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# Big results promised for U.S. 29

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Posted: Sunday, August 10, 2014 8:27 am

Aubrey L. Layne Jr.

For the past 40 years, we have studied, planned and debated U.S. 29 corridor improvements in Charlottesville, but not since the early 1990s has a project moved to construction. Now, the state, in partnership with the community, is finally taking action to deliver transportation solutions that are years overdue.

With the approval of Gov. Terry McAuliffe, last March I directed the Virginia Department of Transportation to convene a panel of local representatives to take the first step in delivering transportation solutions for the U.S. 29 corridor.

The meetings determined success factors: improve mobility for local and through traffic, address the worst congestion areas and the highest crash locations, minimize environmental impacts, enhance multi-modal options, incorporate technology, complete projects on time, stay within budget and produce a reasonable return on taxpayer dollars.

There is no single project that will resolve the transportation issues in the U.S. 29 corridor. The projects selected do not preclude future actions necessary to improve traffic conditions in the area. It will take a programmatic package of projects to address the success factors.

Improvements, worth more than \$200 million, will build a merge lane and second ramp lane to the U.S. 29/250 interchange, widen U.S. 29 from Polo Grounds Road to Towncenter Drive, install adaptive traffic signal

technology, extend Berkmar Drive, build a grade-separated intersection at U.S. 29 and Rio Road, start preliminary engineering on intersection improvements at U.S. 29 and Hydraulic Road, study the extension of Hillsdale Drive to U.S. 250, and fund additional regional Amtrak service from Washington to Lynchburg.

Although the panel was not unanimous in its support for all the projects, there was broad agreement that transportation improvements must move forward. Doing nothing gets us nowhere. We are living with the consequences of our inaction over the years.

These projects are not new. They have been discussed and vetted by local, regional or state planning groups over several decades. Some projects were already programmed with construction dollars and all were identified as



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transportation improvements by localities long before the advisory panel had its first meeting last spring. What's new is these projects will finally get built and bring significant benefits to the Charlottesville area.

Going forward, a second project delivery advisory panel has been convened. The panel represents local businesses and groups that will be most directly affected by these projects. VDOT is working closely with the panel to ensure that the projects are designed and delivered with consideration for their impacts on those who live, work and travel along U.S. 29.

The key goal during construction is to minimize disruption. Get in and get out. VDOT will set careful parameters that contractors will have to abide by. We will not sacrifice quality or safety, but we will not take one day longer than absolutely necessary.

Communications is critical to the successful completion of these projects. The public will be involved and kept informed every step of the way. Below are key factors to ensure open communications and transparency.

» Partnering with the community. VDOT will continue to work with a local advisory panel to determine the best way to deliver projects regarding design, environmental permitting, construction, maintenance of traffic and safety. The panel represents city and county governments, local businesses and the environmental community.

» Addressing concerns of local businesses. The business community along the U.S. 29 corridor is well represented on the panel. Six of the 12 members own or lead local businesses. They are advising VDOT on minimizing construction impacts to businesses in the area.

» Staying informed. All advisory panel meetings are open to the public. The public can attend the meetings in person, watch the meetings live-streamed online or listen to the recorded audio and video podcasts that are posted for the record. There is not a public comment period held during the advisory panel meetings, but the public can submit comments online. All comments are reviewed by VDOT and the panel. The live-streamed videos and all other project information are located in one central place, [www.Route29Solutions.org](http://www.Route29Solutions.org).

» Preventing surprises. Public meetings and other outreach will be held to give residents an opportunity to review and comment on the design plans. Construction will not begin until the public has reviewed design plans.

» Providing communication on construction. VDOT will have an aggressive outreach program to inform motorists, residents, businesses and others on what to expect before construction begins. During construction, communications will be proactive and continuous using several methods to get the information out and engage with a diverse audience, including community and neighborhood outreach, business outreach, meetings, briefings, personal contact, traditional media and social media.

» Collaborating. VDOT is working with its partners in local government to develop and deliver an effective communications strategy that will involve citizens, address their concerns and keep them informed throughout the U.S. 29 project development.

VDOT has proved it can get the job done on complicated projects.

This summer, the agency successfully completed the reconstruction of 11 bridges along the Interstate 95 corridor in the Richmond region, causing minimal disruption for the 160,000 motorists who traveled the bridges daily.

We had similar success in Northern Virginia with Interstate 495 express lanes construction. The complex project involved building new high-occupancy toll lanes, 10 interchanges and 58 bridges while managing more than 200,000 vehicles each day using the Capital Beltway — one of the most congested areas of the country. The project team went beyond mandated, traditional public engagement processes to make the local community, businesses and the traveling public partners through every stage of the project's development, design and construction.

Like the I-95 bridges and express lanes projects, U.S. 29 improvements will focus on the right combination of strong project management, public involvement and communications.

Through the project development and construction phases, it's important that all of us keep our eye on the prize. The Charlottesville area will finally benefit from transportation improvements that will ease congestion, improve mobility and ultimately the quality of life for its citizens.

Aubrey L. Layne Jr. is Virginia secretary of transportation. Prior to his appointment, he represented the Hampton Roads area on the Commonwealth Transportation Board. He has served as president of An Achievable Dream Academy in Newport News, a public-private partnership to assist at-risk students; as president and principal broker of Great Atlantic Properties; and as president of Hofheimer's Inc. He earned a B.S. in accounting from the University of Richmond and an MBA from Old Dominion University. In 2011, he completed the University of Virginia's Sorensen Institute for Political Leaders program.

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**Eric H Schmitz** · Top Commenter

Thank you, Mr. Layne.

\*For very clear communication, which has been anything but the past decades, but particularly the last several years under your predecessor.

\*For holding this community's "leadership" accountable and responsible, after decades of "messaging" with our transportation problems, accomplishing ZERO in the process.

\*For making a personal commitment to see that this latest set of projects GETS DONE. People apparently need to hear the truth:

"These projects are not new. They have been discussed and vetted by local, regional or state planning groups over several decades. Some projects were already programmed with construction dollars and all were identified as transportation improvements by localities long before the advisory panel had its first meeting last spring. What's new is these projects will finally get bu... [See More](#)

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The advertisement features a blue header with the title 'Eagles Landing' and the tagline 'All Inclusive Living in Charlottesville.' Below the header are two photographs: one showing an outdoor swimming pool with a building in the background, and another showing the interior of an apartment unit. At the bottom left is the 'Eagles Landing apartment homes' logo, and at the bottom right is a blue button with the text 'CLICK HERE FOR AVAILABLE RENTALS!'.



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*All the Advantages of a New Home Without the Wait!*  
Click Here to Find Your Move-In-Ready Home! >>>

**STANLEY MARTIN HOMES**

The advertisement has a purple and white color scheme. On the left, there is a circular logo with a house icon and the text 'Stanley Martin Homes MOVE-IN-READY'. The main text is in a white, stylized font on a purple background. On the right, there is the 'STANLEY MARTIN HOMES' logo, which includes a shield icon and a small house icon.

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