replacement of three miles of elevated structure north of the Baltimore Harbor Tunnel. Motorists have been recommended to avoid I-895 during construction and instead use alternate routes of I-95 and I-695 for regional travel. This has resulted in traffic volumes on I-895 through the toll plaza being approximately 40 percent lower than normal since December 2018. To account for this in the current study, traffic volumes and speeds from October 2018 (pre-construction) were used for the purposes of evaluating typical “existing” conditions along I-895 through the project area.

32. Are there any other projects related to the current Project?

Another project along I-895, the Patapsco Flats Bridge replacement project, was recently completed in September 2019. This project involved superstructure replacement along approximately a half-mile stretch of I-895, three miles south of the Baltimore Harbor Tunnel toll plaza. While that project also included long-term lane closures, it did not result in any significant traffic diversion off of I-895 because of lower demand volumes in that section.

33. Is the state looking at ways to accelerate the Project? Is there a similar project being studied for the Fort McHenry tunnel?

The Project schedule is dependent upon programmed funding. Final design and construction cannot begin until the NEPA process is completed. Also, COVID-19 has impacted revenues across the state and MDTA is no different. A project at the Fort McHenry Tunnel is currently in the design phase for converting that facility to AET. Conversion at the Fort McHenry Tunnel will happen before this Project is done.