

Aurora Highlands Civic Association Meeting Minutes

June 9, 2021

1. **Update on Route 1: VDOT's proposal, reactions at 1st community meeting, BPAC meeting, etc. Next steps. If you'd like more notes check out the attachment below and to get involved contact Pam Van Hine**
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5 major players:

- Amazon – wanted feasibility study done as part of agreement. “The Commonwealth’s commitment to Amazon is to improve safety, accessibility, and the pedestrian experience crossing Route 1.” (VDOT website)
- VDOT – tasked by the Commonwealth to perform the FEASIBILITY study
- Arlington County – staff have worked closely with VDOT in the background – silent partners
- National Landing BID – has wanted to bring Route 1 down to grade even before Amazon proposal; Produced Reimagine Route 1 and the People Before Cars campaign.
- Our community – through civic associations and the Livability 22202 Route 1 Working Group

VDOT project: Break down the project title:

- by **VDOT** staff and Kimley-Horn consultants; large task force; public engagements
- **Route 1** – but **ONLY** between 12th and 23rd, focusing on 15th & 18th - NOT entire Route 1 corridor
- **Multimodal** – consider impacts on all modes of transportation: driving, walking, cycling, and transit riding on or across Route 1
- **Improvements Feasibility:**
- Compare **ONLY 3 proposals:** 1) an at-grade **urban boulevard**, (at grade at 15th & 18th); 2) following **CCSP** (leaves Route 1 elevated, moves ramps to middle of Route 1 at 15th); or 3) making improvements to existing structures.
- Are down-to-grade and CCSP **feasible?** (Yes, both can be built – doesn’t mean should be built).
- Use the **Measures of effectiveness** to **score** the proposals and **balance** the competing goals.
- Ultimately, the study aims to provide sufficient information to make the best decision on a future project on Route 1 in Crystal City (A report, but not actual construction).

Summary:

We have asked that the study be changed to include:

- Enhanced safety for pedestrians and cyclists crossing Rt 1
 - Compliance with Arlington's Vision Zero Plan
 - Expanded geographic scope to include 23rd Street and all of Rt 1 to the County line.
 - Expanded conceptual scope to consider bold ideas that will serve multiple needs
 - Better alignment with the Crystal City Sector plan that has many excellent ideas.
- 2. Fern St.: A little history of AHCA efforts to address cut-through traffic and a possible resident proposal.**

Five years ago AHCA raised the problem of cut-through traffic from Eads St. Rob Douglas, who lives near Fern St., is really concerned about the continued traffic and the lack of enforcement of speeding. Rob might come back to us with a proposal to push the County to install speed humps.

3. Supportive housing as an option for the old substation lot on Ives.

The officers reported that the executive committee had met and discussed the future of the former substation at S. Ives and 18th St. The consensus was that we encourage the county to consider, among other uses, supportive housing for the former substation site.

Susan defined supportive housing as housing for people in transition and need it for a short amount of time. It also provides support from professionals such as for school, food, disability counseling, etc.

This motion wasn't approved due to Quorum not being present. It was agreed that such a letter could be sent by the executive committee.

ATTACHMENT

VDOT Route 1 Multimodal Improvements Feasibility Study

Topics: Players, VDOT project, Surveys, Areas of agreement and disagreement, community concerns about an at-grade Route 1 at 18th Street and at 15th Street, impact on local streets, importance of expanding the scope of the project, and a summary, followed by Q&A. **SIGN UP for the VDOT public meeting on June 16! The meeting website is at http://www.virginiadot.org/projects/northern_virginia/route_1_multimodal_improvements_study-third_virtual_public_information_meeting.asp**

Study Goals

- **Safety: Improve multimodal safety** for pedestrians, bicyclists, micro-mobility modes, transit, and vehicles **along and across** Route 1

- **Multimodal accessibility and accommodation:** Increase multimodal accessibility and accommodation **along and across** Route 1
- **Transit effectiveness:** Make transit more accessible, reliable, and convenient
- **Vehicular operations:** Maintain an appropriate level of vehicular operation and accommodation along Route 1 and on **intersecting streets:** 15th Street, 18th Street, 20th Street, and 23rd Street. (Does not mention parallel streets).
- **Environmental:** Preserve, protect, or enhance the built, natural, visual, and social environments
- **Urban Fabric:** Integrate Route 1 within the context of Crystal City and Pentagon City as a multimodal urban boulevard design consistent with context of the surrounding existing and future built environment

Surveys: Both L22202 and VDOT surveyed the public (289 vs. 1224, 92% lived in 22202, 44% for VDOT). Both showed a general dislike for crossing Route 1 on the surface, especially at 23rd and 20th. L22202 showed that people avoid crossing at 23rd/20th: dangerous, confusing, congested, and inconvenient), people prefer crossing at 18th by a ratio of 12:1, and 38% cross at 18th! Neither survey showed support for a down-to-grade proposal. You can find both survey results online through the VDOT project website and the Route 1 Working Group page.

Where VDOT, the BID, and L22202 Agree and Disagree on Goals and Priorities

- **All agree SAFETY** is most important goal – but disagree on how to prioritize everything else.
- **L22202-NL BID Agree:** Need to plan entire Route 1 holistically from Four Mile Run to I-395. The VDOT 9-lane proposal is unacceptable (it's not safe and it's not an urban boulevard); Route 1 speed limit needs to be lowered to 25mph or less; number of lanes and lane width needs to be reduced; intersections need to be designed for safe bike-ped crossings.
- **L22202:** Safety AND impact of diverted traffic onto our local streets (increasing traffic congestion and decreasing safety for everyone). More concerned about CROSSING Route 1 safely than traveling on it. Do not believe that any down-to-grade plan yet proposed is safe enough, while also keeping traffic off our streets. We support investigating additional bold, more innovative designs than the 3 being studied. Meanwhile, L22202 currently continues to support the CCSP.
- **BID:** Safety AND At-Grade **Urban Boulevard** is ONLY way to make Route 1 people-centric rather than car-centric. Therefore, BID does not consider any elevated Route 1 acceptable. Removing physical and psychological barriers of elevated Route 1 is critical to “mending the urban fabric.” Using the additional 3.9 acres of land gained with the removal of ramps with an-grade Route 1 is essential for commercial and retail development. By comparison, the Americana Motel site is about 1.5 acres and the Crystal Flats site is about 0.8 acres.
- **VDOT:** Safety AND traffic throughput. 60% of Rte 1 traffic is through traffic, not coming from or going into our neighborhood. We are still looking for greater detail in the

estimates of future traffic conditions. VDOT is using their process to find the best compromise proposal that balances the competing needs. Note: In March, VDOT proposed 9-lanes at 15th, but since has brought speed down to 30mph, and is considering “only” 7 lanes @ 15th and 6 lanes @ 18th. (or 7 lanes at both, or 6 lanes at both). VDOT says they cannot study all of Route 1 or consider other design options in THIS study (cost, time). They cannot limit lane width because of the size of the vehicles that use Route 1. VDOT states they cannot lower speed to 25mph because insufficient time for drivers to slow down from I-395.

Concerns with an at-grade 18th:

- 18th is currently a key bike-ped-transit rider passageway between Crystal City and Aurora Highlands. We have no convenient or safe alternative. It's perfectly safe with Route 1 above us.
- Transit impacts: Current bus shelters, bus routes, and transit riders will need to be relocated, which might not be as safe or as convenient, and may force transit riders to cross Route 1 at grade.
- How can the intersection be made safe for cyclists/pedestrians/transit riders? It isn't clear there are cyclist counts at the existing 18th Street crossing, although VDOT shared some pedestrian data at the BAC-PAC meeting (slide 12).
- Are there alternatives to an at-grade crossing for pedestrians and cyclists? Some have suggested a pedestrian and cyclist underpass there. There may be conflicts with the WMATA metro tunnels which might prevent alignment on 18th but this might work closer to 20th. At 20th, Rt 1 is much higher than Eads. An underpass would need to be straight (for visibility), well lit, and secure.
- Some have suggested pedestrians using underpasses feel unsafe. Is there data to support this assertion for 15th and 18th Street?
- The relatively short distance between Eads and Bell creates a potential for traffic to back up, as it does at 23rd. This would also increase traffic diverting to local streets.
- New traffic lights at 18th might encourage traffic to use local streets instead. The time required to give pedestrians a safe crossing of Route 1 will likely delay traffic. (stated below)
- If left turns from Route 1 are prohibited, more traffic will turn right, making multiple turns on local streets to get to their destinations. This will impact Eads and Clark/Bell, but may also spill over to other streets.

Concerns with an at-grade 15th:

- VDOT is proposing a 7-lane minimum design, with left turns (or a 6-lane with no left turns)
- Can this intersection be made safe enough for cyclists and pedestrians?
- Can buses easily and safely make the left turn onto 15th turning east into Crystal City?
- VDOT has added a “curve” to slow traffic from I-395 before intersection – what is the impact on sightlines and safety?

- Will only 1 right turn lane suffice? Should right turns be restricted for some or all of the pedestrian walk phase?

Will we have more traffic on our local streets with down-to-grade intersections at 15th and at 18th?

- Local traffic on Eads, Fern, Bell, and Crystal Drive has already increased significantly according to the PCPS transportation report.
- From Glebe to 12th Street, through traffic on Eads and on Route 1 both have six signalized intersections (there are two sets of signals on Rt 1 at 20th) currently. The at-grade proposal adds two (2) more signals to Route 1 which will likely push traffic onto Eads (and then to Fern).
- Providing safe walk phases for an at-grade intersection at 18th is likely to impact Route 1 capacity (this could be tested right now at 20th by changing the signal timing to accommodate the estimated pedestrian traffic and time needed to cross safely).
- In pre-Covid time, we have already seen traffic diverting to our local streets during rush hour, especially with the construction of Potomac Avenue.
- What will be the impact of prohibiting left turns at some Route 1 intersections – on local streets and all mode of transportation? What will be the impact on cyclists and pedestrians with no left turns, especially at Eads and at Bell?
- Should right turns on red be restricted at all intersections?
- Will Arlington change their policies on restricting traffic in the neighborhoods? If changed, will that include enforcement?

Expand the scope to include Rt 1 south to the County Line.

- This is a once in a generation opportunity to recreate Route 1. With development occurring south of 23rd Street, we should plan to improve Route 1 all the way to the County Line.
- A comprehensive plan for Route 1 will make National Landing (and our community) more seamless.
- Decisions made to the northern half of Route 1 will result in motorists diverting at points south of 23rd Street, as well as north of 23rd

Livability 22202 Route 1 Working Group timeline (key dates with VDOT/BID):

- Summer 2020: Started meeting virtually, with reps from 3 civic associations: Wrote up goals, tossed around ideas for Route 1, thought about community survey and public presentations/workshops
- August 26, 2020: First workshop: Highlights were survey plans and ideas for transforming Route 1. Also covered goals and history of Route 1.
- September 30, 2020: Second workshop: Survey results, PCPS, BID presentation
- December 16, 2020: First VDOT Public Engagement

- January 11, 2021: Sent L22202 letter and 20page detailed response to initial VDOT proposal.
- February 22, 2021: Community meeting with VDOT, during which VDOT rejected almost every suggestion we gave them in January.
- February 26, 2021: Sent a letter to the three Virginia Commonwealth delegates that represent 22202, asking for help. Virtual meeting with Del. Lopez on March 12.
- March 3, 2021: Second VDOT Public Engagement: VDOT presented a 9-lane at-grade proposal for 15th that was widely rejected by everyone.
- March 14, 2021: Sent letter and appendix to VDOT: emphasizing that **there's no apparent full at-grade configuration that will provide both adequate safety for east-west walking and biking and prevent excessive traffic from diverting onto parallel streets. If either build concept is recommended in the end, we state that the community would prefer some or all of the CCSP options.** VDOT goes silent.
- April 21, 2021: JBGS-BID Retail Meeting (Route 1 as a high-end retail destination, ala Michigan Avenue)
- May 7, 2021: Met with BID staff.
- May 17, 2021: Met with Delegate Lopez and high-level VDOT staff.
- May 18, 2021: VDOT staff meet with County Board.
- May 20, 2021: T. Gabriel, NL BID, gives update to ARCA, including People before Cars.
- June 7, 2021: BAC-PAC meeting: VDOT presentation.
- June 9, 2021: Route 1 presentation at AHCA.
- June 14, 2021: VDOT Task Force meeting
- June 16, 2021: VDOT Third Public Engagement

VDOT Route 1 MM Improvements Feasibility Study Resources:

- **BAC-PAC Joint Meeting, June 7, 2021 7PM**
- Meeting Recording and VDOT Slide Deck are available through links on this PAC page:
- <https://commissions.arlingtonva.us/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2021/06/June-2021-BAC-PAC-Addenda.docx>
- VDOT presentation starts at about 38 minutes.
- **VDOT Route 1 Third Public Engagement Meeting, Wednesday, June 16, 6:30 PM**
- Register through this link: <https://register.gotowebinar.com/register/4639365539122339852>
- Meeting information is here: http://www.virginiadot.org/projects/northern_virginia/route_1_multimodal_improvements_study-third_virtual_public_information_meeting.asp

General Route 1 websites:

- VDOT Route 1 Multimodal Improvements Feasibility Study:
- http://www.virginiadot.org/projects/northernvirginia/route_1_multimodal_improvements_study.asp
- Route 1 Working Group: <https://livability22202.org/route-1-working-group/>
- National Landing BID Reimagine Route 1: <https://nationallanding.org/get-around/route1>
- VDOT Report on Route 1 to County Board, Part of Regional Reports, Tuesday, May 18: Video recording is here (VDOT presentation starts at 37 minutes)
- http://arlington.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view_id=2&clip_id=3917
- Congress for the New Urbanism (CNU): Highways to Boulevards
- <https://www.cnu.org/our-projects/highways-boulevards>
- NACTO City Limits: <https://nacto.org/safespeeds/>
- Smart Growth America: Dangerous by Design: <https://smartgrowthamerica.org/dangerous-by-design/>

Minutes submitted by:

Alistair Watson, Recording Secretary

Minutes approved:

TBD

