

Lafayette Boulevard needs improvements, public says

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NOBODY IS HAPPY with Lafayette Boulevard.

That's what the Fredericksburg Area Metropolitan Planning Organization and the George Washington Regional Commission report after surveying the public this summer.

It's a difficult place to drive, and over most of its length it's a terrible place to walk or bicycle. Hardly anybody is satisfied with its looks, either.

Drivers complained about traffic backups, especially at Harrison Road and the Blue and Gray Parkway during rush hour. The biggest complaint was having to wait through two cycles of a traffic light to get through an intersection.

Heavy traffic volume was the second-biggest complaint, and many drivers mentioned difficulty turning out of side streets, as well as problems with blind corners. More travel and turning lanes were the most common suggestion.

Do users of Lafayette Boulevard take advantage of public transportation? Of those who answered the question, almost a third said yes--mainly riding Virginia Railway Express or FRED buses.

Those who don't use public transportation cited slow travel time, limited hours of service, infrequent service and public transportation not going where they want to go, among other reasons.

VRE is pretty fast, and beginning this month the Lafayette Boulevard FRED bus started running hourly (instead of every two hours) on weekdays from 7:30 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. Neither service runs on weekends, and there are lots of places you can't get to on VRE or FRED. At least the more frequent FRED service is a step in the right direction.

A lot of people asked for shelters, benches, lighting and better signs. FRED, particularly, has a lot of room for improvement in these areas.

If Lafayette Boulevard is less than ideal for driving or taking public transportation, it's dismal for pedestrians and bicyclists. Not one person surveyed rated the road excellent, good or even acceptable for walking. Lots of people want to see sidewalks, crosswalks and a paved path--none of which exists beyond Sunken Road.

People asked for pedestrian signals at intersections, too, and you won't find those anywhere on Lafayette Boulevard, even at the heavy pedestrian crossings near the train station.

No one rated the boulevard acceptable for bicycling, either, and 16 people rated it downright dangerous. Only five people said they bicycle there, and only in the downtown area. A paved path or bike lane was the most commonly suggested solution.

An overwhelming majority (92 percent) of the people answering the question said they would walk or bicycle more often if Lafayette Boulevard were improved to accommodate them.

How else should the road change? Only seven people rated its current appearance acceptable. No one thought it was good. Everyone else rated it poor or very poor. Besides improvements to the road itself (including places to walk and bicycle), people especially recommended lighting, landscaping, and small and medium-size street-front buildings, with a grocery being the No. 1 choice for another business.

One thing the survey doesn't show is the pictures that were on display at the June 26 public workshop, where people got to vote on pictures of streetscapes. They overwhelmingly chose streets with sidewalks, shade trees and storefronts as examples of how they would like Lafayette Boulevard to look. It might happen.

The complete survey results are available online at fampo.gwregion.org.

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