

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

GENERAL NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY ACT (NEPA) STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What is the purpose of the I-495 Southside Express Lanes Study?

The purpose of the I-495 Southside Express Lanes Study (495 Southside Study) is to evaluate transportation improvements that would extend and provide continuity of the Express Lanes system on the I-95/I-495 Capital Beltway from the I-95/I-395/I-495 Springfield Interchange in Fairfax County, Virginia to the I-495/MD 210 (Indian Head Highway) Interchange in Prince George's County, Maryland.

The study area where the Express Lanes extension would potentially be implemented is shown below.

More information about the 495 Southside Study is available on VDOT's website at: <https://www.virginiadot.org/projects/northern-virginia/495southsideexpresslanes.asp>.



2. Why is the 495 Southside Study needed?

The 495 Southside Study is needed to evaluate transportation improvements that 1) provide Express Lanes system continuity, 2) provide additional travel choices, 3) reduce congestion and improve travel reliability, 4) improve safety, and 5) provide consistency with local and regional plans along the Capital Beltway.

3. Who is involved in the study?

VDOT is conducting the 495 Southside Study in cooperation with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and in close coordination with other federal, state, and local agencies in

Virginia and Maryland, including the Maryland Department of Transportation State Highway Administration (MDOT SHA) and Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT). VDOT will consider agency and public input throughout the development of the 495 Southside Study.

4. What is the scope of the 495 Southside Study?

To comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), VDOT is preparing an Environmental Assessment (EA) to analyze potential impacts from alternatives to extend the I-495 Express Lanes. Resources and topics to be addressed in the EA include land use, socioeconomics, environmental justice, visual quality, traffic, air quality, noise, water quality, wetlands and waterways, wildlife and habitat, threatened and endangered species, cultural resources and historic properties, hazardous materials, and indirect and cumulative effects. Development of the EA will include coordination with federal and state agencies in compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act, Sections 401/404 of the Clean Water Act, and other applicable federal and state regulatory requirements.

5. Are there plans to add Express Lanes to the I-495 in Maryland?

The study area for the 495 Southside Study includes portions of I-495 in Maryland from the Woodrow Wilson Bridge to near MD 210. Through the Op Lanes Maryland initiative, MDOT SHA is considering future improvements, including the implementation of managed lanes, on I-495 in Maryland. MDOT SHA recently published its *Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) for the I-495 & I-270 Managed Lanes Study (MLS)*, which considered managed (high occupancy toll) lanes for I-495 from the American Legion Bridge to MD 5. The Preferred Alternative for the MLS does not include improvements from east of I-270 to MD 5 at this time. Managed lane improvements in Maryland from I-270 to MD 5, or from MD 5 to MD 210 may still be needed in the future and would advance under a separate study. Additional information on Op Lanes Maryland and future phases can be found at: <https://oplanesmd.com/>.

6. What is the planned schedule for the 495 Southside Study?

The approximate study timeline is shown below. VDOT will coordinate with the public, federal, state, and local agencies, and other key stakeholders to inform them of the study and gather their input throughout the study process.



7. How can the public stay informed and provide input on the 495 Southside Study?

Current information about the 495 Southside Study and opportunities for public involvement is available on VDOT’s website at <https://www.virginiadot.org/projects/northern-virginia/495southsideexpresslanes.asp>. Stay informed about the 495 Southside Study by signing up

through the website to receive the monthly study newsletter, public meeting information, and other study updates via email.

The public is invited to provide input on the 495 Southside Study by email to 495southsideexpresslanes@vdot.virginia.gov using the subject line “495 Southside Study”.

495 SOUTHSIDE STUDY ALTERNATIVES AND IMPACTS

8. What alternatives are being evaluated?

VDOT is in the early stages of developing alternatives for the 495 Southside Study. Preliminary alternatives will be shared with the public during a series of in-person and virtual Public Information Meetings to be held in Fall/Winter 2022. It is anticipated that alternatives may include adding one or two Express Lanes in each direction along I-495 within the study area. All alternatives evaluated in the EA will be informed by public and agency input.

As required by NEPA, a no-build alternative will also be evaluated to establish baseline conditions and compare impacts from the build alternatives. Under the no-build alternative, only planned and programmed improvements and maintenance within the study area would occur.

9. Will the 495 Southside Study evaluate the addition of general purpose lanes (free / non-Express Lanes) along the corridor?

Alternatives that would add one or more general purpose lanes were preliminarily considered by VDOT during development of the 495 Southside Study. However, VDOT determined that Express Lanes would be more effective in providing safe, fast, and reliable trips through the study area while reducing congestion. Express Lanes would also provide additional travel choice for transit vehicles, carpoolers, vanpools, and other ridesharing options. Traffic and travel reliability could not be managed in general purpose lanes. Therefore, only alternatives that would potentially extend Express Lanes through the study area will be considered by the 495 Southside Study.

10. Will the 495 Southside Study consider additional access locations to the Express Lanes along I-495?

Yes. The 495 Southside Study will consider access locations to the Express Lanes at the South Van Dorn Street interchange and in the vicinity of U.S. Route 1 (Richmond Highway). Other access locations to the Express Lanes may also be considered as development of the build alternatives continues. Potential access locations will be presented as part of the build alternatives at public meetings to be held in Fall/Winter 2022.

11. Will pedestrian and bicycle facilities be considered in the 495 Southside Study?

Yes. VDOT is considering how proposed improvements to pedestrian and bicycle facilities identified in local planning documents could be addressed by alternatives being developed for the 495 Southside Study. VDOT is also reviewing local planning documents and will consider input from agencies and the public to identify the potential implementation of bicycle and pedestrian facilities in the study area.

12. Will the 495 Southside Study consider noise impacts and the implementation of noise barriers?

The 495 Southside Study will include a noise analysis that will identify noise sensitive areas and determine potential impacts along the corridor. Potential impacts will be identified by projecting the worst-case noise scenario into 2050 with and without construction of Express Lanes. The noise analysis and results will be documented in the EA and the study's Noise Analysis Technical Report. If noise impacts are anticipated, reasonable and feasible barriers to mitigate the impacts will be considered. Information about noise barriers and VDOT's noise regulation policy can be found at: <https://www.virginia.gov/projects/pr-noise-walls-about.asp>.

13. Will the 495 Southside Study include the analysis of local roads adjacent to I-495?

The study will evaluate the impact of Express Lanes on traffic operations at critical intersections adjacent to existing and potential new access points to I-495 and the Express Lanes.

14. Will reduced emissions from electric/hybrid vehicles be considered in the EA's air quality analysis?

Yes, VDOT will include a qualitative discussion of the influence of electric/hybrid vehicles in the study area during the EA's air quality analysis. This discussion will be included in the Air Quality Technical Report and EA.

15. How do I find out if my property will be affected by improvements?

VDOT is in the early stages of the 495 Southside Study. At this time, data is being collected and preliminary concept development is just getting started. As build alternatives have not been developed, potential impacts on property along the corridor are not known. VDOT will present the study's alternatives to the public at meetings to be held in Fall/Winter 2022. VDOT will refine the alternatives based on feedback received from the agencies and public over Winter 2022/2023 and in Spring/Summer 2023 VDOT will release the EA to the public. The EA will present a worst-case scenario for potential property impacts and these impacts may be refined in the future during detailed design of any improvements selected for implementation.

TRANSIT AND RAIL SERVICE**16. Will transit be considered as part of the alternatives evaluated in the 495 Southside Study?**

The 495 Southside Study will be informed by a separate transit study that is being conducted by the Virginia DRPT in coordination with the Maryland Transit Administration. The *I-495 Southside Capital Beltway Transit and Transportation Demand Management (TDM) Study* will identify potential multimodal solutions to reduce congestion, improve trip reliability and regional connections, and enhance existing and planned multimodal mobility and connectivity in the study area. Relevant recommendations from the DRPT transit and TDM study will be considered during the development of alternatives assessed in the 495 Southside Study. To learn more about this study, please visit DRPT's *I-495 Southside Capital Beltway Transit and TDM Study* website here: <https://www.drpt.virginia.gov/work-were-doing/i-495-southside-capital-beltway-transit-and-transportation-demand-management-study/>.

Alternatives regarding future land uses strategies, such as implementation of development that supports transit use (i.e., transit-oriented development) are outside the scope of the 495 Southside Study and will not be assessed in the EA.

17. Will rail be considered as an alternative in the 495 Southside Study? Is it an alternative in the DRPT Transit and TDM study?

Rail is not an alternative under consideration for the 495 Southside Study. However, future rail service on the bridge would not be precluded by 495 Southside Study alternatives.

Rail improvements across the Woodrow Wilson Bridge have not been identified in local and regional plans. DRPT's Transit and TDM Study will evaluate short-, medium-, and long-range options, including new transportation alternatives through transit and TDM enhancements that will increase mobility in the study area. Also see **Question 16** above.

18. How is the DRPT Transit and TDM study being coordinated with other rail and transit studies in this area?

DRPT is coordinating closely with transit and planning staff from local, state, and federal transit agencies, as well as regional transportation planning organizations during the Transit and TDM study.

19. Was the Woodrow Wilson Bridge designed to accommodate transit?

Yes. The design of the Woodrow Wilson Bridge included additional space for future transportation needs and was designed to accommodate future rail across the bridge. Alternatives evaluated in the 495 Southside Study will consider applicable recommendations from the Virginia DRPT Transit and TDM Study. Future rail service on the bridge would not be precluded by 495 Southside Study alternatives.

EXPRESS LANES IMPLEMENTATION AND OPERATION

20. How does VDOT plan to build and operate the potential Express Lanes extension? Would it be publicly or privately managed?

Currently, funding has only been allocated for the study of the potential improvements. If the study advances to a project, VDOT would move forward with implementation of the Express Lanes extension at which point a funding source would be identified. Options to build and operate the Express Lanes could include potential development and operation by either a private contractor or VDOT. All options would be considered.

21. How would the Express Lanes work?

If new Express Lanes are implemented, vehicles with three or more occupants would not have to pay to use the Express Lanes. A toll would be required to use the Express Lanes for vehicles with less than three occupants. The Express Lanes would be dynamic, managed lanes that would vary in price depending on the level of congestion to regulate traffic for faster, reliable, and predictable trips. This is consistent with the current operation of existing Express Lanes in Virginia. Motorists would continue to have a choice to use either the Express Lanes or the general purpose (free) lanes. The current number of general purpose lanes within the study area will not change if the Express Lanes are implemented.