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Pageland Lane residents see renewal of old fight against Bi-County Parkway in Pr. William

By [Jeremy Borden](#)



Page Snyder, a longtime resident of Pageland Lane across from the Manassas Battlefield, points to where a proposed four-lane highway would cut through swaths of historic rural farmland. (Jeremy Borden - The Washington Post)

Legendary activist Annie Snyder, before she died in 2002, told her daughter that a road she battled against for decades would never come to fruition.

Snyder spent her life advocating for the preservation of rural lands, particularly those around the Civil War battlefields in Manassas near her home. She doubted that those who wanted to build a 10-mile Bi-County Parkway — which would skirt the battlefield and sit near the front of the Snyders' family farm — would ever get the funds for such a [controversial project](#), which would run from I-66 in Prince William County to Route 50 in Loudoun County.

The north-south route, supporters say, would create jobs and drive area economic development, ease congestion and provide a key connection between two rapidly growing counties. Detractors, including conservationists and smart growth advocates, say the road would be a boon to rural area land speculators, open up a rural area to development, and bring even more congestion that would result from a large Northern Virginia highway.

It would skirt hallowed Civil War ground, and resistant neighbors bristle at the thought of a four-lane highway competing with what is now bucolic spareness in their front yards.

Page Snyder, Annie Snyder's daughter, now finds herself ensnared yet again in the fight, and she says she feels that the scales are tipped well in favor of the road. The road's supporters — namely the administration of Gov. Robert F. McDonnell (R) — have little in their way of seeing the road through, she said.

Still, she's not resigned. "We've won many lost causes that nobody thought we could win," Snyder said. Since the 1960s, a shopping mall, large cemetery and dirt bike track, among others, have been proposed for nearby lands and were defeated.

While the road project has been with planning boards since the 1980s, several recent events have caused Snyder and others to see Bi-County Parkway (which is often called the Tri-County Parkway because past alignments brought it through Fairfax County) as increasingly [a done deal](#).

In May of 2011, the Commonwealth Transportation Board declared the area as part of a north-south "[Corridor of Significance](#)" that could eventually connect Dulles Airport with Interstate 95 and provide a more easily accessible cargo hub, a concept that has wide support among many conservatives and business groups across the state. The National Park Service has largely agreed to the project, and a federal review that assesses the impacts of the roads, called a "section 106" review, is well under way. Officials say they hope to have it completed and signed off on by federal agencies this summer.

Also, last week, the CTB formally adopted a minor tweak in the road's alignment to avoid a historic property. All told, residents are preparing for the reality of the road even as they continue to fight it.

If the road is built, Pageland Lane residents want to ensure that it does not cut off their access to surrounding roads. They said language in state documents gives the impression that the neighborhood would be cut off, without access to U.S. 29 and the surrounding community. Some alignment proposals could have them getting on the parkway simply to get off to go in the opposite direction.

Those access problems would have other effects. "We have our life's savings in [our property]," said Mary Ann Ghadban, who lives on Pageland Lane. "If we don't have access, our property is totally devalued."

Maria Sinner, a VDOT official who helps oversee projects in Prince William, said that VDOT has not designed or engineered the road's specifics yet. She said that the state is doing what it can to assure that Pageland Lane residents maintain access to U.S. 29 and the surrounding community.

"We're going to do anything possible to continue to provide them access," Sinner said.

There are still key hurdles to the parkway's construction, even as the McDonnell administration sees the road as a "high priority," said Sinner. The biggest is the road's price tag: \$300 million. A new funding plan for Virginia transportation means that some long-delayed projects should move forward, but there are competing needs, Sinner said.

“The administration has a high priority on this, but we know they don’t have \$300 million right off the bat,” she said. So far, \$5 million has been allocated for design work, and officials hope to get about another \$15 million for studies this June, subject to a decision by the Commonwealth Transportation Board, the governing body that controls VDOT.

That board is lead by its chairman, Transportation Secretary Sean Connaughton, a former Prince William supervisor, who has long advocated for the road.

“It is our desire to fund and build it as soon as practical,” Connaughton said in an e-mail.

Still, residents feel that VDOT has not been straightforward with them. Del. Timothy D. Hugo (R-Fairfax), whose district includes the area, has scheduled a town hall meeting on Monday at 7 p.m. at Bull Run Middle School with VDOT officials to address concerns.

Stewart Schwartz, the executive director of the Coalition for Smarter Growth, said that the north-south connection when most residents travel east-west in notorious traffic conditions is a waste of state resources. He has called the parkway the “[Zombie Road](#)” — because, he says, it’s not needed, and it never dies.

The road, officials say, was formally approved in 2005 and should rightfully be on its way toward construction.