

I-895/Baltimore Harbor Tunnel Toll Plaza and Interchange Improvements Project Virtual Public Meeting

Welcome, and thank you for attending the Maryland Transportation Authority's Virtual Public Meeting for the I-895 Baltimore Harbor Tunnel Toll Plaza and Interchange Improvements Project. This is a public project meeting for the National Environmental Policy Act, or NEPA, Study of modifications at the Baltimore Harbor Tunnel Toll Plaza and adjacent I-895 interchanges. The purpose of this meeting is to share information regarding the project's Purpose and Need, proposed improvements, potential impacts, and anticipated project schedule.

Recognizing the ongoing COVID-19 health emergency facing Maryland and our nation, and to protect the safety of residents and our team, this meeting is being conducted virtually.

Cashless tolling is now being conducted at the Baltimore Harbor Tunnel toll plaza, yet fourteen toll booths, seven in each direction of travel, remain across I-895 and are impeding vehicles from traveling at highway speeds.

MDTA, in coordination with the Federal Highway Administration, is conducting this NEPA study to evaluate potential environmental impacts from: removing the toll booths and replacing them with overhead electronic gantries, replacing or removing bridges on I-895 in the vicinity of the toll plaza, and conducting associated interchange improvements.

The project area encompasses the I-895 tunnel toll plaza and I-895 from the K-truss bridge over the CSXT railroad tracks located approximately 2,000 feet south of the existing toll booths to the southern tunnel portal, a distance of approximately 1.1 miles. The project area is bounded by the southern tunnel portal to the east, the K-truss bridge to the west, Frankfurst Avenue to the south and the Maryland Department of Transportation Maryland Port Administration property to the north.

Existing roadway conditions within the project area include low vertical clearance of the I-895 bridge over Frankfurst Avenue. The number of lanes along I-895 varies from two lanes in each direction at the K-Truss bridge, to seven lanes in each direction at the toll plaza, and two lanes in each direction prior to the tunnel portal. Northbound I-895 currently features a combined entrance ramp from Frankfurst Avenue and Shell Road prior to the toll plaza and an exit ramp to Childs Street after the toll plaza. Southbound I-895 currently features an entrance ramp from Childs Street prior to the toll plaza and an auxiliary lane providing exit ramps to Frankfurst Avenue after the toll plaza. As mentioned, there are 14 toll booths at the toll plaza.

The purpose of this project is to replace the existing toll booths at the I-895 Baltimore Harbor Tunnel toll plaza with overhead electronic gantries to allow the collection of tolls at highway speeds, to modify existing interchange ramps on I-895 at Frankfurst Avenue and Childs Street to meet highway speed criteria, to replace the existing I-895 bridges over Frankfurst Avenue and Childs Street, and to remove the existing I-895 bridge over the toll plaza campus storage area.

The needs for the project that have been identified include: providing reliable travel times by reducing traffic congestion and delay, improving safety for motorists and MDTA employees in the vicinity of the I-895 tunnel toll plaza, and improving customer service.

The proposed improvements remove the toll booths, install an overhead gantry, and provide two lanes of barrier separated mainline through traffic in each direction along I-895 between the K-Truss bridge and tunnel. In addition, a two-lane barrier separated collector-distributor road would be installed in each direction adjacent to the mainline traffic lane between the I-895 interchanges with Frankfurst Avenue and Childs Street. The intersection of Frankfurst Avenue and Shell Road would be re-aligned to allow replacement of the two entrance ramps to northbound I-895 from Shell Road and Frankfurst Avenue with a single entrance ramp from the re-aligned intersection, reducing the number of conflict points along I-895. The exit ramp from southbound I-895 to westbound Frankfurst Avenue would be removed and replaced with a ramp connection along the existing exit loop ramp to eastbound Frankfurst Avenue. Proposed mainline I-895 modifications include replacing and raising the I-895 bridges over Frankfurst Avenue and Childs Street, and removing the I-895 bridge over the toll facility campus storage area.

The proposed improvements address the project's purpose by: removing the existing 14 toll booths across I-895 and installing overhead gantries; adjusting locations and spacing of interchange ramps to accommodate current design criteria for vehicles traveling at highway speeds; and reconstructing the I-895 bridges over Frankfurst Avenue and Childs Street and removing the aging bridge over the toll plaza campus storage area.

The proposed improvements address the project's needs by: improving travel speeds from varying between 10 and 15 mph to a reliable 50 mph by eliminating vehicle queues and maintaining a consistent number of travel lanes on I-895 between the K-Truss bridge and the tunnel; improving safety by reducing crash risk and MDTA employee exposure to traffic flows; reducing risks of bridge strikes and associated repairs; and reducing fuel consumption and vehicle emissions by providing more constant travel speeds.

The proposed improvements are anticipated to involve minor impacts to natural environmental resources and may require some property from commercial and industrial properties adjacent to the existing roadways within the project area.

As the project design progresses, opportunities to avoid and minimize impacts to all resources and properties will continue to be evaluated.

Unavoidable impacts will be coordinated with the appropriate permitting agencies and mitigation will be identified.

Several environmental features exist within the Project Area. They have been identified using Geographic Information Systems desktop reviews, field surveys, and coordination with regulatory resource agencies such as the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Maryland Department of the Environment, Maryland Historical Trust and the Chesapeake Bay Critical Area Commission.

Identified environmental features include wetlands, which are areas covered by surface or ground water at a frequency sufficient to support a prevalence of vegetative or aquatic life that require saturated soil conditions for growth and reproduction.

Streams were also identified within the Project Area. In general, there are two types of streams; a perennial stream, which has water flowing year-round during a typical year, and an intermittent stream, which has flowing water during certain times of the year, typically on a seasonal basis.

Floodplain features exist and are land area susceptible to being inundated by water from any source.

Forest features exist and are biological communities dominated by trees and other woody plants covering a land area of 10,000 square feet or greater and having at least 100 trees per acre, with at least 50% of those trees having a 2 inch or greater diameter.

In 1984, to safeguard the Chesapeake Bay from the negative impacts of intense development, the Maryland General Assembly enacted the Chesapeake Bay Critical Area Protection Program, in an effort to control future land use development in the Bay's watershed. The ribbon of land within 1,000 feet of the tidal influence of the Bay was determined to be crucial because development in this "critical area" has direct and immediate effects on the health of the Bay. This feature exists with the Project Area.

The Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties is a repository of information on districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects of known or potential value to the prehistory and history of the State of Maryland. Historic properties have been identified nearby the Project Area.

Project investigations have not identified parkland or rare, threatened or endangered species within the Project Area. Additionally, air quality and traffic noise are being considered during this NEPA study. Air quality is anticipated to improve due to reduced congestion, and reduction in vehicles idling and accelerating at the toll booths. No roadway traffic noise impacts are anticipated.

The proposed improvements may require minimal property acquisition. A sequence of construction for the proposed improvements is being pursued that would avoid or minimize the need for detours and increased travel distance to and from I-895. The removal of the toll booths is expected to reduce travel time and delays through this portion of I-895 by providing consistent and increased travel speeds, while increasing safety by eliminating obstacles in the travel way.

The draft Environmental Document is anticipated Winter 2021 and the NEPA review is anticipated to be completed in the Spring of 2021. The project is also anticipated to reach the Preliminary Engineering milestone in the Spring of 2021 - meaning about 15 percent of the overall project design would be completed at that point. Preliminary and Final Design would continue through 2023 and then phased construction is anticipated to begin in 2024. Complete installation of the project is expected in 2027.

We welcome your feedback!

Please provide your comments by sending a completed comment card, which can be downloaded by clicking the Comment button on the project webpage at <https://mdta.maryland.gov/I895TollPlaza>, via e-mail to I895TollPlaza@mdta.maryland.gov or by U.S. Mail to the attention of Mr. Carl Chamberlin, Project Manager, Division of Planning and Program Development, Maryland Transportation Authority, 2310 Broening Highway, Baltimore, Maryland 21224. The comment period opened December 2, 2020. Please submit your comments by Wednesday, December 30, 2020.

Title VI, 42 USC, Section 2000d, was enacted as part of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Title VI-related statutes and regulations provide that no person shall on the ground of race, color, national origin, sex, English proficiency, or disabilities be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity.

Title VI ensures that public services, including transportation, are provided in an equitable and nondiscriminatory manner. Title VI also provides opportunities for public participation in decision-making without regard to race, color, or national origin, including populations with Limited English Proficiency (LEP).

Should you need LEP assistance or if you believe MDTA is not meeting the expectations of Title VI, you may direct questions, concerns, or file a complaint with Ms. Sherrie Davis, Title VI LEP Program Coordinator, by e-mail at sdavis18@mdta.state.md.us, by phone at 410-537-6714, or by mail at Division of Civil Rights and Fair Practices (CRFP), Maryland Transportation Authority, 2310 Broening Highway, Baltimore, Maryland 21224.

The Maryland Transportation Authority and Federal Highway Administration would like to thank you for your interest in the I-895/Baltimore Harbor Tunnel Toll Plaza and Interchange Improvements Project.

Please continue to monitor the project webpage for updates.

Should you wish to join the project mailing list to receive periodic updates via e-mail or U.S. mail, please sign-up using the comment card available on the project webpage.