



Rethinking the Bi-County Parkway

Executive Summary

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The Virginia Department of Transportation's ("VDOT") own traffic modeling data reveal that the proposed Bi-County Parkway ("BCP") would worsen, not relieve, traffic congestion. The same model shows that the comprehensive alternative offered by our coalition (termed the "Substitute Vision" by VDOT) will better address congestion in the study area, and better serve the dominant need for east-west traffic capacity—now and in the future.

By contrast, the BCP would generate more traffic and more congestion in southern Loudoun County and the areas of Prince William County around Manassas National Battlefield Park ("Park"). The Substitute Vision, a package of common-sense solutions, would generate lower traffic volumes, would better serve local trips, and would move traffic around the Park with significantly fewer impacts both to this irreplaceable historic resource and to surrounding communities.

In its analysis of the Substitute Vision, VDOT has effectively disclosed that it has not included many of the most sensible and critically necessary projects in the current Six-Year Improvement Program or worked to make sure they are included in the regional priorities plan (the Constrained Long Range Plan). The neglected projects would ease east-west commutes, help travelers on Route 28 between Manassas and Route 7, and improve local traffic in areas with planned development in southern Loudoun and western Prince William counties. Important examples of VDOT's failure to provide for needed projects are the lack of full funding for the I-66/Route 28 interchange, the absence of any funding for the Route 28/Braddock Road interchange, and the lack of funding for key primary roads in southern Loudoun and western Prince William counties.

VDOT's priority focus on the BCP is perplexing given its findings that the Bi-County Parkway's effects on I-66 would be "limited," and that the BCP would result in minimal reductions in traffic volumes on Route 28.

For nearly a decade, our coalition of historic preservation, conservation and smart growth groups has recommended comprehensive alternatives for handling traffic in the Bi-County Parkway study area, and lower-impact alternatives for moving traffic around the Park in lieu of building the proposed Bi-County Parkway. Early this year, VDOT agreed to study our comprehensive alternative using the regional traffic model, and in May, VDOT issued its findings. We hired a nationally-recognized traffic modeling expert to analyze VDOT's report and the underlying data generated by VDOT's updated traffic modeling.

Our main findings, based on VDOT's modeling results, and described in more detail in our report, are as follows:

The Ineffectiveness of the Bi-County Parkway

- 1) Building the BCP would make overall traffic conditions worse than they would be if the project is not built, and would generate significantly higher traffic volumes within and in close proximity to the Manassas National Battlefield Park, undermining the goals of improving traffic conditions and preserving the Battlefield.
- 2) As commuters and residents in this area already know, the great majority of travel in the study area is east-west, and yet the BCP is intended to facilitate north-south travel. Worse, building the BCP would actually increase both the amount of overall congestion and north-south congestion in the study area.
 - a) Specific areas where the BCP would increase north-south congestion include:

- The portion of Prince William Parkway (234 Bypass) south of I-66;
- The portion of Cartharpin Road at VA 234; and
- Sudley Road (Business VA 234) south of I-66

b) The BCP also would increase congestion on a number of east-west roadways, including:

- Braddock Road on both sides of the BCP; and
- Sudley Road (VA 234) between Route 15 and the BCP.

c) The BCP would have very little positive effect on two of the most seriously congested highways within the study area: Interstate 66 and Route 28.

- With regard to I-66, VDOT's Traffic Technical Memorandum for the BCP acknowledges on page 24 that "the effects of the proposed [Bi]-County Parkway on operations on east-west I-66 are limited because the proposed roadway is expected to affect east-west travel only to a limited degree."
- On Route 28, which the 2005 Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the Tri-County Parkway recognized as containing "[t]he most severe congestion experienced within the study area," (p. 6 of DEIS), the BCP reduces traffic volumes only by one to two percent.

3) Building the BCP would dramatically increase the amount of traffic within and adjacent to the Park, resulting in close to 30,000 more vehicles on roads directly impacting the Park than would be the case if the BCP were not built. And although the draft Programmatic Agreement (required under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act) includes a commitment by VDOT that the southern portion of the BCP along the western border of the Park will not exceed four lanes, the heavy congestion along that stretch, and proposed 6-lane construction of connecting highway segments to the north and south of the BCP, would likely generate tremendous pressure to widen it.

The Substitute Vision—A Common-Sense, Comprehensive Alternative

1) In contrast to building the BCP, the Substitute Vision reduces both overall congested vehicle miles traveled (VMT) and east-west congested VMT in the study area, while not increasing north-south congested VMT. The Substitute Vision provides a measurable benefit to east-west travel by reducing traffic volumes on US 50 and VA 620 (Braddock Road) and provides extensive transit alternatives for the I-66 corridor, including extension of VRE, addition of express bus service, and a future Metrorail extension to Centreville.

2) The Substitute Vision includes numerous projects that the residents who live and commute in the study area will recognize as critical to addressing their east-west transportation needs, improving other major commuter routes like Route 28, and enhancing local connectivity within Loudoun County and western Prince William County. Grouping the projects in the Substitute Vision by the corridors and the areas they serve reveals that the Substitute Vision improvements include the projects that are needed to address traffic challenges *today*. The BCP and associated North-South "Corridor of Statewide Significance" projects would divert roughly \$1.5 billion from these needs.

3) The Substitute Vision would result in 13,000 trips per day in 2040 moving north-south on Pageland Lane, not much more than the 11,000 to 12,000 trips per day being carried now on Sudley Road (Route 234) through the Park. Meanwhile, building the BCP would bring 60,000 vehicles to the Park's western border, and with congestion projected along much of its ten-mile route, it would have much more harmful traffic, noise and visual impacts on the historic Park and surrounding rural areas.

4) The Manassas National Battlefield Park Amendments of 1988 do not require the construction of the Bi-County Parkway nor the proposed Battlefield Bypass as replacement routes for closing Routes 234 and 29 through the Park.

- The legislation requires that the Secretary of the Interior, in consultation with the Federal Highway Administration, the Commonwealth of Virginia, and Prince William County, “shall specifically consider and develop plans for the closing of those public highways (known as routes 29 and 234) that transect the park and shall include analysis of the timing and method of such closures and of means to provide alternative routes for traffic now transecting the park.”
- In accord with the Congressional directive, the Substitute Vision provides alternative routes for traffic now transecting the park, and it does so more effectively, and less expensively, than constructing two new highways that would result in the Park being surrounded on all sides by major roads.

VDOT's traffic analysis of the Substitute Vision, along with the additional analysis the Coalition groups have provided in this report, confirms that the Substitute Vision provides an appropriate alternative to the Bi-County Parkway and the Manassas Battlefield Bypass, better addressing the key transportation needs in the study area while avoiding and minimizing harm to the irreplaceable historic resources that are the Manassas National Battlefield Park and Historic District. Further, the Substitute Vision would also reinforce the rural land preservation policies of Prince William and Loudoun Counties and represent a far more sensible investment of tax dollars. Rather than invest further time and effort into a damaging and ineffective proposal, the public would be much better served by pursuing our recommended approach.

Rethinking the Bi-County Parkway is a joint effort of the Southern Environmental Law Center, Coalition for Smarter Growth, Piedmont Environmental Council, National Trust for Historic Preservation, and National Parks Conservation Association, incorporating the traffic modeling analysis of Smart Mobility, Inc.

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