



Charlottesville-Albemarle Metropolitan Planning Organization

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July 15, 2011

The Honorable Sean T. Connaughton
Secretary of Transportation
1111 East Broad St.
Room 3054
Richmond, VA 23219

Dear Secretary Connaughton:

The Charlottesville-Albemarle MPO Policy Board has been giving careful consideration to the transportation needs that exist here in our region. We recognize that due to our location our region plays a key role in the transportation system of the entire Commonwealth. At the same time, we hope that you recognize that we have transportation needs that are key concerns within our community. We believe that it is our responsibility to work with you and the state transportation agencies to find solutions which serve both statewide and local needs. We understand that you must focus on meeting statewide needs. We hope you understand that it is difficult for us to support solutions to statewide issues if we cannot also demonstrate to our constituents that local transportation needs are met as well. We would like to suggest to you that we think there is a set of transportation improvements which can meet both statewide as well as local needs.

We understand that the US29 Western Bypass project is a high priority in the Commonwealth. We ask that you understand that the existing US29 corridor in Charlottesville and Albemarle County is a highly important commercial corridor and we need that area to be improved to support our economic development efforts and the future vitality of this community. We are willing to do our part to assist in meeting the Commonwealth's transportation needs and respectfully request that the CTB give consideration in helping us meet our local needs. We ask that in addition to the funding for the US29 Bypass and the widening and grading of US29 between Polo Grounds Road and Timberlake Drive that you also provide funding for the following improvements that will serve local needs:

1. Completion of Hillsdale Drive – Our studies have shown that completion of Hillsdale Drive will reduce traffic on the existing US29 between Hydraulic Road and Rio Road as well as supporting economic development. Total cost for Hillsdale Drive is estimated to be \$29.8 million with approximately \$10 million required for completion. Currently our TIP and the Six Year Improvement Program only include funding to complete design (underway) and right-of-way acquisition. We believe that completion of Hillsdale Drive can both help meet local needs and prevent the need for costly future improvements on the existing US29. We respectfully request that you provide funding for this project.
2. US29/US250 (Best Buy) Ramp and Lane Improvements – This project is a critical safety need within the US29 corridor. We appreciate your commitment to fund this project in the adopted Six Year Improvement Program. We request that you maintain your commitment to fund this project and recognize the safety benefits that will result for both local and state users.
3. Berkmar Drive Extension – One of our concerns regarding the US29 Bypass project is the impact the north terminus interchange will have on communities north of the South Fork Rivanna River such as Hollymead, Forest Lakes and others. We believe that construction of the interchange will introduce safety and access issues in that area of the corridor that will greatly affect these communities. Albemarle County plans call for Berkmar Drive Extension to serve as a key local road to provide access and also

reduce the need for homes/businesses and subdivisions or commercial centers to have direct access to US29. If the bypass is constructed including the interchange, we believe that this need will be even more pressing. We request that as part of the design process for the north terminus interchange that VDOT prepare conceptual design for Berkmar Drive Extension and bridge that is compatible with the bypass interchange design and can be constructed at a later date when local/state funding allows.

4. Belmont Bridge – A vital concern for the City of Charlottesville is the Belmont Bridge. The Belmont Bridge is a very important entrance corridor that is used by visitors to travel between downtown and Monticello and Ash Lawn. It also serves as a vital vehicular link as well as a very important pedestrian connection between residential neighborhoods and the Charlottesville downtown. The bridge is literally falling apart. The deterioration of this bridge has resulted in the closure of the pedestrian walkway on the east side of the bridge which causes some pedestrians to walk in the roadway. This situation is very dangerous. In addition, it presents a very negative appearance to those visiting Charlottesville. Total cost for the project is \$14.4 million. The Belmont Bridge project is included in the TIP and Six Year Improvement Program for full funding in FY16. We respectfully request that you accelerate the funding for this project by two years in the Six Year Improvement Program so that it is fully funded in FY14.
5. Transit to Hollymead/Forest Lakes/Charlottesville Airport – We would respectfully request your consideration of assistance and the assistance of Department of Rail and Public Transportation to fund new transit service to Hollymead/Forest Lakes and Charlottesville Airport. These destinations are not currently served but are often requested by the public. A relatively small investment in these services will greatly help Albemarle County move forward with plans for development in the US29 Corridor with a minimum of new traffic impacts. This is a concept that the Virginia Department of Transportation has previously supported in the Places29 plan.
6. Northtown Trail – The development of the bicycle and pedestrian network is also one of the Charlottesville-Albemarle MPO's highest priorities. We have recently prepared a plan for the Northtown Trail, a continuous 15-mile bicycle and pedestrian facility connecting downtown Charlottesville with the residential and commercial areas at the north end of US29 in Albemarle County. Major sections of this trail have already been completed by City of Charlottesville and as part of the Albemarle County section of the Meadow Creek Parkway. Other sections will be built as part of McIntire Road Extension and through developer commitments. We respectfully request that you incorporate this project into the design for the US29 Bypass and Berkmar Drive Extension to allow it to be built in future years as funding allows.

We recognize that transportation funds in Virginia are limited; however, we would appreciate consideration and support for these requests by the Commonwealth Transportation Board. As you know, we will be considering amendments to our Constrained Long Range Transportation Plan and Transportation Improvement Program on July 27 to incorporate the US29 Bypass and hope to be able to conduct such deliberations in the context of support to assist us with our local transportation needs.

Please feel free to contact us or MPO Director Stephen Williams if you have any questions regarding this letter. Thank you.

Sincerely,



Albemarle County Supervisor Rodney Thomas, Chair



Charlottesville Councilor Kristin Szakos, Vice Chair

Cc: Commonwealth Transportation Board Members
Charlottesville-Albemarle Policy Board Members
Charlottesville Mayor Dave Norris
Albemarle County Supervisor Ann Mallek