Places 29 Advisory Council Meeting Minutes  
Special Work Session  
Route 29 Solutions  
September 25, 2014

In Attendance: Council Members: Heather Stokes, Cynthia Neff, Jane Williamson, Laney Kaminer, Peter Borches, L.F. Wood, Jane Fogelman, Henry Weinschenk, Chuck Lebo, and Peter Skoro. Also attending: County Supervisors: Ken Boyd and Brad Sheffield; County Planning Commissioner: Bruce Dotson; and County Staff: Mark Graham, David Benish and Jack Kelsey. Route 29 Solutions/VDOT: Philip Shucet, Debbie Messina, Dave Covington. Public: Mark Wood and Wendell Wood

-Welcome & Introductions

-Philip Shucet presented a comprehensive overview of VDOT’s Route 29 Solutions Project and the work of the Route 29 Solutions Advisory Panel.

Specifically, Mr. Shucet noted that the Route 29 Solutions Project, consisting of a “package of projects” is now funded and proceeding through the procurement process. The “package of projects” includes the Routes 29/250 interchange improvements, the Hillsdale Drive and Berkmar Drive extensions, the Rio Road grade-separated intersection, Hillsdale Drive South, adaptive traffic signals technology, and the Rt. 29 widening from Polo Grounds Road to Towncenter Drive.

Potential contractors have been selected by VDOT and the RFP process is proceeding pursuant to an established schedule. Details are available at the Route29Solutions Website.

The Work Session was opened for comments and questions by the members of the Council. Attached as Exhibit A is a list of these comments/questions, which list will be forwarded to the County Staff and then to appropriate authorities including the Route 29 Solutions Advisory Panel, as a form of input by the Council.

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 6:40 p.m. The council will hold its next regular meeting, on Thursday, October 16, 2014, at 5:00 p.m., Room 235, County Office Building.
Council Members’ Comments/Questions:

1. Council member Jane Williamson asked about landscaping. Mr. Shucet noted that landscaping and aesthetic features are part of the VDOT RFP.

2. Council member Cynthia Neff asked about the “design build” aspect of the RFP. Mr. Shucet noted that VDOT is in fact asking the potential contractors to include design features in their proposals.

3. Members expressed concern and asked about the impact the construction phase at Rio Road will have on surrounding businesses. Mr. Shucet discussed in detail the nature of the VDOT procurement process, including acquiring ROWs and easements, and how it would address this issue in connection with the Route 29 Solutions Project.

4. Members expressed concern and asked questions about the construction of the Rio Road grade-separated intersection including the design of the bridge for Rio Road and its capacity to handle local traffic. Mr. Shucet gave a comprehensive explanation of how alternative routes in the area would be used during the construction phase and how local traffic would use different design aspects of both the intersection and the bridge when finally completed.

5. Members asked about the traffic light on Rt. 29 serving Albemarle Square. Mr. Shucet noted that the Rt. 29 light at Albemarle Square would be permanently closed during construction due in part to the topography of the area.
6. Members also expressed concern about cut-through traffic in the surrounding neighborhoods during both the construction phase of the Rio Road intersection and after the project is completed. Mr. Shucet acknowledged that cut-through traffic was likely to occur over time.

7. Members inquired about the location of “multi-use” paths and trails along the widening of Rt. 29 above Polo Grounds Road. Mr. Shucet noted that this design feature was dependent upon funding and available ROW. He also stated that this matter would be addressed during the RFP process and that no final decision has been made in this matter.

8. Members asked about pedestrian walkways at the Rio Road intersection as well as related design aspects. Mr. Shucet noted that the preliminary designs contain “refuge areas” and that the issue would be addressed more fully during the RFP process.

9. Mr. Weinschenk expressed concern about the impact of the Rio Road grade-separated intersection on existing businesses in the area which are dependent on having exposure to the vehicles traveling on Rt. 29.

10. Mr. Boyd inquired about traffic safety after construction and whether Rt. 29 would in fact be more or less safe than it is currently.

11. Heather Stokes asked Brad Sheffield if the MPO discussed adding the Ashwood Blvd. connector to the MPO plans, and he replied that the BOS needs to send this to the MPO first. The Ashwood Blvd Connector is included in the Places 29 Master Plan and is supported by Mr. Shucet if the MPO puts it in their plan.

12. Mr. Shucet assured the group that all projects in the RT29 Soulutions package were fully funded and would all proceed as planned.

13. Council member Elly Tucker offered the following statement:

   I would like to go on record saying that I am in favor of the
solutions that Philip Shucet has set forth. I support the proposed extension of Berkmar Drive, as well the other projects in the Route 29 Solutions Package, to provide drivers with alternative routes to reach destinations and improve overall traffic flow in the Route 29 corridor. Berkmar Drive Extended would provide a number of transportation benefits and advantages, including:

- Providing local drivers with a parallel route that will connect multiple destinations along the western side of Route 29;
- Freeing up capacity on Route 29 for drivers making longer distance trips;
- Providing a sidewalk, a multi-use trail, and dedicated bike lanes to create useful new connections for walkers and bicyclists; and
- Avoiding the watershed of the South Fork Rivanna Reservoir, a major drinking water supply.

I urge VDOT to carefully select a route for Berkmar Drive Extended that will avoid or minimize impacts to streams, wetlands, and historic and archaeological sites in the project area, and to continue to take steps to protect these resources as the project moves forward.

All of the Rt. 29 Solutions projects are going to be built and open to traffic by October 2017. This includes the parallel roads and Rio Rd. Rio Rd. is the lynch pin that holds the parallel roads together, so by completing Rio first, the parallel roads work efficiently and effectively. Rio opens in September 2016 and the parallel roads open in October 2017. It is important to remember that the Rio Rd. project is slated to be completed as quickly as possible. Without Rio Rd's completion, the other roads would not be able to maintain the Levels of Service that are necessary.

Although no one enjoys major highway building projects when they are stuck in traffic or rerouted, the end result is usually worth it. I look forward to seeing this project through to its fruition.