

# 4 SUMMARY OF PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT AND COMMENTS

## 4.1 PUBLIC COMMENT SUMMARY AND STATISTICS

As described in **Section 1.3**, the DEIS was made available for public comment for a period of 84 days, from February 23 through May 17, 2021. The MDTA afforded the public numerous options to comment on the document as shown in **Table 4-1**, below.

A total of 861 public comments were received during the comment period. The methods by which the comments were provided are summarized in **Table 4-1**.

**Table 4-1: Comment Methods**

COMMENT METHOD	NUMBER OF COMMENTS
Website	581
Email	188
Letter	8
Governor’s Website	37
Call-In Testimony	14
In-Person Testimony	33
<b>Total</b>	<b>861</b>

## 4.2 PUBLIC COMMENT TOPIC AREAS

The Bay Crossing Study team has categorized the most frequent topics included in the comments received, as shown in **Table 4-2**. The following sections summarize these topic areas. Note that because most comments addressed multiple categories, the total number of comments per category exceeds the total number of comments.

**Table 4-2: Public Comment Topics**

COMMENT TOPIC	NUMBER OF COMMENTS
Study Process and Purpose and Need	163
Corridor Alternatives Retained for Analysis (CARA)	597
Range of Corridor Alternatives and Modal and Operational Alternatives	398
Traffic	706

COMMENT TOPIC	NUMBER OF COMMENTS
Environmental Impacts	353
Engineering	130
General Support	23
General Opposition	67

This section includes a brief summary of the topic areas frequently mentioned in the DEIS public comments by category. **Section 4.3** provides a brief summary response. **Appendix A** includes the full text of every comment received, along with detailed summaries and comment responses by topic area. **Appendix C** includes a response to a report prepared by AKRF commissioned by the Queen Anne’s Conservation Association.

#### 4.2.1 Study Process and Purpose and Need

Comments in this category expressed concerns related to the Purpose and Need and the study process. Some comments stated that the BCS Purpose and Need was too limited and suggested alternate goals that could have been included. Another recurring theme noted concern over whether background information regarding current and expected congestion at the existing crossing justified the need for a new crossing. In particular, many comments suggested that factors not considered in the traffic analysis would affect the need for a new crossing, such as impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, future increases in telework, the impact of AET, and changes in commuting patterns.

Many comments noted concern with the tiered study process, specifically, questioning the level of detail and/or the qualitative analysis used to evaluate alternatives in the Tier 1 study. Some comments suggested that the Corridor Alternatives should have accounted for greater limits, because improvements would be needed along more extensive corridors. Comments expressed concerns that the study process prematurely removed alternatives such as the modal and operational alternatives (MOA) and the No-Build from consideration. Some comments expressed concern that the public or agencies, particularly local counties, were not given enough voice in the Study so far.

#### 4.2.2 Corridor Alternatives Retained for Analysis (CARA)

Numerous comments focused on either support or opposition to the CARA (Corridors 6, 7, and 8). Public opinion was most vocal regarding Corridor 7, with 127 comments expressing support for Corridor 7 as the MDTA-RPCA and 283 comments opposing Corridor 7. Corridors 6 and 8 both received fewer comments, most of which were in opposition to these alternatives.

Comments opposed to Corridor 6 presented concerns with traffic impacts to the local roadway network, local community, and potential impacts to the Bay. Many comments supporting Corridor 6 suggested that this alternative would provide a more direct connection to Baltimore and would help divert traffic away from Annapolis and the existing Bay Bridge corridor.

Comments opposing Corridor 7 were received primarily from residents of Annapolis, Amberly/Cape St. Clair, and Kent Island. Residents expressed significant concerns with additional traffic and infrastructure impacts along US 50 and the surrounding local network. Many of the residents opposed to Corridor 7 suggested that another Bay crossing should be placed elsewhere to divert some of the existing traffic and

provide an alternative route for emergencies, such as traffic incidents. There were numerous complaints about the existing local network traffic conditions that make daily trips difficult for residents during peak summer traffic times.

Supporters of Corridor 7 identified it as the most expedient, cost effective, and best alternative to address the existing and future traffic needs. Comments noted the efficiency of using existing infrastructure, which would minimize the impacts and costs for a new Bay crossing.

Comments opposed to Corridor 8 presented concerns with traffic impacts to their local roadway network, local community, and potential environmental impacts. Public input supporting Corridor 8 generally anticipated traffic from Virginia and the south to be diverted along the proposed corridor, thereby alleviating the existing traffic needs at the current Bay Bridge. Supporters also expect Corridor 8 would improve access to the beaches in Maryland. Some supported Corridor 8 because they believe it would bring needed economic development to the area.

#### **4.2.3 Range of Alternatives and MOA**

There were numerous comments suggesting other crossing locations or MOA that had been previously considered but dropped as stand-alone alternatives prior to the issuance of the DEIS. Most of these comments suggested that crossings farther north or south of the existing crossing would better divert the existing traffic and provide other benefits, such as economic development. Public comments also reflected support for alternative modes of transportation, including consideration for ferries or public transportation, reduction in carbon footprint, and sustainability. Some comments suggested that combinations of the MOA such as TSM/TDM and transit could be implemented instead of a new crossing.

#### **4.2.4 Traffic**

Some comments questioned the projected forecast and future need for a new crossing or additional transportation capacity and provided reasons such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the increase in teleworking, and recent implementation of AET at the existing Bay Bridge would reduce congestion. Comments questioned the methodology of the traffic forecasting and the data used to support it. Many of the traffic-related concerns referenced the existing traffic conditions along US 50, the existing and future impact to the local network, and potential future impacts associated with the CARA.

Comments also expressed concerns that the MDTA-RPCA would cause additional traffic problems along local roadways in Corridor 7. Traffic concerns unrelated to any CARA focused on existing and future noise impacts, impacts during construction, rerouting alternatives, and other constraints in the existing infrastructure to support any new Bay crossing. There was also concern over the potential effects on traffic from temporary bridge closures during maintenance, construction or emergency situations.

#### **4.2.5 Environmental Impacts**

Comments concerning environmental impacts were generally in the context of opposing one of the CARA, and worries about the removal of vegetation, increase in noise, and the impact to wildlife and natural resources. Many residents stated concerns about negative effects to their quality of life due to a new Bay crossing, including impacts to local community resources such as schools and parks, as well as their land values. Some comments questioned the value of adding transportation capacity with the forecast in sea

level rise and impacts to the Eastern Shore. Commenters expressed concern over potential impacts to Environmental Justice (EJ) communities from a new crossing, such as property, air quality, drinking water, public health, and other impacts to EJ populations.

#### 4.2.6 Engineering

Several comments offered questions and suggestions for potential engineering solutions, crossing types, typical sections and lane configurations, bridge design, and the construction of tunnels. Accommodations for pedestrians, bicyclists, and mass-transit were also requested for consideration.

#### 4.2.7 General Support

Comments in this category expressed general support for the Study, or for a new crossing, but did not indicate a preference among the Corridor Alternatives. Comments that supported the Study generally based their support on existing traffic congestion and safety concerns and believe that increased capacity is required to relieve existing local traffic congestion. Some comments expressed a sense of urgency, stating that a new crossing is needed as soon as possible.

#### 4.2.8 General Opposition

Comments included in this category indicated general opposition to the Study, opposition to the construction of a new crossing, or support for the No-Build. Many comments expressed concern that the environmental impacts from a new crossing would be too great, citing direct impacts to the Bay as well as potential new sprawl development on the Eastern Shore. Many expressed that a new crossing would not be worth the cost. Some stated a preference to divert taxpayer dollars to other priorities, such as transit, lower-impact alternatives, or projects in other areas. Many expressed opinions that TSM/TDM measures would be more cost-effective. Many comments indicated support for modal and operational alternatives such as transit, TSM/TDM, and ferries.

### 4.3 PUBLIC COMMENT RESPONSE SUMMARY

The Bay Crossing Study team has reviewed and considered all comments provided on the DEIS. This section provides a brief summary response to the prevalent themes of comments received on the Tier 1 DEIS. The full text of every comment received, as well as detailed summaries and comment responses by topic area, are provided in **Appendix A**.

The Purpose and Need for the Study has been established by MDTA and the FHWA to focus specifically on the extensively documented problems of traffic congestion at the existing Bay Bridge, an MDTA-owned facility. MDTA is responsible for evaluating and considering solutions to the existing problems at the MDTA facility. Thus, the Purpose and Need for the Study, and the transportation solutions proposed with the CARA and Corridor 7, emphasize traffic relief at the existing Bay Bridge. The decision to advance Corridor 7 in the Bay Crossing Study would not preclude separate studies with purposes that differ from the Bay Crossing Study's Purpose and Need.

With respect to the COVID-19 pandemic's potential long-term impacts on future traffic volumes, it is not possible at this time based on limited data to predict how future unforeseen changes such as increased

telecommuting could affect traffic volumes. However, preliminary data indicates that Bay Bridge volumes and congestion have largely returned to pre-COVID levels. Furthermore, it is not anticipated that any long-term changes to summer vacation travel would be affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The tiered NEPA review adopted by MDTA for the Study properly identifies impacts at a level of detail that is appropriate for regional planning decision-making across a broad geographic area. Greater detail on environmental impacts of a proposed alignment would be the subject of a potential future Tier 2 study. It should be noted that the intention of the Tier 1 phase is to identify the best corridor for potential new crossing infrastructure; however, the No-Build Alternative would still be considered in any future project-based Tier 2 study. Specific details of a potential new crossing, such as lane and crossing configurations, pedestrian and transit access and other considerations, would also be included in a Tier 2 study.

While some comments expressed skepticism that Corridor 7 would provide the greatest traffic congestion relief, the findings of the traffic analysis based on the best available data strongly indicate that Corridor 7 best meets the traffic relief goals of the Purpose and Need. Other solutions such as TSM/TDM, ferries and transit were also evaluated for the Bay Crossing Study and would continue to be evaluated in Tier 2 in conjunction with a new crossing. A future Tier 2 study would also consider combinations of various MOA as alternatives; these would be evaluated within the context of Corridor 7.

Concerns over whether potential additional capacity near the existing bridge would cause increased traffic on local roadways would be a focus of any Tier 2 study. At that time, MDTA would evaluate local roadway tie-ins in greater detail to ensure that no new traffic problems are created by a proposed new crossing. It is also likely that traffic relief from a new crossing would benefit local roadway networks, due to fewer backups and less cut-through traffic.

It is anticipated that any new crossing capacity over the Chesapeake Bay would lead to potential land use changes and development on the Eastern Shore. Corridor 7 is considered the most consistent with existing and planned land uses. A new crossing in Corridor 7 would add new capacity in close proximity to the existing roadway networks, rather than create substantial new highway facilities where only local roadways currently exist. Therefore, Corridor 7 would likely have the lowest overall impact on land use and development compared to the other corridors studied.