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Fair Lakes Interchange Is Now Fully Funded

Stimulus money greenlights project.

By Bonnie Hobbs

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People having to drive through the intersection of the Fair Lakes and Fairfax County parkways at rush hour know how frustrating it is. Traffic's backed up in both directions and, when the light for Fair Lakes Parkway motorists turns green, only three or four cars make it across before the light turns red again.

Last year, it looked like help was on the way when the Northern Virginia Transportation Authority earmarked the remaining funds needed for construction of an interchange there. But when that organization was ruled illegal, plans for the interchange project came to a screeching halt.

Now, though, a new infusion of cash from the federal government has the interchange on the road again — and is also providing the necessary funds for the Fairfax County Parkway's Environmental Proving Grounds extension.

On May 21, the Commonwealth Transportation Board (CTB) obligated \$13 million for the Fairfax County Parkway/Fair Lakes Parkway interchange and \$60.1 million for phases three and four of the Fairfax County Parkway EPG Extension.

"WITH APPROVAL of \$25 million in supplemental Northern Virginia regional stimulus dollars anticipated in June, the Fair Lakes interchange will be fully funded," said Jeff Parnes, vice-chairman of the Transportation Advisory Commission.

"I'm excited about finally seeing it come to fruition," continued Parnes. "It will cut back Fairfax Center's biggest, single, traffic problem. Anybody who's driven by there — especially in the holiday season — knows how bad it can get. It can back up traffic as far north as Route 50."

Parnes says advertisements for construction bids for the Fair Lakes Interchange could be ready as early as December, and At-Large Planning Commissioner Jim Hart can hardly wait to see things move forward.

"The Fair Lakes interchange has been a priority for several years, and people got frustrated that it kept getting delayed," he said. "It's a very slow intersection and, since it's close to the intersection of I-66, it has the potential to back up traffic on I-66, too."

So Hart called the stimulus funding "good and welcome news. This [project] has taken longer than most of us would have hoped. It will move traffic through that area much faster than now."

Del. Chuck Caputo (D-67th) said that interchange is "absolutely mandatory to remove the gridlock, particularly on the Fairfax County Parkway during rush hour." And all the good this money can do, he said, "demonstrates the value of the stimulus funding from the federal government."

Meanwhile, Supervisor Pat Herry (R-Springfield) said the county has been working on this project as if it were fully funded. "We were planning to use RSTP funds, but this [new money] guarantees it'll get done," he said. Regional Surface Transportation Program (RSTP) dollars are federal funds allocated to states by the Federal Highway Administration, mainly from the federal gas tax.

He said the interchange is important to this area because "we have very few north-south routes in Fairfax County, and this is the biggest one — and the biggest chokepoint. So I think the [stimulus money] is wonderful."

THE DESIGN shows a split-diamond, grade-separated interchange, with Fairfax County Parkway bridging over Fair Lakes Parkway and Monument Drive. But that would raise the road right into the Dominion Virginia Power utility lines crossing the Fairfax County Parkway.

So in December 2008, on Herry's motion, the Board of Supervisors got Dominion to move these lines slightly north -- and in two years less time than it had originally planned for this work. And now that the stimulus money has put the interchange back on track, Herry said a construction company will be chosen next spring and "we're hoping to get it all done, a year-and-a-half after that."



Artis's Rendering Contributed
Construction should begin on the interchange at Fair Lakes and Fairfax County parkways in 2010 and take about 2 1/2 years to complete.

Fair Lakes Interchange Project

The Fairfax County Parkway between I-66 and Route 50 carries more than 64,000 vehicles per day, with 118,000 vehicles per day projected by 2025. So VDOT wants to widen it within the existing median to six lanes — three in each direction — between I-66 and Route 50.

But an interchange — already in the county's Comprehensive Plan — is also needed to handle the congestion. Currently, because of heavy traffic and the stoplight at the Fair Lakes Parkway intersection, northbound Fairfax County Parkway backs up to the I-66 interchange during morning rush hour.

Similarly, southbound Fairfax County Parkway traffic is backed to the Route 50 interchange during the afternoon rush. And ever-growing shopping centers and residential areas along Fair Lakes Parkway also draw motorists.

So the interchange design will be as follows:

Traffic flow on both parkways will be improved by eliminating the signalized intersections at Fair Lakes Parkway and Monument Drive. And the additional lanes on the Fairfax County Parkway will improve traffic flow from south of I-66 to north of Rugby Road.

Planned is a split-diamond, grade-separated interchange, with a free-flowing Fairfax County Parkway bridging over Fair Lakes Parkway and Monument Drive. These two roads will have full access to the Fairfax County Parkway via four ramps. Through traffic would be separated from local ramp traffic, with traffic signals on the ramps, not on the parkway.

Due to the close proximity of Fair Lakes Parkway to the existing interchanges at I-66 and Rugby Road, an additional auxiliary lane will be required in each direction between interchange ramps (I-66 to Fair Lakes Parkway, and Fair Lakes Parkway to Route 50).

Fair Lakes Parkway will be widened to accommodate the necessary left-turn lanes for the interchange. Beginning at Fair Lakes Parkway, a multi-purpose trail is anticipated along the east side of Fairfax County Parkway with a connection to the existing trail at Rocky Run Stream Valley Park.

Because of safety concerns, North Lake Drive would be made a cul-de-sac so it no longer intersects with Fairfax County Parkway.

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