

Falmouth intersection work is complete

BY SCOTT SHENK/THE FREE LANCE-STAR | Posted: Saturday, October 3, 2015 12:00 am

It has been decades in the making, but the makeover of the Falmouth intersection is finally complete.

The new lanes have been open for a while already, but the official opening happened Wednesday, when the contractor cleared out. Workers will come back later this month to do landscaping.

The intersection of U.S. 1, U.S. 17 and Butler Road certainly looks different. It's more open without buildings at each corner and with twice as many lanes as before. There also are raised medians, crosswalks with pedestrian signals, sidewalks and decorative stone walls.

Whether the \$22.1 million upgrade has a dramatic effect on one of the area's historically most congested intersections, only time will tell.

So far, things seem to be running smoothly, according to the Virginia Department of Transportation's local spokeswoman Kelly Hannon, who said the agency has had crews out watching how things are working.

"Traffic is flowing better," she said.

She added that the highway department will keep an eye on the intersection and is open to making adjustments should any issues arise.

The project added eight new lanes around the intersection. One big difference is that U.S. 1 northbound and southbound traffic can now pass through the intersection at the same time. Along with that, the addition of dedicated turn lanes is expected to help cut down on the backups and improve traffic flow.

VDOT projects that wait times will be 56 seconds at the new intersection in 2016. If nothing were done, those average waits would have been nearly four minutes.

"I applaud VDOT and local, regional and state leaders for having the patience and persistence to push this project to completion," Hap Connors, the region's Commonwealth Transportation Board



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The Falmouth intersection in Stafford has been widened to accommodate new through and turn lanes.

representative, wrote in an email.

Getting to this point hasn't been easy.

Talk of fixing the intersection dragged on for decades with potential solutions ranging from a flyover for U.S. 17 and Butler Road to a tunnel running under the Falmouth Baptist Church parking lot.

The current plan was finally settled on and work started in late 2012 with the demolition of structures around the intersection.

Buildings at each corner of the intersection that were razed included an old bank building and Republican headquarters, Koons Automotive, Blazes and Glover Enterprises. Three homes on Butler Road also were demolished.

All told, VDOT acquired all or part of 27 properties around the intersection. At \$12.7 million, right-of-way acquisition cost twice as much as the actual construction work.

The actual road work started in March 2014 and took 18 months to complete.

Now the nearly 50,000 drivers who pass through the intersection each day have a chance to see how it works.