

# Would the Inter-County Connector Really Relieve Traffic Congestion?

"None of the ICC alternatives will have a substantial impact on the levels of service [congestion] experienced by motorists on the Capital Beltway, I-270 or I-95 within the Study Area."

ICC Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS), Vol. III, 1997, prepared by the Maryland State Highway Administration and the Federal Highway Administration

The real story of this year's election season ballyhoo about the ICC is that with or without this highway and with or without the "Go Montgomery Plan," traffic congestion will be worse in the future. Traffic on the Beltway is projected to increase by about 40 percent by the year 2020 with or without the ICC. Every ICC alternative would increase traffic on one or more stretches of I-95 in the ICC Study Area.

Proponents of this billion-dollar road often claim that it will reduce travel time countywide by 24 percent. What do the official studies say? In 1997, the ICC Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) modeled 529 countywide trips, which showed savings of only 2 percent of travel time with the ICC. However, the proponents picked only 11 of these trips to come up with their statement. And of these 11 trips, only one of the very few that go the full length of the ICC showed significant time savings, while the time savings realized in the other trips were miniscule. For example, the ICC saved only 3 minutes in a trip from West Gaithersburg to Wheaton.

The ICC would not significantly relieve traffic through local intersections. The DEIS modeled evening rush hour traffic volumes at 54 intersections within the Study Area, and of these only 15 would improve, while more than half of the 39 remaining intersections would be operating at the worst congestion levels. Moreover, the DEIS found that between 70 and 80 percent of all the travel for each of the ICC alignments studied (Northern, Master, and Midcounty) would be made at very congested condi-



*The Good Hope tributary, the primary wild trout spawning and nursery area for the entire Paint Branch fishery, near the Master Plan Alignment.*

tions during the rush hours. The DEIS even recognized that traffic flow through the intersections modeled could actually improve without the ICC, if, among other measures, strategic improvements are made at the intersections to increase the capacity, and if local land use policies change the development patterns from those that were assumed in the ICC study.

More recently, the Montgomery County Transportation Policy Task Force found that making changes in development patterns to balance the location of jobs and housing would significantly improve countywide travel time. The Task Force tested two scenarios for the years 2025 and 2050: a Transit and Balanced Land Use Scenario without the ICC, and a Roads Scenario with the ICC and no land use

changes. Countywide travel time was better in the scenario without the ICC.

A favorite myth of the ICC proponents is that the ICC would dramatically improve access to the airports. The Task Force tested various highway networks with and without the ICC and found that the ICC would do very little to improve auto travel to the airports. For example, the ICC would not change the auto travel time for trips from Wheaton to BWI or from Silver Spring to Dulles. And a trip from Dulles to Rockville would actually take more time if the ICC were built.

The source of our region's problem with traffic congestion is not a lack of roads like the ICC or the Techway. Rather, it is the abundance of poor land use policies, subsidies, and prejudices that have worked to the advantage of the automobile and the disadvantage of transit, as well as a lack of visionary planning for development that sustains instead of degrades our natural resources. How bad will our traffic have to become before we realize that we need to seriously invest in other forms of transportation and implement land use policies that promote sustainable development to preserve our environment and strengthen rather than destroy our communities?

## If We Say *NO* to the ICC, Then What Are the Alternatives? Here Are Some Ideas That Work

Los Angeles, which is consistently rated the city with the worst traffic congestion in the nation, has a staggering 909 miles of freeways and highways. Even *The Washington Post*, a constant booster of the false ideology of road expansion as the solution to commuting woes, admitted in a 1999 article that "widened highways generate their own traffic," citing the fact that "less than eight years after [the widening of I-270] was finished, the highway has again been reduced to what one official called 'a rolling parking lot.'" <sup>1</sup> The Maryland State Highway Administration's own Environmental Impact Statement projected that not only would the ICC not relieve Beltway traffic, it would actually increase local traffic congestion while fragmenting neighborhoods and destroying homes, forests, parks, streams, and floodplains. <sup>2</sup> Road building and road widening are an old-fashioned, discredited mid-20th century approach to the problems of the 21st century. Expensive and destructive, they compound the problem rather than alleviating it.


So what are the smart-growth-oriented alternatives? There are more of them than you may think, and they work. Here's a brief overview of just a few of the solutions that could be implemented in Montgomery County with the \$1.5 billion we'd save by not constructing the ICC.

Over 10 percent of the U.S. workforce already telecommutes full- or part-time, and the numbers are growing. Recent cost-benefit analysis shows that



*Wagon carrying equivalent of the pollution in the form of particulate matter that is generated by one eastern Montgomery County resident commuting to work in Tysons Corner for one year.*

employers can save up to \$14,388 per year by allowing an individual employee to telecommute part-time. <sup>3</sup> According to the 1999 Telework America National Telework Survey, employees who telecommute save their employers \$10,000 each in reduced absenteeism and job retention. And the benefits to the environment are even greater: if an eastern Montgomery County resident whose company headquarters is in Tysons Corner, Virginia, telecommutes full-time instead of driving his Saturn to the office, he'll save 5,075 pounds of CO<sub>2</sub> pollution per year, and 220 pounds of particulate matter, a current suspect in the 100 percent increase in American asthma rates over the last 30 years. If she telecommuted instead of driving her Ford Expedition to Tysons Corner each day, she'd save 10,520 pounds of CO<sub>2</sub>! Even if she worked from home



*My Backyard* is the newsletter of Eyes of Paint Branch, a grass-roots organization dedicated to preserving, protecting, and restoring the Paint Branch and its watershed.

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other way around..."

"We've looked at the InterCounty Connector -- and seen that it would be a disaster. Candidly, when we were first looking at it a decade ago, when I was first elected Governor, I supported it. But the more I got into the analysis of it, I said it made no sense. The environmental impact cannot be mitigated, it will be very serious. It's just not cost-effective. You are talking about at least a billion and a half dollars and the best analysis I've seen shows it will reduce about six minutes for people coming from central

Montgomery County and going to BWI Airport "

"I know people are out there running for various offices saying, 'Oh, I'll build the ICC.' But I think when they come to grips with what it really means, including the environmental impact, they'll realize it'll never be approved by the federal government. They'll understand we need to look at alternatives -- alternatives like better land use, more mass transit, and better utilization of our existing roads network -- including carefully thought-out and designed road construction.

## Eyes of Paint Branch Upcoming Events

Tuesday, September 10, 2002

### Primary Election Day

Vote for the environment and for the Paint Branch! Local government has the greatest impact on our work and most races are decided in the primary election, so please remember to vote!

Saturday, September 28, 2002

### Burtonsville Day 10am to 3pm

Join us in the Parade at 9:30am at Paint Branch High School or at our display at Columbia Park next to the Fairland Rec. Center.

Saturday, October 5, 2002

### Walk the ICC Master Plan route in the Good Hope Sub-Watershed 10am to noon

This route would cross the Good Hope Tributary right where the primary spawning grounds of the wild trout are located. See first-hand how this alternative would destroy the most ecologically diverse area of the entire Paint Branch watershed; the heart of the Special Protection Area. Public officials and candidates will be specially invited to this walk. Meet at Drew Elementary School  
Directions: North on New Hampshire Ave., Right onto Cape May Rd., then right onto Good Hope Rd., right onto Twig Rd., right onto Cavendish Rd., right into Drew Elem. parking lot.

Sat. & Sun., October 12 & 13  
Maryland Native Plant Society  
Annual Fall Conference

### "Native Plants, Natural Communities & Geology of the Fall Line of Maryland"

9am to noon

One of the field trips of this conference will be to the McKnew Bog of the Little Paint Branch watershed north of Fairland Regional Park. This area is threatened by the Fairland Golf Course Community proposal; details at: [www.mdflora.org](http://www.mdflora.org).

Saturday, November 9, 2002

### Tree Planting

Tree Planting with the Anacostia Watershed Society in the Upper Paint Branch watershed. Details in our next publication and on our web site calendar.

Thursday, November 14, 2002

### EOPB Quarterly Public Meeting 7:30 to 9pm

Join us in discussing the health of the watershed and planning future EOPB activities. Time will available for public input on specific concerns. Location will be listed in our next publication and on our website calendar.

because of unavoidable severe environmental impacts to sensitive stream valleys, wetlands, and wooded areas. Further, they suggested that a more northerly route along the ridgelines rather than through the stream valleys should be considered.

In the early 1990s proponents tried once again to dust off this old relic. Another ICC study was initiated which included a northern route. A Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) with the northern route as an option was issued in 1997. Federal environmental agencies again expressed their concerns about the environmental and social impacts of the old Alternate G (Modified) route, now labeled the "Master Plan Alignment." The Environmental Protection Agency gave the Master Plan Alignment their worst possible rating. The Army Corps of Engineers stated that they would never approve the needed permits for construction of the ICC on the Master Plan Alignment. The U.S. Department of the Interior and the Fish & Wildlife Service responded similarly.

Based on this response, the Maryland State Highway Administration announced that it would no longer pursue construction of a new roadway on the Master Plan Alignment between MD 197 (Georgia Avenue) and U.S. 29, the area through the Northwest Branch and Paint Branch Stream Valley Parks. The Federal Highway Administration concurred with this decision. Soon thereafter, the Montgomery County Council voted against all DEIS alternatives.

In the spring of 1998, Governor Glendening put the ICC on indefinite hold and appointed a panel of nationally renowned transportation and land use experts and local stakeholders, the Transportation Solutions Group (TSG), to take a fresh look at short- and long-term solutions to the transportation needs in the area. In July 1999 the TSG stated that priority should be given first to vehicle travel reduction, and unanimously recommended a package land use, transit, and travel demand management measures. This included economic incentives for taking mass transit or car pooling and living close to jobs, reclaiming brown-fields (old industrial sites), building bicycle and pedestrian amenities, improving bus service, and studying the possibility of a Metrorail purple line. The TSG voted against building the ICC at one point, but later endorsed the concept of a value-priced, parkway-like roadway between I-270 and I-95 on a split vote. The Group could not agree on a route for this roadway. A TSG Minority Report pulled together the integrated land use and transportation strategies that were unanimously endorsed by the TSG.

On September 22, 1999, Governor Glendening announced his long-awaited decision on the ICC. The



*A fully functional wetland, as indicated by vegetation, in the Good Hope sub-watershed, near the ICC Master Plan Alignment.*

Governor stated "I will not build the InterCounty Connector. As far as I am concerned, there is no ICC!" He stated that he would sell the properties the state has acquired for the northern alignment to prevent the road from ever being built there, and would recommend that the property along the master plan alignment be reserved for parkland and mass transit. He also proposed building two new parkway roads, one at the west end of the proposed ICC route and the other at the east end. The state would also pay for major intersection improvements throughout Montgomery County in an effort to ease traffic congestion. Governor Glendening also stated that "With regard to the Master Plan Alignment, specifically the section including the Northwest Branch and Paint Branch, again, the Federal environmental agencies have made it very clear to us that because of the severe environmental impacts, they will never approve a roadway in this area. Also, the Transportation Solutions Group's studies show that building such a connector would have a minimal -- I repeat minimal -- impact on Beltway traffic in any significant way. It would not relieve Beltway traffic."

On March 5, 2002, the Montgomery County Council voted against supporting a non-binding state legislative resolution to restart the draft environmental impact study (DEIS) for the Inter-County Connector. "This Council agrees with Governor Glendening and with our colleagues on the Prince George's County Council. The ICC would be very destructive to the environment -- however it is built -- and would do precious little to relieve traffic congestion."

In August 2002 the county cable channel featured an interview with Governor Glendening. Excerpts on the ICC include:

"We have a disproportionate amount of investment in roads over transit. Let's use really good land use to build communities, then figure out the roads we need -- not the

only 2 days a week and drove that SUV the other 3 days, she would save 4,208 pounds of CO<sub>2</sub> per year.<sup>4</sup> And obviously, every car off the road is one less car adding to our rush-hour traffic.

Contrary to popular belief, high-tech jobs are not the only occupations that lend themselves to telecommuting, though of course the D.C. metropolitan area has tech jobs in abundance. Researchers, writers, graphic artists, accountants, lawyers, consultants, administrators, and engineers; anyone who has a job that includes time spent independently preparing reports or proposals or compiling data and research, or making phone calls, is a potential telecommuter.

Telecommuting offers numerous benefits to both employers and employees including reduced absenteeism, increased productivity, lower overhead costs, a better work-family balance, reduced stress and of course, reduced commuting time and expense.<sup>5</sup>

The Maryland Department of Transportation, in collaboration with the Baltimore Metropolitan Council and the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments, already sponsors a little-known Telework Partnership with Employers that offers free professional services to Maryland companies interested in setting up telecommuting programs, and more should be done to promote this program. Prince George's County has several Telework Centers that provide videoconferencing, faxing, copying, printing, and voicemail systems to workers who commute a short distance to the center instead of working in a distant office -- that Montgomery County has not yet established similar centers is astonishing. Furthermore, the county could look to D.C. and Northern Virginia, where a 2-year pilot program "eCommute," funded by a federal grant and run by the nonprofit, bipartisan National Environmental Policy Institute, encourages businesses to contribute to environmental quality by providing tax incentives for allowing employees to telecommute.<sup>6</sup>

#### *Build the Inner Purple Line*

This proposed 14-mile, suburb-to-suburb light rail line would not only save time for existing transit riders but also inevitably bring more commuters out of their cars and on-board Metro. The Sierra Club estimates that 160,000 to 200,000 riders would use the Purple Line every day -- that's equivalent to the carrying capacity of two to three highway traffic lanes.<sup>7</sup> As William Miller, President of the American Public Transportation Association, explained in his May 23, 2001, testimony before the House Highways and Transit Subcommittee, modern mass transit solutions like the Purple Line are not a matter of "just talking about

more buses or more trains, but rather about ways to improve the way we live. Transit rail lines can provide a nucleus for high-density urban growth, giving workers the option to live near jobs, replacing congested highway miles with transit trips and easy walking distances."<sup>8</sup>

In addition to construction of the Purple Line, existing parking structures adjacent to popular suburban Metro stops should be expanded, and a portion of the gasoline or automotive sales tax could be used to expand the program of free bus rides on Code Red bad air days to include Metrorail itself.

#### *Enhance Existing Mass Transit with Shuttle Bus Service and Provide Unlimited Alternate Rides Home to Car and Van Poolers*

In cities across America, socially responsible businesses, in cooperation with local transit authorities, provide free shuttle buses from light and heavy rail stations directly to their employment centers. In San Jose, eleven shuttle routes take transit users to major business parks, downtown hotels, and San Jose State University. IBM's light rail shuttle, for example, combines fixed-route service during peak commuter hours with demand-response service in the off-rush hours, while Lockheed Martin operates its own network of employee shuttle buses.<sup>9</sup> And in Mercer County, New Jersey, leading employers like Janssen Pharmaceutical, Merrill Lynch, and Educational Testing Service participate in a "Home Free Program" for employees who carpool, vanpool, take mass transit, bike, or walk to work. Anytime these workers have to work late or leave early due to illness or a family emergency, they can take a free private car service home -- drivers will even make intermediate stops at schools and daycare centers.<sup>10</sup>

Montgomery County, with our many empty HOV lanes begging to be filled by multiple-occupant cars, vans, and private buses, could encourage its existing employers to create similar programs through tax incentives, and could require them from any large businesses that wish to construct new office complexes outside of city centers.

#### *Expand and Promote Carsharing Programs*

Many residents who live in town and city centers in the Washington, D.C., metro area and already use mass transit feel compelled to own and maintain a car just for those rare trips to the mountains on the weekends or so they can run errands during the workday. Zipcar and Flexcar programs allow participants who pay an annual fee and security deposit to borrow from a fleet of cars kept at Metro stations and use them on an occasional, as-needed basis.

Arlington County, Virginia, pays the \$25 application fee for residents, and the City of Alexandria gives participants in carsharing programs \$105 towards their first year's membership fee. Montgomery County should do the same.

### *Encourage Flex Time*

Companies could actively encourage their employees to adopt staggered work schedules. While not providing the antipollution benefits that telecommuting, mass transit, or ride sharing does, flex time would greatly ease the traffic congestion that surrounds the hours of 9 AM and 5 PM. More flexible work hours would also be helpful to households with two working parents.

### *Deciding to Live Where You Work/Work Where You Live*

The most obvious solution to long and congested commutes is perhaps the most unexplored: incentives to help individuals chose to live near their places of employment, and its corollary, incentives to businesses who make it easier for their workers to do so. Companies could provide financial assistance through low interest loans or no-closing-cost mortgages to employees who live within a prede-

finied radius. The county could offer property tax deductions to people who telecommute or who move closer to their offices. Large corporations with multiple offices in the area could make it possible for two employees who do the same or similar jobs to swap locations in order to cut down on their commute.

### *Notes*

1. "Md.'s Lesson: Widen the Roads, Drivers Will Come," The Washington Post, Jan. 4, 1999; Page B1.
2. [www.iccfacts.com](http://www.iccfacts.com).
3. International Telework Association and Council, October 1999, as quoted in "Myths and Reality: eCommuting and Clean Air" at [www.ecommute-nepi.org/faqs.html](http://www.ecommute-nepi.org/faqs.html).
4. Calculate your potential pollution savings at [www.att.com/telework/calculator.html](http://www.att.com/telework/calculator.html).
5. [www.teleworksmart-md.org/benefits.htm](http://www.teleworksmart-md.org/benefits.htm).
6. [www.ecommute-nepi.org/newindex.html](http://www.ecommute-nepi.org/newindex.html).
7. [www.smartergrowth.net/community/purpleline/benefits.php](http://www.smartergrowth.net/community/purpleline/benefits.php).
8. Testimony of the American Public Transportation Association before the Highways and Transit Subcommittee on May 23, 2001 ([www.apta.com/govt/record/aptatest/solutions.html](http://www.apta.com/govt/record/aptatest/solutions.html)).
9. [www.vta.org/services/light\\_rail\\_services.html#rail\\_shuttles](http://www.vta.org/services/light_rail_services.html#rail_shuttles).
10. [www.gmtma.org/transit.htm](http://www.gmtma.org/transit.htm).

## An Environmentally Sensitive ICC?

As the 2002 elections draw near, there has been increased talk about the need to build the ICC *in an environmentally sensitive way*. Yet there is no attempt by ICC proponents to explain what "environmentally sensitive" means. Platitudes to the promise of American ingenuity, such as the published statement of a local candidate that proclaimed "if we can put a man on the moon we can build an environmentally sensitive ICC," do nothing to provide further insight into how this task could be successfully accomplished.

Rather than relying on groundless speculation that supports wishful thinking, it is important to consider the facts. The ICC's failure over the past 40 years is directly related to its failure to comply with federal, state, and local environmental laws and statutes -- that's a fact. In addition, numerous studies over the years have cataloged the facts regarding the irreparable environmental impacts the ICC would cause. Here's a brief list from those studies of what the ICC would do:

Cut across and severely degrade six watersheds: Indian Creek, Little Paint Branch, Paint Branch, Northwest Branch (of the Anacostia River), North

Branch Rock Creek, and Rock Creek (main stem).

Bisect the largest, most biologically diverse, and most unspoiled forests and wetlands left in eastern and central Montgomery County, including the Upper Paint Branch Special Protection Area and the Needwood North Biodiversity Protection Area.

Add sediment, heat, and chemical pollution to streams, leading to a reduction in aquatic species.

Destroy over 100 acres of functional wetlands.

Eradicate floodplains that store floodwaters, causing increased erosion to our already stressed stream banks.

Eliminate vital recharge zones that filter and release cool, clean water into our streams.

Bisect, in its Northern Alignment, the Agricultural Preserve and the part of the Patuxent watershed that provides our drinking water.

Contribute to increased air pollution as a result of the increased congestion it would bring.

Pave over critical breeding habitat for amphibians.

Fragment forests, devastating over 1,000 acres of increasingly rare habitat for 21 species of forest-interior-dependent songbirds.



Naturalist John Parrish with frog eggs from a wetland next to the Good Hope tributary, near the Master Plan Alignment (above). Two generations of volunteers planting trees next to the ICC Master Plan Alignment (right).



## A Short History of the ICC: An Idea Whose Time is Past

Proponents of the ICC often say that it should be built because it has been in the county's master plan for many decades. What they don't say is how it got there.

The concept of an outer circumferential freeway originated in the early 1950s. Planners picked a radial distance from the inner city and charted a route that linked the least developable areas. In general the high, dry areas are the first to be developed, and the low, wet areas (like stream valleys) are the last to be developed. Consequently, the resulting route cut through the middle of stream valleys and across six different watersheds.

In the 1960s this route was identified as the Outer Beltway and was included in the state's 20-Year Highway Needs Inventory. But as scientists learned more about the importance of protecting natural areas, laws such as the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969 instituted prohibitions against building roads through parks, wetlands, and sensitive resources. In the 1970s, the concept of an Outer Beltway was dropped from planning documents, but the portion of such a facility between I-270 and the Baltimore Washington Parkway known as the Inter-County Connector (ICC) was retained. No studies to justify the need for this road or determine its effectiveness were conducted, nor was there any public process. In the 1980s a Preliminary Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) was completed for the proposed ICC along the Alternate G (Modified) route. The federal regulatory agencies clearly stated this route was unacceptable

Eliminate the last-remaining east-west wildlife corridors in the eastern and central parts of the county, increasing instances of wildlife roadkill.

Destroy several champion trees in the ICC right-of-way, as well as habitat for rare and uncommon plant species.

Some ICC proponents have proposed using end-on construction to reduce the damage. But the Environmental Protection Agency has said that "end-on construction would not effectively mitigate the impacts of the Master Plan Alignment" and that "regardless of the construction technique employed," "the highway corridor would fragment large contiguous forested areas, adversely impact the stream valley parks, [and] generate potentially polluting stormwater runoff."

All of the assertions presented here are well documented in public and private reports and correspondence. For more information on any of these points, please see the ICC section on our Web page ([www.eopb.org](http://www.eopb.org)), or contact Eyes of Paint Branch.

We recommend the next time you hear someone saying we need an ICC that can be built in an environmentally sensitive way, provide them with these facts and ask whether they consider these outcomes to be environmentally sensitive.

# The Mythology of the ICC

Reading the press coverage of Montgomery County's election campaigns, I'm reminded of a course I took called "Problems of Democracy." In this course I learned about the various techniques of political propaganda and how to sort through it to get to the real issues. One of these techniques, called the "Big Lie," was to keep repeating something so often that it becomes an accepted "truth." This election season, our "Big Lie" is that the ICC will relieve traffic congestion on our roads.

Numerous candidates for local and state offices have been calling for another study of the ICC, and many have said that it is the only way to relieve our congested roads. One after another, candidates and newspapers keep talking about our awful transportation mess and how one project above all others will ease our pain. These statements are gaining acceptance among the public. Recent polls have shown that two thirds of the people in Montgomery County want the ICC.

But the real story of the ICC is, as studies have shown, that congestion will be worse if it is built. In addition, the ICC would provide the access needed to open up vast, currently undeveloped tracts of land at its endpoints to sprawl development, resulting in a compounding of congestion.

Eyes of Paint Branch has always been interested in the ICC because various alternatives go right through the headwaters of the watershed, a designated Special Protection Area. We have examined all of the official studies on this proposed highway and present the facts to you in this special edition of our newsletter.

While the proponents of the ICC always talk about the supposed benefits, they never talk about the costs. The direct environmental costs are so great as to be virtually incalculable, and the indirect environmental costs, such as increased air pollution and runoff, have not even been studied. The enormous fiscal costs mean that other worthwhile projects would go unfunded. And the social costs of fragmented communities and sprawl development that will follow will also exacerbate all of the other problems as we come full circle.

The polls would be very different if the public knew the facts and not the mythology of the ICC.

Robert Ferraro, President

myBACKYARD

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