



## **The Mount Vernon Council of Citizens Associations, Inc.**

**P.O. Box 203, Mount Vernon, VA 22121-9998**

<http://www.mvcca.org>

May 27, 2022

To: Chairman Jeffrey McKay  
Chairman, Fairfax County Board of Supervisors

Supervisor Daniel Storck  
Mount Vernon District

Supervisor Rodney Lusk  
Lee District

The Mount Vernon Council of Citizens Associations has been a strong supporter of the redevelopment and revitalization of Richmond Highway, the Embark Richmond Highway Comprehensive Plan Amendment, and the Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system for many years, dating back to 2015. We were particularly pleased with the 2018 Embark Amendment to the Fairfax County's Comprehensive Plan laying out plans for the Richmond Highway corridor with its emphasis on remaking the highway into our area's Main Street incorporating a new BRT system, 6 foot sidewalks, 2 way bicycle paths, street trees, and other placemaking changes. These include the development of high-density mixed use Commercial Business Centers (CBC). We are now at a critical juncture that will determine if the forward-looking vision for our Main Street (where we live, work, and play and want others to do the same) is fulfilled or lost forever.

Design plans were presented last summer by the Fairfax County Departments of Transportation (FCDOT) and Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) that revealed additional lanes beyond the 10 lanes standard. This is not in keeping with the Embark vision in the County's Comprehensive Plan. The MVCCA sent a letter to you outlining our concerns (Attachment A). We noted that after many briefings by FCDOT and VDOT over the years with slides showing (Eight lanes including two BRT lanes\*), we suddenly became aware of the updated plan that had eleven, twelve, and thirteen lanes. The excessive width came from dedicated right turn lanes, double left turn lanes, and two extra travel lanes. These designs raised great concern among our members as they suggested the transportation agencies were not adhering to the Embark Vision of making Richmond Highway our "Main Street", providing welcoming access to the new BRT stations, and the county's commitment to equity for all its

citizens. We stated that the MVCCA could not support such a plan, adding "It must be redone to ensure there are no more than ten lanes (plus bike paths and sidewalks) anywhere along the corridor, utilities are undergrounded, native shade trees are planted along the entire corridor, and traffic is slowed to 35mph to promote safety and eliminate sound walls".

We greatly appreciate that the Board of Supervisors sent the designs back to the FCDOT and VDOT for further review to remove excessive turn lanes and to base the plan on a 35mph (rather than 45mph) speed limit. We also want to thank the staff of those departments for their efforts thus far and their recommendation that some of the additional lanes be eliminated. We agree with the reductions they have suggested, yet we believe the reductions do not go far enough, and there are still places that exceed ten lanes at certain intersections (including BRT station intersections). We agree with approximately 60% of the staff recommendations supporting lane reductions, but we disagree with the other 40% where their recommendations still support excessive lanes or additional through lanes. Unfortunately, it appears that their calculations still favor through traffic, not pedestrians, bicyclists, people with impaired mobility, or promotion of BRT ridership. We strongly urge that the maximum be kept to 10 lanes in total (3 north bound travel lanes, 3 south bound travel lanes, 2 BRT lanes, and 2 dedicated turn lanes which transition to planted medians). We believe it is imperative for the safety and equity of all Mount Vernon and Lee District citizens living on and near the corridor that these further reductions are made.

A major goal of any development and revitalization along the corridor must be knitting our communities closer together as envisioned in the Embark Plan and the One Fairfax policy. It is also critical to promote commercial ventures in the area that they be able to draw customers from both sides of the highway. Additional turn lanes not only make it more problematical for people walking to the BRT stations, but they make it harder to cross to shop on the other side. Just imagine yourself on crutches, using a wheel chair, or holding the hands of your small children trying to navigate this highway in order to use the new BRT or cross to the nearest store.

In addition, the new plans are silent on placing crosswalks at reasonable intervals between the major intersections. People are being killed each year crossing Richmond Highway mostly at mid-block locations. The dangers will only grow as both sides of the road are developed with major population increases. Fairfax County officials have agreed that streets should have pedestrian crossings at a minimum of 400-500 ft. Some distances between intersections in the current design will be as long as 2,500 ft. In order to bring the two sides of our Main Street together, promote commerce, and reduce pedestrian/bicyclist deaths and serious injuries, we need to plan for crosswalks with timed lights at no more than 400- 500 ft. intervals. (Alexandria City has shown that well-timed lights at crosswalks will not hinder vehicle movements but will certainly save lives.) It is a well-known fact that many of our lower-income citizens live close to the highway and do not own cars. On average 16.4% of households do not own a vehicle on the Richmond Hwy corridor from Beltway to Jeff Todd/Fort Belvoir. With a

high of non-ownership of 24% in Groveton, Hybla Valley/Gum Springs vs 4.4% County wide as per the recent US Census. An ability to cross the street safely is key to creating our Main Street and a major issue of equity and fulfilling the One Fairfax principles. These citizens need access to the other side of the road to shop, board buses, and attend social events without fear of being hit by fast moving drivers.

Finally, we are disappointed that recent briefings have omitted completely any discussion of undergrounding of utilities. This is critical for security as well as for aesthetic and commercial reasons (in terms of place-making and building up our local economy) as we have pointed out many times and should become the norm for road construction throughout Fairfax County. It would be foolish to start this billion dollar project without including undergrounding, especially since our neighbors in Prince William and Arlington counties as well as Alexandria are doing so. The Potomac Banks tourism mantle that has recently been given to Mount Vernon District needs to be accompanied by a tourist centric corridor that is welcoming to tourists and encourages them to shop and dine as they travel to our historic sites.

Again, we appreciate your work on transforming Richmond Highway, but we will only have one opportunity in this generation to get this right. The vision is there in the Comprehensive Plan. We must ensure that it does not get taken away as the details are implemented.

Regards,

*Katherine Ward*    *B. Lynn Pascoe*

*Pete Sitnik*



Katherine Ward  
Co-Chair MVCCA

B. Lynn Pascoe  
Co-Chair MVCCA

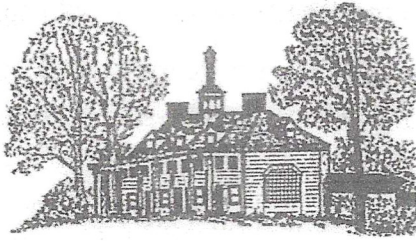
Peter Sitnik  
Chair Transportation  
Com. MVCCA

Jason Zaragoza  
Chair Public Safety  
Com. MVCCA

Attachment A: MVCCA letter of July 18, 2021

Attachment B: One Fairfax Policy and Richmond Highway Widening

\* Attachment C: 8 Eight lane cross section (Include BRT) & Eight lanes with a turn lane.



**The Mount Vernon Council of Citizens Associations, Inc.**  
P.O. Box 203, Mount Vernon, VA 22121-9998

<http://www.mycca.org>

Dear Supervisor Storck,

July 18, 2021

Ref: Your email of July 14,, 2021, on Richmond Highway VDOT/FCDOT widening designs

The MVCCA appreciates your reaching out to us regarding our alarm over the latest VDOT and FCDOT designs for Richmond Highway. We have serious concerns over these designs that the Board of Supervisors must address before giving their approval. The purpose of this letter is to reemphasize our previously stated positions, outline our overarching concerns, and state our objections to recently learned details.

First and foremost, we are amazed that the latest designs run contrary to several County policy positions as well as the BOS approved Comprehensive Plan amendment on the BRT. The traffic engineers do not seem to be aware of (or have chosen to ignore) the Board's policies or the views of citizens along the corridor on a variety of issues:

- Urbanization of Richmond Highway (our "Main Street") to ensure a more walkable, bikeable, and people-centric environment;
- Green House Gas (GHG) reductions. – The design gives highest priority to an automobile thoroughfare to the Beltway and Alexandria and will encourage more, not fewer vehicles on the road;
- Racial and Income Equity for all citizens – Many of our citizens who live in the corridor rely heavily on crossing the highway and taking mass transit. They will face more, not fewer obstacles with these additional lanes;
- The additional lanes to cross at BRT stations and CBC's will discourage, not encourage BRT ridership and cross-highway movement;
- Tree Canopy is reduced in many areas by excessive road width and overhead utilities - The design trades asphalt for many of the trees promised in the BRT plan;
- It ignores the Comprehensive Plan stipulation that utilities be placed underground;
- Tourism enhancements – The overly wide Richmond Highway will make tourists feel as though they are on a thoroughfare and not on a historic roadway/main street. They will not take advantage of the shops, restaurants, and hotels on this historic roadway.

- It undermines the Embark plan's focus on placemaking by including soundwalls instead of focusing on the need to reduce the speed limit and eliminate the need for them.

The Board of Supervisors will be asked to approve the current design of this BRT plan at their July 27, 2021, meeting. We urge you to stop the process on this vote until serious modifications are carried out.

You should be aware that the presentations from VDOT and FCDOT have for years glossed over the planned lane expansion. They have consistently shown a slide with six traffic lanes and two BRT lanes plus some green medians, not what is in the detailed plans. We have only recently learned that they are envisioning the road to include a total of eleven, twelve, and thirteen lanes. This is not what is shown on the FCDOT website. Instead of the comforting 8-lane slide, we now see that they are planning roads half-again as wide at intersections where people will need to get to the BRT stations and cross the street to the CBC retail stores and neighboring communities. Widening many side streets abutting Richmond Highway as well increases safety concerns. This plan may be a traffic engineer's priority, but it is not ours. Nor does it conform to the BRT promise or the EMBARK vision you approved.

Furthermore, funding for the BRT is based on an effort to reduce auto traffic and broaden multimodal ridership. How can this be squared with designing a road that envisions an expansion of auto traffic by 2045? Frankly, from our point of view, it looks like the plans are not in compliance with their FTA funding requirements. How can they say they are seeking \$1.2B in funds for BRT in order to reduce auto trips and then create a car-centric plan with 11, 12, and 13 lanes of traffic based on projections of increase traffic?

Richmond Highway has many low-to-middle income older housing units. The citizens living in these units must often cross the highway on foot. The proposed width creates major safety issues, especially for children and senior citizens. Multiple turn lanes from and onto side streets create dangerous situations for pedestrians and bikers by allowing drivers to turn at higher speeds. Additionally, this proposed width will continue to divide the Lee district and the Mount Vernon district citizens from each other rather than unite them along a "Main Street" with a slower speed and maximum 10-lane street.

As you know, the Mount Vernon Council of Citizens Associations (MVCCA) has been a strong backer of the Embark Plan from its inception and was pleased with the March 20, 2018 Board of Supervisors adoption of the Comprehensive Plan amendment. We have also been encouraged by the County's planning that looks forward to making our "Main Street" a reality. On the road itself, the concept has consistently included widening the southern portion to three traffic lanes each way, a left-turn lane, and two lanes in the medium for a Bus Rapid Transit system. The Embark plan promised undergrounding of utilities, trees lining the street, bike paths and walkways, and a focus on pedestrian safety and convenience. As part of this effort we have supported reducing the speed limit on the highway to 35mph as a critical safety measure. We have also argued consistently for trees as a buffer, not unsightly "sound walls" that cut off people from their "Main Street". The lower speed should eliminate the need for these walls, but the study to make this a reality has been inexplicitly delayed until September.

MVCCA's position on the plan has been consistent for a dozen years. In October 2009 we supported the pre-BRT proposal for three lanes in each direction with median strips for a *dedicated left-turn lane*. We later supported the two lanes for a Bus Rapid Transit system in the middle. In numerous briefings, resolutions, and letters, we have insisted that the implementation of the plan stick closely to the "Main Street" concept, including undergrounding facilities and no "sound walls". As one participant put it in a meeting a few years ago, the Council may disagree on many things, but we are unanimous that the reconstruction of Richmond Highway must result in a better, pedestrian-friendly environment without walls and with the utilities underground.

We believe that the current VDOT/FCDOT designs fail to carry out the County's commitment in the 2018 Plan Amendment. The Mount Vernon Council of Citizens Associations is deeply disturbed that the highway design we have been shown in recent weeks fails to live up to the county's promise to the people living in the vicinity of Richmond Highway. In many respects, it also defies common sense.

We cannot support the current design. It must be redone to ensure that there are no more than ten lanes (plus bike paths and sidewalks) anywhere along the corridor, utilities are undergrounded, native shade trees are planted along the entire corridor, and traffic is slowed to 35mph to promote safety and eliminate "sound walls". In short, we want our "Main Street" as promised, not the thoroughfare shown in the current designs.

We appreciate your offer to arrange a meeting with VDOT and FCDOT and other appropriate county staff agencies to get these plans back to reality and ensure the entire corridor is no more than ten lanes wide. We would be happy to provide our suggested details intersection by intersection to the designs. In the meantime, please have the proposed BRT design vote delayed until the changes we have requested are incorporated. This is a huge project, and we want to work with you, the Board of Supervisors, and State and County staff to get it right.



B. Lynn Pascoe  
Co-Chair Mount Vernon Council  
of Citizens Associations



Katherine Ward  
Co-Chair Mount Vernon Council  
of Citizens Associations

cc: Supervisor Lusk  
Chairman McKay

# **One Fairfax Policy applies to the development of Richmond Highway BRT and numbers of lanes.**

**Equity Definition:** The commitment to promote fairness and justice in the formation of public policy that results in all residents – regardless of age, race, color, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, national origin, marital status, disability, socio-economic status or neighborhood of residence or other characteristics – **having opportunity to fully participate in the region’s economic vitality, contribute to its readiness for the future, and connect to its assets and resources.**

**One Fairfax areas of focus that apply to the BRT and appropriate numbers of lanes on Richmond Highway. The EMBARK Comprehensive Plan should be followed keep RH to 10 lanes.**

8. Neighborhoods that support all communities and individuals through strong social networks, trust among neighbors, and the ability to work together to achieve common goals that improve the quality of life for everyone in the neighborhood.

11. A quality built and natural environment that accommodates anticipated growth and change in an economically, socially, and environmentally sustainable and equitable manner that includes mixes of land use that protects existing stable neighborhoods and green spaces, supports sustainability, supports a high quality of life, and promotes employment opportunities, housing, amenities and services for all people.

14. A multi-modal transportation system that supports the economic growth, health, congestion mitigation, and prosperity goals of Fairfax County and provides accessible mobility solutions that are based on the principles associated with sustainability, diversity, and community health.



# Preliminary Design Endorsement

- Public comment period was open from June 11 to July 09,
- There were 106 public comments:
  - Most of the comments (about 50%) contained comments or questions related to the design or operation of the system but did not state overall support or objection to the project. These include comments about utilities, roadway width and crossing safety, speed limit as tied to sound walls and lane width, cost, and property impacts, among other items.
  - About 32% of comments stated direct support for the project. About 15% stated opposition.
- Staff seeking the BRT Executive Committee's recommendation that the full BOS endorse the preliminary design plans at the July 27, 2021, BOS meeting.
- Staff will continue to refine the design and work to mitigate property impacts, where possible.



# Roadway Design Overview

