

A Report to the Maryland General Assembly

and

the Governor's Office

regarding

**Maryland Transportation Authority – Video Tolls -
Collection**

(Ch. 547, Senate Bill 973, Section 2, p. 8)

MSAR# 11744

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Maryland Department of Transportation
Maryland Transportation Authority

The Maryland Transportation Authority (MDTA) prepared this report in response to statutory language contained in Senate Bill 973 (Chapter 547) which was signed into law by Governor Hogan on May 8, 2018. The language states:

“SECTION 2. AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, That, on or before December 1, 2020, the Maryland Transportation Authority shall report to the Governor and, in accordance with §2-1246 of the State Government Article, the General Assembly on its progress in improving access to its customer service operations, including enhanced use of e-mails, text messaging, and other methods of wireless communications.”

PROFILE OF THE MDTA

The MDTA was established in 1971 by the Maryland General Assembly to finance, construct, operate, and improve the State’s toll facilities, as well as to finance new revenue-producing transportation projects. The MDTA acts on behalf of, but is separate from, the Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT). The MDTA helps support MDOT’s mission to be a customer-driven leader that delivers safe, sustainable, intelligent, and exceptional transportation solutions to connect its customers to life’s opportunities. The MDTA’s nine toll facilities – four bridges, two tunnels, two turnpikes, and one express toll lanes (ETL) – connect Marylanders to life’s opportunities.

The MDTA is a self-sufficient non-budgeted State agency and receives no money from the State’s General Fund or the Transportation Trust Fund. The MDTA is exclusively financed by toll revenues, and such revenue is reinvested in the operation and maintenance of the toll facilities. The MDTA’s Trust Agreement, between the MDTA and its Trustee, is for the benefit of bondholders and outlines how these funds may be used. The work of the MDTA is handled by its more than 1,700 employees encompassing eighteen functional areas.

SCOPE OF REPORT

The MDTA is committed to quality and excellence in customer service. In accordance with the legislation, the scope of this report covers activities and initiatives the MDTA has undertaken to improve access to its customer service operations. Where there is comparable data, this report covers Calendar Years (CY) or Fiscal Years (FY) 2018, 2019, and includes available data for 2020. In some instances, data is tracked on either a Fiscal Year or Calendar Year basis.

Of the eighteen functional areas within MDTA, Facility Operations, Traffic Management and Support Services, Communications, *E-ZPass*® Operations, and MDTA Police are the primary customer facing departments.

Facility Operations is responsible for the operation, management, and maintenance of the MDTA’s facilities, to include MDTA’s roadway courtesy patrols, as well as the collection, disposition, and safeguarding of toll revenue. Traffic Management and Support Services

manages the MDTA's Operations Center and telecommunications and public safety radio systems and equipment, which includes the MDTA's 1-877-BAYSPAN (229-7726) telephone traffic advisory system. The Division of Communications serves as the official voice of the MDTA for the media and the public, and manages the MDTA communications, public outreach, and education efforts. *E-ZPass* Operations is responsible for planning, directing, managing, operating, and maintaining Maryland's electronic toll collection system. Its functions include overseeing electronic toll operation contract vendors, *E-ZPass* customer service operations, and electronic toll collection quality assurance and data reporting.

ROADSIDE CUSTOMER SERVICE

Courtesy Patrols - Vehicle Recovery Units (VRU)

MDTA Courtesy Patrols are vital to customer service and safety on our roadways through working to minimize the risk of crashes and congestion from stopped vehicles. They assist drivers with disabled vehicles and provide fuel, tire changes, and other minor repairs. Additionally, MDTA Courtesy Patrols assist with incident-management efforts and tow disabled vehicles, keeping traffic moving; this is especially crucial during daily peak travel times, holiday travel periods, and weather or construction events. Patrols are staffed by the MDTA's Vehicle Recovery Unit (VRU).

Vehicle Recovery Units provide 24/7 coverage at the Bay Bridge, Key Bridge, Hatem Bridge, Baltimore Harbor Tunnel, and Fort McHenry Tunnel, plus peak-travel coverage at the Kennedy Highway (I-95) and the ICC/MD 200. Units are equipped with Automated External Defibrillators (AED).

In FY18, MDTA Courtesy Patrols assisted the drivers of 8,400 disabled vehicles and changed more than 6,400 flat tires. The unit logged more than 36,400 assists, more than 450 towed vehicles, and more than 1.2 million patrol miles. In FY19, MDTA Courtesy Patrols assisted drivers of 7,398 disabled vehicles, changed more than 6,200 flat tires, and logged more than 34,400 assists. In FY20, the unit logged more than 33,337 assists which included more than 289 towed vehicles, more than 5,700 flat tires changed, and 6,599 disabled vehicle assists.

Commercial Vehicle Safety Unit (CVSU)

The Commercial Vehicle Safety Unit (CVSU) includes uniformed MDTA Police officers, civilian motor carrier inspectors, and police cadets. In CY18, the CVSU inspected 25,515 vehicles and of those, 2,985 vehicles were found to be overweight, which negatively impacts their safe operations. The unit took 5,697 vehicles and 2,112 drivers out-of-service to help preserve our roadways and facilities and keep our customers safe. In CY19, the CVSU inspected 25,885 vehicles, of which 2,818 vehicles were found to be overweight. The unit took 6,102 vehicles and 2,743 drivers out of service to help preserve roadways and keep customers safe.

MDTA Police Communications Unit

Supporting both police personnel and the public, the MDTA Police Communications Unit coordinates delivery of emergency services for the MDTA Police and the MDOT Maryland Aviation Administration Fire/Rescue. Three centers are staffed 24/7 by trained emergency dispatchers and are designated for the Baltimore Metro area, BWI Thurgood Marshall Airport, and the Nice/Middleton Bridge. In CY18, the Police Communications Unit handled 304,452 calls for service and 3,970 calls from emergency management and fire. In CY19, MDTA Police Communications Unit handled more than 281,800 calls for service and 4,402 calls for emergency management and fire.

E-ZPASS® CUSTOMER SERVICE AND OUTREACH

In April 2020, the MDTA marked 21 years of electronic toll collection in Maryland. In those 21 years, *E-ZPass* use has consistently grown each year. More than 2.5 million *E-ZPass* Maryland transponders are on the move, and 81 percent of all traffic at MDTA facilities uses *E-ZPass* to pay tolls electronically. In February 2018, the MDTA launched a new *E-ZPass* Maryland mobile friendly web site to provide customers with more-convenient access to their accounts via <https://www.ezpassmd.com/>.

The MDTA continues to enhance customer service and tolling operations at its facilities. The MDTA revamped its Customer Service Centers with a consistent look and feel including purple paint treatments, stanchions, rugs, posters, materials, and more to enhance customers' experiences when visiting the centers. *E-ZPass* Operations continues to take measures to help alleviate its customer inquiry backlog, including increasing staff, streamlining processes, and implementing new waiver guidelines, which were developed to increase the account specialists' ability to quickly resolve issues and provide an elevated level of customer service. As more of these changes are implemented, and with the transition to the 3G Tolling System in 2021, the MDTA anticipates timeliness and service quality will continue to improve.

During the timeframe included in the scope of this report, the vendor Conduent is responsible for providing *E-ZPass* customer service. As part of Conduent's contract with the MDTA, certain customer service requirements must be satisfied. These service level standards cover call center performance, transaction payment/processing, transponder distribution/return, account maintenance, violation processing, and system processing. It should be noted that COVID-19 impacted the contractor's ability to meet all the standards. The attached table that accompanies this report provides a listing of the required service level requirements.

In June of 2018, Conduent expanded its communications to *E-ZPass* account holders using email notifications. *E-ZPass* account holders now receive email alerts notifying them of low account balances or insufficient account funds, the need to update an address, and renewal reminders for the discount Hatem A and B plans. In the first month the email notification system was in place, 398 emails alerts were sent to customers. By the end of FY19, the average number of emails

sent on a monthly basis increased to 5,022. Throughout all of FY19, 2,484,100 email alerts were sent to *E-ZPass* customers and this number increased in to 2,866,525 in FY20.

In September 2018, the MDTA expanded access for customers with the opening of its fourth MDOT MVA *E-ZPass* Maryland Customer Service Center at the MVA Bel Air branch. In CY19, *E-ZPass* Maryland Customer Service Centers operated in a total of four MVA locations: Bel Air, Beltsville, Gaithersburg, and Glen Burnie. In October 2020, two additional MVA *E-ZPass* Maryland Customer Service Centers opened to the public – Annapolis and Waldorf – for a total of six MVA *E-ZPass* Maryland Customer Service Centers currently in operation. At all locations, customers can sign up for *E-ZPass* Maryland, update their account, pay video tolls, and have face-to-face interaction with a customer service representative.

In September 2018, the MDTA extended the hours of operation at its *E-ZPass* Maryland Customer Service Centers until 6:30 p.m. on the second and fourth Monday of each month, and the *E-ZPass* Customer Service Centers located at the MVA branches have extended hours every Thursday; however, MVA *E-ZPass* Customer Service Center operating hours have been impacted by COVID-19 and, therefore, adjusted.

E-ZPass Outreach Activities

The MDTA continues to look for ways to enhance the experiences of customers. The MDTA's *E-ZPass* Outreach Team's purpose is to provide *E-ZPass* Maryland information and On the Go Transponders to large employers, community groups, and civic organizations.

During CY18, the *E-ZPass* Outreach Team processed 2,058 transponders and shared information with almost 4,200 citizens during 105 local events and visits with businesses. In CY19, the *E-ZPass* Outreach Team grew with thirteen new members joining the team and processed 2,809 transponders, engaging 13,443 customers through 180 events.

In CY19, the *E-ZPass* Outreach Team attended MDTA public meetings to engage new customers and began targeting events to the regions in which facilities would be transitioned to all-electronic tolling (AET). By utilizing both online and print ads, the team was able to reach a diverse group of individuals and bring access to transponders to local community centers and libraries.

E-ZPass Outreach Bus

The MDTA identified a need to expand *E-ZPass* customer service opportunities beyond the traditional Customer Service Centers and our customary Outreach Events. The *E-ZPass* Outreach Bus program was created by outfitting an out-of-commission MDOT MTA bus to match *E-ZPass* colors and branding. In CY19, the MDTA Outreach Bus became operational and was made available on several occasions to serve customers. The bus was utilized in support of MDTA's all-electronic tolling launches at the Hatem and Key Bridges. In September 2019, the Outreach Team brought the bus to MDTA's Customer Appreciation Day at the Intercounty Connector (ICC)/MD 200 facility in Laurel. In early 2020, the bus was in operation for 22 days

at the Kent Island Volunteer Fire Department, during which time the *E-ZPass* Outreach Team processed more than 300 On the Go transponders for new *E-ZPass* customers. Also, in early 2020, the Comptroller's office requested to have the MDTA and MVA Outreach buses serve downtown Annapolis for a day during the Maryland General Assembly's legislative session. In coordination with the Comptroller's office and the MVA, on January 31, 2020, the MDTA Outreach Bus was positioned in downtown Annapolis to serve the public, state employees, and elected officials.

MDTA CUSTOMER COMMUNICATIONS

The MDTA's Division of Communications continues to keep customer service at the forefront of the agency's operations. Using public relations, education efforts, grassroots marketing, and new technologies, the MDTA provides customers with prompt and comprehensive information necessary to plan both their daily commutes and their vacation travels. All customer inquiries received via social media direct messages or through email are answered within one business day.

During CY18, MDTA Division of Communications (DOC) staff handled 3,921 customer calls, 1,391 emails, 697 pieces of correspondence, 228 Public Information Act requests, and more than 200 media contacts and inquiries. In addition, more than 147 traffic advisories and news releases were provided to media outlets, elected officials and affected stakeholders. In CY19, MDTA Communications staff served MDTA customers through 4,030 customer calls, 1,279 emails, 565 pieces of correspondence, 230 Public Information Act requests, 121 traffic advisories and news releases, and more than 200 media contacts and inquiries.

The MDTA Divisions of Communications also coordinates information systems that assist travelers in accessing real-time travel information and updates. The 1-877-BAYSPAN (229-7726) hotline provides timely Bay Bridge traffic conditions and reminds motorists about Maryland's 511 traveler information system. In CY18, the hotline received 689,600 calls, and in CY19, received 1,050,000 calls. The baybridge.com website allows travelers to view traffic along the bridge and the US 50 corridor, while accessing travel tips and Bay Bridge construction projects. In CY18, 506,379 visitors utilized this source, and that number increased to 665,529 in CY19. In addition, the [MDTA's website](http://mdta.org) continued to provide valuable information to customers about all facets of the agency, including an interactive project map. More than 700,000 visitors accessed the site in CY18, with more than 660,000 visitors in CY19. Both sources feature responsive design, which makes the sites easily viewable and accessible from desktop computers, tablets, and smartphones, allowing quick and convenient access. Nearly 53 percent of users who visited the MDTA's page and 66 percent of those visiting the Bay Bridge's accessed the websites via mobile devices and tablets.

CY18 was the first full calendar year that MDTA utilized GovDelivery to provide customer email/text alerts to subscribers; by the end of CY19, the MDTA had grown its GovDelivery subscription base to more than 49,400. This service allows customers to stay informed of ongoing roadwork and projects based on their commuter route via email or text alerts. The

MDTA Division of Communications managed more than 44,000 subscriptions to traffic advisories, news items, and news releases. A total of 216 bulletins were sent to MDTA subscribers in CY18 and 232 bulletins were sent in CY19.

In CY19, the MDTA added a new commercial vehicle notification through its GovDelivery email and text notification system, which currently has more than 6,800 subscribers; this system sends alerts to commercial-vehicle and wide-load vehicle operators regarding major traffic impacts at the Bay Bridge that could impact their delivery travel routes. For example, the MDTA Division of Communications sent tailored alerts to commercial drivers regarding width restrictions and traffic impacts during the westbound right lane rehabilitation project in 2019 and early 2020.

MDTA currently uses social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, Flickr, and Instagram to provide information regarding customer service operations, emergency messages, traffic advisories, and tolling practices. The MDTA Twitter and Facebook accounts are particularly valuable tools for customers to get real-time information about MDTA facilities throughout the State. These platforms allow the MDTA to reach customers quickly, provide media outlets and other transportation agencies access and then share messages directly to their audiences, and offers customers another avenue to express concerns or provide comments.

When Governor Larry Hogan eliminated the *E-ZPass* \$7.50 transponder fee in May 2018, the MDTA's social media platforms were crucial in providing regular reminders of the change throughout the summer travel season. Additionally, MDTA's Facebook and Twitter accounts played a key role during the November 2018 launch of the I-895 Bridge Project, as the social media profiles were used to share real-time updates on traffic pattern changes, alternate routes, project details, and other vital announcements.

One way for MDTA to track social media usage is to look at the number of followers; in CY19, the MDTA increased its followers on both Twitter and Facebook, by over 3,600 and 5,500, respectively. These increases demonstrate the growth of MDTA's outreach, involvement, and engagement.

PUBLIC AND COMMUNITY RELATIONS OUTREACH

Another aspect of customer service for the MDTA is carried out by MDTA Community Relations, which works in collaboration with the Division of Communications and the Division of Planning and Program Development. The Community Relations team leads MDTA's grassroots outreach activities to keep customers, communities, and stakeholders informed about current and upcoming projects, as well as to collect public feedback. For example, the MDTA maintains dedicated webpages on active projects and planning studies so that customers, communities, and stakeholders can stay informed. These webpages present project and study details, promote public meetings, and provide information regarding milestones such as publication of project or study-related reports or information on upcoming construction schedules.

Dedicated webpages for information about major MDTA projects and studies can be found at https://mdta.maryland.gov/Capital_Projects/projects_and_studies.cfm. Projects and studies with dedicated webpages include I-95 Express Toll Lanes (ETL) Northbound Extension, Bay Crossing Study, New Nice/Middleton Bridge Project, I-95 At Belvidere Road Transportation Improvement Study, I-95 Access Improvements Study, Toll Modernization, I-895 Bridge Project, and Westbound Bay Bridge Deck Rehab Project. Additionally, the Bay Bridge's website is also used to keep customers up to date on traffic advisories, emergency closures, and construction schedules, and details regarding The MDOT Bay Bridge Reconstruction Advisory Group (BBRAG).

Public Involvement

Customer and public involvement are vital to the success of MDTA's projects and planning studies, as they allow an opportunity for MDTA to share the latest information as well as receive public input. Notice of these opportunities, which have included a telephone town hall, virtual meetings, in-person public meetings, video updates, public comment periods, and availability of meeting minutes, are provided to the public via e-blasts, project and study webpages, social media, and digital and print advertisements.

In CY18, the MDTA held 31 public meetings and information sessions, followed by 38 in CY19. As of September 2020, the MDTA has held 17 public meetings and information sessions in CY20. Public meetings since 2018 have included the following:

- Six public meetings in CY18 and seven in CY19 regarding the Bay Crossing Study
- Three in-person public meetings in CY18, two in-person public meetings in CY19, and two virtual updates in CY20 for the I-95 ETL Northbound Extension;
- A Telephone Town Hall about the I-895 Bridge Project
- Nine public hearings in 2019 about the MDTA's Toll Modernization plan;
- Video updates for studies that compose the Bay Crossing Study;
- One in-person public meeting and one virtual update in CY18 for the New Nice/Middleton Bridge Project; and
- One in-person public meeting in 2018, one in-person public meeting in CY19 and one virtual public meeting in CY20 for the I-95 at Belvidere Road Transportation Improvement Study.

In 2019, the MDTA held four Open Houses to educate and inform the public about MDTA's transition to all-electronic tolling (AET) at the Hatem and Francis Scott Key facilities. All MDTA's public outreach efforts work in concert with the abovementioned customer service initiatives. An *E-ZPass* Outreach Team is on site during in-person public meetings to provide attendees with the opportunity to sign-up for *E-ZPass*.

Additionally, customer and stakeholder emails (e-blasts) serve as a vital notification tool to send alerts about new project and study information, public meetings, and traffic advisories. In CY18, MDTA sent 13 e-blast notifications reaching nearly 13,600 people, followed by 18 reaching more than 23,000 people in CY19. To date, in 2020, MDTA has sent 55 e-blasts reaching more than 6,500 people. These e-blasts provided updates on the following MDTA projects and

studies: the I-95 ETL Northbound Extension, the Bay Crossing Study, the New Nice/Middleton Bridge Project, the I-95 at Belvidere Road Transportation Improvement Study, the I-95 Access Improvements Study, MDTA's Toll Modernization plan, the I-895 Bridge Project, and the Westbound Bay Bridge Deck Rehabilitation Project.

Public Outreach Campaigns

In addition to hosting in-person and virtual public meetings, the MDTA also engages in public outreach and education campaigns to expand its reach to customers and the general public. These campaigns play a key role in communicating about MDTA construction projects, traffic impacts, and information about alternate routes. During CYs 18-20, public outreach campaigns were developed for the I-695 Curtis Creek Drawbridge Project, the I-895 Bridge Project, and the Westbound Bay Bridge Deck Rehabilitation Project.

For the I-695 Curtis Creek Drawbridge Project, the MDTA's outreach campaign ran from January through June of 2018 and included radio, digital, and social media ads. Toll-lane handouts were distributed at the Key Bridge over the course of the project. In November 2018, the I-895 Project's public outreach campaign was launched. This campaign included billboard, radio, digital, print, and social media ads. An informational video was developed and distributed on MDTA's website and social media pages. Toll-lane handouts were distributed at the Fort McHenry tunnel several weeks before the project started. Informational posters were distributed to more than 60 local businesses and door hangers were distributed to more than 500,000 residents. For the Westbound Bay Bridge Deck Rehabilitation Project, the public outreach campaign started in September 2019 and included billboard, radio, digital, print, and social media ads. Informational posters were distributed to 176 local businesses on the Eastern Shore. Given the magnitude of the project, a second public outreach campaign was initiated in April 2020 to keep the public informed about the project and timeline for completion.

Small, Minority, Women-owned, and Veteran-owned Business Outreach

The MDTA strives to engage all companies who would like to do business with the agency, the other MDOT Transportation Business Units (TBU), and the State of Maryland. For several years, part of this commitment includes conducting free outreach events entitled "Getting Your Foot in the Door" (GYFITD). These forums are targeted at engaging small, minority, woman-owned, and veteran-owned businesses who participate, or who are interested in participating, in the State of Maryland's Minority Business Enterprise/Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (MBE/DBE), Small Business Reserve (SBR), and Veteran-Owned Small Business (VSBE) Programs. The GYFITD events include discussions about procurement procedures and opportunities, one-on-one access to MDTA, and other government agencies' representatives who work in Procurement, Engineering, Consultant Services, IT, and Construction, and updates on advertising dates for potential upcoming contracts for the agencies in attendance.

In CY 18 and 19, a total of six GYFITD forums were held attracting 162 attendees. In 2020, due to COVID-19, there has been one GYFITD session which was conducted virtually. As of September 2020, the email notification distribution list for GYFITD totals 415 unique emails.

3G TOLLING SYSTEM – CUSTOMER SERVICE ENHANCEMENTS

On February 21, 2018, Maryland's Board of Public Works approved two contracts to develop and operate the third generation (3G) of MDTA's electronic toll collection system. The 3G tolling system will upgrade toll collection software and hardware with the latest technology and will modernize related customer service. The contracts will allow the MDTA to expand and modernize the customer experience by providing increased accuracy of automated assignments of toll classifications and rates through the application of profile-based technology and facilitate the communication and payment of tolls in the manner that customers desire in today's technology enriched world. The 3G Customer Service Center is anticipated to be operational in CY 21.