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Va. transportation officials draw ire at town hall on Pr. William's Bi-County Parkway

By [Jeremy Borden](#)

State transportation officials methodically laid out their plans Monday for a proposed four-lane parkway through western Prince William County during a packed and often tense town hall meeting.

Few of the 300 or so residents who attended, however, were likely to have left the forum at Bull Run Middle School in Gainesville satisfied, as the prospect of a Bi-County Parkway connecting I-66 in Prince William to Route 50 in Loudoun County appears increasingly likely.

Some residents began shouting questions during transportation officials' lengthy powerpoint presentations, and many said they are uneasy about what could happen to their properties and about preserving the area's rural character, or questioned whether the road would cut off their access to area roads and how fast the new parkway might be built.

What was clear is that the parkway [is moving forward](#) after decades sitting on planning boards.

Virginia Department of Transportation officials said that, ideally, they would like the full road to extend in future years to I-95 and Dulles Airport. Such a road, they said, would drive economic development and establish the airport as a cargo hub for trucks traveling from the south up I-95.

Gary Garczynski, a member of the Commonwealth Transportation Board which oversees VDOT, said that Gov. Robert F. McDonnell (R) was clear about his priorities with state transportation officials: connecting Dulles airport with I-95 would be an economic boon for the area and is one of his administration's top priorities.

"Not everybody is always going to be happy, and not everybody wants a road," Garczynski said. "I have to try to make a decision ... as to what's best for the Commonwealth of Virginia."

David Tyerar, deputy secretary of transportation, said the airport was vital to the state's economy. "The airport is going to grow," he said. "It's important to give it access from the south."

He drew sarcastic laughs when he told the crowd, "We're not going to take anything away from anybody."

The road would run by the historic Manassas [battlefield](#), and likely around and through area family farms. Some fear that it would open the county's protected rural area, called the Rural Crescent, to future development.

"I keep hearing about ... the economic engine of Dulles," Elena Schlossberg, a resident who has long advocated for protecting the county's rural areas, told officials. "What about Prince William County? What about what matters here?"

The town hall meeting, hosted by Del. Tim Hugo (R-Fairfax) and Supervisor Peter K. Candland (R-Gainesville), and attended by other state elected officials, was prompted by Pageland Lane residents who fear that the new road would block access to their neighborhood and U.S. 29.

The new parkway is slated to run near Pageland Lane, adjacent to the Manassas battlefield, and they say state officials have not done enough to assure them that they'll be able to access U.S. 29, the road that connects them with the surrounding community. Officials say they cannot yet provide that level of detail for a road that is still being designed.

The meeting's turnout indicates how much Prince William has grown since the road, or something like it, was first considered in the 1980s. New neighborhoods have cropped up, and those who moved in recent years to the gated community of nearby Heritage Hunt were out in full force, some saying they had never heard of the road until the meeting was called.

Chairs ran out quickly and residents stood along the back and sides of the room well before the meeting's start time.

David Vandegriff, 54, lives near where the proposed project. He said that the road portends a Los Angeles-like community, where sprawl would be never-ending around Washington, D.C. "Each county is pushing for economic growth," he said.

A resident shouted from the back of the room, asking state officials to be honest about how close the construction of the long-delayed road really was. Tyerar, the deputy secretary of transportation, said that after it is designed it could be built in four years.

But he and other officials stressed that there isn't any funding allocated for the \$300 million project, so the timeline is hard to know. Officials hope to allocate more money to design the road this spring and dollars for the road's construction could be allocated by the CTB as soon as this June, they said.

Jim Murray, 57, said his property is now "condemned" due to the road's projected alignment, which would run through his property. Even now, he doesn't believe anyone would be willing to buy a property where a road is planned.

"Just be honest with us," Murray said in an interview, of state transportation officials. "They're taking my house. The state of Virginia just passed a transportation bill. You do the math."

Many believe that the recently-passed [transportation bill](#), which provides dollars for new roads, serves as the parkway's impetus. It will compete for dollars with projects across the state, however.

Many also said they were dismayed by the National Park Service's tentative agreement to the project.

Park Superintendent Ed Clark said that the park service was following 1980s legislation passed by the U.S. Congress. He has said previously that if VDOT stands by its stipulations to reduce the

visual and aural impact of the parkway, “and we do it in a way to manage sprawl, I think it can be done and be a real benefit to the park.”

Once the park service was on board, a key hurdle, many residents believe that opposition to the parkway became fruitless.

Dori Burner, who runs the Battlefield Park Polo Club and Equestrian Center on Pageland Lane, where the project is slated, said that her land has become the “community barn,” as she coaches area polo teams.

She said the park service and state transportation officials should have been more forthcoming with their plans. “They pulled the wool over everyone’s eyes until it was too late to do anything about it,” she said.

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