



August 7, 2023

W. Calvin Britt, Project Manager
Virginia Department of Transportation, Northern Virginia District
4975 Alliance Drive, Fairfax, VA 22030

Dear Mr. Britt,

I am writing on behalf of the Washington Area Bicyclist Association (WABA) and our nearly 6,000 members across Fairfax County and the Washington metropolitan area to offer comments on VDOT's Braddock Road Multimodal Improvements Project.

For more than 50 years, WABA has worked to transform the capital region by improving the conditions for people who bike. Our work to advocate for dedicated bike infrastructure, pass laws that promote safe roadway behavior, and provide education for all road-users has resulted in a drastically different cultural and political approach to biking. Biking can and should be an equitable, safe, low-cost, time-saving, and sustainable way to navigate our region for all residents and visitors.

We have thus far been encouraged by the preliminary designs for Braddock Road presented by VDOT during the study phase, designs that have demonstrated real emphasis on pedestrian and bicyclist safety, connectivity, and comfort. A project pitched as a multimodal and safety-focused must deliver on those promises. As VDOT nears finalization of the preliminary design this fall, we offer the following comments and feedback:

Shared-Use Paths

We are excited to see the continued inclusion of bicycle and pedestrian facilities on both the north and south side of Braddock Road. People live, work, shop, and recreate on both sides of this vital corridor and should be able to safely navigate along and across it on foot and by bicycle. Without these improvements, residents will continue to be cut off from this busy 6-to-8 lane roadway and reliant on cars for even the shortest trips.

That VDOT has found means of accommodating the shared-use paths with less impacts to the tree canopy is also encouraging. Retaining walls will, in addition to maintaining more trees and the myriad positive benefits they provide, keep the tree canopy closer to the shared-use path, thus providing more shade and a more pleasant experience to people walking, biking, and rolling.

Despite VDOT's findings that many of the existing paved trail segments along the corridor are unsuitable for retrofitting and inclusion in the shared-use path, these segments still provide unique value and access to neighbors and can complement the new continuous paths. We encourage VDOT to ensure physical connectivity between the existing and new segments wherever possible. Additionally, VDOT must take the opportunity to demonstrate connectivity to the wider Fairfax bike network through wayfinding markers and signage. New and comprehensive signage is just as important on our pathways as it is along our roadways.

Intersection and Roadway Safety

While not a focus of the Public Information Meeting #3, intersection safety remains a major concern. Even with dedicated bike and pedestrian facilities along it, Braddock Road will remain a fast-moving thoroughfare that is daunting to cross. We strongly urge VDOT to center safety as it proceeds with its project design and to incorporate proven safe infrastructure solutions. These include bulb-outs and tightened turn radii at intersections; walk phase signal timing that accommodates older adults, people traveling with young children, and people with disabilities all of whom require more time to safely cross the road; and wide, protected refuge medians in crosswalks. VDOT and Fairfax County's commitment to Vision Zero and reducing traffic violence makes this a priority.

We also remain particularly concerned with the bike and pedestrian crossings of the on- and off-ramps to I-495 and urge VDOT to pursue aggressive strategies to reduce vehicle speeds, improve visibility, and protect sidewalk/path users. We acknowledge that Braddock Road is a legacy crossing and presents significant physical constraints on more robust improvements; still, VDOT can and should work to make this pinch-point as comfortable and safe as possible for those on bike or foot to better connect the communities east and west of the beltway.

One additional avenue to improve safety, minimize road crossing distances, and encourage compliance with posted speed limits is narrower lane widths and we encourage VDOT to consider 10' travel and/or turn lanes. Narrower lanes are proven to reduce vehicular speeds and make for markedly easier pedestrian crossings. In addition to the safety benefits, a narrower roadway enables a narrower overall project footprint, requiring less land acquisition and disturbance to tree cover.

Ravenworth Road

Lastly, we wish to express cautious optimism for the creation of a shared-use path along Ravenworth Road to Heritage Drive. Grade-separation as provided by the proposed design is

certainly a marked improvement to safety and comfort over the current conditions featuring unprotected bike lanes; however, the limits of the project scope will require a crossover at Heritage Drive to shift path users back into the unprotected bike lanes. This shift must be straightforward and protected to ensure safety and vehicle compliance. We are eager to see and weigh in on VDOT's proposed treatments as the project progresses and the vision crystalizes.

We also encourage FCDOT to pursue extension of the planned shared-use path and/or hardening of the existing bike lanes on Ravensworth to complement the VDOT project. Given the long timeline for VDOT's project, FCDOT should have sufficient time to undertake planning work, secure funding, and coordinate with VDOT such that work along the length of Ravensworth can commence simultaneously.

Overall, this project to improve the safety and comfort of Braddock Road for *all* users – not just cars – shows substantial promise and WABA strongly supports the direction of the bicycle and pedestrian elements in VDOT's designs. We encourage VDOT to keep safety and multimodal use front and center as it progresses and to take particular note of the areas outlined herein to ensure a maximally beneficial outcome for those who walk, bike, and roll.

We thank you for the opportunity to weigh in on this critical infrastructure project and look forward to continued engagement in the months and years ahead.

Sincerely,
Kevin O'Brien
Virginia Organizer, Washington Area Bicyclist Association