

News ▾

Sports ▾

County Budget Stories ▾

Cappies -- High School Theater ▾

Faith ▾

Health ▾

Entertainment ▾

Homes ▾

Alexandria Schools ▾

Crime ▾

Alexandria Opinion ▾

Newcomers' Guide ▾

Hoops Handbook ▾

Alexandria Gazette Packet ▾

Arlington Connection ▾

Burke Connection ▾

Centre View ▾

Election Guide 2003 ▾

Fairfax Connection ▾

Fairfax Station Connection ▾

Great Falls Connection ▾

Herndon Connection ▾

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Potomac Almanac ▾

Reston Connection ▾

Springfield Connection ▾

Vienna/Oakton Connection ▾

Last Look at Alternatives

Residents view Battlefield Bypass proposals; new alternative to G is added.

By Bonnie Hobbs
March 18, 2004

Fairfax and Prince William county residents Tuesday night saw maps and heard a presentation about the final alternatives being proposed for the Battlefield Bypass.

Mandated by Congress in 1988, the project closes routes 29 and 234 through the Manassas National Battlefield Park and channels the traffic elsewhere. On Tuesday, Marie Graham of Centreville's Bull Run Estates community got to see what Alternative G would mean to her, personally.

"It goes right through my front door," she said in horror. "The four lanes would be very close to my house. We bought it with the intention to stay there, the rest of our lives. If they choose this option, my husband and I must choose whether to fight it or relocate."

Graham was one of about 125 people attending a public workshop at Stonewall Jackson High in Manassas. It was the last one before the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) details the human, cultural and environmental impacts of all five alternatives in a draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and selects a preferred route.

The document is tentatively scheduled for completion, the end of April, with a public hearing on it, 30 days later. Meanwhile, area residents are urged to send comments on the alternatives to: Jack Van Dop, project director, Federal Highway Administration, 21400 Ridgetop Road, Sterling, VA 20166. Or E-mail battlefieldbypass@parsons.com, or post comments on the project Web site, www.battlefieldbypass.com.

Two of the pathways, C and D, skim the south side of Fairfax National Golf Course, running between Bull Run Stream and the golf course. Two others, A and B, do likewise on the north side. In January, Alternative G was added, running south of the Battlefield Park and north of and parallel to I-66.

It gets drivers from the existing Route 29 to I-66, but its path goes smack through six or seven homes in Bull Run Estates. Besides taking out houses on Bull Run Post Office Road, Compton Road and Bull Run Drive, the road also plows through a corner of the historic, Cub Run Primitive Baptist Church.

And now, an Alternative G option tying in to the planned Tri-County Connector has also been added to the proposals. It meets the Tri-County Connector west of Luck Stone Quarry, hooking up to I-66 near the Manassas rest areas.

TUESDAY NIGHT, Ken Mobley, project manager for Parsons, the bypass-study consultant, presented details of each alternative's potential impacts. "We've completed most of our field analyses, but we're still working on the environmental and traffic impacts," he said. "They'll be in the draft EIS, [as will] noise evaluations and runoff impacts to the watersheds."

He and Van Dop then answered written questions from the audience. "We realize there's no perfect solution here," said Van Dop. "We look for your input."

"We received lots of e-mails from people who didn't want roads north or west of the park because of sprawl, physical intrusion, neighborhood impacts and effects on the area's rural character," said Mobley. "And we got lots of public comments asking us to look at the I-66 Corridor."

He said a proposed co-location of Route 29 onto I-66 was scrapped. "VDOT said one lane would need to be provided in each direction on I-66 to accommodate the extra traffic, and it wanted the I-66 right-of-way preserved for other possible uses," he explained.

Whatever pathway is chosen will be 100 feet wide. "Right now, there are 15,000-16,000 vehicles



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per day on Routes 29 and 234 through the park, so four lanes are needed for this amount of traffic," said Mobley. "But we may only implement a two-lane road [because of funding constraints]. Most will be federal funds, but there'll be some local match."

When asked if there's been a formal survey to assess the amount of support for closing the roads through the park, Mobley disclosed an actual "e-mail campaign," saying they've received about 500 e-mails from around the country supporting the closure.

Study data gathered so far shows that Alternatives G, A and C – each with a preliminary estimated cost of \$94 million – would be the most expensive to build. And only Alternative G has limited additional capacity for traffic growth.

PEOPLE LIVING within the park would have difficulty entering or leaving their property if Alternative G is chosen, and it's the one route that provides no access to quarries. Alternatives A and C involve the most residential acres – nearly 41 acres each – and Alternative G is the only one with a business/retail impact. It would affect four commercial businesses and almost 14 acres of commercial property.

Alternative D has the most architectural resources in its path, but G is believed to contain the greatest number of Civil War archaeological areas. After Alternative A, G would impact the longest length of streams and also has more ponds than do the other routes. Alternates C and G contain the largest number of wetlands areas – and the most acres of federally protected wetlands.

However, G is the only alternative that has federally listed, threatened and endangered species on it. It's been identified as a potential habitat for the small, whorled pogonia – a yellow, terrestrial orchid that grows among hardwood and in mixed stands of evergreen trees. It's on the battlefield property, near the Groveton overpass on I-66, and can't be propagated.

Afterward, Mark McConn of Bull Run Drive said if Alternative G is chosen and becomes a permanent line on the map, "There's no way it won't affect our property values. If it has to be built, we all support C as the best alternative because it's the least impact to residential communities."

In February, the West Fairfax County Citizens Association (WFCCA) Land-Use Committee went on record as opposing G and preferring C and D, south of the golf course and SYA Fields of Dreams. And Tuesday, Jeff Parnes, chairman of the Sully District Council's Land-Use and Transportation Committee, said he'll recommend his group reinforces its support of C and D.

"Those roads go through the northern tier of the park, lessening the impact on the surrounding residents," he said. And since G's the only alternative with no room for traffic growth, said Parnes, "It could pose problems in the future – and then another road would be needed."

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