

**BRAC/MARK CENTER ADVISORY GROUP
ALEXANDRIA, VIRGINIA**

November 30, 2009

Chairman Sean Kumar and Members of the Transportation Commission
301 King Street – City Hall
Alexandria, VA 22314

Re: BRAC-133 I-395 Interchange Alternatives (Agenda Item No. 2 for Meeting of 12/02/09)

Dear Chairman Kumar and Members of the Transportation Commission:

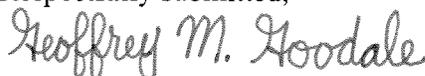
The BRAC/Mark Center Advisory Group (“Advisory Group”) respectfully submits these comments to the Transportation Commission (“Commission”) for its consideration in deciding what recommendations to make to the City Council (“Council”) with respect to the issue of potential options for direct access from I-395 to Mark Center. As discussed below, we urge the Commission to recommend that Council request that the City’s Department of Transportation and Environmental Services (“T&ES”) prepare a report that evaluates the potential direct options currently being considered by the Virginia Department of Transportation (“VDOT”) and other possible options in terms of the “Guiding Principles” that the Advisory Group has adopted, and that Council inform VDOT that the City will advise VDOT of preferred options as soon as practicable after the T&ES report has been completed, commented on, and considered by Council.

At the Advisory Group’s meeting on October 21, 2009 (“October 21 Meeting”), a presentation was given by VDOT’s consultant relating to the seven direct access options currently being considered as part of an Interchange Justification Report (“BRAC Access IJR”). Several of the options involved encroaching upon the Winkler Botanical Preserve (“Preserve”) and/or property of various entities operating at Mark Center and paying damages to acquire such properties, and the remaining options also possessed a number of shortcomings. *See* October 21 Meeting Minutes at pages 2-4 (copy attached as Exhibit 1).

In view of its concerns about the options currently being considered by VDOT, the Advisory Group developed “Guiding Principles” that should be considered and followed in evaluating the merits of various options at its meeting on November 18, 2009. Subsequently, the Advisory Group submitted a document reflecting the “Guiding Principles” to the Council in connection with the Council’s public hearing on November 21, 2009 (copy attached as Exhibit 2).

We urge the Commission to recommend that Council request T&ES staff to prepare a report that evaluates the current options being considered by VDOT and other possible options in terms of the “Guiding Principles,” and that Council inform VDOT that the City will advise VDOT of preferred options as soon as practicable after the T&ES report has been completed, commented on, and reviewed by Council. We would hope that several new alternatives that do not involve encroaching upon the Preserve or properties of entities operating at Mark Center would be included in the T&ES report and that the Advisory Group and the community would have the opportunity to submit comments on the report before Council reaches a decision on preferred options. Your consideration of our request is greatly appreciated.

Respectfully submitted,



Geoffrey M. Goodale

Vice-Chair, BRAC/Mark Center Advisory Group

Encl.

EXHIBIT 1

Minutes of BRAC/Mark Center Advisory Group Meeting of October 21, 2009

BRAC Advisory Group Meeting
October 21, 2009
7pm – 9pm
William Ramsay School Auditorium

Roll Call –

Present:

John Komoroske, Chairman of the Planning Commission
Jim Turkel, Chief, Belvoir Integration Office, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
Jerry Dawson, Duke Realty
Jayme Blakesley, Alexandria Transportation Commission
Judy Cooper – Vice Chair, Brookville-Seminary Valley
Julie Edelson, Lincolnia Hills/Heywood Glen
Dick Somers, Seminary Park Community Association
Dave Dexter - Chair, Seminary West
Dick Hayes, Seminary Hill
Kathy Burns, West End Business Association
Tom Burket, JBG
Don Buch, Citizen at Large
Nancy Jennings, Seminary Hill
Dave Cavanaugh, Seminary Ridge
Mark Benedict, Parkside of Alexandria

Not Present:

Colonel Moffatt, Fort Belvoir Deputy Garrison Commander for Transformation and BRAC
Ronald Sturman, Seminary Heights
Geoffrey Goodale – Vice Chair, Brookville-Seminary Valley
Duanne Gautier, Alexandria Economic Development Partnership
Kai Reynolds, JBG

Elected Officials:

Councilwoman Pepper
Councilman Smedberg

City Staff:

Mark Jinks, Deputy City Manager
Rich Baier, Director, Department of Transportation and Environmental Services
Bob Garbacz, Division Chief, Department of Transportation and Environmental Services
Ravi Raut, Department of Transportation and Environmental Services
Pat Mann, Department of Planning and Zoning
Pat Escher, Department of Planning and Zoning

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Army

Edward Travis, Fort Belvoir BRAC PAO

VDOT

Tom Fahrney, BRAC Coordinator

Ronaldo T. “Nic” Nicholson, VDOT Regional Transportation Director for the Northern Virginia Megaprojects

General Engineering Consultant

Paul W. Hoffman, VA MegaProjects

Michael Baker, Inc

Paul Prideaux, P.E.

46th District Representative

Jennifer Bissett – Legislative aid to Charniele Herring

1. Roll Call
2. Approved September minutes
3. It was announced that Agenda Alexandria will be discussing BRAC 133 at their October 26th meeting which is held at the Holiday Inn on Eisenhower Avenue. The program includes dinner and anyone can attend.
4. Jennifer Bissette with Charniele Herring’s office handed out a letter to the group that is looking at funding options for direct access to Mark Center. A representative from Congressman Moran’s office will be attending the next meeting.
5. Interchange Justification Study (IJS) – once finalized it will become a report
Tome Fahrney with VDOT gave an introduction for the discussion of the IJS. VDOT developed eight (8) different alternatives to a direct access ramp into the Mark Center. These alternatives were discussed with the City, the counties, the Army and IDA. There will be a public meeting in January.

Paul Prideaux, with Michael Baker, Inc. gave a presentation of the IJS findings. These findings are based on the existing conditions today as a baseline, an interim date of 2015 and a final date of 2035. To reach some conclusions they reviewed the traffic with the

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conclusion of a direct access to the Mark Center. The High Occupancy Toll (HOT) lanes are being considered with this projection as they are in VDOT's long range transportation plan. If in the future the HOT lanes are taken out of the long range planning effort, then adjustments would be made to these findings. The HOT lane project would increase the number of lanes from 2 to 3 and move I-395 north about 14 feet or the one lane. It would provide access for north bound traffic to the Seminary interchange.

Alternative A-1 – Flyover with a right in and right out with a flyover the existing free right turn ramp. Doesn't help the north bound traffic and only services the one garage.

Alternative A-2 – Access from Seminary Road, not grade separated. Would eliminate the existing free moving ramp, has weaving conflicts and would only serve one parking garage. VDOT's position on weaving is to reduce, remove or at best lengthen lanes.

Alternative B-1 – Access from the I-395 interchange and retaining the free right access ramp. Still has weaving conflicts, would have to be off set to accommodate required stand off distances, would encroach into the Winkler Preserve and would connect to the internal private road just south of the IDA building. VDOT is required to connect to a public road. This connection is to a the private road that may have limited capacity.

Alternative B-2 – South bound loop road connecting to Mark Center Drive. Would impact IDA's proposed new building and parking structure and the preserve. IDA has not pulled a building permit, if this is the preferred alignment, VDOT would pay IDA for damages. This design provides access to the free flow movements to entire site and beyond to Seminary and Beauregard, unlike the previous designs. The B designs use the existing I-395 ramp.

Alternative C – Uses part of Alternate A-1 and serves traffic to the south. There is a flyover across the interstate into the garage, servicing the northbound traffic. This design would impact the green space to the south of the interstate, on Van Dorn Street. This design would require sound walls, ranging from 10 to 15 in height.

Alternative D – Uses the northbound HOT lanes, flying over the interstate and into the preserve connecting to Mark Center Drive. Similar impacts as previous alternatives with impact to preserve and IDA. This alternative would provide a reversible traffic flow, similar to the existing HOT lanes and therefore would serve northbound traffic in the am and southbound traffic in the pm. This maybe a toll solution or it may be a High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) solution. It would work with the Army's transit center.

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Alternative E – HOT lanes flyover the interstate and provided both north and south bound movement and provide direct access to the south parking garage. A bus could exit the interstate, drop off passengers at the transit center, get back on the interstate and then continue on to the Pentagon. VDOT will begin to eliminate alternatives. When the final design has been decided upon, it will have to be vetted within VDOT. This should be completed by January of 2010. It is hoped that by mid 2010 that Federal Highway Administration will have made a determination. Then the project would have to be designed, an Environmental Impact Assessment performed and funding made available – will take approximately 3 to 5 years.

Discussion:

- What about a braided ramp through Southern Towers? Or flyover between Southern Towers and Mark Center? Both these ideas have grade separations issues that would prevent the design.
- Have you looked at the backup onto I-395 in the am periods and redesign of this interchange? As part of this study, VDOT has to look at the interchange and has to justify that improvements to the interchange would not improve the traffic flow. Modifying an existing interchange can be very costly. The City acknowledges that there is potential redevelopment that may increase traffic. This study was for direct access, not an analysis of the regional traffic.
- What is the amount these road improvements would cost? Don't know at this time – will have to look at the macro level – have to look at the interchanges to the north and south – will have to go through the NEPA process – that may eliminate the preferred alternative and VDOT will have to go back to one of the other alternatives. Impacts to the Winkler Preserve may become the fatal flaw for those alternatives – the topography is very challenging.
- IIS should be done prior to site selection.
- Remote Inspection Facility (RIF) has limited direct access to the site.
- Does VDOT have a transit oriented solution? Some of these alternatives would encourage transit with using the HOT/ HOV lanes. There is an ongoing parallel study reviewing incorporating BRT into the HOT/HOV lanes.
- Concern was raised about cut through traffic.
- Site design has an internal loop road to facilitate traffic and transit routes.
- Army will look at transit with their Traffic Management Plan. (TMP) – use of shuttles
- If the group has any solutions or comment regarding these alternatives, forward them onto Pat Escher – who will in turn forward to Paul Prideaux.

6. WHB report comments:

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- Bob Garbacz discussed the intersection improvements that would provide addition vehicle storage by elongating the existing medians and provides a triple left movement at the intersection of Beauregard and Seminary and double left turn movement at the intersection of Beauregard and Mark Center Drive. The city wants one official report and is seeking comments from the group about the report.
 - Concept 3 – direct access to the entire Mark Center is the preferred alternative – but it will be 3 to 5 years before any major improvements can be done.
 - Concept 4 - the triple left and double left need to be put in place to alleviate traffic while WHS is in operation prior to any direct access to Mark Center. Once these improvements are in place, they will be difficult to remove. How will these improvements effect nearby roads, buses and pedestrians?
 - It was pointed out the VHB report stated that even with additional left turn lanes, some of the critical intersections serving the Mark Center site would operate over capacity and would not be able to accommodate significant number of the additional project trip demand. Staff stated that there would be a need to review traffic light sequencing but without widening that section of Seminary (between Beauregard and George Mason Drive) there is very little that can be done to alleviate traffic congestion. Dick Somers recommended that, in spite of seeming lack of satisfactory alternatives, the Department of Transportation and Environment Services undertake an intensive search for solutions, addressing not only Seminary but possible alternative routes for traffic diversion to mitigate probable gridlock on Seminary east and west and Beauregard north and south of the site.
 - Report indicated that under all scenarios the triple left and double left are needed.
 - Supports concepts 2 and 3 of the report
 - Acknowledged that the left turns are necessary
 - Need to look at the turn lanes at the intersection of King and Beauregard Streets
 - Dave will write a draft letter to Council and will circulate to the group
 - The letter will support the recommendations of the report
 - The letter will acknowledge that the left turn movements and additional vehicle storage are necessary
 - The group supports some kind of direct access to the site
 - The letter will request that VDOT expedite the process for direct access
7. Mark Jinks updated the group about the Council work session which discussed the HOT lanes. The Council will pass a resolution opposing the HOT lanes. The City has been advised by the City attorney, Mr. Baker, that it is not necessary to enter into litigation at

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this time – it is better to take a wait a see approach. With respect to the noise walls, the City would need to look at all issues including environmental and socioeconomic.

8. Nick Nicholson, VDOT, -

- Will the delay of the HOT lanes effect the operation of WHS?
 - The HOT lanes have been delayed, but are still in the long range plans. These improvements would include a second slip ramp onto the Seminary Road interchange. These improvements are reviewed independently of any proposed development.
- What is the relationship intra the HOT lanes, the slip ramp and the noise abatement walls?
 - The slip ramp is being reviewed as to its impacts and funding sources.
- If the HOT lanes are not constructed, will the noise abatement wall still be built?
 - If there are no HOT lanes then there will be no walls.
- What type of material will be used for the walls and will there be landscaping to soften their appearance?
 - The wall would be a sound absorbing material and will be landscaped. These are a variety of materials and colors that can be used.
 - Concern about a 6,000 foot long wall which may be over 20 feet in height in some places. This wall will have more impact on some communities than others. Can the wall be segmented? VDOT looks at the wall in its entirety.
 - The actual location of the walls has not been determined. When the engineering is complete, it will go to committee for review, then their will community meetings and the individuals of the community vote, it's a simple majority vote.
 - The group would like to get a base line noise level to see what the actual increase would be with adding one lane.

9. Construction lighting is going to be put on a timer so that is will be off in the evening hours. Permanent lighting will be lower levels that the construction lighting and will be around the secure perimeter. The fixtures used will have shields and there will be no light trespass off the site. The site will be a 24/7 operation with limited night time use.

10. Beaugard SAP will have a kick off meeting October 29 at John Adams cafeteria at 7 pm. There will be a brief discussion of the plan and then it will be mostly community input. The plan will be looking at infrastructure, community services, potential increases to density, and transit. Is the boundary set in stone? Can it be extended west on Seminary? To be discussed at the meeting. With respect to potential increases in density, Dick Somers stressed that increased density should be avoided.

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11. Loren Helgason with Studio 39 presented the proposed landscaping for the Mark Center. The design and plantings are determined by the secure perimeter which restricts the heights and type of plantings. They have used between 90 – 95% native plantings, incorporated a bio-retention area, have a green screen on three sides of the north parking garage and are trying to fulfill LEED requirements with their design.

12. Public Comments:

- Concern about transit.
- Want to keep bus service shuttle to Springfield and Pentagon.
- Frustration with the 3-5 year time line for access improvements.
- Should explore remote parking facilities.
- Who's going to pay for the transit?
- A developer has purchased properties in Fairbanks & Foster – wants to do a mixed used development – would need a rezoning of the property.
- Parkside has lost property values – Alternative C of the VHB report would further impact the community by impacting view corridors – there has been a tremendous loss of trees – is there a green roof for the south garage?

• **Public Comment by Susan D'Amico**

My name is Susan D'Amico. I am a homeowner living in Parkside at Alexandria, a condo community located along N. Van Dorn Street, just south of Seminary Road. Many residents in our community have living room windows facing the Army Headquarters construction site. Previously, we looked across at a huge density of beautiful trees, a good portion of which have been mowed down for the construction. Our homeowners have suffered a sizable decline in property values. Consequently, our concerns relate to human health, quality of life, as well as property values. With this in mind, I would like to express concern on two topics addressed at this meeting.

Direct Access Ramp to BRAC site. First, I have concerns with certain alternative designs presented by V-DOT for a possible Direct Access Ramp to the BRAC site. Specifically, design alternatives C through E would create ramps 15-20 feet in the air directly adjacent our community, right in front of our living room windows. These potential designs would impact our quality of life and create significantly more traffic noise and chemical pollution. Additionally, such ramps would negatively impact our property values.

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Consequently, I spoke to the V-DOT representatives in the hallway to show them where Parkside is located on their maps. I asked if it would be possible to design a direct access ramp from the HOV lane that would hug the current Seminary Road Bridge. This would put the ramp far enough north to lessen the impact on our homeowners. The V-DOT Engineer indicated that this would be possible and agreed to explore such a design. He believes that a direct access road could be built on the South side of the bridge that would involve a left turn for traffic heading north and exiting from the HOV lane.

There have also been some proposals for a direct access ramp from the HOV lane to be built underground. I did not raise this idea with V-DOT. But it is one that should be explored.

Landscape Improvement/Tree Replacement at BRAC site. My second concern relates to the Landscape Improvement/Tree Replacement plans for the BRAC site that were presented tonight. As I mentioned, our homeowners previously viewed dense trees across the highway from their living room windows. Now we view a huge complex of imposing structures. Consequently, I was disappointed that the designs presented tonight do not seem to include plans for a green roof on top of the South Parking Garage. Whoever designed the green roof at the Pentagon adjacent to the Pentagon North Parking lot facing Washington Boulevard did an excellent job. We would be grateful if something of that caliber could be planned for the South Parking Garage which faces our living room windows.

In closing, I would like to express my appreciation for the work of this Advisory Group and to all of the government representatives for their efforts to address the concerns of the affected communities!

13. Meeting was adjourned.
14. Next meeting November 18th – Burke Library

EXHIBIT 2

Guiding Principles Relating to VDOT's BRAC Access Interchange Justification Report

**BRAC/MARK CENTER ADVISORY GROUP
ALEXANDRIA, VIRGINIA**

Guiding Principles Relating to VDOT's BRAC Access Interchange Justification Report

The BRAC/Mark Center Advisory Group (the "Advisory Group") supports direct access from Route I-395 to the Mark Center campus with the following guiding principles. The improvements should:

1. Be transit-oriented and accommodate HOV lanes;
2. Be consistent with the existing and proposed Transportation Management Plans and the City's Transportation Master Plan;
3. Provide for amenities/incentives to encourage alternate transit use;
4. Reduce the traffic impacts to the I-395 and Seminary Road Interchange;
5. Serve the entire Mark Center campus;
6. Protect the Winkler Botanical Preserve;
7. Be designed/built for the long term usage, being the most transit efficient alternative, **not** necessarily the least expensive or most expedient;
8. These improvements need to consider/accommodate the potential future redevelopment of the surrounding areas (e.g., Mark Center and Beauregard Corridor); and
9. Be funded by the Federal Government through the design and construction phases.

Furthermore, the Advisory Group recommends that:

10. The City should urgently work to develop and implement solutions to the current and projected traffic problems on Seminary Road from George Mason to Beauregard (as documented in the VHB report) and at least to Kenmore Avenue on the East and also consider the Route 7/King Street corridor from Skyline to I-395 rather than just Seminary Road. The City should likewise review traffic and pending solutions along Beauregard Street to the intersection with Little River Turnpike. This should involve working closely with VDOT, Fairfax County, and Arlington County.