

**VDOT Puts HOT Lanes On Hold for Now:
Arlington Lawsuit Pours Cold Water on Proposal**

On February 3, the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) announced that it no longer plans to construct high-occupancy toll (HOT) lanes on I-395 in Alexandria and Arlington. This decision means that Parkfairfax will not be disrupted by a radical redesign and reconstruction of the Shirlington Circle in the near future.

Instead, VDOT announced a re-scoped, smaller version of the HOT lanes project on I-95 from Stafford County to the Edsall Road interchange on I-395. These HOT lanes would link to the I-495 HOT lanes already under construction. The re-scoped I-95/395 HOT lanes project will undergo an environmental assessment.

VDOT also announced it would accelerate plans to build a ramp to connect the existing HOV lanes on I-395 to Seminary Road in order to help accommodate the influx of traffic to the new BRAC-133 site at Mark Center. VDOT will seek a Categorical Exclusion (i.e. a waiver from further environment studies) for the new ramp.

VDOT cited ongoing legal action by Arlington County as a major factor in its decision. In August 2009, Arlington filed a lawsuit in U.S. District Court challenging the federal government's granting of a Categorical Exclusion for the "northern section" of the original project from Springfield to the 14th Street Bridge in January 2009. Another factor in VDOT's decision may have been the reported failure of Fluor and Transurban (private companies who are building the I-495 HOT lanes) to secure private sector financing for the original I-95/395 HOT lanes project.

VDOT originally proposed to add HOT lanes from I-95 in Spotsylvania County north to the 14th Street Bridge on I-395, replacing existing HOV lanes (though HOV-3 would still travel free on HOT lanes.)

Delegate David Englin (D-45) – who led the fight in Richmond against the original I-95/395 HOT lanes project – issued the following statement in response to VDOT's announcement:

"[The] announcement that the I-395 HOT Lanes project will not go forward is welcome news and an important victory for thousands of Alexandria and Arlington residents whose neighborhoods and quality of life would have been harmed. I commend Secretary Connaughton for being responsive to our community's concerns by finding an alternate solution to our region's traffic mess, and also for working so hard to address the traffic challenges created by the Department of Defense relocation to Alexandria's Mark Center. Congratulations to the many citizen activists throughout our community who made their voices heard in defense of our neighborhoods, and to the leaders who stood with them."

On February 10, though, VDOT Secretary Sean Connaughton told the Potomac Local News:

“If HOT lanes [on I-95 and I-495] are as successful as we think they are going to be, then we will look more at the possibility of adding them to I-395. HOT lanes are the only way we are going to be able to add to new capacity to roads in Northern Virginia, especially on 395 where we are unable to widen lanes.”

Given these comments, Parkfairfax residents will need to remain vigilant about VDOT’s potential future plans for HOT lanes on I-395 and how those plans may impact us.

A special thanks to all of the community members who participated in Parkfairfax’s HOT Lanes Task Force, which beginning in April 2009 voiced key concerns about the project with local and state officials. Thanks also to the many other Parkfairfax residents who got involved, beginning at the June 2009 meeting with VDOT at Charles Barrett School and continuing with efforts to raise awareness with city, state, and federal lawmakers. You made a positive difference.

Parkfairfax now has a permanent Transportation and Land Use Committee that is tracking future transportation and development projects that could impact our community. If you are interested in joining, please come to our next meeting on Thursday, March 10 at 7:30 p.m. in the Association Office.