

Residents Learn About Route 50 Widening

By [Bonnie Hobbs](#)

Thursday, March 12, 2009

Concerns about traffic flow and property access marked last week's design public hearing on the Route 50 widening project. It was held Thursday, Feb. 26, at VDOT's Northern Virginia District Office in Chantilly.

The plan is to increase a 3.6-mile span of Route 50 from four lanes to six from Poland Road in Loudoun County to Route 28 in Fairfax County. And more than 100 people came to the public hearing to learn about the project and add their comments.

"We do our best to put together a good design," said Jim Zeller, VDOT's preliminary engineering manager in Loudoun. "But members of the community often bring up good ideas that get incorporated into our projects."

The preliminary design plan is about 30-percent complete, and attendees got to see it and ask questions about it. VDOT representatives also explained why they want to improve the road.

"We're building it to deal with the horrendous congestion this stretch of the Corridor experiences every day," said Zeller. "You have six lanes east of Route 28 and out by South Riding — and a chokepoint bottleneck in the middle. This project will address that and will also enhance safety in that area."

It will also provide 10-foot-wide, pedestrian and bicycle paths on each side of the road. And, said Zeller, "It will better manage the forecasted traffic growth that will come in the future."

Project Manager Kim McCool, a senior VDOT transportation engineer, said there'll be a grass median on the inside and either curb-and-gutter or eight feet of paved shoulder on the outside. "We'll also do a reconstruction so the lanes will all be the same height," she said. "Widening will be on the north side of the road, where we have more right of way and will impact less businesses."

VDOT already did traffic studies and, where warranted, it plans to upgrade intersections, install new signals, lengthen turn lanes, add pedestrian signals and add crosswalks with curb ramps. It will also upgrade the small bridges over Cub Run, put in landscaping where there's room and install stormwater management facilities.

TOTAL ESTIMATED COST is \$75 million: \$4 million for preliminary engineering and design, \$20 million for right-of-way and utility relocation, and \$51 million for construction. The selected contractor will finish the design according to the approved plans, acquire the right of way, relocate utilities and do the actual road construction, beginning in 2010.

"Doing it this way provides a significant time savings," said McCool. "This is a high priority; we have full funding and will keep moving forward."

As part of the project, the existing left turn from southbound Route 28 to Lee Road west and the popular Chantilly Crossing Shopping Center will be eliminated. But that will lead to another problem, said Sully District Transportation Commissioner Jeff Parnes.

"Traffic would have to go to the new, Willard Road interchange and then back to turn right onto Lee," he said. "But if you're going to make the traffic go there, you need to



Photo by Bonnie Hobbs/Centre View
Chantilly's Vijay Malladi discusses his property along Route 50 with VDOT's John Leddy, who deals with right-of-way issues.

[Email this Article](#)
[Print this Article](#)

make Lee Road the four-lane road it needs to be. It's four lanes, north and south of the bridge [over the creek on Lee Road], and two lanes in the middle [on the bridge]. So it needs to be part of this project."

Calling it an "excellent comment," Zeller said VDOT will look into it.

THEN VIJAY MALLADI of Chantilly said he owns property at Route 50 and Pleasant Valley Road that could be taken for this project. He asked if he'd be compensated for the "fair value" of his land, and Zeller said he would.

Nicole Philkus of South Riding remarked that, if the entrance to the Chantilly Crossing Shopping Center is moved near the Five Guys restaurant, "There's no signal, so something needs to be done." And McCool told her that other residents have expressed the same concern.

Greg Zakarian, representing that shopping center's developer, told VDOT that, by eliminating the left turn from Route 28 south to Lee Road west, "You're penalizing the shopping center and industrial park." Furthermore, he added, "Lee Road isn't equipped to come from Route 50 to the shopping center. It's a hazardous road and people are going to drive off the road there."

Also worried was the Rev. Will White, pastor of Pleasant Valley United Methodist Church, along the four-lane section of Route 50. "We've been there 110 years and have made many contributions to Route 50," he said. "And in terms of our long-term health as a congregation, we really want to maintain our safe access to Route 50."

White said half of his congregation comes from the eastern side of the county, westbound, so he urged VDOT to "make connectivity between the east and west lanes so people can access our facility coming west."

One woman was concerned about provisions for pedestrians and bicyclists during the road construction. She said the shared-use paths need a stronger pavement portion and recommended a safe haven for walkers and cyclists crossing Route 50 at Stonecroft Boulevard because "they have to cross nine lanes of traffic with no place to stop, and it's dangerous."

Noting that, driving on Pleasant Valley Road north to turn right onto Route 50 east, there's currently a lane where motorists may merge into traffic, another woman wondered if this lane would be "done away with." John Vandergriff, with The Louis Berger Group, which prepared the design for VDOT, said it's not envisioned as part of the project.

And in response to comments regarding traffic flow during construction, Vandergriff said some lanes would remain open because the existing long backups on Route 50 toward Loudoun County, especially during the evening rush hour, are "one of VDOT's top concerns."

Residents may still weigh in on the project until March 12. E-mail VDOT at meeting_comments@VDOT.Virginia.gov.



©2009 Connection Newspapers. All Rights Reserved. [Privacy Policy](#)
7913 Westpark Dr. ♦ McLean, VA 22102 ♦ 703-821-5050
Site Design, Development and Hosting by [Timberlake Publishing](#)