Board of Supervisors Transportation Committee Meeting Minutes

October 29, 2024, at 3:00 p.m.
Conference Room 11, Government Center

Board of Supervisors Members Present:
James N. Bierman, Jr., Dranesville District (Committee Chairman)
Walter L. Alcorn, Hunter Mill District (Committee Vice Chairman)
Jeffrey C. McKay, At-Large (Chairman)
Kathy L. Smith, Sully District (Vice-Chairman)
James R. Walkinshaw, Braddock District
Rodney L. Lusk, Franconia District
Andres F. Jimenez, Mason District
Daniel G. Storck, Mount Vernon District
Dalia A. Palchik, Providence District
Patrick S. Herrity, Springfield District

Board Members Absent: None

County Leadership:
Bryan J. Hill, County Executive
Beth Teare, County Attorney

Link to agenda and presentation materials:
https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/boardofsupervisors/board-supervisors-transportation-committee-meeting-oct-29-2024

Committee Chairman Bierman called the meeting to order at 3:04 p.m.

1. Opening Remarks

2. Approval of Minutes

The Committee approved the September 17, 2024, meeting minutes.

3a. I-495 NEXT Project Overview

Three officials from the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT), Michelle Shropshire, Megaprojects Director; Rimpal Shah, Project Engineer; and Bill Cuttler, Northern Virginia District Engineer; updated the Committee on major activities of the I-495 NEXT project. The construction update included major lane closures and traffic diversions on northbound (NB) I-495 near Tysons and details of the I-495 (Capital Beltway) traffic scheduled to be shifted in phases onto new outside lanes in early 2025. The work also included the replacement of old

bridges with upgraded and new bridges featuring sidewalks and trail connections. The new noise wall installation was at 45 percent completion. The revegetation plan was presented at a series of public meetings. The main themes requested were year-round vegetative screening, using vegetation to hide the noise walls, using trees over shrubs, and others. There were also maintenance-related questions. The Big Beam weekend is scheduled in late January 2025 to install five large bridge girders over I-495 NB at the Dulles Corridor Interchange for the new 495 Express Lanes ramp. The weekend-long operation will impact traffic in the Tysons area. The reasons for the weekend-long operation are to shorten the duration of impacts to travelers, not overextend into many weekends, and to allow enough time for the construction crew to complete the bridge replacement and upgrades. VDOT will coordinate with several local and regional agencies, such as the Virginia State Police, Fairfax County Police Department, and Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department. VDOT will conduct a robust outreach campaign to inform travelers of lane closures and impacts by asking them to avoid the area and adjust travel plans. Social and traditional media will be key in updating and sharing information with the public. VDOT will continue planning, coordinating, and briefing regional agencies and partners on the plans, details, dates, and timing.

Committee Chair Bierman applauded VDOT's early completion of a new bridge project over Georgetown Pike. He indicated that all Fairfax County residents and travelers will feel the impact of narrowing I-495 NB to a 2-lane road for the project. He urged VDOT to do public outreach at all nine magisterial districts in the County.

Chairman McKay praised VDOT's efforts in community outreach meetings for the revegetation plan from April to October 2024. He asked if VDOT would continue the meetings for another round of public comments and inputs and how VDOT would incorporate those comments into their revised plan. Ms. Shropshire said that there were not many comments from the public. VDOT is working to finalize the plan and will present it early in 2025 with County staff and others. VDOT will not have another public meeting on the revised revegetation plan.

Supervisor Palchik recommended that the project team work with the Fairfax County Department of Transportation (FCDOT) and public transit partners to encourage people to use alternate forms of transportation during that Big Beam weekend and emphasized the need for public outreach or one-on-one conversations with the affected homeowners. Ms. Shropshire stated that there have been opportunities for those homeowners and communities to share their concerns and comments and to share the project news with them regularly.

Supervisor Alcorn asked for details on the closures/detours affecting the Dulles Toll Road (DTR) and the Dulles Access Road. Ms. Shropshire confirmed that the Dulles Access Road would stay open. The eastbound DTR at Dulles Airport Access Highway to northbound I-495 will be closed and detoured. The westbound DTR under I-495 will be closed and detoured. The plan seeks to avoid traffic diversion through Tysons.

3b. I-495 Southside Express Lanes Study

Michelle Shropshire, Rimpal Shah, and Bill Cuttler (VDOT) continued to update the Committee on the I-495 Southside Express Lanes Study. The Northern Virginia Regional Express Lanes network is 94 miles long, including I-395 (reversible lanes), I-495 (2 lanes each direction), I-66 Outside the Beltway (2 lanes each direction), and I-66 Inside the Beltway (2 lanes, weekday peak travel time, peak commute direction). Three miles of network are under construction: the I-495 Northern Extension (2 lanes in each direction, opening late 2025) and the I-95 Express Lanes/Optiz Boulevard Ramp (opening late 2024).

The I-495 Southside Express Lanes study consists of the environmental study to extend the Express Lanes system to 11 miles of the southern section of I-495 (Capital Beltway) and ongoing coordination with federal, state, regional, and local agencies in Virginia and Maryland. The study area is from the Springfield Interchange in Fairfax County, across the Woodrow Wilson Memorial Bridge, to the MD 210 interchange in Prince George's County, Maryland. The study has three alternative scenarios: No-Build, 1 Express Lane, and 2 Express Lanes. VDOT will study the existing conditions and traffic patterns, as well as existing and future traffic conditions, to compare the travel time benefits. The study will present new transit and multimodal options, new bike-pedestrian facilities, and access while preserving space for future Metrorail. Weekly agency coordination between VDOT and the Maryland Department of Transportation's State Highway Administration (MDOT/SHA) is ongoing. There are meetings scheduled for public/stakeholder outreach and engagement activities. The study was initiated in early 2022 and is expected to be voted for inclusion in the Visualize 2050 plan in 2025.

Chairman McKay stated that he believed in the project and hoped it would stay on track because of the benefits in travel time and new transit and multimodal options. He mentioned the project's challenges, asking what would happen if Maryland did not support it. Ms. Shropshire responded that VDOT was still hopeful that the benefits of the project and the study's findings, future traffic conditions, and alternatives would be able to convince Maryland that this would benefit the whole region. Chairman McKay reiterated his hope for the project to be successful as planned. However, he encouraged VDOT to prepare a high-level analysis for the scenario that the project would not extend to Maryland, including traffic spillover and reduced benefits.

Supervisor Storck said it was hard explaining to communities that adding this project would somehow improve the current traffic gridlock. Communities were skeptical about the whole process. He listed several issues that concerned people in his district, including the existing gridlock, the requirements for on and off-ramps for this project, how this study would be incorporated with the Huntington Area Transportation Study (HATS), how to avoid creating a pass-through for commuters, reducing cut-through traffic in the area, and other needs. He stressed that many things need to be done and discussed with the communities before they could support the study.

Supervisor Lusk shared Supervisor Storck's concerns, especially the study's impacts on arterial roadways such as Franconia Road and South Van Dorn Street. He asked for the maximum areas of disturbance in terms of the project's limits. Ms. Shropshire replied that this was a National

Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) study, so there was no specific area of disturbance like an engineering study requires. Supervisor Lusk asked when the information would become available. Ms. Shropshire did not provide a timeline, noting many variables, such as whether the project could move forward as a Public-Private Partnership (P3), the inclusion of the Financially Constrained Long-Range Plan (CLRP), and other factors. Supervisor Lusk asked if the Commuter Choice Program would be used to minimize congestion issues. Ms. Shropshire responded if the project becomes a P3 project, then annual transit payments can be worked into terms within any potential contract or concessionaire agreement.

Supervisor Herrity stated that the benefits of the Express Lanes for carpoolers and buses are often overlooked, namely that mass transit would move people quicker. He inquired if there was a federal requirement to keep rail across the Woodrow Wilson Bridge. Ms. Shropshire answered that it was initially written in the NEPA process when constructing the bridge. Supervisor Herrity asked for the cost of keeping the rail option. VDOT staff stated they are working with the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) to get the number later. Supervisor Herrity's concern was that the rail option might push the price too high for the project.

Supervisor Alcorn stated that the projected afternoon traffic in 2050 did not look good, even with the Express Lanes. He thought that something else needed to be done to improve the traffic. Chairman McKay related to the traffic on the Beltway and the surrounding arterial roads. If we do nothing, as in the "No-Build" scenario, he "guaranteed" that Franconia Road, Route 1, and Huntington Avenue are the roads that people would cut through to get around. He questioned why the communities were concerned about the increased traffic they thought this project would bring to the area; when he believed that the gridlock on I-495 would bring more traffic to the area.

Committee Chair Bierman summarized the discussion and emphasized that if I-495 is backed up, every road around will be in trouble. He hoped Maryland would get on board and make this project happen.

4. Follow-Up Discussion: Local Authority for Setting Speed Limits

Vanessa Holt, Engineer IV, and Neil Freschman, Chief, Traffic Engineering Section, FCDOT, followed up on the September 2024 meeting presentation on the new local authority by providing information about what other jurisdictions are doing in regard to speed limits, including the City of Falls Church, which reduced their speed limits to 20 mph on residential streets. Reviewing local roads on a case-by-case basis, Montgomery County, Maryland, began its pilot program with five (5) roads in 2021 and has expanded to over 100 roads. Washington, D.C.; Portland, Oregon; Seattle, Washington; and Cambridge, Massachusetts, reduced the speed limit on most local residential streets to 20 mph. Washington, D.C., and Seattle also reduced some arterial speed limits to 25 mph. Portland reduced the posted speed limit to 20 mph, which resulted in lower vehicle speeds and fewer vehicles traveling at higher speeds. Cambridge lowered the speed limits on most neighborhood streets from 25 to 20 mph and experienced similar results as Portland.

The VDOT process and guidance document was presented. VDOT recommendations include developing processes with local law enforcement and applying them to roads with self-enforcing characteristics such as on-street parking, pedestrian activity, sidewalks, and marked crosswalks on roadways with a minimum length of 0.2 miles or 1,000 ft. Staff recommended that the Board select three pilot roads from a list that FCDOT staff developed based on vulnerability index and roadway characteristics. Community engagement will also play a crucial role in the implementation of the pilot. Staff will collect data for analysis beyond the pilot study based on the feedback to develop a future program/process.

Committee Chair Bierman expressed concern that the proposed three (3) roads for the pilot were insufficient as each district (based on a quick poll at the meeting) had roads to include. He asked for increased staff time if the pilot program was to scale up to at least nine roads. Mr. Freschman indicated they would use existing Residential Traffic Administration Program (RTAP) staff in the initial proposal to collect data, perform fieldwork checks, and submit the application for VDOT approval. If the pilot program were to expand (to nine), he thought they could do it in phases and as the program advances within their capacity.

Chairman McKay said he supported the pilot program but wanted more samples based on the County's different environments and characteristics. He underlined the County's diversity of geography and physical environments. Regarding the staff's question on the feedback on implementation beyond the pilot study, Chairman McKay said that the results from the pilot program will help steer staff toward the answer. Before seeing the data and analysis, he did not want to answer this question.

Supervisor Smith was concerned with the limited resources and wanted to know where the problem areas were. She stressed the need to identify the dangerous problems and locations we are trying to solve.

Supervisor Walkinshaw stated that he supported the program. He thought that if this was in the RTAP tool kit, the community could lower the speed limit instead of installing the speed humps. That could save the County some money and give the community more choices.

Supervisor Palchik asked about the changing speed limit signs and who would be responsible for the replacement cost. Mr. Freschman responded that the County would be responsible for the cost of new signage. Supervisor Palchik stressed the importance of this new tool for pedestrian and bicycle safety and said that the cost may be lower than other solutions.

Supervisor Alcorn supported the program. He suggested looking at areas not qualifying for the traffic calming program. Many roads have a speed limit of 35 to 40 mph that needs to be lower; the County has the authority to do it now.

5. DMVMoves Overview

Clark Mercer, Executive Director of the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments, briefed the Board on DMVMoves. Gregg Steverson, Acting Director, FCDOT, Noelle Dominguez, Chief of the Coordination and Funding Division, and Brent Riddle, Chief of the

Coordination Section, FCDOT, were also there for the discussion. DMVMoves is a joint initiative by the Metropolitan Washington Council of Government (COG) and the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) to develop a unified vision and sustainable funding model for public transit in the region. The initiative will re-examine the existing transit network model and decide what the region wants and needs, the costs and funding, and how to best manage and govern it.

Mr. Mercer began by noting that last year Metro overcame a funding gap of $480 million. The District, Maryland and Virginia have different funding mechanisms to pay for Metro. Metro provides about 87 percent of transit in the region along with VRE, Maryland Area Rail Commuter (MARC), buses from many jurisdictions, and others. DMVMoves is examining all types of transit and their associated funding issues. In addition to the DMV Moves Task Force, which includes elected officials from the District, Maryland, and Virginia, as well as other senior officials, other key stakeholders from the region are involved in this process and have been divided into two groups. The community partner group is led by Mr. Jack McDougle, President & CEO of the Greater Washington Board of Trade, which includes small businesses, trade groups, chambers of commerce, industries, labor unions, and environmental groups. The government partner group led by Mr. Bryan Hill, Fairfax County Executive, includes the executives from the region's localities, transit bus operators, VDOT, MDOT, the District Department of Transportation (DDOT), and others.

DMVMoves benchmarks WMATA with 11 other major transit providers in the United States, looking at efficiency, growth, and the outcomes they want to achieve. Mr. Mercer stated that in FY 2028, the cost to fund the existing transit in this region will be roughly between $600 million, $700 million, and up to a billion dollars. There are projections for population growth and the traffic associated with that if the region does not act. He discussed the current state of Metro's ridership before and after COVID-19, with Metro having the fastest U.S. ridership recovery at 81% of pre-pandemic. The region's population has increased from 3 million people in 1990 to 6 million today. The next 20 to 30 years, the population will increase by 1.5 million people. He said the region would be gridlocked with traffic without a robust transit system. He also discussed the capital and operation budgets and compared Metro with other transit providers in the region and the country.

He discussed six improvements to the transit system:

1. Fare policy for the region: uniform and consistent policy for the region, such as kids ride free, discount policy, and fare-free for youths
2. Adopted shared service guidelines for when and how often transit operates and measured performance
3. Improve wayfinding signs for the users
4. Bus priority strategies on how to get the best value for high-frequency routes, bus-only lanes, and others
5. Administrative and cost efficiencies: joined procurement for cost savings of acquiring equipment for the region, such as buses, high tech equipment, and buying in bulk

6. Training, certification, and inspection programs for the region

The task force will discuss issues of capital budget (issue bond program for the next 30 to 40 years) in mid-November and operations in December (the 3% cap each year). Committee Chair Bierman asked the Board members to send their questions to Mr. Hill and Mr. Mercer.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:44 p.m. The next Board Transportation Committee is scheduled for February 25, 2025. The schedule for 2025 has not been officially confirmed yet.