

July 24, 2023

Subject: Why there is a need to establish an expert panel to review the VDOT plans for the Braddock Rd Corridor

From: Michael Perel, 4700 Declaration Ct, Annandale VA 22003

I and other citizens and organizations have reached out to you over the past year to express concerns regarding the proposals shared by the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) for the \$74+ million Braddock Rd Multimodal project. We question the value of the shared use paths relative to their monetary costs and adverse impacts on our environment and community. The claimed benefits of the proposed intersection changes should also be reassessed. VDOT has attempted to address some of the community concerns in the preview of their presentation ahead of Wednesday's meeting. However, because of the high estimated costs of this project, the questionable benefits, and the adverse environmental impacts on our community, I ask you to work with other legislators to set up an independent, expert panel to review the data, assumptions, claimed benefits, and adverse impacts. This is obviously a complicated project as evidenced by how long it has been studied and apparently rejected twice for funding. As such, the proposed VDOT plan would benefit from an independent expert panel review and more citizen involvement. This review would help residents feel more comfortable with either the VDOT options or better alternatives that might be identified. Below are some of the issues that such an expert panel should examine:

1. Questionable justification to gain Smart Scale funding approval: We have been told that the intersection improvement funding was contingent on building SUPs in order to make this project multimodal. Residents who know the area can not imagine that the SUPs will provide any meaningful multimodal transportation. These paths duplicate existing paths and trails plus neighborhood sidewalks along the corridor that people are already using. In addition, no studies have been conducted to show that the SUPs would meet a need that the existing paths don't provide. The key justification needed—level of use of a new path and origin and destination study-- was never studied. (As VDOT stated in their summary report: "We do not have complete bike and pedestrian data for the corridor.") The SUPs will be unappealing to use because they will be without shade and next to speeding, noisy, and polluting traffic. Without valid justification for the need for these extensive paths, there is no basis for claiming it will lead to a viable multimodal corridor. This could be a multimillion dollar waste of money if the SUP is not used and does not help to reduce car use on Braddock Rd.
2. Flawed survey used to claim support for and use of SUPs: The survey that VDOT and FCDOT claim shows community support for the SUP is deeply flawed in terms of the methodology, questions asked, and interpretation of findings. Thus, there are reasons to question the validity and interpretation of the findings. VDOT and the FCDOT report provided no description of the method for conducting the survey. There was no information on how respondents were selected or data on their demographic characteristics. Only 593 responses were received. It appears to be just a survey of convenience; not statistically representative of residents. The questions were

phrased in a way that biased the findings, e.g., there was no description of the implications of the proposed SUP design on the environment or availability of existing walkways.

3. **Adverse Environmental and Community Impacts of the SUP:** Known environmental benefits of keeping trees and vegetation do not appear to outweigh hypothetical benefits of the SUP planned for both sides of Braddock Rd. Trees along a 25 ft wide area on both sides of Braddock Rd will be bulldozed. Among the environmental benefits of the Braddock roadside vegetation are: carbon capture, intercepting stormwater, and providing wildlife habitat. The U.S. Department of Agriculture estimates that just 100 trees can remove 53 tons of carbon dioxide and 430 pounds of other air pollutants every year. The tree destruction will increase noise, light, and exhaust pollution for homes adjacent to Braddock Road, as well as reduced shade for those people who may be using the proposed new paths. Roadside trees are known to reduce vehicle speeds.
4. **Misleading Traffic Improvement Expectations of the SUPs:** We believe the expectation that the shared-use path will alleviate traffic on Braddock Road during peak times by encouraging alternative modes of transportation is misguided, based on flawed analyses, and also ignores potentially more impactful and cost-effective options, such as improved bus services, incentives for carpooling, and telework opportunities.
5. **Misleading Braddock Rd Congestion Improvement Estimates:** VDOT estimates suggest that if no changes to intersections are made, there would be a “30% increase in average intersection delay, 20% increase in travel time along the corridor” by 2045. This was estimated for travel between Ravensworth Rd and Twinbrook Rd, which is further West of the proposed construction. They then estimate that their redesigns of the intersections would result in a 20% improvement in intersection delay and 14% improvement in travel time. These projections do not appear to account for induced demand, the well established phenomenon whereby increasing roadway capacity encourages more people to drive, thus failing to improve congestion as much as anticipated. Moreover, the projections and estimated travel time reductions due to the modifications are given as point values and do not include upper and lower error bounds typical of statistical estimates where there can be variability in the data.
6. **Outdated Data and Assumptions:** The initial data and assumptions used in the project planning are over eight years old. It is common sense to update this information to ensure accurate decision-making. Since then, commuting patterns have changed. New County environmental and strategic planning efforts have given greater emphasis to environmental needs. In particular, the project was initiated before CECAP (the Community Energy and Climate Action Plan) and Resilient Fairfax plans, which have heightened our awareness of the climate crisis.
7. **Safety Concerns for Pedestrians and Bikers:** Constructing paths on both sides of Braddock will increase potential for risky mid-block crossings. Pedestrians will rarely go out of their way to cross at an intersection. They will take the most direct route possible to get to their destination, even if this means crossing several lanes of high-speed traffic. Because the SUP will not cross the Beltway on the South side of Braddock Rd, bicyclists and pedestrians using the Southern

SUP will have to cross Braddock somewhere if they want to get to Ravensworth Rd. The paths will also bring bicyclists/pedestrians into conflicts with turning vehicles at side street crossings and at the beltway overpass, where high speed traffic is merging onto Braddock Rd. The long grade on Braddock Rd will encourage bicycle speeding and conflicts with pedestrians who may not hear bikers approaching from their rear.

8. Safety Impacts on Motorists: The proposed complicated intersection at Wakefield Chapel and Danbury Forest includes the retention of the left turn traffic signal at Wakefield Chapel and the addition of another left turn signal at Danbury Forest. This design has the potential to increase potential conflicts and jeopardize motorist safety. It is not a true “Restricted Crossing U Turn” design because of those two left turn opportunities. Adding additional traffic lights will also increase the risk of rear-end crashes into stopped vehicles. Community residents have raised concerns about other proposed intersection realignments, such as at Kings Park Dr and Burke Lake Rd.

Given the significant impact this project will have on our community and the complexity of the issues involved, the need for an independent expert panel review is a common sense approach to assuring that our tax dollars will be spent wisely and make meaningful improvements in traffic without jeopardizing safety and our environment. Can you help establish the panel?

Thank you once again for your unwavering attention to this project and our neighborhood.