



COUNTY OF ALBEMARLE
Department of Community Development
401 McIntire Road, North Wing
Charlottesville, Virginia 22902-4596

Phone (434) 296-5832

Fax (434) 972-4126

February 29, 2012

Chris Collins, Project Manager
Virginia Department of Transportation
Environmental Division
1401 East Broad Street
Richmond, Va. 223219

Re: Route 29 Bypass, Agency Scoping

Dear Mr. Collins:

I am responding to your request for information and concerns for Albemarle County with the subject project. Given the limited amount of time between receiving your letter and the deadline for submitting information, it has not been possible to have this reviewed by the County Board for completeness or accuracy. As such, please recognize that the attached is staff's summary rather than a document vetted by the County's Board of Supervisors.

Our response is focused on existing County policy and land use, concerns received by the County from various individuals and groups, and possible impacts on natural resources and cultural assets of the County. We are assuming you are already reviewing materials from the last Environmental Impact Study (EIS) for this project and have instead focused this letter on issues where there is newer information.

1. County Policies and Land Use

- a. In 2011, the County adopted a master plan for its development area north of the City of Charlottesville. This master plan is called "Places 29" and a copy is being provided to you. (<http://www.albemarle.org/departments.asp?department=cdd&relpage=3735>) Associated with this master plan was a U.S. 29 North Corridor Transportation Study Final Report. (http://www.albemarle.org/upload/images/forms_center/departments/community_development/forms/Places29_Master_Plan/2011/March/Appendix_5-29N_Final_Report_081808_REV_090408_FINAL.pdf) This study, which was funded with a combination of local and VDOT funding, was overseen by a team of MPO and VDOT staff. The study was adopted by the MPO and then incorporated into the Place 29 Master Plan. In reviewing this information, you may wish to consider the following.

- i. One of the transportation priorities in the Places 29 Master plan is the extension of Berkmar Drive from its current terminus below the South Fork of the Rivanna River northward to join Meeting Street in the Hollymead Town Center and then extending northward to join Lewis and Clark Drive in the North For Research Park, providing a major local street running parallel to Route 29. It is noted that the alignment of Berkmar Drive and the proposed bypass will intersect somewhere on the north side of the South Fork of the Rivanna River. We hope that any assessment of the bypass would include consideration of how VDOT would assure the bypass does not preclude or increase the cost of building the Berkmar Road extension.
 - ii. It is noted that the transportation models all rely on two decade old data for origin and destination of trips. With respect to the effectiveness of this bypass versus other transportation infrastructure, updated origin and destination data seems important.
 - iii. Subsequent to the approval of the above report and its incorporation into the regional transportation plan, the above study was used by VDOT's consultant in developing recommendations for VDOT's Route 29 corridor study. That work included some analysis on the effectiveness of this bypass versus other transportation improvements. We hope this assessment can address the earlier findings of VDOT's corridor study and evaluate the effectiveness of this bypass with and without those additional improvements planned for this section of the Route 29 corridor. Recognizing those additional improvements are all within areas already developed and the bypass will cross undeveloped property, it seems a critical question for this environmental assessment is whether the bypass or those improvements provide a better benefit to Virginia.
- b. Noting that a majority of this proposed bypass largely traverses parts of the County designated as Rural Areas, the County adopted a new Rural Areas Plan in 2005. (http://www.albemarle.org/albemarle/upload/images/forms_center/departments/community_development/forms/Comprehensive_Plan/Rural_Areas_Comprehensive_Plan_B OS_Approved_3_2_05_amended_7.11.07.pdf) As the proposed bypass was not part of the regional transportation plan at that time, this Rural Area Plan is silent on the bypass. In reviewing the strategies in this Rural Areas Plan, this includes a strategy on protecting the biodiversity within the County, including fragmentation of land such as might occur with a bypass, and protection of historic resources. We encourage you to review these strategies and assess any impacts being created by this bypass.
- c. In 2000, the County adopted a Historic Resources Plan as part of its Comprehensive Plan (http://www.albemarle.org/albemarle/upload/images/forms_center/departments/community_development/forms/Comprehensive_Plan/NATURAL_RESOURCES_&_CULRURAL_ASSETS_16_Historic_Resources.pdf) This plan was amended in 2001 to include a listing of historic resources. We encourage you to review these strategies and assess any impacts being created by this bypass.
- d. Since the last EIS was completed, the County has seen extensive development occurring in the vicinity of this project. The attached link provides a summary map. (http://www.1-community.org/PDF/Transportation%20Workshop/29corridor_forweb.pdf) This has included a number of developments occurring north of the proposed bypass. One

consequence of this new development is the County has seen a significant increase in the number of traffic signals on Route 29 north of this bypass. Currently, there are eleven existing or proposed traffic signals on Route 29 between the northern terminus of this bypass and the County line, while there are thirteen existing or proposed traffic signals between the northern and southern terminus of this proposed bypass. Effectively, the northern end of the bypass is ending in the middle of the County's urban development area. We encourage you to review the northern terminus of this bypass with respect to its function, given the amount of development occurring north of the proposed bypass.

- e. Since the last EIS was completed, the City and County have adopted a regional water supply plan.
(http://www.rivanna.org/documents/waterproject/regional_plan_oct2011.pdf) That plan is managed by the Rivanna Water and Sewer Authority (RWSA). The County has also adopted this plan into our Comprehensive Plan. We note this plan, which was considered and approved while the bypass was not part of the regional transportation plan, places a higher reliance on the South Fork Rivanna Reservoir than existed at the time the previous EIS was finalized. Currently, RWSA utilizes a pipeline from the Sugar Hollow Reservoir to the Ragged Mountain Reservoir to serve as a water source for their Observatory Hill Water Treatment Plant. With the newly adopted water supply plan, the Ragged Mountain Reservoir and Observatory Water Treatment Plant will rely on a pipeline from the South Fork Rivanna River Reservoir. This means a possible spill along this bypass has the potential for impacting both the Observatory and South Fork Rivanna Water Treatment plants. We encourage you to assess the protection of the area's water supply associated with both the potential for a spill and ongoing runoff from the road.
- f. We note that the southern and northern terminus of the bypass are within the County's adopted Entrance Corridors which regulate development appearance under Section 30.6 of the Zoning Ordinance.
(http://www.albemarle.org/upload/images/Forms_Center/Departments/County_Attorney/Forms/Albemarle_County_Code_Ch18_Zoning30_Overlay_Districts.pdf) We encourage you to assure the Environmental Assessment considers the County's Design Guidelines in evaluating the visual impact to the Entrance Corridors.
http://www.albemarle.org/upload/images/Forms_Center/Departments/Community_Development/Forms/ARB_Applications/EC_Guidelines_update_Feb_2011_final_text2.pdf
- g. Finally, after extensive public input and participation in 2011, the Board adopted two separate resolutions for the bypass that conditioned the County's support. Those resolutions were already forwarded to VDOT, but links to the resolution are provided here.
(http://www.albemarle.org/upload/images/Forms_Center/Departments/Board_of_Supervisors/Forms/Agenda/2011Files/1012/9.0_BypassResolution.pdf ; and http://www.albemarle.org/upload/images/Forms_Center/Departments/Board_of_Supervisors/Forms/Action_Letters/20111102actions.pdf , Attachment 6) We encourage VDOT to review this project against those Board adopted resolutions.

2. Concerns of individuals and groups

- a. I believe the MPO is sharing the 160+ comments they received from their hearings on the revised transportation plan, so I am not duplicating that effort. I am attaching

comments received by the County since last June. This includes letters, emails and public comments made at various meetings of the County Board of Supervisors. There is an extensive list of concerns expressed, which I hope the assessment can address. I focus the remainder of this section on the concerns I believe have been repeated the most.

- b. Schools – Possible impacts on schools has been one of the prevalent concerns expressed. Since the last EIS, I've noted that there have been 3 major school expansions and 2 new schools built within one-half mile of the proposed bypass. The new schools are St. Anne's-Belfield, a private school at the southern terminus of this project, and Ivy Creek School, near the existing Jack Jouett Middle School. The expanded schools are Greer Elementary (less than one-quarter mile from this bypass), Jack Jouett Middle School, and Albemarle High School. For these public schools, I have provided you a map that shows the relationship between the schools and the proposed bypass. I note that other than the Ivy Creek School, the school construction started after the previous EIS was finished and when the bypass had been removed from the region's transportation plan. As no bypass was planned at the time these schools were being built, there was no consideration of impacts from this bypass on the schools. As noted in the attached citizen letters and emails, as well as comments received by the MPO, there has been considerable concern with the possible impacts of this bypass on the students.
 - c. Noise – As noted from the attached letter and emails, the County has seen a number of citizens expressing concern with the impacts of the bypass on enjoyment of their property. This has included requests for noise studies and determinations of where attenuation is considered appropriate.
 - d. Air Quality / Vehicle Emissions – Along with the noise, there has been considerable concern expressed by citizens on the amount of emissions generated from vehicles on this new road and the proximity to existing residences.
 - e. Increased traffic – Recognizing the volume of truck traffic currently on Interstate 81, a question raised by a number of the public is whether this project will encourage more trucks to use Route 29 as an alternative to Interstate 81. If true, this would mean that traffic projections for Route 29 have underestimated truck traffic. Those citizens have expressed an interest in new traffic studies that consider the likelihood that truck traffic will be diverted to Route 29 from Interstate 81, Interstate 85, or Interstate 95 as a result of this project. This information would then be used in evaluating the above concerns with noise and emissions.
3. Concerns with Natural Resources and Cultural Assets – In considering impacts of the proposed bypass, we hope that VDOT will consider the Chapter of the County's Comprehensive Plan addressing natural resources and cultural assets.

(<http://www.albemarle.org/albemarle/live/department.asp?department=cdd&relpage=3972>)

In addition to the issues and concerns already described, I note the following sections have been added or amended in the Comprehensive Plan since the prior EIS was completed.

- a. Water Resources – I note that beyond the typical stormwater management issues, the County has identified protection of groundwater and stream buffers as critical issues. While the County had protected stream buffers for most of this road's length when the EIS was completed, the section above the South Fork of the Rivanna River now has added protection of intermittent streams. Groundwater recharge and protection of water quality also remain important concerns for the County.

- b. Biologic Resources and Biodiversity – Of particular concern with a project of this type is the fragmentation of habitat with the road effectively dividing areas. The County has an established committee for this issue (Natural Heritage Committee) and we encourage you to coordinate with their staff liaison in Community Development, Scott Clark, to assure the strategies of this part of the County's Comprehensive Plan have been addressed.
- c. As previously noted, the County adopted a Historic Resources Plan since the prior EIS was completed and the County has established a committee for this issue. We encourage you to coordinate with their staff liaison in Community Development, Margaret Maliszewski, to assure the strategies of this part of the County's Comprehensive Plan have been addressed.
- d. I also encourage you to consider the Appendices of the Chapter, with particular emphasis on the Greenway Plan (http://www.albemarle.org/albemarle/upload/images/forms_center/departments/community_development/forms/Comprehensive_Plan/NATURAL_RESOURCES_&_CULRURAL_ASSETS_Appendix_A_Greenway_Plan.pdf) Given this bypass will cross the South Fork of the Rivanna River, we encourage you to consider the strategies of this plan as related to ensuring the enjoyment of this resource by County residents.

I appreciate the opportunity to provide this information for consideration with the new Environmental Assessment for the Route 29 Bypass project. Should you have any questions or concerns with this information, I will be happy to respond. Finally, we hope that the County will be provided an opportunity to review this assessment and provide comments before it is finalized. As I noted at the beginning, the short turnaround time provided for this letter has not give the County's Board of Supervisors an opportunity to consider this issue. I hope they will have that opportunity prior to the assessment being finalized.

Yours respectfully,

Mark B Graham

Mark B. Graham, P.E.
Albemarle County Director of Community Development

Attachments