

MEMO

TO: Parkfairfax Board of Directors
FR: Parkfairfax HOT Lanes Task Force
RE: HOT Lanes Update
DA: June 10, 2009

This memo provides an overview of the proposed I-95/I-395 HOT lanes project; an explanation of the impacts the project (particularly reconstruction of the Shirlington Circle) would have on Parkfairfax; and a first round of task force recommendations to the board to address these issues.

Construction Plans

A public-private partnership between the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) and Fluor-Transurban has proposed constructing 56-miles of high occupancy toll (HOT) lanes between Spotsylvania County and the Pentagon. The Commonwealth and the private partners have not yet signed a formal agreement, but one could be finalized in August or September.

HOT lanes are express travel lanes designed to maintain consistent speeds by requiring travelers to use carpools or transit or pay a variable toll for single occupancy vehicles. This proposal would expand the current high occupancy vehicle (HOV) lanes in the corridor from two lanes to three. The roadway between Shirlington and the Pentagon is extremely narrow such that VDOT would need to shrink the lane width of the travel lanes and eliminate emergency shoulders in order to fit three lanes of traffic.

Additionally, the road, though originally built with public funds, would be leased to a private company. In order to increase profit, the company would look for ways to bring more traffic into the HOT lanes, thus encouraging more single drivers when we should be looking for ways to get cars off the road.

As part of the proposal, VDOT has proposed adding a new entry-exit ramp to the southwestern side of the Shirlington Circle. First suggested as a bus-only exit, VDOT now contemplates a full-blown exit ramp for all vehicles – one of only two exit points between the Mixing Bowl and the 14th Street Bridge. To handle the increase in traffic, VDOT would need to widen the circle and add new traffic lights at each intersection.

Regardless of whether the Shirlington Circle is reconstructed, the HOT lanes project calls for new sound barriers to be constructed behind the Parkfairfax buildings adjacent to I-395 along Martha Custis Drive. VDOT has said that residents in the affected areas will be able to vote on whether to have sound barriers and VDOT will work with them on the design elements.

Community Concerns

While Parkfairfax should share the laudable goal of encouraging transit-oriented development in Shirlington, the community faces a number of negative consequences if VDOT undertakes a major reconstruction of the Shirlington Circle.

Additional Traffic and Traffic Lights

The Shirlington Circle could see an increase in overall traffic as the new HOT lanes attract new cars from local neighborhoods in the West End, Del Ray, and Crystal City. In addition, to accommodate the new HOT lanes off-ramp, VDOT would need to install traffic lights at all six of the feeder intersections. These new lights would create a headache for drivers going around the circle, and we would see traffic backing up on Gunston, Martha Custis, Quaker Lane, and Preston. To avoid congestion on the circle, frustrated motorists might cut through Parkfairfax to Glebe Road – as they do now when there is an incident on I-395. This added traffic could adversely affect Parkfairfax streets, our neighborhood ambiance, and roadway safety in front of the Charles Barrett Elementary School.

Multi-Year Construction

VDOT anticipates it could take five years to add new lanes and lights to the Shirlington Circle – subjecting Parkfairfax and Fairlington residents to considerable noise and pollution during construction and once the HOT lanes open. Current plans call for destroying and rebuilding the current structure and widening and redirecting the roadway.

Close Construction and Sound Barriers

Many Parkfairfax buildings on Martha Custis are within 300 feet of the construction zone, and several are just a few feet from the construction zone at the Quaker Lane on-ramp and the concrete retaining wall along Martha Custis. Even with the application of all the latest construction technologies, these residences may be rendered uninhabitable for five years by construction noise, vibration, dust, and pollution both day and night.

In addition, VDOT plans to conduct sound tests to determine the properties most impacted by traffic noise from the HOT lanes. Those in the affected area will be allowed to vote on whether to install sound barriers and provide input on their design. Some residents have expressed a desire for VDOT to coordinate the design elements of the sound barriers and the current concrete retaining wall.

Pedestrian Bridge

At Arlington's request, VDOT is considering changes to pedestrian access across I-395. Ideas currently under debate include: adding sidewalks around the circle (extending traffic light cycles); lengthening the pedestrian bridge ramps (taking land in Parkfairfax), and removing or replacing the pedestrian bridge.

Action Items

- **Attend Meetings with Public Officials.** The task force is working to set up meetings with State Delegate David Englin, State Senator Patsy Ticer, Mayor Bill Euille, and members of the Alexandria City Council to voice our concerns about the HOT lanes project. We suggest that board members attend these meetings in order to show Parkfairfax's resolve on these issues and commitment to fighting the project.
- **Pass Board Resolution Opposing Shirlington Circle Reconstruction.** We suggest that the Board pass a resolution (draft attached) putting Parkfairfax on record firmly opposing the Shirlington Circle reconstruction and seeking relief for residents most impacted by the overall HOT lanes project. Copies of the resolution should be sent to Governor Tim Kaine, VDOT Secretary Pierce Homer, the Commonwealth Transportation Board, State Delegate David Englin, State Senator Patsy Ticer, Mayor Bill Euille, Alexandria City Council, Arlington County Board, and the National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board. It also should be printed in the Parkfairfax Forum.
- **Contact Other Neighborhood Associations.** We suggest that the Board write a letter to nearby neighborhood associations seeking to work cooperatively against the Shirlington Circle reconstruction.
- **Hold Community Meeting.** While word is beginning to spread about the HOT lanes project and its potential impacts on Parkfairfax, we suggest that the board work with nearby neighborhood associations to convene a public meeting this summer for VDOT and Fluor-Transurban to explain the project to the local residents who would be most directly impacted by it. This meeting should be widely publicized – perhaps with door-to-door flyers, community signs, and advertisement in the Parkfairfax Forum – in order to maximize turnout.

The task force stands ready to work with the board as needed on these action items.