

American Legion Bridge + I-270 Multimodal Improvements  
Maryland Department of Transportation – State Highway Administration  
Project Description

The project directly aligns with the goals of the Large Bridge Project program to improve safety, efficiency, and reliability of the movement of people, including transit riders and carpools, and freight over bridges; provide accommodations for bicycles and pedestrians; and improve the condition of bridges that do not meet current geometric design standards and traffic requirements typical of the regional transportation network.

The project begins south of the George Washington Memorial Parkway on I-495 to north of the MacArthur Blvd on I-495. The project corridor is one of the most congested in Maryland which impedes the safe and efficient flow of people, goods, and services including limiting interstate transit. The corridor includes the American Legion Bridge (ALB) which provides the crucial connection between Maryland and Virginia on I-495 and is currently one of the nation's largest traffic bottlenecks due to substandard infrastructure and inadequate capacity. The ALB can no longer accommodate daily traffic levels and is limited in its ability to support efficient transit, alternative transportation and active transportation options. While the bridge is safe, it will require repairs to rehabilitate its deck within the next decade – a disruptive construction activity that would further stress congestion on the already constrained bridge.

The current average annual daily traffic along the I-495 corridor is 253,000 with a projected increase to 289,000 by 2045. Maintaining the efficient operation of the ALB and the many other critical structures along these routes is of regional, as well as national importance, supporting economic vitality, freight mobility, and homeland security.

As part of the I-495 and I-270 Managed Lanes Study project as a whole, the corridor will be modernized by being brought into a state of good repair and accommodating future multimodal transportation efficiency. Approximately 72 lane-miles of general-purpose lanes, ramps, and side roads will be rehabilitated, 28 new lane-miles of high-occupancy toll lanes will be constructed, and 7 existing interchanges upgraded. This will improve traffic flow through the corridor now and in the future. To support this work, in the first phase of the project a total of 8 bridges, including the ALB, will be replaced and will be constructed to today's standards.

Due to the close spacing of each of the eight bridges in the project limits and limited width of bridges on the interstate such as the ALB, the inclusion of all eight adjacent bridges in the project is needed to safely and efficiently maintain traffic during the construction of all bridges and to provide for future transportation efficiency.

To support multimodal and active transportation opportunities, 3 miles of accessible sidewalks, 3 miles of accessible shared use paths, and 2 miles of bike lanes are being constructed or reconstructed to connect communities separated by the interstate. To mitigate community noise impacts, approximately 5 miles of new and extended sound barriers will be constructed, and 4 miles of existing sound barriers reconstructed.

While this project includes the replacement of multiple bridges in the corridor, the ALB is the largest bridge structure. The ALB opened in 1962 and is rated in fair condition for the superstructure and

substructure. In addition, the bridge deck is in need of replacement. The bridge is anticipated to drop into “poor” condition within a three-year period, a priority consideration of the Bridge Investment Program, unless the deck is replaced, and the concrete deterioration is addressed. The existing span is 1,404-feet in length and the typical section consists of a total of ten lanes with five lanes in each direction. The fifth lane in each direction is an auxiliary lane connecting the Clara Barton Parkway in Maryland and the George Washington Memorial Parkway in Virginia. The existing 138-foot-wide typical section includes 12-foot travel lanes with inside and outside shoulders between 2 and 3.5 feet in width with concrete traffic barriers.

The ALB will be replaced with a new, wider bridge on the existing center line to improve safety, reliability, and efficiency, and reduce overall maintenance costs. The widened bridge would meet current safety and geometric design requirements, provide width for the new High Occupancy Toll (HOT) managed lanes network including connecting to the existing HOT managed lane network in Virginia, and add a new protected shared-use path for bicycles and pedestrians, providing a key interstate link in the National Capital Region's pedestrian and bike network. HOT lanes will better accommodate high occupancy ridesharing passenger vehicles, vanpools, and buses, among other vehicles.

The proposed ALB structure will be a 1,404-foot span and consist of two separate bridge decks that can be constructed while the existing bridge is in use. The proposed typical section for northbound I-495 will include five 12-foot general-purpose lanes, two 12-foot HOT lanes plus an auxiliary lane for traffic merging from the George Washington Memorial Parkway, 4-foot buffer, 12-foot shoulders on both sides of the roadway. The proposed typical section for southbound I-495 will include five 12-foot general-purpose lanes, two 12-foot HOT lanes, 4-foot buffer and 12-foot shoulders on both sides of the roadway.

A minimum 14-foot shared use path will also be provided on the ALB to connect multimodal facilities in Maryland and Virginia, which will increase active transportation opportunities and access to multiple parks, residential areas, transit hubs and employment centers along I-495. Other bridges in the corridor will also accommodate bicycles and pedestrians. Bridges over the interstate will include bicycle and pedestrian facilities on the bridges and bridges on the interstate will be long enough to accommodate bicycle and pedestrian facilities on the arterial and local roadways to connect communities separated by the interstate. These expanded multimodal connections, within the corridor and beyond, are consistent with improvements and priorities identified in county master plans.

Free, general-purpose lanes will be maintained throughout the system and are open to all users. Transit vehicles, vanpools, and carpoolers with three or more passengers will be able to utilize the new HOT lanes at no charge, providing faster, more reliable transit service and encouraging the use of carpooling and vanpooling in the region. The Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA)'s Better Bus service redesign initiative proposes medium-frequency all day service and low-frequency overnight regional connector services that would use the ALB and benefit from dedicated infrastructure. In addition, the Fairfax County Department of Transportation's Fairfax Connector Route 798 will provide express bus service, starting in 2024, between the Tysons and Bethesda WMATA rail stations. MDOT is actively engaging with the public to guide additional transit operating investments on the corridor that may utilize the HOT lanes to include MTA commuter bus service. Single occupant vehicles who choose to use the HOT lanes will be required to pay the toll. The funds generated from the tolls will provide funding for transportation improvements throughout the corridor, including supporting regional expanded transit opportunities, that would not be funded otherwise.

Safety is a primary concern, and a crash analysis was undertaken. Over the three-year crash study period (2016 to 2018), nearly 1,000 crashes occurred along the I-270 West Spur and I-495 within the I-495 and I-270 Managed Lanes Study project limits in Maryland, with nearly 30% of those crashes resulting in injury or fatalities. Of these crashes, 75% were rear end and sideswipe collisions which are attributed to congested conditions and 53% of the crashes occurred during peak periods. In addition, 23% of the segments within the project limits have a crash rate higher than the statewide average, with some segments more than triple the statewide average. By reducing the congestion levels during peak periods and accommodating the projected increase in traffic, the unstable flow and stop/go conditions on the roadways will be addressed, leading to a reduction in the potential for these types of congestion-related crashes. The goal of the effort and this project is to upgrade aging infrastructure to a state of good repair to ease the travel burdens, increase travel time reliability, and provide a safe and efficient network for travelers.

The project has been under development since 2017. The Maryland State Highway Administration (SHA) undertook the I-495 and I-270 Managed Lanes Study under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) to address the state of good repair for the ALB simultaneously with the mobility challenges along the corridors including providing reliable transit service options in the corridor, enhancing access to transit hubs such as MARC and Metrorail stations, improving bicycle and pedestrian connections, and providing reliable options for carpoolers and other drivers.

I-495 is a critical facility in the national and regional transportation infrastructure system and is one of the most heavily traveled routes in the National Capital Region and in the nation. I-495 is designated as part of the National Highway System and the National Highway Freight Network, providing access for our national supply chain ([https://www.sddc.army.mil/sites/TEA/Functions/SpecialAssistant/STRAHNET/\\_STRAHNET%20101.pdf](https://www.sddc.army.mil/sites/TEA/Functions/SpecialAssistant/STRAHNET/_STRAHNET%20101.pdf)) and playing a vital role in connecting regional, as well as national markets along the I-95 corridor. Designated as part of the Strategic Highway Network (STRAHNET), the routes provide defense access, continuity, and emergency capabilities for movements of personnel and equipment in both peace and war.

The NEPA study resulted in a Record of Decision (ROD) in August 2022 for the Selected Alternative, a two-lane HOT managed lane network on I-495 and I-270 in each direction and across a new American Legion Bridge, which will include a protected shared use path connection across the bridge.

The Managed Lanes Study was coordinated with Virginia's 495 Northern Extension (NEXT) project, which is also focused on the implementation of multimodal strategies along I-495 and is currently under construction. This coordination ensures a multi-jurisdictional and coordinated approach to improving mobility within the National Capital Region.

On November 17, 2023, Governor Wes Moore signed Executive Order 01.01.2023.19 which authorizes state governmental units to consider project labor agreements and community benefit agreements for projects where the state commitment is \$20 million or more. The ALB project is being evaluated as a project labor agreement candidate by MDOT. If funded, the project will include strong labor standards and practices for good paying jobs that will ensure responsible bidders have capable workers available for the duration of the project.

<https://governor.maryland.gov/news/press/pages/governor-moore-signs-workforce-development-executive-order-for-state-public-works-projects.aspx>.

SHA has incurred significant costs to develop the current project scope of work. Leading up to October 2023, SHA has incurred a total of \$221.0 million to complete the environmental review and preliminary design activities to ready the project for implementation.