

SENATE OF VIRGINIA

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COMMITTEE ASSIGNMENTS
COMMERCE AND LABOR
GENERAL LAWS AND TECHNOLOGY
LOCAL GOVERNMENT
REHABILITATION AND SOCIAL SERVICES

October 14, 2010

The Honorable Sean T. Connaughton
Secretary of Transportation
1111 E. Broad Street, 3rd Floor
Richmond, VA 23219

Dear Secretary Connaughton:

On September 23, you, along with Governor McDonnell, released the findings of the independent financial and performance audit of the Virginia Department of Transportation. Among its findings, the audit identified \$1 billion available for VDOT's maintenance and construction program that has not been used, and \$800 to \$900 million in funds that the Governor noted could be put to work immediately building roads and reducing congestion statewide.

I write to urge you and the Commonwealth Transportation Board to allocate a portion of that available funding to complete the construction of two projects of regional and statewide importance: the Route 7/659 interchange and the Sycolin Road overpass over the Route 7/15 Bypass.

Background

U.S. Route 7 is a vital corridor in rapidly growing eastern Loudoun County, which has become a globally recognized center for technology industries, including communications, aerospace, IT and life sciences. Route 7 currently carries 75,000 vehicle trips per day, serving keynote employment areas and large residential communities. It connects to Route 28, the gateway to Dulles International Airport, one of the world's major airports and one of Virginia's largest employment generators, and it is part of the National Highway System.

This corridor has regional and statewide significance.

The segment of Route 7 between Leesburg and Route 28 is a six-lane, median-divided, controlled access road. Over the past fifteen years, the private and public sectors have worked together to transition this corridor to a fully limited access road. Several of the at-grade intersections have been replaced with grade-separated interchanges, and another is planned to be

underway soon, mostly through substantial investment by private development and Loudoun County.

The benefits of this public/private infrastructure investment cannot be fully realized, however, without construction of these two projects. Stop-and-go conditions persist through much of the day, and delay in the corridor is high because of these two signalized intersections. Major traffic backups occur daily and these two intersections are consistently among the most dangerous in Loudoun County.

Route 7/659 Interchange

Three legs of the existing intersection currently function at Level of Service F during the afternoon peak and the fourth functions at LOS D. Based on an analysis prepared by Dewberry and Davis, Loudoun County transportation staff estimates that if nothing is done, vehicle delay can be expected to grow to nearly 200 seconds in the future. Since 2002, this intersection has been one of the county's "Top Five" accident-prone locations averaging more than 70 incidents per year.

Design of the interchange was funded by Loudoun County and the preliminary engineering phase is nearly complete. While the estimated cost of the interchange is high due to the size of the intersection and the grade of surrounding areas, conversion to a grade-separated interchange will significantly improve safety, relieve congestion and promote economic development. Proffers from a nearby development in the amount of approximately \$3 million can be applied, and Loudoun County transportation staff estimates that an additional \$55 million is needed to complete the project. The appropriate studies needed to "federalize" the project are underway or planned, should a combination of state and federal funds be identified.

Sycolin Road Overpass

The intersection of the Route 7/15 Bypass and Sycolin Road is the most congested intersection in the Town of Leesburg. Traffic volumes are 70,000 vehicles per day and are projected to increase to 105,000 vehicles per day by the year 2030. The intersection is currently operating at LOS F, with the average delay for each vehicle entering the intersection being over 110 seconds. The intersection is also the most dangerous in the Town of Leesburg and one of the most dangerous in Loudoun County with 93 accidents in the last three years.

Construction of the Sycolin overpass will eliminate this signalized intersection, and it has been a part of the transportation goals of the Town of Leesburg for many years. This project and an associated widening of a segment of the Route 7/15 Bypass from four to six lanes was previously funded in the Six-Year Improvement Program, but funding for construction was removed as the SYIP construction budget was reduced over the last few years. The state funded the preliminary engineering, and it is nearly complete. VDOT staff estimates an additional \$20

The Honorable Sean T. Connaughton
October 14, 2010
Page Three

million is needed to construct the overpass and believes construction could be expedited under federal rules because of public safety concerns.

The completion of these two projects will make great strides toward the completion of Route 7 as a limited access highway and improve traffic flow on one of the region's most critical transportation corridors. It would support employment growth in a corridor of regional and statewide significance, bolster the area's economic competitiveness, reduce congestion and travel time on Route 7, improve the quality of life for thousands of commuters who suffer through heavy traffic congestion and frustrating delays every day, improve safety for the traveling public by eliminating two of Loudoun County's most dangerous intersections, and allow for the state to be a full partner in the public/private partnership that has characterized the forward progress of the corridor over the last fifteen years.

Thank you for your consideration, and I look forward continuing to work with you and the CTB in addressing the transportation needs in the northern Virginia region and throughout the commonwealth.

Sincerely,



Mark Herring

cc: J. Douglas Koelemay, Commonwealth Transportation Board, Northern Virginia District
Members of the Loudoun County Board of Supervisors
Kristen C. Umstatt, Mayor of the Town of Leesburg
Members of the Town Council of the Town of Leesburg