



June 15, 2023

Mr. Dan Reinhard, Senior Program Manager
VDOT Route 1 Multimodal Feasibility Study
4974 Alliance Drive
Fairfax, VA 22030
(sent via email dan.reinhard@vdot.virginia.gov)

RE: Livability22202 Comments on the Phase 2 PIM 4 Presentation for the Route 1 Multimodal Improvements Feasibility Study

Dear Dan:

We, the Presidents of the three civic associations in the 22202 zip code (Arlington Ridge, Aurora Highlands, Crystal City), which constitute the Livability22202 coalition, are writing to you with our comments on the status of the VDOT Route 1 project, as described in your PIM 4 presentation on May 15, 2023. We have also joined with The People before Cars Coalition to separately present jointly agreed comments. This letter expands several topics and highlights our concerns about: 18th Street, TDM, and Speed Reduction.

We continue to support several positive VDOT planning decisions described in PIM 3 and outlined in our December 12, 2022 letter. We are pleased that current VDOT plans have increased the ROW north of 18th, and continue to enhance the streetscape characteristics and improve the redesign of the Route 1 intersections with 23rd, 20th, 15th, and the I-395/Route 110/ Route 1 intersections. Many of these plans will need additional refinement for safety and convenience and we hope that VDOT will continue to make improvements during the rest of Phase 2. One specific example being the reduction of Route 1 travel lane widths to 10' and adding a left turn lane signal from eastbound 23rd to northbound Route 1.

Our ongoing concerns about VDOT plans for an at-grade Route 1 intersection at 18th Street, the VDOT TDM plan, and the VDOT speed study and the implementation of a safer maximum speed limit are addressed in the following paragraphs.

18th Street: Grade Separation or Barnes Dance Signalization

We ask that VDOT reevaluate the impact of keeping Route 1 grade-separated from 18th, and at-grade at 15th. We feel that it is the only solution that **is safe** and **will feel safe** for all users while helping to create the desired urban boulevard along Route 1. We do not see significant difficulties with the roadway grade dropping from the elevated 18th to the at-grade 15th Streets as that would also serve to moderate traffic speeds. The attached sketch shows the grades between the relevant

intersections. Keeping 18th Street elevated while 15th comes down to grade will require a roadway grade lower than the current grade from 20th to 18th. While the roadway would gain and lose elevation over a quarter-mile distance, drivers could navigate this elevation easily albeit at safer and slower speeds. Alternatively, we suggest building a Dutch underpass under an at-grade Route 1 to provide an acceptable, safe option. Ensuring that pedestrians can access the Marriott Gateway “tunnel” combined with creating a safe midblock crosswalk on Eads would provide an additional safe crossing option. Retaining the overpass would be the least expensive of all the potential options.

Keeping the current Route 1 overpass at 18th Street addresses many of the pedestrian safety issues we have identified with the project and provides a safe, rapid, convenient, and direct crossing under Route 1. This strategy would simplify the signal timing and help reduce congestion on the north end of the project. It also would maintain emergency vehicle access into Crystal City. The current VDOT plan shows all of the land that will be made available from this project north of 18th Street. For the portion of the roadway that is elevated closer to 18th Street, we feel creative designers could easily build attractive, functional buildings with street-level entrances along Route 1 and Clark/Bell.

We are alarmed that VDOT and Arlington County have yet to reach an agreement on how to provide Barnes Dance signalization at an at-grade Route 1 intersection at 18th Street South. This signalization must provide sufficient time for pedestrians to cross diagonally without the total signal cycle being so long that pedestrians and cyclists will bolt across Route 1 and drivers will be encouraged to run red lights and turn right on red. Also, Route 1 traffic cannot be allowed to back up onto our local streets. As a result, we feel that keeping the existing overpass at 18th Street must be considered as a critical and viable alternative strategy to at-grade. We strongly feel that VDOT needs to keep Route 1 grade-separated, as proposed in the Crystal City Sector Plan. If that, in the end, proves impossible, then VDOT and the County must figure out how to make the Barnes Dance signalization work.

We conclude that the at-grade intersection at 18th would degrade local conditions overall for drivers, cyclists and pedestrians. Our reasons for recommending a grade-separated Route 1 at 18th include:

Safety for cyclists and pedestrians:

- Grade separation directly supports the goals of the Amazon-Virginia MOU which specified, “improve safety, accessibility, and the pedestrian experience crossing Rt. 1”. Implementing an at-grade intersection, even with community requested improvements, will make this intersection less safe for pedestrians and cyclists. They will not be required to cross a 6-lane highway while avoiding turning cars.
- Vision Zero: Creating a new, more dangerous intersection is against Vision Zero precepts. If this project is examined more carefully through Arlington’s Vision Zero plan, many ideas would be rejected or need to be significantly modified.
- Current conditions are safe and feel safe: Pedestrians and cyclists cross Route 1 quickly and safely at 18th every day with no vehicle conflicts. The lack of pedestrians and cyclists presently crossing at-grade at 20th and 23rd provides real evidence that at-grade crossings of Route 1 are not viewed as safe or accessible.

- 18th is **the** crucial Route 1 crossing: Currently, 18th Street is one of only two safe crossings of Route 1 and the megablocks surrounding it and the only crossing used by the majority of pedestrians transiting through the Crystal City metrorail station. Fitness tracking data and heatmaps confirm that cyclists and pedestrians prefer to use 18th Street for crossing Route 1. The only other safe crossing, 12th Street, is too far to the north for most pedestrians to use and lacks protected bike facilities.
- East-West Connectivity: Keeping Route 1 grade separated from 18th Street ensures continued convenient east-west connectivity in the heart of our neighborhood which lacks an urban street grid because of the presence of so many superblocks.
- Support for Arlington's Diversity: We need to ensure this is a safe crossing for all of Arlington's pedestrians, to include the young and elderly; the mobility, sensory, and behaviorally/mentally impaired; those in need of assistive devices; and parents with small children and strollers.

Reduction of impacts to drivers:

- New traffic signals at an at-grade 18th, between the proposed signals at 20th and at 15th, may delay east-west drivers who already encounter existing traffic lights on 18th at Fern, Eads, and Clark-Bell as well as north-south drivers along Route 1. The VDOT proposal has four signalized intersections in under a half mile (23rd, 20th, 18th, and 15th) and would also have four east-west signalized intersections in under a quarter mile (Fern, Eads, Rt 1, and Clark-Bell). Retaining the overpass reduces that to three in both directions.
- As VDOT has indicated, the short blocks on 18th and on 15th, between Eads and Clark-Bell, are problematic. Retaining the grade separated roadways avoids creating yet shorter blocks if Route 1 is at-grade.
- The new right turn is of minimal benefit to 18th Street drivers heading south on Route 1, who will probably prefer to enter Route 1 from further south. A right turn from Route 1 onto westbound 18th may be useful for some drivers, but may also increase traffic on 18th. The right turn from 18th onto northbound Route 1 is a benefit for Crystal City drivers, although they need to find a different route to return to Crystal City.

*Other benefits of **keeping** a grade-separated intersection:*

- Commercial Development: Keeping the overpass would not affect the amount of developable land along Route 1 and could be easily accomplished through creative design with two street level elevations that include retail.
- Police and Fire Department presently have ready access to Crystal City: Maintaining grade separation along 18th Street would also facilitate rapid response by the Arlington Fire and Police Departments to Crystal City.

TDM: Insufficient as Presented

We were shocked when VDOT discussed its TDM plan during PIM 4, which seems minimal, at best. VDOT's current TDM proposal conflicts with the proposal presented in Phase 1, without any explanation of why specific constraints have been relaxed and/or removed. Rather than identifying big goals, their proposal seems to aim low. In the recent VDOT presentation to the PAC and BAC, VDOT indicated that the primary purpose of the TDM effort was to avoid off-ramp

congestion from I-395. TDM could serve to improve transportation safety, transit use, and the environment for everybody in the region so there is no reason to take a minimalist approach.

Current VDOT TDM proposal conflicts with the proposal presented during Phase 1 PIM 3:

- During PIM 3 of Phase 1, VDOT stated that the “Conversion to at-grade intersections needs a comprehensive and effective TDM strategy that reduces future traffic volumes 20% to 30% below existing (2019) volumes” by reducing future congestion and reducing future diversion of traffic to local/regional roads. VDOT projected traffic volume out to 2040. The current (2023) VDOT proposal only projects traffic to 2030, is based upon traffic data gathered during the pandemic, and assumes that the pandemic traffic patterns will continue, so that traffic only needs to be reduced 10% of 2022 traffic. “Effective” is no longer mentioned by VDOT.
- VDOT also stated that turning movements onto and off of Route 1 need to be accounted for without causing spillback onto the side streets and nearby neighborhoods. The current VDOT TDM does include this.
- VDOT stated that “TDM transit shift should focus on through trips (60%) given the significant transit investments in Crystal City/Pentagon City”, yet the current VDOT TDM almost exclusively focuses on reducing traffic in the National Landing area.
- Finally, VDOT states that “Between 11% and 20% of AM NB traffic is going to destinations outside of Arlington or DC.” The need to mitigate this traffic is not mentioned in the current VDOT TDM plans.

Other TDM concerns:

- VDOT admitted that their primary TDM goal is to keep traffic from backing up on I-395, which they believe can be mitigated by reducing traffic around 15th Street by 10% through mode shift. This new TDM goal is inadequate in its scope and does not support the safety of vulnerable road users in our neighborhood.
- According to the VDOT analysis, a high percentage of local commuters who used non-SOV methods pre-Covid have switched to driving. The behavior of this specific population needs to be understood and addressed with targeted TDM mitigation.
- VDOT suggested that the TDM targets would be those which are easily replaced by the use of Metro or other regional transit. This would tend to ignore those commuters passing through our community on the way to DC or other locations or who work here but live in areas poorly served by mass transit. It seems that the approach proposed by VDOT is geared to minimize the need to widely engage with a regional effort and instead builds on current Arlington programs (which lack the regional reach).
- According to national TDM models, VDOT could achieve up to 25-30% traffic reduction because of high transit availability (in our specific area) and if drivers had to pay for parking. Why is VDOT not proposing a higher percentage reduction than 10%?
- The VDOT TDM program would cost at least \$500,000/year and require at least 2 staff. It is unclear who would pay or who would manage the program. It is also unclear what long-term commitments VDOT will make to the long term nature of the program. The role of VDOT and VDOT staff has not been delineated or differentiated from the roles of local, regional, state-wide, and national TDM colleagues.

- The TDM discussion showed a graphic suggesting the effort should begin four years before the project construction begins; however there was no indication that VDOT had developed a plan to do so.

We continue to support a TDM program that is regional in scope and collaboration, and supports active transportation and transit/commuter train services that are safe, affordable, reliable, convenient, accessible, and frequent enough to encourage mode shifts.

Speed Reduction

We believe the Route 1 plans should not progress further until VDOT has completed its speed study. We believe Route 1 should be designed for 25 mph maximum speeds to keep everyone safe, and are eager to learn about the speed study. We feel that VDOT needs to conduct the appropriate transportation network modeling with a variety of traffic volumes and speeds in order to evaluate how the maximum speed limit will impact the level of service along Route 1 and divert traffic onto neighboring streets.

We feel that VDOT needs to consider the following in its speed reduction plans:

- How will VDOT reduce driving speeds safely for traffic coming from I-395 or Route 110 onto Route 1?
- Will slower speeds encourage drivers to switch to non-SOV commuting? How will VDOT measure this?
- Will slower speed encourage drivers to migrate to our local streets? We need more data on the impact of this diversion.
- Do slower speeds decrease crashes along Route 1 and on local streets? Will VDOT track?
- How will lower speed limits be enforced? Can automated enforcement be used? What personnel will provide enforcement and where, when, and how will they be deployed safely? How will VDOT monitor compliance with lower speed limits?
- What are additional street design features that VDOT can use to further reduce driving speeds?
- How will the 11 foot travel lanes work against other speed reduction strategies?
- Can VDOT extend the lower 25 mph speed limit further south to the Alexandria border to continue this safer speed on Route 1 from National Landing to the southern end of Old Town? Failure to reduce the speed limit on that portion of Route 1 will permit drivers to travel at higher speeds and will reduce the efficacy of the new 25 mph zone.
- Can VDOT test lowering speeds now by installing new signage and adjusting existing traffic signalization and creating temporary new signals on Route 1 at 15th and 18th? This approach provides an unique opportunity to prototype the concept and refine the design.
- What happens if VDOT cannot successfully lower speed limits?

To summarize, we request:

- A grade separated crossing at 18th Street at Route 1, our first preference.
- A 2nd best alternative: a workable Barnes Dance signalization at 18th that safely supports both pedestrian and cycling crossings.

- A more robust, regional, and shovel-ready TDM strategy that is focused on more than just moving traffic on I-395 and is based upon non-pandemic traffic and future of work projections as well as regional population growth.
- A speed study and speed management program that are comprehensive, effective, and could be implemented quickly.

We look forward to meeting virtually with the VDOT project team and County staff to discuss the issues we have raised in this letter and work to resolve them to our mutual satisfaction. Thank you.

Sincerely,



Kateri Garcia, President
Arlington Ridge CA



Cory Jacobbe, President
Aurora Highlands CA



Eric Cassel, President
Crystal City CA

Attachments:

- Sketch of Grade at 18th Street South
 - Livability22202 Letter of December 12, 2022 (<https://aurorahighlands.org/wp-content/uploads/Letter-to-VDOT-from-3CA-re-rte-1-December-12-2022.pdf>)
- cc: Arlington County Staff, Sarah Crawford (via email scrawford@arlingtonva.us)
Arlington County Manager, Mark Schwartz (via email CountyManager@arlingtonva.us)
Arlington County Board (via email CountyBoard@arlingtonva.us)
VDOT Commissioner Stephen C. Brich (via email Stephen.Brich@vdot.virginia.gov)
VDOT District Project Development Engineer Nicholas Roper (via email Nicholas.Roper@vdot.virginia.gov)