

SENATE OF VIRGINIA

SCOTT A. SUROVELL
36TH SENATORIAL DISTRICT
PART OF FAIRFAX, PRINCE WILLIAM, AND
STAFFORD COUNTIES
P.O. BOX 289
MOUNT VERNON, VIRGINIA 22121
(571) 249-4484



COMMITTEE ASSIGNMENTS:
GENERAL LAWS AND TECHNOLOGY
LOCAL GOVERNMENT
REHABILITATION AND SOCIAL SERVICES

July 15, 2019

Superintendent Charles Cuvelier
George Washington Memorial Parkway Unit
National Park Service
c/o Turkey Run Park
700 George Washington Memorial Parkway
McLean, Virginia 22101

Re: Official Comments Regarding George Washington
Memorial Parkway, South Section, Traffic Safety Study

Dear Superintendent Cuvelier:

I am writing to follow up on our public meeting last week to provide you with my initial comments regarding traffic safety on the George Washington Memorial Parkway ("the Parkway") and the Mt. Vernon Memorial Trail ("the Trail"). I am also gathering community comments on the issue and will provide you with the community feedback and supplemental comments of my own before August 21.

The following serve as my initial official comments.

I have lived two blocks from the Parkway and the Trail my entire life. My grandparents moved to my house on Halloween Day in 1941. I was born in 1971, learned to ride my bike on the Trail and at Fort Hunt Park, and was one of the first riders when the ribbon was cut on the new segment between Alexandria Avenue to Waynewood in 1978. My wife runs four miles on the trail every morning and occasionally commutes using the 11-Y bus. I taught my kids to ride their bikes on the trail and at Fort Hunt Park. I commute on the Parkway every morning. My family and I are frequent users of the Parkway and the Trail.

Source of the Problem

I am well aware of the restrictions posed by the National Historic Preservation Act and I support maintaining the Parkway's status on the National Register, preserving its historic nature, and ensuring that it remains the historic and scenic byway that it is. I also recognize that the original road did not have intersections at Belleview Boulevard, Tulane Drive, Waynewood Boulevard, Vernon View Drive or Stratford Landing, and most "intersections" were entrance points from existing unimproved dirt roads that served a handful of farms or vacation cottages. It was never designed for modern conditions, commuters, high speeds or heavy volumes.

While the massive development of the 22307, 22308, and 22309 zip codes between 1940-1970 put pressure on the road, it never really became dangerous until recently. The current problems on the Parkway mainly stem from two sources – (1) traffic volume and (2) excessive speed. Traffic became a real problem after the 2005 round of the Base Realignment and Closure Commission (BRAC). I can see the effects in the morning due to all of the Maryland license plates heading south (at high speed). These conflicts are most obvious at left turns.

Speed Cameras

For this reason, I have supported a speed camera solution from the beginning, and I believe speed cameras at problem intersections – perhaps positioned in stone boxes – would go a long way toward reducing speeds.

Former Congressman Dick Armey and former Virginia Governor Jim Gilmore sent letters attacking speed cameras in 2001 which caused the National Park Service (NPS) to deactivate the camera at National Airport, but they are no longer in office and our problems have grown much more acute in the last 18 years. Speed cameras have been extensively deployed around the world, Maryland, and the District of Columbia since then and have proven effective.

I also understand the budget restrictions on the NPS and federal prohibitions on revenues benefiting specific park units. Perhaps the NPS could consider a concession contract for speed cameras. I am willing to advocate any financial needs with Virginia's Congressional delegation.

Traffic Diets

I support the consideration of traffic diets. However, I have concerns that if traffic is narrowed to one lane that it could limit the opportunities for left turn entrances onto the Parkway during peak volumes. Traffic diets could be tested in locations using orange cones to see how traffic reacts as an interim measure.

Left Turn Bans

While prohibitions on left turns might have some intuitive appeal given that most collisions occur during left turns, I am concerned that most left turn changes will not solve problems but only them elsewhere unless they are coupled with other solutions. For example, a left turn ban at Morningside Lane, will only push more cars onto either Tulane Drive or Alexandria Avenue. Alexandria Avenue is already troublesome given Northdown Road's narrow road width, 15 MPH speed limit, and high volume of cyclists and pedestrians who share the road after the trail ends. Westgrove Boulevard is likewise a residential street not designed for significant commuter volume.

A left turn ban at Belleview Boulevard would overwhelm a bad problem that already exists at Belle Haven Road as demonstrated by your queueing data. However, if a left turn prohibition – on and off – if Belleview Boulevard was coupled with a traffic light at Bellehaven Road, that might be more manageable, provided the Belle Haven Road approach to the Parkway was redesigned to take 10th Street's intersection with Belle Haven Road into account.

Mount Vernon Bike Trail

The Mount Vernon Trail is one of the most amazing parts of the park. It allows people to intimately enjoy the park's full splendor. However, like the road, it is also under significant stress.

As an avid cyclist, I find the trail to be patently unsafe. The trail is too narrow. Exercise enthusiasts and bike commuters are in frequent conflict with pedestrians, children or slower riders who are often unaware of the danger they are creating. The frequent turns and blind corners create dangerous situations at higher speeds. I have multiple cyclists friends – some avid, some recreational

– who have ended up in the emergency room due to spills. One constituent told me they were a juror in a case involving a cyclist collision on the Trail.

The lack of maintenance (I understand the budget restrictions inflicted by Congress over the last four decades) is allowing roots to create an uneven surface which creates challenges, especially when the trail is wet. The NPS should consider major improvements to the trail including widening in the long term or perhaps even a separate study.

In the short term, the NPS should evaluate allowing cyclists back on to the main road – at least (1) in the lower speed sections, (2) where there are lower traffic volumes (e.g. between Mount Vernon and Vernon View Drive), or (3) by closing a portion of the road – perhaps from Stratford Landing to Mt. Vernon – on weekends, similar to what occurs on Beach Drive in Rock Creek Park.

Pedestrian Safety

The existing road is also extremely unsafe for pedestrians. I frequently see pedestrians “stranded” on the median at Belleview Boulevard trying to get back to their condominiums or to the Trail. Bus commuters, runners, and cyclists put their lives at risk trying to cross to the bus stop and trail at Belle Haven Road or Tulane Drive. People who ride the 11-Y are in extreme danger every morning to get to the east side of the road to reach bus stops, and the southbound bus stop at the Stone Bridge requires users to cross back to the east side of the road to reach Northdown Road and Alexandria Avenue. These pedestrian crossings are especially dangerous in the winter when it is dark during the evening commute.

The road desperately needs crosswalks. It also needs formal pedestrian refuge infrastructure and signage or embedded pavement lights to warn drivers of their responsibilities.

Southern Terminus

Traffic queueing at the southern terminus is a significant problem in the morning and evening. I did not see any formal measurement of that in the display boards. The intersection of the Parkway with Old Mount Vernon Road and Mount Vernon Memorial Highway presents further problems due to the large number of pedestrians crossing from the Mt. Vernon Estate Parking Lot, although pedestrian volume is probably lower during weekday peak volumes.

The NPS, in consultation with the Virginia Department of Transportation, should evaluate (1) a stop light, (2) prohibiting left turns from Old Mount Vernon Road, and (3) adding a traffic enforcement officer during peak hours to mitigate these issues. (4) Work with Mount Vernon Estate to encourage all buses to avoid using the south parkway.

Other Thoughts

I also have the following ideas not otherwise outlined above:

- **35 MPH Zone Speed Study:** The display boards at the public hearing had speed data for the Parkway, but no data where the speed limit drops to 35 MPH. The NPS needs to assess speeding conditions at Belleview and Belle Haven.
- **West Boulevard Drive Left Turn Ban:** NPS should ban left turns from the West Boulevard Drive intersection south of the Stone Bridge. I have noticed traffic apps try to push cars there while there is a safe right hand turn just over the bridge. Shutting down this left turn will have minimal impact on other intersections.
- **Chadwick Road Easement:** The NPS should consider eliminating what appears to be a road easement extending from Chadwick Road on the land between West Boulevard

Drive and the Parkway. There is no reason that needs to continue, and I have seen a few cars continue to try to use it.

- **Stone Bridge Problems:** Buses and (illegal) trucks continue to strike the Alexandria Avenue Stone Bridge. The existing signage is not adequate. The NPS should consider other alternatives to increase driver awareness of the bridge height, including radar warning systems or limit traffic to one lane in each direction through the middle lanes of the bridge where the arch is tallest. The NPS should also investigate whether it is possible to add height warning alarms to commonly used commercial and/or bus electronic navigation systems.
- **Wildlife Impacts.** The data you presented including no information wildlife impacts of traffic or their involvement in collisions. This would be useful, as would solutions to prevent wildlife deaths on the parkway.
- **Horticultural Plan.** NPS should fully implement the horticultural plan for the entire parkway, consistent with Congress's intent.
- **Increased Enforcement.** NPS should increase enforcement of speed limits on the Parkway and on the bike path. NPS should not allow scooters on the bike path. I am also willing to talk to the Virginia State Police and possibly assisting with enforcement. It is my understanding that the Fairfax County Police Department is unwilling to consider additional enforcement responsibilities. I also have received numerous constituent complaints about illegal trucks continuing to use the road.
- **Surface Maintenance.** I have always been astonished that a road constructed in 1932 has held up so well and that major pavement rehabilitation was only done once – about 15 years ago? However, the surface has significantly deteriorated in many sections, the lane markings have faded, and the road needs significant rehabilitation right now today.

As I mentioned above, I will have additional comments once I have completed my constituent survey which you are welcome to review at www.bit.ly/GWPSurvey.

Thank you in advance for all of your work on this and I look forward to the ultimate outcome.

Sincerely Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Scott A. Surovell", written over a horizontal line.

Senator Scott A. Surovell
36th District

cc: U.S. Senator Mark R. Warner
U.S. Senator Timothy M. Kaine
Congressman Donald S. Beyer, Jr.
Senator Adam P. Ebbin
Delegate Paul E. Krizek
Delegate Kathy Tran
Delegate Mark Levine

Superintendent Charles Cuvelier

July 16, 2019

Page 5 of 5

Chairman Sharon Bulova

Supervisor Dan Storck

Mayor Justin Wilson

Colonel Michael H. Greenberg

Secretary Shannon Valentine, Virginia Department of Transportation

Mr. Tom Biesadny, Fairfax County Department of Transportation

Mr. Bruce Wright, President, Fairfax Area Bicyclists Association

Ms. Glenda Booth, President, Friends of Dyke Marsh

Mr. Robert D. Rosenbaum, President, Friends of Fort Hunt Park

Mr. Judd Isbell, Co-President, Friends of Mount Vernon Trail

Ms. Josephine Liu, Co-President, Friends of Mount Vernon Trail

Ms. Katherine Ward, Co-Chair, Mt. Vernon Council of Citizens

Mr. John Ribble, Co-Chair, Mt. Vernon Council of Citizens

Ms. Lynn Pascoe, Co-Chair, Mt. Vernon Council of Citizens

Mr. Douglas Bradburn, Executive Director, Mount Vernon Ladies Association