



January 17, 2017

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Subject: VDOT Proposed Overhead Bike & Pedestrian Bridge - Lee Highway

The Arlington - East Falls Church Civic Association and citizens petition VDOT, Arlington County, Northern Virginia Regional Parks and the City of Falls Church to immediately pause the proposed VDOT overhead bridge crossing over Lee Highway near I-66. **This VDOT project, if not paused, will create problems for holistic future pedestrian and cyclist transit development in the area, as well as create negative impacts on the surrounding neighborhood in a way that a more thoughtful design would not.** Although we need a trail crossing, we need a plan that considers more than solely the VDOT controlled right of way. Pause this project so the neighborhood and the surrounding areas can fully consider the problems we are trying to address (both present and future).

1. Improved Safety Measures & Improved Bicycle and Pedestrian Network in the Vicinity-

The present state of the W&OD trail is dangerous. Cyclists face serious hazards as they make their way to the W&OD trail navigating through busy neighborhood blocks already inundated with cut through traffic (cars and pedestrians) from Metro users, a high volume of motor vehicles cutting through the neighborhood to reach I-66, school buses trying to load and unload and neighborhood residents simply trying to come and go from their homes.

2. Need for Missing Segment of W&OD Trail- As serious cyclists commute on the trail, they are essentially dumped out for a five block span into a neighborhood that intersects considerable traffic, both vehicular and metro commuter pedestrians. Any plan to provide an overhead bridge should restore the missing segment of the trail as the missing segment causes friction and dangerous near misses regularly.

3. Neighborhood Development - Arlington- East Falls Church Area Plan - The proposed bridge would place a major and permanent obstacle in the middle of a neighborhood space that is central to smart future neighborhood development (including a West Entrance to the EFC Metro and possible overhead I-66 development). Properly planned, this development will unify the two halves of a neighborhood bisected by I-66. This is the heart of the vision expressed throughout the East Falls Church Area Plan.

4. Impediment to Future West Entrance to EFC Metro - Arlington has the opportunity to create a true multimodal improvement by creating a West Entrance to the East Falls Church Metro. The VDOT proposed bridge would stand in the way of this opportunity to serve Arlington and Falls Church residents looking to use Metro and help get more cars off the road. The bridge's Eastern abutment will present a nearly insurmountable challenge to the design of a Western entrance to the East Falls Church Metro.

5. Visual Impact to the Area - This bridge, at nearly a fifth of a mile in length and approaching three stories in height presents a massive visual and functional barrier to the sights and activity of East Falls Church area, particularly the pedestrian oriented design of the highway at this location.

What is the vision for EFC in Arlington? - For the past two years we have endured the VDOT Spot 2 project near this location (which is still not complete) and are now faced with this proposed impending overhead structure as part of the I-66 Tolling/Widening Project. We do not need more structures along with the additional billboard signs to advertise dynamic tolling. **This area should be planned for as the inviting Western entrance to Arlington County, not a "truck stop" feel where cars race through to access I-66.** How does this bridge impact the discussion around a true connective solution for our community? Why is there no conversation about the crumbling sidewalk on the narrow bridge that is unsafe to walk on to cross over I-66 to get children safely to and from Tuckahoe Elementary School? How does this impact the large scale renovation of the near by Benjamin Banneker Park that has trail improvements as part of its project plan?

Sample of Alternate Suggestions Include:

1. A trail alignment that proceeds from the west along Four Mile Run behind the Fire House, under Lee Highway (**using existing box culvert**) and behind the West Lee condominium and live work units where it returns immediately to Westmoreland Street, whence as a bike lane or side path it follows Westmoreland to 19th Street to Van Buren Street to reconnect this the existing trail in Benjamin Banneker Park.

2. Taking the W&OD across Fairfax Drive at the same intersection, going under the Lee Highway overpass, and following the I-66 right of way across Sycamore St, across or under the eastbound I-66 onramp and reconnecting with the W&OD trail at the landmark known as Brandymore Castle.

We ask that you take a step back from this bridge and evaluate with the many groups involved to look at sound and BETTER solutions than this band-aid bridge that does not position ARLINGTON for success. **Please note, the neighborhood only learned about this bridge in October.** I would ask that VDOT provide you with data specific to Arlington residents on their thoughts about the inside the beltway project for your review when after their public comment period on January 30th.

Sincerely,
Kelly Alexis
President, Arlington-East Falls Church Civic Association