

**Regarding the Braddock Road Multimodal Improvement Project November 29, 2022, public meeting -  
Comments of the Friends of Accotink Creek**

December 21 2022

To:

VDOT  
FCDOT  
Supervisor Walkinshaw  
Senator Marsden  
Senator Saslaw  
Delegate Watts  
Delegate Filler-Corn



***"Begin with the premise that the automobile must accommodate the earth, rather than vice versa."***

**Executive summary in a nutshell:**

- **Danbury Forest Drive intersection** - Base Option is good. Option 1 is very wrong.
- **Stormwater** - Synergize with [Long Branch Central Watershed Management Area Project](#).
- **Shared Use Paths** – Non-automotive options are welcome, but at what environmental cost vs. benefit?
- **Pedestrian Bridge** – Can be deleted in favor of trees.
- **Multimodal** – Maximize use of [Complete Streets](#) concepts for a showcase result.
- **Habitat** – Preservation of trees and habitat is essential.
- **495 Cloverleaf** – Replant a problem spot left over here from the 495 Express Lanes.
- **Sobering Realities** – The Chesapeake Bay and the climate demand our attention.

**Danbury Forest Drive intersection:**

You will surely hear a lot from citizens about this intersection. We applaud the innovative “R turn” solutions of the Base Option at Danbury Forest Drive that avoid incursion into the wetland areas along Long Branch. Our thanks go to VDOT for choosing this more environmental option.

Option 1 may be dead, but many residents seem to be applying CPR. People are overly skeptical of the unfamiliar, but will soon become accustomed and see the advantages. Stick to your guns regarding the Base Option. The old-fashioned square intersection of Option 1 offers no advantage, either for travelers or for the environment. Let’s go forward with the innovative solution of the Base Option.

Nor would Option 1 be viewed as the “Least Environmentally Damaging Practical Alternative” by the Army Corps of Engineers and Virginia Department of Environmental Quality. Nor will it help Fairfax County achieve any of our Chesapeake Bay preservation goals [[Chesapeake Bay Preservation Ordinance](#)]. Option 1 would also face difficulty gaining approval from the National Environmental Policy Act’s Section 4(f) perspective regarding taking of parkland. Let’s avoid the risk of being scalded in the boiling regulatory alphabet soup of NEPA, DEQ, USACE, NPS, etc. by sticking with the Base Option.

Even simpler and less costly alternatives do still exist. For example, [this proposal shared by a neighbor](#). Or the simplest of all – turn Danbury Forest Drive into a cul-de-sac.

Again, the Base Option at Danbury Forest Drive is the best for both travelers and for achieving the environmental goals of Fairfax County and Virginia.

**Stormwater:**

Long Branch is already a designated impaired stream subject to a [TMDL plan](#) (along with Accotink Creek). It is also the subject of the [Long Branch Central Watershed Management Area Project](#) for extensive work to reduce stormwater runoff. Lake Accotink, just downstream from Braddock Road, requires urgent dredging at a cost to taxpayers of some

\$50 million. By working hand-in-hand, the Braddock Road project and the Long Branch project together can achieve synergy for a better chance to reduce sediment generation.

This project provides the opportunity for incorporating stormwater retrofits to control runoff from existing pavement. We should accept no excuses for foregoing this rare opportunity to correct past oversights. However, rather than sacrifice additional forested habitat for stormwater ponds, let's incorporate advanced stormwater controls within the roadway itself. [[VDOT Rolling Road example](#)] [[Alexandria examples](#)]

### **Shared Use Paths:**

The shared use paths will bring welcome improvements to automobile alternatives in the corridor. But why do trees and habitat always give way to asphalt when such environmental good intentions are put into practice?

It is a daunting mental challenge to look at such trees-to-asphalt conversions and convince ourselves we are doing an environmental good. Are we? Really? The lack of data on existing path usage makes costs vs. benefits difficult to evaluate. Utilization data for existing and new shared use paths should be collected to inform our planning.

What happens to the old trail when new shared use paths are installed - abandonment in place or environmental restoration? Of course, we could spare trees by simply refurbishing the existing trail and foregoing the new shared use paths. The challenges of making the old path ADA compliant should be comparable to building from scratch. [Fairfax City's proposed [Pickett Road Connector Trail](#) has ADA exceptions attained by providing strategic handrails and resting points, solutions that might be applied here.]

Planting shade trees of suitable native species along any new shared use paths will improve user comfort and also somewhat reduce the heat island effect of increased asphalt pavement. Any trees planted will also mitigate the setback to Fairfax County's [CECAP](#) climate goals.

At the meeting, a presenter questioned the safety of having children walk behind trees (the existing path),

- Yet in other present cases, we hear the value of paving new paths through forests with no such concern.
- Yet we must ask if the well being of children would not be best served by forgoing unmitigated deforestation in this time of global warming when our children need every carbon-sink tree we can save?

When will we ever cease the practice of using sidewalks and shared use paths, and especially handicapped curb cuts, as a [dumping place for winter snow](#)? This unfortunate habit is certainly no incentive to non-automotive travel.

### **Pedestrian Bridge:**

Presenters at the meeting suggested the option of omitting the pedestrian bridge at Burke Lake Road, citing cost and tree loss. We are very much in favor of saving trees and would approve of deleting the bridge.

If the pedestrian bridge is not built, let's make the crosswalks here exceptionally inviting to pedestrians, with extra safety and visibility features, and no requirement to push buttons for a green signal.

If the pedestrian bridge is built, let's make it an esthetic gem that will attract admiration and photography, rather than a utilitarian eyesore.

### **Multimodal:**

The designation "multimodal" too often equals road widening plus even more asphalt for bikes. That is the case here. There are no transit lanes, nor integrated planning for transit.

In response to a citizen question about sound walls, a presenter indicated no sound study was required because no lanes are to be added. Yet two 10 foot wide asphalt paths plus attendant tree clearing are equivalent to adding 1.5 traffic

lanes. This 1.5 lane widening is made in the hope of reduction of vehicle miles traveled, but that hope is not substantiated by any data. We request to know which regulation provides the soundwall exemption.

Discussion/debate at the meeting of pedestrian and bicycle options inspired some thoughts:

Shared use paths receive a certain level of use, but to be honest, as currently configured, they can be desolate and uninviting – whipped by cold winds in winter and baked in the sun in summer, with too many obstacles and delays at driveways & intersections. We don't have ready answers, but if we cannot find ways to make these shared use paths considerably more inviting, we can expect the same sparse use that we see on the existing Braddock Road shared use path west of the project area.

Crosswalks are too often a “Run, rabbit, run!” challenge demanding heightened alertness, steady nerves, and faith in the protection of Providence. Vehicles have the advantage in every way whereas it should be pedestrians who are made to feel confident, safe, and prioritized.

- Crosswalks in every quadrant should be the default in this project area and everywhere. Whenever traffic lights cycle green for vehicles, they should also automatically turn green for pedestrians and bicycles on the shared use path.
- The inviting, safe, and pleasant experience, with placemaking features of [Complete Streets](#) envisioned by [Active Fairfax](#) should be our guide.
- Let's be instructed by a [Vision Zero](#) ethic.
- The principles of Fairfax County's [Safe Streets for All](#) and its [Street Design](#) recommendations, including effective enforcement of road rules, should govern.
- [VDOT's Bicycle and Pedestrian Treatments](#) offers a rich palette of safety options which should be liberally painted along this corridor, turning it into a showcase.
- The speed limit will likely have to be reduced to 35 mph for pedestrian multimodality to have its best chance of success.



#### **Habitat:**

No net loss of tree cover or habitat should be caused by the project. Equivalent acreage of native species replanting should occur in closely adjacent areas. Or at least we forlornly wish this would happen to halt the relentless nibbling away of our remaining tree canopy on all fronts. The right of way along nearby Americana Drive has been suggested as one location in need of replanting. Here again, any trees planted would mitigate the setback to Fairfax County's [CECAP](#) climate goals.

Existing median tree plantings in the corridor may not be in the best health. They should be cared for. In partial remediation of tree loss elsewhere, new median tree plantings should be put in place wherever space remains. Median plantings should be maintained by VDOT, not dependent upon volunteer perpetual care agreements. Wouldn't a corridor of flowering native trees be splendid?

VDOT's no-mow pollinator zones that already exist in spots along the corridor should be expanded to the maximum extent possible.

The bridge over Accotink Creek presents one of the very limited opportunities for safe terrestrial wildlife movement across Braddock Road. Improvements planned for human passage under the bridge should not come at the cost of wildlife movement. This may even present an opportunity to facilitate wildlife movement.

The project corridor is thick with invasive alien plant species. Long-term invasive plant control should be instituted on whatever vegetated areas remain along the right of way. No invasive or non-native species should be introduced. Park areas are reseeded with native plant seed mixes - the entire corridor could receive the same treatment. If any stormwater ponds must be built, they should receive pollinator mixes and no mow maintenance.

## **495 Cloverleaf:**

Let's replant the barren section of the southeast quadrant of the 495 cloverleaf in partial remediation of tree loss elsewhere.

Informal use of this quadrant as a staging area (and now becoming an illicit dumping area) should be curtailed.

## **Back to the Drawing Board?**

"Carmel [Indiana] replaced five lanes of traffic with just two lanes and multiple roundabouts. Green space and sidewalks have sprouted where those lanes used to be, and total traffic flow on the road has actually increased." – [Washington Post article](#)

## **Sobering Realities We All Face:**

"But the overall rate of tree losses has been so great that even doubling or tripling plantings won't close the gap by itself." - [Chesapeake Bay Journal article](#)

We have missed goal after goal for improving the health of the Chesapeake Bay. Wishful thinking and halfway measures will not preserve the Bay or Accotink Creek. – [Chesapeake Bay Journal article](#)

There is no credible pathway to 1.5C in place, the UN has said. We need every carbon-sink tree we can save to avoid climate disaster! - [2022 UN Emissions Gap Report](#)

***"Dominion over nature is a gift which has been given us yoked to the trust for its preservation."***

**[#SaveCinderBedWoods](#)**