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Pedestrians might find Lafayette friendlier someday

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LAFAYETTE Boulevard is one of the region's workhorse roads. It connects Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania County. It skirts a national park. People live in neighborhoods along it, and businesses large and small line the street.

One thing it is not is particularly pedestrian-friendly. Also, living and working alongside Lafayette Boulevard has pros and cons. The location is great because of the road's directness and convenience--but word has gotten out. Traffic makes it hard for drivers to find an opening to pull out from the side streets.

A regional transportation group paid consultant Kimley-Horn and Associates to come up with some solutions for Lafayette Boulevard. Public meetings were held in the neighborhood over the past year, and the results were unveiled at last week's Fredericksburg Area Metropolitan Planning Organization meeting.

Renderings show a transformed street. In Kimley-Horn's vision, there are sidewalks lining the road, separated from the street by a line of trees. There are crosswalks, bus stops, roundabouts in key locations to help drivers emerge from the side streets without impeding traffic flow, and landscaped medians.

Consultants also recommend reworking the Blue and Gray Parkway intersection at Lafayette, building an overpass/underpass for better traffic movement.

The price tag is \$86.1 million to make all of the study's recommendations a reality. And that's in 2009 dollars.

FAMPO's board members, mostly elected officials from Fredericksburg and Stafford and Spotsylvania counties, asked staff to identify projects that could be accomplished with minimal funding.

Visit fampo.gwregion.org to view the full study. Click on "FAMPO committees," then the link for the Sept. 21 FAMPO meeting. The study is agenda item 19B.

Dear Kelly: Since Monday, Aug. 24, there have been significant backups turning from U.S. 1 southbound onto Mills Drive at Cosner's Corner just before 7 p.m. The problem seems to be a large number of students traveling to Germanna Community College for classes, because Mills Drive opens back up after the turn for Germanna. Perhaps VDOT can inspect the traffic patterns at this hour and adjust the timing on the lights to improve flow. It's only going to get worse here when the hospital opens for business. This evening cars were blocking the intersection at U.S. 1 and Mills Drive.

--Brian Davis, Spotsylvania

When Virginia Department of Transportation staff went to inspect the signal at Mills Drive and U.S. 1, they traced the origin of the problem back to Lee Hill School Drive.

Before your question, the signal timing at Lee Hill School Drive did not change based on the time of day. As you observed, more cars want to turn left onto Lee Hill in the evening than at other times of day, and vehicles were flowing out of the left-turn lane onto Mills Drive, creating a backup all the way to U.S. 1.

To improve the situation, VDOT has adjusted the signal so vehicles turning left onto Lee Hill School Drive will get more green time when demand is higher, including the start of evening classes at Germanna.

Not noticing a change yet? Tina Bundy, VDOT spokeswoman for the Fredericksburg District, encourages you to get in touch at 540/899-4560 so signal technicians can address the problem.

Dear Kelly: When work began on Bragg Road between Central Park and State Route 3, it was said that Bragg Road was being widened to more lanes. However, based on the markings painted on the new lanes, it appears that VDOT has chosen to simply reroute the two-lane road slightly, instead of using the new lanes as much-needed additional lanes.

What is the reason for the change in plans?

--Michelle Gibson, Spotsylvania

Don't worry--there has been no change. VDOT is still widening Bragg Road to four lanes, plus new turn lanes where needed.

I can see how drivers would be confused, since what you're seeing when you drive along Bragg Road now is half of the finished road.

VDOT is widening Bragg Road in three phases. Over the past nine months, VDOT has built the two southbound lanes of the new road, along with a new sidewalk.

In a few weeks, the two-lane traffic on Bragg Road will be flipped to that new pavement. Once that's done, VDOT will start ripping up the old pavement that traffic is driving on now, and will build the two northbound lanes of the new Bragg Road, for a total of four traffic lanes at the project's completion.

The final construction phase will be the fastest phase, in which VDOT will finish the landscaped median separating northbound and southbound traffic. At the end, VDOT will activate two new traffic signals, at River Road and Wills Way. It is also installing a wooden sound wall at Riverside Manor townhomes.

I'll write about this project in more detail in the next week or two, preparing everyone for the new traffic pattern, when specific times and dates are available.

Kelly Hannon is The Free Lance-Star's transportation reporter. If you have questions, send them to Getting There, c/o The Free Lance-Star, 616 Amelia St., Fredericksburg, Va. 22401; or you may fill out the Getting There form on the Web at fredericksburg.com.

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