

December 13, 2017

Chair Bridget Newton
Transportation Planning Board
Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments
777 N. Capitol Street, Suite 300
Washington, DC 20002

Re: Long Range Plan Task Force Study

Dear Chair Newton and members of the Transportation Planning Board:

Thank you for your leadership in seeking to develop a more effective regional transportation plan through the Long Range Plan Task Force. We commend the Task Force and staff for their careful evaluation of 10 Initiatives as part of a regional long range transportation plan.

The Audubon Naturalist Society, along with many other groups and some individuals recently expressed support for the Regional Land Use Balance (RLUB) and Travel Demand Management (TDM) measures as the best options for our region. The task force report also identified the Additional Northern Potomac Bridge as the least effective among the ten packages in meeting regional challenges. With the attached document, we would like to demonstrate that a new bridge crossing also puts our region's drinking water at an unnecessary risk of contamination.

We recommend strongly against including the Northern Potomac Bridge crossing in the long-range transportation plan. As a local non-profit representing many conservation-minded residents in the greater Washington DC area, we appreciate the opportunity to express our concerns and provide this document to you and members of the Board for consideration.

Sincerely,

Lisa Alexander
Executive Director, Audubon Naturalist Society

Elyzabeth Earnley
Member, Audubon Naturalist Society

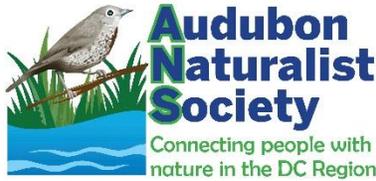
Attachments:

Fact Sheet: Northern Potomac Bridge Poses Significant Risk to our Drinking Water in the Metropolitan Washington Area

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FACT SHEET

Northern Potomac Bridge Poses Significant Risk to our Drinking Water in the Metropolitan Washington Area

According to studies conducted by VDOT,¹ the northern Potomac bridge would serve a very small percentage of commuter trips while the greatest need is at the American Legion Bridge and Rosslyn Metro tunnel. The northern bridge performed worst among ten packages of projects and policies for addressing regional transportation. Additionally, it would pose a significant threat to our area's drinking water supply.

Most of our region's drinking water supply (75%) comes from the Potomac River, serving over six million area residents. This source is fragile: it already requires treatment to meet water quality standards and has experienced periods of low flow. It's now at risk from longer periods of drought due to climate change.

The proposed northern Potomac bridge would create a new and unnecessary risk to this already fragile drinking water supply. Four of the region's drinking water intakes are downstream from the most frequently proposed northern bridge crossing, and an accident which leads to a major spill of gasoline or other toxic chemicals would directly threaten drinking water for the majority of the region's residents. If the intakes need to be shut down, we will have only 48 hours of drinking water supply without the Potomac.

Support residents and protect our water supply:

Do NOT include a new Potomac Bridge crossing in the long-range transportation plan.

Risks to our area water supply:

1. **A major highway bridge increases the likelihood of a chemical spill that could contaminate our drinking water.** In 1997², 1 out of 10 trucks in the US was transporting hazardous material. About half of those carried flammable liquids, such as gasoline, diesel fuel, and fuel oil. Accidents are common, and a study of data from 1991-2000³ found that the likelihood of a spill in the event of a crash was 50% higher for hazardous materials than non-hazardous.
2. **One tanker truck of hazardous material can contaminate an entire drinking water system.** A tanker can carry 5,500 to 11,600 gallons by volume. In January 2014, 10,000 gals of a coal cleaning fluid leaked into Elk River one mile upstream from a Charleston WV municipal water intake, which was not closed in time, resulting in the contamination of water

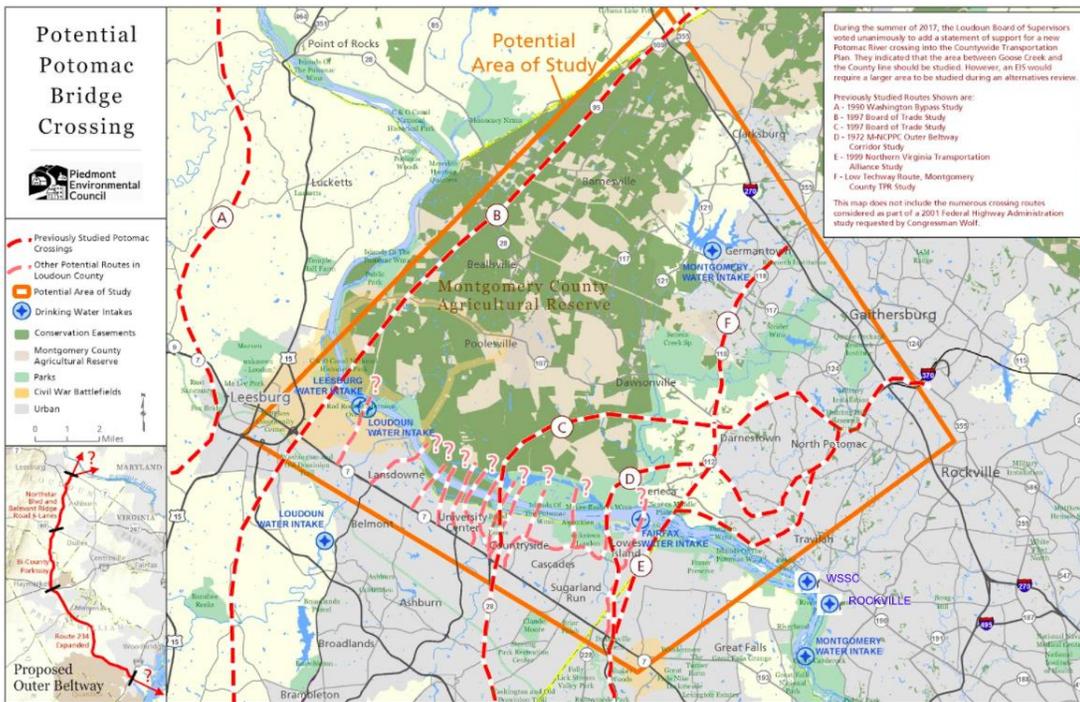
¹ <http://www.smartergrowth.net/virginia/outer-beltway/>

² <https://ntl.bts.gov/lib/51000/51300/51302/fmcsa-ri-04-024.pdf>

³ <https://ntl.bts.gov/lib/51000/51300/51302/fmcsa-ri-04-024.pdf>

for over 300,000 residents. These residents were without water for 9 days. Many continued to use bottled water for months after the spill because they no longer trusted the safety of their municipal tap despite official assurances⁴. In this instance, the tank was stationary, but it still took respondents 12 days to identify the exact contaminant mixture, which included a second previously unidentified coal processing contaminant⁵.

- 3. We could have less than a day to react before a spill contaminates municipal water intakes serving nearly 5 million area residents.** Based on a USGS river flow rate study⁶, a spill from a bridge at the Route 28 alignment⁷ could take approximately 9 hours to reach the Fairfax County intake serving 1.9 million residents; 21 hours to reach the WSSC intake, serving 1.7 million in Montgomery and Prince George's counties, including the cities of Gaithersburg and Germantown; 24 hours to reach the City of Rockville intake, serving 50,000; and 29 hours to reach the Washington Aqueduct intake serving approximately 1 million in the District of Columbia, Arlington County, Virginia, and the City of Falls Church. Bridge crossing proposals further downstream could cut in half the amount of time to respond for each of these intakes. A spill from a bridge farther upstream would additionally endanger the Leesburg and Loudoun water intakes, potentially leaving less than 3 hours to respond. A spill could also potentially contaminate the federally designated Piedmont Sole Source Aquifer⁸, which serves the residents and businesses in the Montgomery County Agricultural Reserve and also as a backup source for the District of Columbia.



⁴ <http://www.rollingstone.com/culture/news/dont-drink-the-water-west-virginia-after-the-chemical-spill-20140312>

⁵ <http://pubs.rsc.org/en/content/articlepdf/2017/ew/c5ew00294j>

⁶ https://www.potomacriver.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/Emergency-River-Spill-Model_Technical.pdf

⁷ <https://www.pecva.org/our-region/loudoun/growth-development-traffic/1317-potomac-bridge-crossing-maps>

⁸ <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-1998-02-06/pdf/98-3042.pdf>

4. **A spill requiring cleanup lasting longer than 48 hours could result in most of the Washington Metro Area being without water.** A cooperative of area water providers (CO-OP) under the ICPRB has made significant efforts to improve the response time and coordination of a spill response, resulting in many recent spills being handled without impact to the area's water supply. However, even if intake valves can be closed in time to prevent contaminants from entering the system, we currently have only 24-48 hours of water supply without the Potomac, according to Tom Jacobus, general manager of the Washington Aqueduct⁹. There are currently not enough backup supplies without significant infrastructure investment.

5. **Climate change could make backup water supplies less reliable during spill events.** Under climate change, droughts are predicted to be more frequent and longer, resulting in backup supplies being used more extensively. By 2040, it is predicted the area's most accessible alternative source, the Little Seneca Reservoir, could be drained during a drought¹⁰. What then if there is a spill? Other alternative sources already require a week to reach the area and could take longer if water flow levels are low due to drought.

⁹ <https://wtop.com/local/2016/12/md-quarry-solution-dc-water-supply-shortcomings/slide/1/>

¹⁰ <https://www.potomacriver.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/DemandStudyFactSheet-2015.pdf>