



Alliance *for* Community Choice *in* Transportation

October 6, 2011

Albemarle County Board of Supervisors
Albemarle County Office Building
401 McIntire Road
Charlottesville, VA 22902

Dear Supervisors:

I'm writing to ask you to take into account opportunities to improve bicycle, pedestrian, and transit service as part of the Western Bypass Project when you consider a resolution specifying what you ask VDOT to include in its addendum to the RFP.

We share the concerns of many others that the community has had limited opportunities to raise proposals during the rapid reemergence of this project. Since it seems this amendment may be the last opportunity for the community to lay out its priorities before the project is put out to bid, we implore you to focus not only on the roadway design, but on design elements that impact the ability of this project to improve bicycle, pedestrian, and transit connectivity in our region.

The RFP currently includes few mentions of bicycles and pedestrians and no mention of transit. It states that the Bypass itself should be a limited-access highway, so bikes and pedestrians are, by design, to be excluded from the roadway. This does not mean, however, that the project cannot include trails in the road's right of way. In fact, the RFP mentions quite vaguely that "there was some mention of the need for more trails."

This is an understatement. All community surveys of parks and recreation needs show that trails are at the top of the list of priorities. Right now, the TJPDC is working on a "Northtown Trail / Route" project to create a continuous bike trail connecting the north part of the community to employment centers downtown and at the university. This project is complicated, however, by the need to get bikes and pedestrians across major roadways and the Rivanna River.

The Bypass right of way and infrastructure has the potential to provide a way for bikes and pedestrians to get across the Rivanna and major roadways for continuous and uninterrupted access across this zone of the metropolitan area—just like vehicular traffic. Any project that spends \$250 million or more to improve the flow of vehicular traffic without devoting some funds to improved transportation via these other modes is an anachronism. We have learned, from having done things the wrong way in the 1950s to the 1990s, that it is expensive to retrofit auto-centric infrastructure to accommodate alternative modes. All

projects in the 21st Century, especially those connecting and passing through densely-populated areas, should include accommodations for walkers and bikers.

The neglect of transit is equally egregious. The connection of the Bypass to Leonard Sandridge Road makes it ideal for serving university students and employees via transit. The University is committed to doubling the ratio of its population arriving at the university by other than single-occupancy vehicle, and transit expansion will need to be an important component of this plan, but the planning for this road has curiously ignored opportunities to design the road so that it can maximize its potential as a transit route.

Our local transit service providers (CAT, UTS, and Jaunt) have an opportunity to develop a new express route connecting the university to the airport and residential/employment areas in Hollymead, via the Bypass. This service is unlikely to be created, however, unless the County insists that the Bypass be designed to allow this express bus to pick up passengers at a number of places along its route. Including pulloffs for bus stop and pedestrian ramps from nearby employment and residential areas at a few places along the route—for example at its Earlysville Road crossing where it comes close to the dense housing on Rio Road; and near Sam's Club and Berkmar—would allow the express bus to serve these employment and residential centers without going in and out of shopping centers in the way CAT's #7 currently does. Only by giving transit the ability to travel at similar speeds to vehicular traffic will we ever be able to entice choice riders to switch to transit.

In view of these opportunities, we strongly urge the BOS to use the resolution being adopted next week to push VDOT to include specifications requiring the bidder to include trails and transit in its design. Specifically, we urge that you push for the following:

- Include in the design of the bridge over the Rivanna and other bridges over major roadways a trail for bikes and pedestrians that is physically separated from traffic (as on the 14th Street Bridge over the Potomac in Washington, DC).
- Include in the design of the Bypass roadway pulloffs for at least three bus stops with stairways and/or wheelchair accessible ramps providing pedestrian access from nearby neighborhoods to the express bus service.
- Include in the project a continuous bicycle and pedestrian trail (similar to the Mount Vernon Trail along the George Washington Parkway) along the entire route of the Bypass.

Thank you for your consideration of our proposals.

Sincerely,

Len Schoppa
Alliance for Community Choice in Transportation