



September 29, 2021

Dan Reinhard P.E.
VDOT , Project Manager
4975 Alliance Drive
Fairfax, VA 22030

RE: Livability22202 Comments on VDOT's Draft Report on Route 1

Dear Dan:

The Livability22202 Working Group on Route 1 representing the three civic associations in 22202—Arlington Ridge, Aurora Highlands, and Crystal City—wishes to express appreciation to VDOT for recent efforts to respond to our concerns and clarify a number of points. We recognize that this has been a major effort and that a lot of thought has gone into the report. We are pleased that VDOT has decided to move into a Phase 2 of the study where many of the remaining concerns will be addressed, and hopefully resolved.

However, we still have a number of concerns and believe that the report remains incomplete. The VDOT study highlights the potential value of a Transportation Demand Management (TDM) component, but suggests that it be focused in Arlington County, neglecting the significant number of motorists travelling on Route 1 from outside the County. That this is a regional issue is a compelling argument for leadership by VDOT and not Arlington County.

We note specifically that “The Commonwealth’s commitment to Amazon is to improve safety, accessibility, and the pedestrian experience crossing Route 1.” The stated purpose therefore of the VDOT study was “to identify enhanced multimodal connectivity and accommodations along and across Route 1 in Crystal City, to meet the changing transportation needs of this growing urban activity center.” **The proposal in the draft study fails on all accounts: it will compromise both safety and connectivity and affect negatively the pedestrian experience crossing Route 1. Moreover, much depends on the proposed TDM that may or may not mitigate traffic sufficiently. Given the potential for TDM, it isn’t clear why immediate implementation wouldn’t be appropriate. Therefore, if VDOT’s Phase 2 Study fails to support its Phase 1 recommendation, we believe the Phase 1 recommendation will have to be modified or abandoned.**

We are providing general comments in this cover letter and specific suggestions for improvement Phase 2 studies in **Appendix 1**, as well as a plan and sketch for a potential bike/ped underpass under Route 1 at 18th Street in **Appendix 2**. Our primary concerns remain the same:

1. **Urban Design:** We continue to believe, as do other stakeholders, that the scope of the VDOT study is overly restrictive, both in considering urban road designs and in addressing only a small section of Route 1 in isolation rather than taking a holistic approach to the entire corridor to the City of Alexandria line. VDOT says that it lacked funding for the full holistic study in Phase 1, but this was clearly a major missed opportunity to solve the larger

problems of Route 1. Ignoring significant stretches of Route 1, Glebe Rd., and the proposal for the airport access road in the Crystal City Sector Plan (CCSP) likely dooms the plans for a shortened urban boulevard to failure.

One of the VDOT project goals is to mend the urban fabric by creating connections between Crystal City and Pentagon City, yet the Phase 1 proposal fails to create better East-West connectivity across Route 1—a key goal of Livability 22202. No new east-west cross streets are proposed; no megablocks are broken down into a more human size. From an urban design perspective, the development anticipated along this portion of Route 1 effectively masks the elevated roadway. The porosity of Route 1 remains unchanged, and new, much needed east-west connections are not created. All modes of transportation continue to be channeled onto a handful of cross streets—12th, 15th, 18th, 20th, and 23rd—continuing to create conflict between users and danger to pedestrians and cyclists. Rather than improving the crossing experience at 20th and 23rd, the study proposes degrading the experience at 15th and 18th to mirror the problems at 23rd. Emergency response vehicles currently use the underpass at 18th Street when responding to Crystal City. It would be appropriate to consider how an at-grade crossing would affect response times.

2. **Safety:** The draft report does not improve safety for all travelers along and across Route 1, which is the number one VDOT project goal and the number one goal for our community. The VDOT report acknowledges that: “Pedestrian operations/safety may worsen with the at-grade intersections. However, lowering the Route 1 speed limit and restricting left turns at the Route 1 and 18th Street S intersection may improve overall safety in the corridor in addition to considering a pedestrian overpass or underpass along 18th Street S at Route 1.” Even with a massive, effective TDM program, pedestrians and cyclists will face greater risks and delays crossing an at-grade Route 1 at 18th Street. This is a critical problem since Arlington will eventually have to build a school in either Crystal City or Pentagon City to meet growing demand, and parents will not want their children to walk if they cannot safely cross Route 1.

We support the many urban road safety design features VDOT mentions in its report, such as: “reduced speeds (30mph), tighter curb radii, reduced lane width, trees and landscaping, median and curb extensions, and the potential for future on-street parking and bike lanes along Route 1.” We also recommend that VDOT reduce the width of traffic lanes from 11’ to 10’ or 10 ½’ (widths used by DDOT and MDOT). Speed and red light cameras need to be part of the project. Right on red needs to be prohibited at all intersections.

However, we strongly believe that these safety design features—essential as they are—are not sufficient to keep us truly safe. The Schneider study (1) makes excellent recommendations that demonstrate that major routes should not have more than 4 lanes to cross, have a speed limit of no more than 25mph, and have a traffic volume of no more than 25,000 vehicles per day. We recommend that VDOT study the feasibility of implementing these recommendations in their Phase 2 studies.

3. **Process:** We appreciate that VDOT has included definitions for its Measures of Effectiveness (MoE) and noted whether you applied a qualitative, quantitative, or both analyses to each MoE. We were startled however to see a new MoE for the National Landing BID proposal. If this is included in the final report, fairness and transparency would require an MoE for the Crystal City Sector Plan, which is the Arlington County approved plan for the Crystal City area, including plans to redevelop Route 1 as an urban boulevard. The VDOT report states: “The At-Grade (Option 3), Grade-Separated Sector Plan, and Modified

Existing configurations were evaluated using the MoEs and rated based on their relative impacts as compared with the existing configuration.” Yet, exactly how the relative impacts were derived and how they were applied is not transparent. Without knowing these details, we continue to be skeptical about your conclusions.

4. **Costs:** The at-grade cost estimate of \$180 million does not include the costs of the huge regional TDM program, a bike-ped passage over/under Route 1 at 18th, or the expansion of the multimodal center at the Crystal City Metro station, needed for the bus stations displaced from an at-grade Route 1 at 18th. As these projects are essential to the success of an implemented at-grade option, their estimated costs need to be included in the cost estimates, even if the costs are not covered by VDOT. These additional costs would increase the total cost estimate significantly, perhaps exceeding the cost estimate for the CCSP option. This discrepancy needs to be noted clearly in the report.
5. **Traffic:** VDOT continues to predict significant traffic diversion onto our side streets with the at-grade proposal. In particular, the study shows that “The combination of closely spaced traffic signals and heavy pedestrian volumes affect vehicular throughput along eastbound/westbound 18th Street S, and queues are observed in various scenarios to spill back from Route 1 in both directions.” It also states: “The most significant increases in volumes are along the nearby parallel streets—Crystal Drive, S Eads Street, and S Fern Street.” The proposed Phase 2 “robust TDM strategy” is critical to a successful plan to reduce Route 1 traffic by 20-30% and mitigate traffic diversion, though we are skeptical that this is possible. We need this comprehensive analysis of regional travel through the corridor as well as transit capacity now, before the Route 1 plan is finalized. We also need to know how Route 1 traffic will be prevented from diverting onto our neighborhood streets. Moreover, VDOT’s plan depends heavily on TDM that may, but very possibly may not, mitigate traffic sufficiently. Under no circumstances should VDOT proceed to implement its plan until it can actually demonstrate an on-the-ground TDM strategy that will prove to be successful.
6. **Impact on community:** We continue to assert that the VDOT at-grade proposal delivers no real benefits or improvements to the community: the report statement that “desire on the part of **many** [bold added] stakeholders to remove this segment of urban freeway” does not reflect something the community desires. Rather, it creates tremendous value for developers, by opening up frontages along Route 1, whereas the community might prefer more open space. That statement needs to be corrected in the report, perhaps to say “desire on the part of commercial interests....” We are particularly concerned that, in citing the National Landing study, the report gives the impression that the community is onboard, which is not accurate. The increased friction on East-West connectivity across Route 1 in the proposed plan not only delivers no community benefits, it also seems destined to cleave National Landing into a separate Pentagon City and Crystal City zones in which the ability to share community facilities, retail and other essential services is even more limited than it is today.
7. **Phase 2:** We are pleased that VDOT has agreed to study a number of areas of concern during the second phase, especially the possibility of a bike/ped underpass under Route 1 at 18th Street, development of a robust TDM strategy to reduce traffic volume and diversion onto local streets, specific design concepts for slowing the speed of vehicles along Route 1, study of additional pedestrian safety elements, consideration of interim improvements to 23rd Street, and acknowledgement that a new transit center will need to be built to accommodate

the relocation of buses and bus routes. We are providing in **Appendix 2** a suggested plan and preliminary sketch for a bike/ped tunnel under Route 1 at 18th Street that has great potential, and ask that VDOT engineers engage with our urban architect Brian Harner to study this possibility. More detailed sketches are in preparation.

We look forward to cooperating with VDOT during Phase 2. We strongly encourage you to hold a community meeting early in Phase 2 to update us on your Phase 2 plans, to hear our concerns about the project, and allow us to offer suggestions. **Please see Appendix 1** attached to this letter for our comments on specific VDOT Phase 2 proposed studies and our suggestions for additional studies.

Finally, we repeat that, from our perspective, there's no apparent full at-grade configuration that will provide both adequate safety for east-west walking and biking and prevent excessive traffic from diverting onto our parallel streets. We continue to support following the plans in the Crystal City Sector Plan that create an urban boulevard along Route 1 while maintaining its elevation above both 15th Street South and 18th Street South.

Thank you.

Sincerely,



Kateri Garcia, President
Arlington Ridge CA



Scott Miles, President
Aurora Highlands CA



Carol Fuller, President
Crystal City CA

Reference: (1): Schneider, R. J., Sanders, R., Proulx, F., & Moayyed, H. (2021). United States fatal pedestrian crash hot spot locations and characteristics. *Journal of Transport and Land Use*, 14(1), 1–23. <https://doi.org/10.5198/jtlu.2021.1825>

Appendix 1: Phase 2 Studies – An Encouraging List, but Still Incomplete

Appendix 2a: Plan for a Potential Bike/Ped Underpass under Route 1 at 18th Street

Appendix 2b: Preliminary Sketch for Bike/Ped Underpass under Route 1 at 18th Street