

**Comment Form**

Park: George Washington Memorial Parkway  
Project: Southern George Washington Memorial Parkway Safety Study (ID: 89079)  
Document: George Washington Memorial Parkway Safety Study (ID: 96964)

\* indicates required fields

City: \* Alexandria State/Province: \* Virginia

Postal Code:\* 22309

First Name: Poul Middle Initial: M

Last Name: Hertel

Organization:

Member  Official Representative

Address 1: 3716 Carriage House Court

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Country: United States

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**Comments or Requests:**

Dear Sirs

Please find enclosed my comments regarding the George Washington Memorial Parkway Safety Study.

Sincerely

Poul Hertel

**connie\_g@hotmail.com**

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**To:** Poul Hertel  
**Subject:** RE:

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**From:** Poul Hertel [<mailto:poufh@erols.com>]  
**Sent:** Wednesday, August 21, 2019 3:45 PM  
**To:** 'Connie Graham'  
**Subject:**

George Washington Memorial Parkway  
Attn: Alexandria to Mount Vernon Safety Study  
700 George Washington Memorial Parkway  
c/o Turkey Run Park  
McLean, Virginia 22101

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Dear Sirs;

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the ongoing traffic study regarding the South portion of the George Washington Memorial Parkway. However, I would urge the electronic comment filling system accommodate attachments in the future, and am happy to provide an electronic copy of this letter if requested.

The importance of the George Washington Memorial Parkway (GWMP) can only be properly understood in the context of its history and purpose, a copy of which is enclosed in the appendix to this letter. The GWMP was envisioned as a drive with certain definitions: "Parkways or ways through or between parks; distinguished from highways or ordinary streets by the dominant purpose of recreation rather than movement; restricted to pleasure vehicles, and arranged with regard for scenery, topography and similar features rather than for directness."

The GWMP was purposefully routed through the city of Alexandria because the City still had some structures that dated back to the days of George Washington, and it presented an appropriate way point to provide a contemplative setting to evoke George Washington. The City created a Historic District and enacted an ordinance to protect this view shed. This is why the GWMP portion that runs through the City of Alexandria is different than the rest of the parkway.

The George Washington Memorial Parkway (and the City of Alexandria) thus shares this heritage with the world, as people from all nations and walks of life pass through Alexandria to make a pilgrimage to Mount Vernon to pay their respects to the "Father of Our Country." The George Washington Memorial Parkway also represents a trust placed on the City by the Federal Government that Alexandria would maintain the highway for the purpose and dignity it that was envisioned to convey, and that the Historic District created as a quid pro quo would continue to protect this singular heritage.

Here are my comments concerning the traffic and safety of the parkway south of Alexandria.

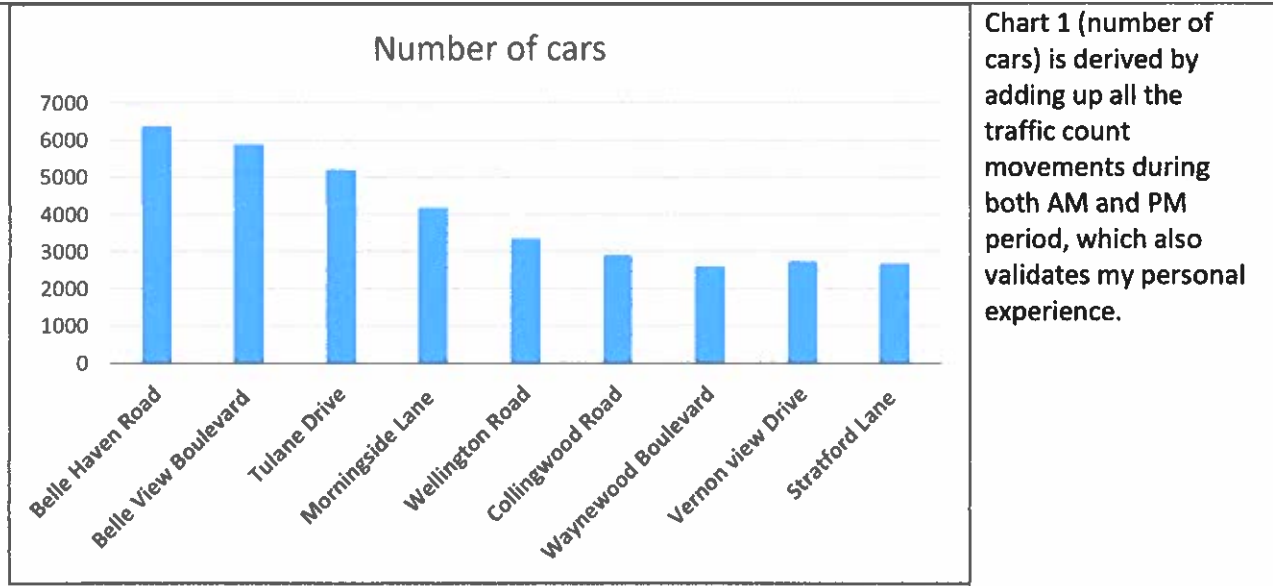
### Traffic Safety Issues

1. The GWMP was created for the purpose of contemplative reflection, but this purpose conflicts with its current use as a faster commuter route when cars drive faster than the current posted speed limit of 45 miles per hour. Unfortunately, due to extremely limited enforcement of the speed limit, cars are encouraged to drive significantly faster. The lack of enforcement is so poor that is noticeable, and the drivers have accommodated themselves to those conditions. And when there is enforcement, it seems to have a generous tolerance for speeders.
2. The speed limit of 45 miles per hour is too fast for the conditions and should be lowered to 40 miles per hour.
3. Aggressive enforcement needs to be implemented and traffic cameras should be installed.
4. Once problem that is easily remedied is the prevalence of obstructing vegetation that is compromising the view of turning vehicles onto the GWMP. This is an extreme problem that requires immediate attention; the intersections of Belle View Boulevard and Morningside Road should be first on the list, they are the most obstructed.

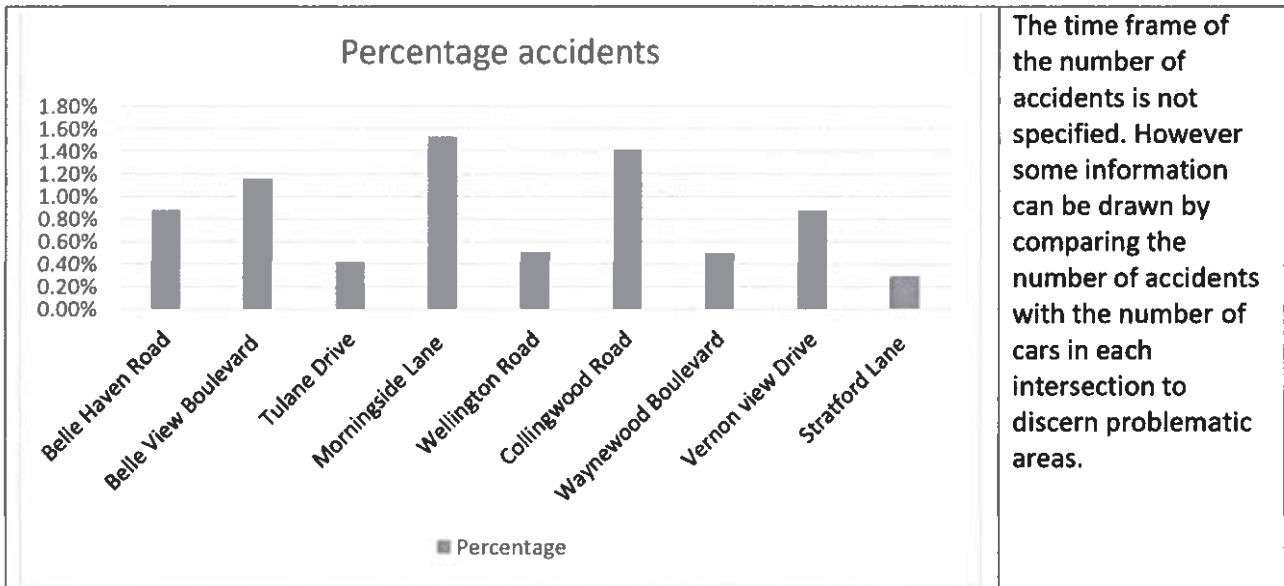
**Informal Review and recommendations from data provided by the National Park Service.**

The National Park Service (NPS) has provided the public with data collected at various intersections along the GWMP. This includes the amount of traffic and turning movements in the AM and PM period. These data collections have been used along with the traffic accident statistic to compile a preliminary indicator of potential safety issues. Although the data is not refined enough to draw specific conclusions, it can be used as an indicator for more thorough research.

**TOTAL TRAFFIC (Chart 1)**

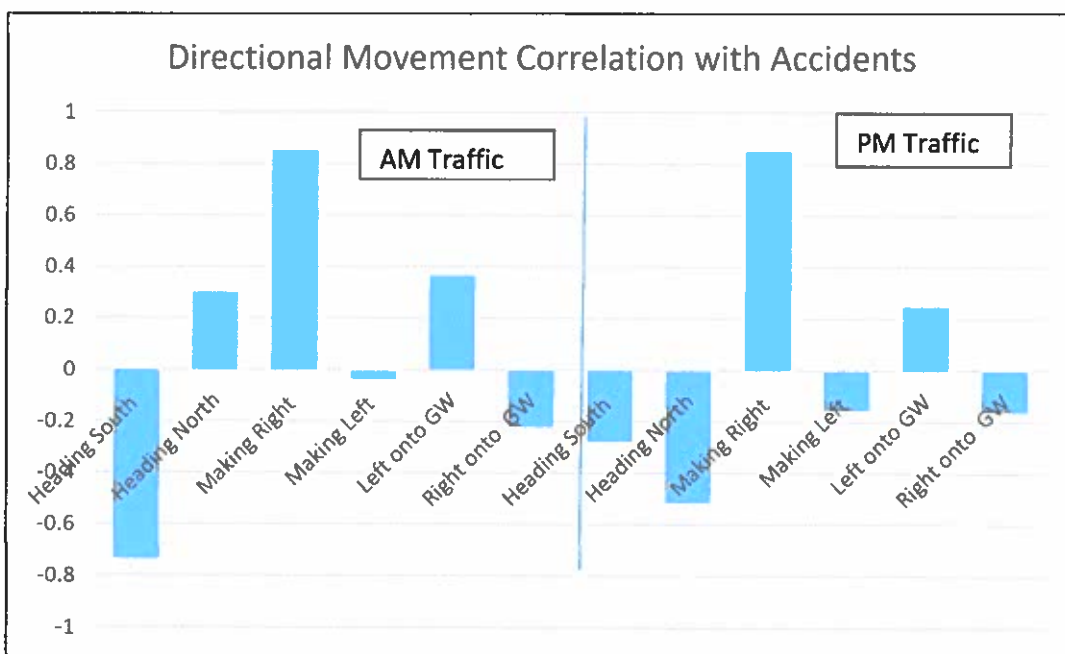


**ACCIDENTS AS A PERCENTAGE (Chart 2)**



Ranking of Problem Intersections	
<p>This reveals, in order of problems.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Morningside Lane</li> <li>2. Collingwood Road</li> <li>3. Belle View Boulevard</li> <li>4. Vernon View Drive</li> <li>5. Wayne Wood Boulevard</li> <li>6. Tulane Drive</li> <li>7. Stratford Lane</li> </ol>	<p>These rankings are surprising.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Morningside Lane, Collingwood Road have far greater issues than the traffic count would warrant.</li> <li>• Tulane Drive has far less issues than the other intersections.</li> <li>• Belle Haven Road has significantly less issues than Belleview Boulevard.</li> </ul>

DIRECTIONAL MOVEMENTS AND CORRELATION WITH ACCIDENTS (Chart 3)



As before, the data can only be interpreted as an indicator and requires far more detail for a definitive analysis. However, using the numbers provided by the NPS the following is discerned. The numbers are broken down by AM and PM and the directional.

AM Traffic	PM Traffic
1. Heading South on GWMP AM	7. Heading South on GWMP PM
2. Heading North on GWMP AM	8. Heading North on GWMP PM
3. Heading South on GWMP and Making Right turn at intersection to side road AM	9. Heading South on GWMP and Making Right turn at intersection to side road PM
4. Heading North on GWMP and Making Left turn at intersection to side road AM	10. Heading North on GWMP and Making Left turn at intersection to side road PM
5. Making Left turn onto GWMP North Bound from side road AM	11. Making Left turn onto GWMP North Bound from side road PM
6. Making right turn onto GWMP South Bound from side road AM	12. Making right turn onto GWMP South Bound from side road PM

The result suggest is that cars on the GWMP turning right onto the side roads are so highly correlated with the amount of accidents at these intersections. This is followed at much lower ratios by cars turning left onto the GWMP. I did an informal survey of traffic conditions from 0830 0930 on 20 August 2019, and these are the conditions observed (Chart 4):

**GWMP South Traffic Conditions (Chart 4)**

View from Intersection	Vernon View	Waynewood	Collingwood	Wellington	Morningside Lane	Tulane	Belle View	Belle Haven
Remove Obscuring Foliage		X	X	X	X		X	X
Adjacent Turn Lane Obstructs View					X		X	
Needs Right turn Berm off GWMP	X	X	X		X		X	
Move Stop Bar on Street forward	X	X		X	X			
Good Visibility Left Turn		X				X		
Good Visibility Right Turn						X		
Poor Visibility Left Turn			X				X	
Poor Visibility Right Turn		X		X	X			X
Traffic Too Fast for Conditions					X		X	X
<b>"No Headlights" Cars-No right VIZ</b>					XXX			
No Street Sign				X				
Move Stop Sign Forward				X			X	
Traffic on parkway one lane each way					X		X	
No space reserved in center for turn					X		X	
Reduce Parkway Speed								

The NPS handout of the visibilities at the various intersections did not include visibility obstruction caused by turning cars in the turn lanes. This is especially acute at the Morningside lane, where a turning car can obscure all of the South bound GWMP traffic.

- Belleview Boulevard suffers from the same affliction, with right turning cars obscuring the little view of the South Bound GWMP traffic there is.
- The visibility studies should have included south bound GWMP car using the turning lanes access the view shed properly.
- Tulane has surprisingly good visibility even if cars are using the South bound turn lanes onto Tulane, which could explain the lower crash ratios at the intersection.
- Collingwood Road has an unexpectedly high accident ratio, but also has the highest left onto the GWMP turn movement ratio of any intersection.

Generally, the turn lanes need to be shaved and the turns onto the side roads need to be made sooner, away from the cars making left turns onto the GWMP. There should be a grassy berm separating the two, and the stop lines on the side road should be extended further out toward the GWMP for better visibility.

At some intersections, cars making a left turn on the South Bound GWMP will inevitably have the view constrained by the cars making right turns onto the side road, and by the cars on the side road wanting to make a right turn on the South Bound GWMP. This is especially acute at Belle View Boulevard and

Morningside Road. Also, obstructing vegetation is an extreme problem at Belle View and Morningside Roads, this vegetation needs to be removed immediately.

## GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

The GWMP is a national treasure known the world over and singularly American feature that so appropriately venerates the Father of the United States. A feature that is far too often overlooked by those using it in their rush to get somewhere. This has created an atmosphere of incredible speeding and far in excess of the conditions and far removed from the original intent.

There is a portion of the GWMP that is a straight and heading north culminates at Morningside lane. There the traffic has very limited eye sight of the North Bound traffic due vegetation. A condition that is not safe. The traffic needs to be slowed at least down to 40 miles per hour and need to be believed.

The data suggests that a major problem is also the cars making a right had turn off the parkway, because they block the views as well.

One intersection that is actually designed well is, Belle Haven Road. The right turning lane is separated from the side road traffic heading North on GWMP by a berm. The traffic turning right onto GWMP is removed from the traffic turning left, thereby obscuring the view to a lesser extent. There is a well demarked center spot to transition onto the North Bound GWMP traffic. Yet there are still accidents there. Belle Haven Road has the added problem of a significant amount of north bund traffic wanting to make the left turn from the GWMP to the side road. This obscures the view for the cars wanting to make the left turn onto the North Bound GWMP.

Belle View Boulevard is very problematic as well as is Morningside Road. This suggests that at these three spots the GWMP though lanes be limited to two. This would give a freer and safer turning movement. Unfortunately, the GWMP has not been kept up, which allowed the vegetation to intrude the line of sight combined with a significant speeding problem that the NPS need to address.

## History of the George Washington Memorial Parkway

No words can adequately express just how important the first president was in uniting a young nation. George Washington's residence at Mount Vernon and the city that bore his name could be dismissed as cultural icons, if it were not for his importance to the American heritage. The two became intertwined through not only George Washington, but also by the road connecting the two. This connection was so great, that in "Historic Buildings of America as Seen and Described by Famous Writers", Arthur Shadwell Martin relates how "every patriotic American who visits Washington makes a pious pilgrimage to the home and tomb of the Father of his Country. " But, haste was out of the question," the Family Magazine related in 1837, "for never was worse road extant than that to Mount Vernon." Departing from Alexandria, the road to Mount Vernon went inland, rather than along the river as it does today. There was scarcely a glimpse of the scenic Potomac. Instead, one was required to traverse two large hills on an inland road in various state of disrepair that sometimes was more like a wooded trail.

Caroline Gilman described it in her book, "the Poetry of Travelling" as being "intolerably bad," and that "no one probably passes it without thinking before he arrives at Mount Vernon, that he has paid too dear for his whistle. "The City of Alexandria fared no better than the road, having also fallen on hard times. Many authors described it as a dilapidated little town where "no one wishes to linger." Nevertheless, the importance of Mount Vernon was growing in the national conscience, even bringing forth calls for the government to take it over. While the family of George Washington had graciously accepted visitors for many years, they eventually could not manage the upkeep of the Mansion.

To save this landmark, the Mount Vernon Ladies Association was created in 1856 as the first historic preservation effort in America. It raised enough money to purchase the property two years later. Although, roads existed to Mount Vernon, they were neither the original one, nor ones that lent themselves to contemplative or pleasurable drives. Consequently, in 1887, in an article he wrote for the National Republican (a DC paper), Edward Fox came up with the idea to create a National Highway from Washington DC to Mount Vernon. Fox called for the "making of a splendid drive, a grand avenue and 100 feet wide that was properly graded and shaded between the capital city of the nation and the tomb of its great founder."

Building on the enthusiasm of the Fox article, in 1888, Mayor John B. Smoot of Alexandria founded the Mount Vernon Avenue Association in Alexandria to promulgate the creation of a national road to George Washington's home. The road would travel through Alexandria on the basis that many existing establishments were there when George Washington walked these streets. Since fortune had bypassed Alexandria, the buildings were still there. The Mount Vernon Avenue Association appealed to Congress the following year, which then really got started with trying to design this. They appropriated money for a Colonel Haines to come up with three routes (one of which came through Alexandria). No matter which route was selected along the Potomac, Haines intended it always to be in the process of development and embellishment. Envisioned as having a monumental character, the proposed "National Road", was a symbolic link between Mount Vernon Estate, the site so closely associated with George Washington, and the city that bore his name. Congress, unfortunately allocated no further money.

By 1898, the Centennial of the Nation's Capital was impending, so a group of citizens approached President McKinley about a plan for celebrating the event. This eventually resulted in the creation of the



McMillan Senate Park Committee in 1901-1902, which was one of the most important committees in the nation's history, and which was named for Senator James McMillan of Michigan, Chairman of the Senate Committee on the District of Columbia. Park enthusiasts, historians, and planners in Washington, DC, often invoke the great and expansive vision of the McMillan Plan as the conceptual underpinnings of today's National Mall and Washington, D.C.'s Park System.

Although the McMillan Commission did not directly deal with it, they very specifically addressed the need for and importance of having a road leading to the home of the father of our nation. The McMillan Senate Park Committee had clearly been influenced by landscape architect pioneers Olmstead, Vaux, Cleveland, and Eliot, who are credited with creating the term "Parkway." The McMillan Committee envisioned that "these drives had certain definitions: Parkways or ways through or between parks; distinguished from highways or ordinary streets by the dominant purpose of recreation rather than movement; restricted to pleasure vehicles, and arranged with regard for scenery, topography and similar features rather than for directness".

Although WWI had taken its toll, interest in history (particularly Colonial and early American history) remained strong. The Bicentennial of George Washington's birth was the impetus for a 1924 committee formed by Congress, and in 1932, the road was constructed. The road did travel through Alexandria on what is now known as "Washington Street." In doing so, the City of Alexandria entered into a 1929 agreement with the Federal Government promising to keep the memorial character of the Parkway. However, by 1946, Alexandria had fallen off the memorial wagon (so to speak), so the Federal Government indicated that the Parkway was to be moved away from Alexandria. At this point, the City of Alexandria offered to create a historic district to protect the Parkway, which would then remain in Alexandria. That is the genesis of Alexandria's historic district. Over the years, there have been numerous battles back and forth between Alexandria and the Federal Government.

In 1999, Alexandria requested that the National Park Service provide a clarification as to the memorial nature of the Parkway. Many of the features from the National Park Service's response to the City of Alexandria were incorporated into the Washington Street Standards as we know them today. The George Washington Memorial Parkway is therefore the genesis of the Alexandria Historic District, which, in turn, has generated a significant tourism response. The George Washington Memorial Parkway (and the City of Alexandria) thus shares this heritage with the world, as people from all nations and walks of life pass through Alexandria to make a pilgrimage to Mount Vernon to pay their respects to the "Father of Our Country." The George Washington Memorial Parkway also represents a trust placed on the City by the Federal Government that Alexandria would maintain the highway for the purpose and dignity it that was envisioned to convey, and that the Historic District created as a quid pro quo would continue to protect this singular heritage.