

# U.S. 17 widening project explained

BY SCOTT SHENK / THE FREE LANCE-STAR | Posted: Thursday, May 23, 2013 5:36 pm

**PDF:** VDOT presentation on the project

Anyone who went to the meeting Thursday evening on the U.S. 17 widening project got a good idea why something needs to be done.

Southbound traffic was bumper-to-bumper from the Falmouth intersection to where the meeting was held, the University of Mary Washington-Stafford campus.

Traffic jams on the two-lane highway are a regular occurrence.

About 50 people braved that traffic quagmire to get details on what will happen during the \$49.8 million U.S. 17 widening project that is aimed at improving one of the area's most congested roads.

Plenty of drivers will be impacted by the work. Some 55,500 vehicles, 17 percent of which are tractor-trailers, use the highway each day, according to the Virginia Department of Transportation.

VDOT's Greg Henion told the crowd during a presentation that by 2034 traffic on U.S. 17 is expected to nearly double.

The widening project is designed to handle that increase, he said.

The project will widen the highway from four to six lanes.

A through-lane will be added in each direction, along with dedicated turn lanes aimed at making it easier for traffic to get into and out of businesses and neighborhoods along U.S. 17.

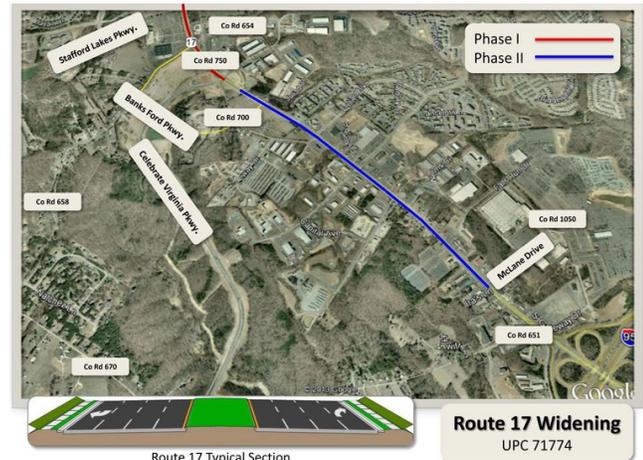
There will be signal and intersection improvements, too.

The project area covers just more than two miles, from McLane Drive to just north of Stafford Lakes Boulevard, where the university's campus is located.

Work is supposed to start in June. The estimated completion date is December 2016.

Henion laid out details of the project and what will happen during construction.

Temporary lanes will be used for traffic while work is being done, he said, adding that all entrances to



Route-17-Widening.jpg

Map of the Route 17 widening project.  
Click to view larger.

businesses and residences will stay open.

Two lanes will remain open each way in the work zone during the daytime.

Lane closures on the southbound side of U.S. 17 will happen from 8 p.m. to 5:30 a.m. On the northbound side, the closures will happen from 9 p.m. to 5:30 a.m. At least one lane will be open each way at all times.

The work zone speed limit will be lowered to 35 mph.

Among several residents who spoke after Henion's presentation was former Stafford County Supervisor George Schwartz.

He criticized the plans to end the widening work short of the Interstate 95 exit and the entrance to the shopping center where Target is.

"I see another Falmouth intersection coming," said Schwartz, who lives in Falls Run, a neighborhood along the U.S. 17 corridor.

The better flow created by the widening "is gonna make it worse" around the exit, he said.

That area is already a problem as exiting traffic, much of it tractor-trailers, constantly backs up.

There are plans to fix the interchange, though.

The Rappahannock River Crossing project, which has \$55 million in funding, calls for a redesign of the I-95 interchange. The plan also includes feeder roads along the interstate from U.S. 17 to the State Route 3 exit.

By using the feeder roads, local traffic would be able to avoid I-95.

That project, however, has been mired in controversy.

For more than a year, the Fredericksburg Area Metropolitan Planning Organization has battled over a Spotsylvania parkway that was originally approved as part of the project.

The parkway has been shelved, but the plans for the U.S. 17 interchange and feeder roads continue to move along.

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