



April 21, 2017

Ms. Amanda J. Baxter
Virginia Department of Transportation
Northern Virginia District
4975 Alliance Drive
Fairfax, VA 22030

Dear Ms. Baxter,

Arlington County appreciates the opportunity to comment on preliminary design elements of the Washington & Old Dominion Trail Bridge over Lee Highway proposed by VDOT as part of the I-66 widening project. We recognize that VDOT has upheld its commitment to our Board to work with staff and the community to develop a bridge design as part of a public process.

We very much appreciate VDOT's attention to two very critical elements of the bridge – the alignment and scale. Maintaining fire access to the Crescent Apartment building was non-negotiable for the County and we are glad to see an alignment that maintains this access. Additionally, the original scale of the bridge was imposing and inappropriate for the urban streetscape that exists and is envisioned for the East Falls Church area of the County. The design presented on April 5 is a step in the right direction from the original concept we reviewed in January.

As referenced, in 2011 the County completed an area plan for East Falls Church with a vision that includes activating the streetscape along Lee Highway and, congruent with the City of Falls Church, identifies a mutual goal of fostering redevelopment in this corridor. The plan outlines a future that envisions a medium density urban node focused towards the East Falls Church Metrorail Station and supported by a multimodal transportation network – I would encourage VDOT to examine its contents, as well as the attached Minimum Design Expectations and Principles of Civic Design attached to this letter.

When the County Board endorsed the general concept of the W&OD Trail Bridge at its meeting on January 28, it requested that VDOT ensure that elements of the proposed bridge recognize and maintain consistency with the East Falls Church Area Plan and develop a context-sensitive design that is appropriate in scale to the surrounding development and consistent with the urban form anticipated.

To that end, we find that the bridge structure and design elements presented at the April 5 public workshop appear to fall short of fulfilling this request. The bridge design and proposal for the immediate surroundings leave lacking the expectation for context-

sensitivity related to the urban form of the neighborhood and the historic coal trestle of the W&OD railroad. The structure as presented too closely resembles a highway overpass, which is not a desirable outcome to what has been a collaborative process, admittedly conducted within tight parameters and on a fast-track timeline not at all ideal for the scale and scope of the project.

With this in mind, we would offer the following suggestions foremost to improve the process for developing a bridge design that is truly context-sensitive and secondarily to offer feedback on the most recent design materials presented to the public on April 5.

W&OD Trail Bridge Design Process

The County Board called upon VDOT to conduct a public process with County staff on the design of the W&OD Trail bridge. While VDOT has in fact included several touch points with the public on design elements, we are concerned that the end product resembles a kit-of-parts design that has been inserted into this unique setting. The County and VDOT have a history of collaborating on creative, innovative, and context-sensitive projects – the Courthouse Road/10th Street interchange with Arlington Boulevard is a perfect example of collaborative design that has produced an attractive and engaging structure from what otherwise would have been drab highway interchange. We had been hoping for the same exciting results with the W&OD Trail Bridge, especially considering the unique historic elements of this location, as well as the sensitivity regarding a neighborhood still recovering from bifurcation by an interstate.

Therefore, the County requests that VDOT revise the schedule for implementation of the W&OD Trail Bridge. We request that VDOT require its design-build firm to move construction of the bridge to the end of the project construction timeline and conduct a more intensive design process throughout the next year. We would expect that any design-build firm chosen for the project retain an experienced artist/architect specializing in structural solutions that highlight the specific character of a place. To be clear, we are not asking VDOT to delay the I-66 widening, nor the implementation of the full project schedule. We are simply asking VDOT to require the selected design-build firm to allow for more time in design of the structure by shifting this specific element to the end of the construction sequence and including a provision for close oversight by VDOT and County staff. We believe that additional time spent in design of the bridge and ground plane underneath would result in a structure lauded by the community, County, VDOT, and our colleagues across the region and nation.

Comments on Design Materials presented on April 5

Railings: The County requests that the railing and fence materials be rethought. The current options yield an abrupt transition from railing to fence. The current options also have no relation to the structural elements supporting the bridge – it would be more aesthetic to relate the fencing to the piers directly beneath it. Staff suggests mimicking the fin design by slowly elevating the railing to fence height, creating a softer transition using the same materiality for both railings and fencing.

Exposed Steel Structure: The County requests that VDOT explore alternatives to the exposed steel structure under the bridge. The design and materials of the underside of the bridge should be an integral part of the overall design. The enclosure of the bridge underside will also negate the need for bird mitigation measures, providing for a lower-maintenance structure by also protecting from the elements. There are a number of structural applications that could be applied, including pre-cast concrete box sections joined with post-tensioned steel cable, which creates a smooth façade, or panels that could be added after the proposed structure is completed.

Lighting: The County requests more options for lighting on the bridge that are not vertical in nature and that focus downward on illuminating the path of travel. Please explore all possible options within the VDOT/NOVA Parks/Dominion portfolio. Bollard style lighting would be preferred to the Carlyle lights. It should not be assumed that the County has the capacity to maintain any lights installed as part of this project.

Sound wall along Washington Boulevard: County staff remains concerned that the sound wall presented on the plan (immediately south of Fairfax Drive/Washington Blvd. and east of Lee Highway) will preclude future access to the planned west entrance of the East Falls Church Metrorail Station from the Washington Boulevard flyover. This path of travel is vital to creating multimodal access to the Metrorail station from the City of Falls Church and the East Falls Church neighborhood of the County. Further, the current position of the sound wall would inhibit future potential for enhancements to the Washington Blvd. flyover during the construction of the west entrance to East Falls Church, as well as connections to development along Lee Highway.

We understand that the decision to construct the sound wall will be handled through a process outlined in VDOT's Highway Traffic Noise Impact Analysis Guidance Manual. To that end, we would request that the County be involved in outreach related to this sound wall to provide citizens voting on the wall information about consequences of including the sound wall to their future access of the Metrorail station.

Communication of graphic elements: The County has received a number of inquiries from citizens related to the other components of the I-66 Inside the Beltway project – the HOT Lanes, widening, and multimodal improvements. Please identify on any maps or graphics generated for the bridge the other elements of the entire I-66 project that have already been determined including, but not limited to:

- HOT lane infrastructure (toll information sign placement, etc.)
- Any altered ROW needed for the widening
- Any multimodal projects approved by NVTC

Other Comments Related to the W&OD Trail Bridge and Environment

Pedestrian elements: As VDOT redesigns the traffic signal infrastructure at Fairfax Drive/Washington Blvd. and Lee Highway, as well as the ground plane features related to the W&OD Trail Bridge, we would expect that all pedestrian elements be designed to current standards, including sidewalk widths, aprons, crossing mechanisms, etc. We would be happy to provide you with some plans preliminarily developed by our planning staff. We

would also like to see an expanded/enhanced refuge island on Lee Highway to provide a safer at-grade crossing for those local movements.

Pedestrian access to the trail on the east side of Lee Highway: Related to the sound wall issue outlined above, staff is concerned that the proposed path from the Fairfax Drive/Washington boulevard intersection with Lee Highway to the base of the trail bridge on the east side of Lee Highway would provide an uncomfortable and potentially unsafe experience for users. From the plans provided, it appears that users would be traversing between a sound wall and a bridge abutment with perhaps six to eight feet of clearance between these elements. Please provide a cross section through the east approach ramp along Washington Boulevard so that we may understand the confines of this location.

Ground plane environment: We recognize the great potential for place-making of the ground plane under and adjacent to the bridge and appreciate VDOT providing examples of this use throughout the process. We would like to include this environment in our primary request to extend the design timeframe for the bridge element. This would allow our staff and the public the ability to thoughtfully determine how this space might best meet current and future needs for this open space community asset.

Historic Benjamin Elliott's Coal Trestle

Finally, we have concerns related to how this historic resource is being incorporated into the W&OD Trail Bridge design. As you are aware, there are obligations VDOT is required to undertake related to this resource as outlined in the Section 106 process, and we expect a resulting agreement that establishes how all agencies will avoid, minimize, and/or mitigate adverse effects to the resource. The current set of plans almost completely neglects the existence of the coal trestle on the site. To that end, we request the following be addressed:

- *Section 106 Mitigation:* Pursuant to Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, VDOT and the FHWA identified Benjamin Elliott's Coal Trestle (053-0276-006) as a contributing resource to the determined-eligible Washington and Old Dominion Railroad Historic District. The proposed design of the W&OD Trail Bridge over Lee Highway would have an adverse effect and diminish the structure's integrity of location, setting, and association. As shown, the design of the proposed bridge and accessibility to the trestle fails to avoid, minimize, or mitigate the adverse effects of the contributing resource. The design of the bridge and associated trails should allow for users to access and view the trestle. Historical markers and/or display should be incorporated into the design.
- *Additional Information Required:* As the subject Certified Local Government (CLG) and consulting party, the Arlington County Historic Preservation Program (HPP) requires additional information regarding the relationship between the Benjamin Elliott's Coal Trestle and the proposed trail bridge. Please contact HPP staff separately as soon as possible to continue consultation. VDHR should also be consulted regarding adverse effects to this resource.
- *Historical Affairs and Landmark Review Board:* The County Board listed the Benjamin Elliott's Coal Trestle as a local historic district in 2014. Any alterations within the boundaries of the local historic district require review and permit approval by Arlington County's Historical Affairs and Landmark Review Board (HALRB). From the information provided, the location of the abutments in respect to the historic district are unclear. Whether or not the trail bridge is within the boundaries of the historic district, the project

should be presented to the HALRB for review and permit approval as it will have adverse effects to the property's integrity of location, setting, and association.

We thank you for your attention to the concerns outlined in this communication. We look forward to continued collaboration, as we believe the W&OD Trail Bridge can be an asset to this community, to Arlington, to the W&OD Trail, and to the region when we work together to ensure the design is appropriate and context-sensitive to the immediate environment. Please contact Sarah Crawford (scrawford@arlingtonva.us or 703-228-3397) of my staff with any questions related to this letter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Mark J. Schwartz". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "S" at the end.

Mark J. Schwartz
County Manager

Cc: Arlington County Board Members
Dennis Leach, DES Transportation

Attachments:

- Minimum Design Expectations for the W&OD Trail Bridge over Lee Highway
- Principles of Civic Design for the W&OD Trail Bridge over Lee Highway