

MDOT Head Declares Congestion 'Emergency,' Gov. Hogan Asks Lawmakers To Support Parkway's Handover

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Maryland Transportation Secretary Pete Rahn called Maryland's traffic problems "an emergency."

"This issue of congestion which is choking our quality of life and it's choking opportunities for businesses to operate efficiently," Rahn said in a press conference at the State Highway Administration offices in Hanover. "If we do

not act, those commute times are going to grow longer."

The state's commutes routinely rank among the longest in the country.

"We have, I believe, a congestion emergency within this state," Rahn said.

Rahn said part of the solution will include the state taking over much of the Baltimore-Washington Parkway. On Wednesday, Gov. Larry Hogan sent a letter to the congressional delegation urging them to support the transfer of the federal portion of the Baltimore-Washington Parkway from the National Park Service to the state government. Rahn said an act of Congress was needed to facilitate the handover.

"We want to take over the road because it is the best way to take care of the road," Hogan wrote, noting billions of dollars of maintenance backlogs throughout the NPS.

Right now, the state maintains the parkway only between the Baltimore Harbor Tunnel Thruway and Maryland Route 175, with the park service controlling the 30 miles from there to the Capital Beltway. Transferring that stretch would allow state officials to increase safety and ease commutes by adding capacity and building express toll lanes.

"This project would not only improve the quality of life for millions of Maryland drivers, but also greatly benefit our regional economy by reducing transportation costs and expanding travel options," Hogan wrote.

Recently, the park service reduced the speed limit on a portion of the highway from 55 to 40 mph, citing "poor road conditions." That led Sen. Chris Van Hollen to write to NPS Acting Director Dan Smith, calling on that agency to expedite pothole repairs. A project to repave the highway from Routes 197 to 198 is set to begin in the fall, but officials say they're looking into short-term solutions.

"It is an unsafe situation that needs to be remedied immediately through expedited action by the National Park Service and its federal partners," Van Hollen wrote.

Rahn said transit investments can also play a role in solving congestion.