

A NORTHEASTERN BYPASS RESURFACES IN VDOT'S PRELIMINARY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ROUTE 29 IMPROVEMENTS

VDOT is studying the Route 29 corridor in Virginia from the North Carolina state lane to the I66 intersection in Gainesville in order to identify improvements to safety and mobility, and to ensure the continued viability of Route 29 as a major multimodal transportation corridor.

VDOT held two public hearings with the Fauquier County Board of Supervisors this past summer on the Route 29 study as it relates to Fauquier County. During the first hearing on July 9, 2009, VDOT, through its contractor, the Parsons Transportation Group, presented a summary of the then ongoing study and the "preliminary consensus themes" for their improvement recommendations along the corridor. No specific improvements were identified at that time. Rather, VDOT hastily read through the prepared slide presentations outlining transportation concepts such as access control, congestion mitigation, corridor stewardship. VDOT could have been speaking to any one of the many targeted audiences along the subject study area.

VDOT then sought the BOS comments to their "findings". After confirming with VDOT that no funding exists to implement any actual road improvements, Supervisor Schwartz implored VDOT to act now to "Stop the Madness", referring to the continuation along 29 of the unbridled levels of commercial growth that predominate Route 29 in Gainesville and Charlottesville. Other Supervisors suggested ways to regulate growth along 29: downzone properties, create special taxing districts, obtain more realistic traffic impact data from VDOT on proposed developments involving 29, to name a few. In the interim, the Board expressed a need for a plan to support their efforts to limit growth when faced by unacceptable development proposals along the 29 corridor.

In August, 2009, VDOT returned to present the Fauquier BOS with alternatives to Route 29 at Fauquier County's northeastern border with Prince William County. VDOT explained that since their meeting with the BOS the prior month, two Prince William County Board of Supervisors suggested two alternatives to Route 29 through Fauquier County: an alignment and extension of Riley Road/Route 676 north into Prince William County with a new interchange on Route 66; or a bypass from U.S. 29 to U.S. 15 that would connect to 29 somewhere east of Broad Run Church Road/Route 600 and west of Vint Hill Road/215.

In a showing of solidarity rarely exhibited by our current Board of Supervisors, the Board conveyed their stout opposition to either proposal, as well as to any infringement upon Fauquier County's farmlands to rectify the traffic conditions created by Prince William County. The Board's message to VDOT was clear: stick to your assigned mission to improve and enhance U.S. 29 without such unacceptable distractions and diversions.

However, despite Fauquier County's position, VDOT is recommending a northeastern bypass from U.S. 29 in New Baltimore to U.S. 15, which happens to run through the Northern half of the Civil War Buckland Mills battlefield. VDOT's recommendations are based upon questionable data, unrealistic assumptions, and fail to accurately address the traffic or safety benefits or feasibility of their proposal.

For example, the recommendations assume Route 15 can function as a no access road that, with two additional lanes, can accommodate three times its existing levels of traffic. Currently, Route 15 is flanked at either end by large-scale shopping centers, with Madison Crescent on the south side and future home of Home Depot and Safeway etc. on the north, with a similarly large-scale residential community in the middle, with "For sale" signs abounding up and down this corridor, no doubt future sites for development. Route 15 is already a major commuter route, used to avoid the traffic obstacles created by the too many to count new traffic signals along the Route 29 corridor that accompany the continuous line of shopping centers along either side of Route 29. Elimination of these traffic signals and similar traffic obstacles was the task assigned VDOT, not creation of new roads over our sparse open spaces to advance new unbridled levels of development.

Rerouting the commuter, regional and local traffic from Route 29 to U.S. 15 will mandate an expedited major overhaul of the I66 interchange at Haymarket. Does VDOT have the billions of dollars to widen and raise the roads with futuristic-like flyovers and otherwise completely redesign Haymarket like it is doing in Gainesville? Does anyone really want a repeat of Gainesville in this once quant village? And why is VDOT performing such an ambitious overhaul of the Gainesville I66 interchange if they plan to redirect traffic from using it?

Citizen's comments on these recommendations and others proposed by VDOT is invited on Thursday, October 1, 2009 at VDOT's Citizens Meeting from 5:00-8:00 P.M. in the John Barton Payne Community Room, 2 Courthouse Square in Warrenton. Please attend and let your voice be heard.