



### **Recap of VDOT's Presentation and Discussion on the Route 50 Project**

Last Thursday, I hosted staff from VDOT and Shirley Contracting at my Town Hall meeting for my annual update on the Rt. 50 project. I thought it was the best and most comprehensive meeting that we've had on the project, and I think the residents that were able to attend gained a much better understanding of exactly what has been happening and what's next. I have since received many emails from commuters who were not able to attend, so we've put together this email.

The main presentation was given by Larry Tomlinson, Route 50 project manager for VDOT, Sunil Taori, VDOT Assistant Director for Land Use/Loudoun County, and Rickey Meyer, project manager for Shirley Contracting. The VDOT representatives acknowledged how difficult the project has been for commuters, thanked us for our patience, and committed to maintaining an open dialogue with me and the community over the rest of the project.

Over the course of the project, I have shared many of the concerns expressed to me from residents—especially that the project is taking too long and that not enough people are working on it. These concerns were addressed a number of different ways at the meeting.

First, VDOT and Shirley went into great detail about the work that has been completed since construction began in September, 2011. To date, crews have:

- Negotiated agreements to acquire 75 parcels for Right of Way (2 remaining)
- Relocated over 3 miles of power lines and 78 poles
- Relocated 10 miles of communications lines
- Relocated over 3 miles of water main

- Relocated over 3,900 feet of gas line
- Relocated 1,100 feet of sewer
- Removed 4,000 truckloads of asphalt
- Removed 5,000 feet of guardrail
- Set and relocated 22 miles of roadway barrier
- Moved 25,000 truckloads of dirt
- Installed 4 miles of storm drainage pipe
- Installed 220 storm structures
- Installed 485 feet of reinforced double barreled box culvert
- Installed 640 feet of concrete retaining wall
- Installed 1500+ cubic yards of concrete & 1200 feet of piling for Cub Run Bridge
- Placed 1,600 truckloads of stone
- Placed 3,750 truckloads of asphalt

Both VDOT and Shirley emphasized that the hardest part has been the relocation of numerous utility and water lines. Separate agreements had to be negotiated with each utility, and lines had to be completely rebuilt, largely under the surface. Shirley noted that at any given time, a large portion of the work being done on the project is out of sight, below the road surface. Both entities also discussed the difficulties in sequencing—each piece has to be done in sequence, part by part, while both the road and the utility lines remain operational.

VDOT noted that this project is actually a reconstruction, not just a widening, and thus 10 lanes actually had to be built in order to get 6 for the final product (due to temporary lane shifts).

### **Upcoming Milestones**

Now let's get to the heart of the question—when is it all going to be done? These are the timelines that were outlined:

**August 2014:** the 3 eastbound lanes will be completed and in their final configuration. This will provide 3 straight lanes for the length of the project. No more of the shifts that slow speeds through the corridor.

**December 2014:** the project team will:

- Open the 3 westbound lanes between Stonecroft and Poland Road.
- Complete permanent signals between Poland Road and Pleasant Valley Road in Fairfax County.
- Complete and open a spur ramp for Lee Road traffic to access channelized turn lanes separate from Rt. 50 westbound traffic

**May 2015:** the 3 westbound lanes between Lee Road and Stonecroft will be opened, providing 3 lanes in both directions for the length of the project.

**June 2015:** complete the permanent signals between Lee Road and Stonecroft.

**November 2015:** complete permanent pavement, signage, trails and landscaping.

Shirley and VDOT noted that the timelines are subject to weather conditions. An unusual number of storms could result in a delay.

**There were some common themes in the questions asked by residents. The major questions are below:**

#### **Is the Project on Time? Were There Delays?**

When VDOT kicked off the project in September of 2011, the time estimate for construction was four years. Based on that estimate, the project is on time. Along the way, however, there have been some delays. The most notable was the decision to reopen the third lane of the project east of Stonecroft Boulevard, which was done at the urging of myself and Delegate Ramadan after massive delays were caused by the closure. In my view, VDOT should never have planned for that lane closure and that needs to be a lesson learned for future projects like Route 606. In any event, reopening the lane has resulted in about a 6 month delay in the overall project.

From a budget perspective, the project is on budget. In fact, the project actually was running under budget, and VDOT decided to add the spur feature from Route 28 to Lee Road for westbound 50.

#### **Will Six Lanes be Enough?**

Both at the meeting and in our discussions, many of you have shared concerns over whether this project will be enough given the growth over the past few years in our area. VDOT explained that even today we are not at a full 2 lane capacity given the smaller lane widths, barriers, and

multiple shifts. Going to 3 lanes will add more than 50% capacity over what is currently in place. In addition, a major component of the work will include synchronizing signals through the corridor to move traffic through more efficiently once permanent signals are installed. The current signals on Route 50 are actually temporary signals and work via microwave or camera, which is not as reliable as the loop sensors that will be installed. Loudoun and VDOT modeling takes into account future growth, and shows Route 50 operating at an acceptable level of service out to at least 2030 even with growth at six lanes.

Nevertheless, our area continues to grow, mostly as a result of previously approved development and by-right housing. I noted that the next big improvement for Route 50 (absent of a discussion on the Dulles Access Road, which I've covered in detail in other emails) is removing at least some of the traffic lights and replacing them with interchanges. However, given that the most difficult intersections are in Fairfax County, there will only be so much benefit to this in Loudoun. As time goes on, a regional approach must be taken between the two counties and VDOT to ensure that traffic will flow and 50 will have the capacity it needs.

### **Design/Bid/Build vs. Design/Build**

Another question that was raised had to do with the method of construction that was chosen. VDOT generally uses two methods, design/bid/build and design/build. Design/bid/build generally takes longer from start to finish on the whole project. The design is completed upfront, all right of way and easements are secured and utilities are relocated. After all of these items are complete construction begins.

In design/build the project is designed to 30% and then bid. The contractor handles completion of the design, acquiring right of way and easements and relocating utilities. Many of these processes are able to happen concurrently on various portions of the project. The downside to design/build is that the road is under construction longer. The upside is that the project overall can take much less time.

Route 50 is a design/build project. Utility relocation has taken longer than expected, and as noted above, right of way needed to be acquired from 75 different properties which took a considerable amount of time. But, had this project not been design/build, Shirley estimated that actual construction would be started around this time, and the overall project would not be completed for at least another two years.

VDOT is utilizing design/build for the Rt. 606 widening as well. Like Route 50, all the pieces will be moving concurrently. As we begin that process, I have asked County and VDOT staff to be ready to discuss lessons learned from the Route 50 process - so they can be applied to 606. The 606 project is expected to take about 3 years, with completion by the end of 2017. You won't see much construction activity until well into next year, due to all the other things that have to be completed first. This has also been timed to coincide with extra capacity on Route 50.

Obviously, this project has been difficult for everyone. It will be a huge relief when it is completed. I certainly don't think it will be a cure-all, but conditions can only improve after these changes. If you have additional specific questions, I'll be happy to answer them or try to get answers from the project team.

To view the presentation that VDOT used at the project, click [here](#).

As always, if you have any questions, feel free to contact me at [matt.letourneau@loudoun.gov](mailto:matt.letourneau@loudoun.gov). Also, be sure to like my [Facebook](#) page for project updates and notifications on lane shifts as they proceed towards the milestones listed above.