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GWMP

GEORGE WASHINGTON
MEMORIAL PARKWAY
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

SUMMARY OF PUBLIC COMMENTS

OVERVIEW . . .

In the spring of 1984, the National Park Service began an environmental impact study of methods to improve traffic and safety problems on Spout Run Parkway and George Washington Memorial Parkway between Spout Run and the Theodore Roosevelt Bridge. The public involvement process was initiated in early April when an informational brochure was mailed to elected officials, government agencies, transportation organizations, neighborhood associations, and conservation groups. The brochure's purpose was to briefly outline the problems and issues being addressed by the study and range of options available to resolve the problems. It announced the upcoming public informational meetings and provided a mail-back public comment sheet. The local newspapers and Federal Register also carried announcements of the meetings.

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The Meetings . . .

Between April 25 and May 2, informational meetings were held in Virginia, Maryland, and Washington, D.C. A total of 65 persons attended the five meetings. Most of those who attended represented either themselves, a neighborhood association, or a conservation group. Following the introductory presentations by the NPS, the public broke into small groups to discuss and record their concerns. As a result of the meetings, six sets of group comments were recorded and are summarized in this mailer.

Written Responses . . .

The public was invited to send in comments using the mail-back comment sheet provided in the brochure. The comment period was from April 7 to July 7, 1984. During that period the NPS received 69 written responses--43 responses from individuals, 13 from government offices, 11 from neighborhood associations, and 2 from vanpool groups. Approximately 80 percent of these responses contained specific and often very substantive comments. These comments reflect many of the same concerns and ideas recorded at the meetings, but generally go into greater detail about specific options to resolve the problems. A summary of written comments are enclosed. In addition, excerpts of public comments are included at the back of this mailer to give examples of various specific ideas, some of which are not necessarily covered in the summary section.

Next Opportunity to Comment . . .

The next opportunity for public involvement will be following the release of the Draft EIS in May, 1985. At that time, public meetings will be held.

Copies of the group comments and individual written comments are available for public review at the following locations:

National Capital Region Headquarters
1100 Ohio Drive, S.W., Room 359
Washington, D.C. 20242

GWMP
Turkey Run Headquarters
McLean, Virginia 22101

telephone: 426-6660

telephone: 285-2600

SUMMARY OF GROUP COMMENTS . . .

HOV/Ridesharing

The majority of participants felt that mandatory High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) restrictions were unacceptable. Reasons given included:

- people in the Washington area work varied hours, making it very difficult to form car or van pools,
- good mass transit is not available in parts of Fairfax and Montgomery counties,
- HOV restrictions are confusing to tourists and limit their access to Washington, D.C.
- concerned that non-HOV traffic would shift and lead to congestion on alternate routes.

Voluntary ridesharing, on the other hand, was considered a very acceptable alternative by the majority. Several suggestions were made on how to accomplish this, including:

- advertise van pool information along the parkway (783-Pool),
- provide park and ride facilities near access points along the parkway
- bring the subway out to Tyson's Corner and Dulles Airport
- increase the number of buses, bus stops and frequency of bus service in the suburbs.

Other suggestions included:

- establish one lane for HOV during rush hours,
- establish HOV 2 on the George Washington Memorial Parkway,
- provide "queue jumpers" along the parkway for HOV's.

Spout Run Parkway

The majority felt it very important that Spout Run Parkway remain open. The Arlington community was particularly vocal about this issue. There was concern about where traffic would go if the parkway were closed. Several Arlington residents also felt strongly against installing traffic lights at Lorcom Lane or GWMP.

Other suggestions included 1) installing ramp metering on Spout Run, and 2) eliminating the traffic policeman and allowing the inbound left lane of GWMP to keep moving while the right lane is an alternate merge with Spout Run traffic.

Other Traffic Management Options

A variety of other traffic management ideas were suggested and are summarized below:

- decrease HOV-3 to HOV-2 on I-66
- remove HOV restrictions from I-66 and 395
- institute a toll system for the GWMP
- study reversible lanes - all lanes one-way in direction of rush hour traffic
- spread out peak rush hour by staggering work hours
- improve Canal Road and MacArthur Blvd. to encourage traffic to stay on the Maryland side of the river.

Construction Options

Certain concerns were consistently raised during the meetings regarding construction alternatives. They focus on the effectiveness of construction alternatives within the context of regional problems. Specifically, several individuals were concerned that widening the parkway may only temporarily ease traffic congestion and actually create more traffic demand. Some felt that the limitations of the bridges and D.C. arterials would continue to create traffic bottlenecks which would negate any benefits from road widening. One participant voiced his opinion that traffic problems would always exist because the metropolitan area continues to grow and generate more traffic.

One participant was concerned about the impacts of Rosslyn Circle improvements on traffic patterns and access to the Key Bridge Marriott.

Construction options recommended by participants focused primarily on improving specific problem areas. It was recommended that the double weave problem between the Key Bridge on-ramp (outbound) and Spout Run exit be solved. As part of the solution, one person recommended widening the Key Bridge on-ramp (outbound). Another suggestion was to improve the Theodore Roosevelt Bridge on-ramp to provide enough room for traffic to merge. For inbound morning traffic, one participant suggested lengthening the off-ramp to the Theodore Roosevelt Bridge. Additional construction alternatives suggested by individuals included adding a lane inbound between Spout Run Parkway and Theodore Roosevelt Bridge and widening Theodore Roosevelt Bridge.

Safety

On the issue of safety, the majority of participants endorsed the concept of enhancing the safety of the roadway. The following specific options were suggested at the meetings:

- provide reflective striping on both parkways
- groove the roadway for better traction
- lower the speed limit
- improve speed zone enforcement
- improve the roadbed surface
- improve lighting along the parkway
- provide road shoulders

The Environment

During the meetings, participants were asked to address any environmental concerns they might have regarding potential changes to the parkway. The major environmental issues consistently expressed were:

- preserve the natural resources of the parkway, such as the trees, streams, and wildlife habitat,
- maintain the parkway's integrity and beauty as a gateway to the nation's capital with its vistas of the river and monuments,
- ensure protection of waterfront values and safe access to Theodore Roosevelt Island and waterfront trails.

In addition, several individuals were concerned about the affect of any proposed alternatives on air and noise pollution levels. Several points were made regarding existing congestion and how idling cars contribute to air pollution and how congestion adds to daily driver stress.

SUMMARY OF WRITTEN COMMENTS . . .

General

One observation, expressed repeatedly by several individuals, was that traffic volumes on the GWMP had declined since I-66 had opened and that congestion was not a major problem, especially compared to the traffic congestion on other major roads. Lower inbound volumes were particularly noted. These respondents, therefore, were cautious about supporting any major construction changes. Those who did support construction alternatives generally supported the minimum changes necessary to resolve problems in specific locations in the study area.

HOV/Ridesharing

In general, HOV restrictions were strongly opposed for the following reasons:

- the irregular work schedules of many commuters prevent them from carpooling,
- the potential impact on other roads (both neighborhood and major arteries) as a result of traffic shifts,
- the disruption to individuals and companies who have located in areas of Fairfax and Montgomery counties based on the availability of the parkway for their main access into the District,
- the inadequate mass transit systems in the outlying suburbs,
- the lack of alternative routes for non-carpoolers because of the HOV restrictions on I-66.

Spout Run Parkway

Several respondents opposed the closure of Spout Run Parkway because they felt it gave undue preference to Fairfax and Montgomery county commuters at the expense of Arlington residents. Some felt that by eliminating Spout Run traffic even more commuters from the outlying suburbs would be encouraged to use the GWMP and eventually congestion would return. One group voiced their concern that diverted Spout Run traffic would cause additional congestion and safety problems on Lee Highway.

Other Traffic Management Ideas and Comments

The following is a range of other traffic management ideas expressed by various respondents.

- Encourage government and non-government offices to stagger work hours further in order to spread out the commuting period.
- Improve mass transit alternatives.
- Impose a commuter use fee during rush hour periods. This may involve setting up collection points or requiring the purchase of commuter stickers.
- Establish "queue jumpers" for vehicles with 2 or more occupants, especially at constrictive points such as Spout Run and Lorcom Lane.
- Set-up staging areas where commuters can meet and carpool.
- During rush hours allow 3 lanes for the major traffic flow and only one lane in the other direction.
- Close the GWMP inbound at Rt. 123 in the morning.
- Close the Key Bridge ramp during the evening rush hour.

Construction Options

The responses received concerning construction options were very mixed. Many people supported some level of construction, but this ranged anywhere from just resurfacing the road to building a full additional third lane on both the inbound and outbound sections between Spout Run and Roosevelt Bridge. The majority supported adding third-lane sections only in those areas where specific problems were perceived such as:

- a third (stacking) lane for morning traffic trying to exit at Roosevelt Bridge,
- a third lane from the Spout Run merge inbound to a new Rosslyn exit ramp (before Key Bridge),
- a third lane between the Spout Run merge and Roosevelt Bridge,
- an extended merge lane for outbound traffic coming off the Roosevelt Bridge,

- an improvement in the outbound double-weave problem between the Key Bridge ramp and Spout Run exit.

Several respondents opposed construction options primarily because of environmental concerns, which are noted in the next section. Other concerns expressed by several individuals are the following:

- Increased capacity and enhanced traffic flow by adding lanes will encourage more drivers to use the parkway. Sooner or later the congestion which lane widening was meant to solve would recur.
- The bridges into the District are already congested. Enhancing traffic flow on the parkway would only lead to larger traffic jams at exit ramps to the bridges.

The Environment

The majority of respondents expressed sincere concern for the environmental and scenic qualities of the GWMP. In general they all wanted to maintain the aesthetic qualities of the parkway regardless of the alternative chosen. The following concerns were expressed:

- the parkway is one of the most beautiful entrances to a capital city in the world,
- the beauty of the parkway is important to the quality of life in the Washington area,
- the beauty of the parkway is more valuable than its use as a commuter road,
- widening the parkway would conflict with air quality control efforts in this region,
- the beauty of the Potomac Palisades would be damaged by widening the parkway,
- widening the parkway in one section would open the door someday to widening the rest of the parkway.

Recreation

Those who commented on recreation options generally expressed a desire to see better pedestrian and bicycle access to the riverfront from Arlington.

EXCERPTS OF COMMENTS . . .

General . . .

"I think it is important to come up with a 'staged' solution to the traffic problems, so that you can measure the impact of less intensive, less permanent solutions before moving on to more intrusive, more expensive, more permanent solutions. Thus, improvements in traffic management should be explored and tested out before permanent additional lanes are provided. Clearly, road resurfacing is required and some realignment should be considered for safety reasons if nothing else. But I believe that this highway situation is, as is the Metropolitan traffic situation in general, in some flux, especially with Metro developments and continuing growth of outlying suburbs."

"There already is insufficient capacity at I-495 to accomodate the present load of cars exiting from the Parkway to I-495. Improvements which increase capacity of the Parkway must take other roads into consideration, i.e., all connecting roads must be included in a "system" approach to resolution of Parkway traffic problems."

Spout Run/HOV . . .

"There is no reason why Arlingtonians should be inconvenienced in commuting to work only to enable residents of Fairfax and Montgomery counties to arrive at the Potomac River bridges a little faster. Moreover, we sincerely believe that barring Arlington residents from the GWMP will only attract more cars from elsewhere until the congestion is the same as before."

"Non-Arlington residents who reside near the Potomac River and who work in Rosslyn or Washington have few alternatives to the GWMP. Arlington commuters by contrast, have several alternatives to choose from, including U.S. 66, the enlarged Lee Highway, Highway 50, and a number of wide, one-way city streets that lead directly through Rosslyn to the bridges. By closing Spout Run during peak periods to Arlington commuters, the GWMP congestion problem would be eliminated overnight--without affecting the environment and without spending a dime of the public's money."

"We also oppose the use of traffic lights on Spout Run, either at Lorcom Lane or at GWMP. The traffic management techniques currently in use during morning rush hours are very effective in minimizing accidents and delays on both Parkways. Traffic signals will ruin the park atmosphere and may actually be more hazardous in off-peak hours."

"I think there should be better, more sophisticated traffic monitoring and management on the morning merge at Spout Run. Options that might be explored include (A) installation of a computerized light or monitoring system to more fairly balance the waiting times at Spout Run and at GWMP and perhaps to inform traffic coming in at Route 123 of the

relative delays, and (B) changing traffic flow so that the left hand lane of GWMP is a through lane on a continuous basis and the right hand lane would be alternately merged with that from Spout Run."

"Promote carpooling and vanpooling during rush hour peak demand periods by posting signs directing commuters to call the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments Commuter Club for ridematching information. The signs simply state "For Car Van Pool Information Call 783-POOL." This one action is fairly inexpensive and can have an effect in reducing the number of vehicles using the Parkway.

"Measures taken to preserve the quality of the parkway must avoid unduly burdening those communities that have developed on the premise of G.W. Parkway availability as the primary transportation artery to and from Washington."

Construction . . .

"I support an alternative that would provide for an additional lane of traffic to accomodate rush hour traffic. I feel that the current situation jeopardizes the safety of rush hour travellers and that steps should be taken to alleviate this problem."

"Let me begin by noting that the situation today is much different--and much improved--from a year ago. This results from traffic's shifting to the newly opened Route 66. As it happens, this new easing of GW Parkway traffic is so considerable that it has left just one serious bottleneck: the short segment of the southeast-bound roadway which extends from the Spout Run Parkway merge point to the Roosevelt Bridge ramp."

"The morning rush-hour constraint appears to be the TR Bridge (and, after 9 AM, there can be comparable congestion on the exit to Key Bridge); this can only be alleviated if the exit ramp to TR Bridge were lengthened or, for example, if the exit were limited to HOV or if cars had to continue on to Memorial Bridge if any backlog accumulated on TR Bridge so as to back up traffic onto GWMP. Not only is the right lane of GWMP often backed up through the Key Bridge exit, but also the left lane often is significantly impeded because of the narrowness of the road and drivers 'cutting to the head of the line'."

"The only practical, realistic, politically acceptable and fundable alternative is to widen the G.W. Parkway one extra lane only from Spout Run to the Rosslyn off-ramp, a distance of about one-half mile. To widen any more would destroy nature, press to tight under the Key Bridge, and jam up more traffic on the Key and Roosevelt bridges. There is no justification to spend millions to make things worse. Go out and look at the bridges. You will see that they can't accept all present rush hour traffic. Why do harm to bring more traffic to them? Don't do it."

"Even if traffic flow on the parkways is enhanced and congestion reduced, the areas where that faster moving traffic exits the parkways must be capable of handling the faster moving (and I submit, additional) traffic. Otherwise, the congestion will simply reappear at the egress areas."

"Fatalities on the GW and Spout Run Parkways occur at night. Wider, straighter lanes built to accomodate commuters in the daytime will induce speeding at night, which will inevitably lead to more fatalities, not fewer."

The Environment . . .

"The land in question was acquired for the purpose of establishing parkland with a parkway through it. That roadway was designed and intended to be a parkway, not a commuter freeway. Land development in outlying regions has generated a continuously expanding demand for more highways. New highway construction and highway widening over the past ten to fifteen years has failed to provide anything more than very temporary relief of the problem."

"It is most important that the aesthetic and scenic qualities of the GWMP be maintained as the overall design goal of any alterations. The value of the parkway experience in the long term far outweighs the short term convenience of one person per car commuters."

"In regards to Theodore Roosevelt Island, I believe that the present level of use has already exceeded the capacity of the land. Serious damage is obvious with numerous paths everywhere leading to erosion and destruction of the plant life of the Island. The litter problem (despite the best efforts of the Rangers and Scouts) is clearly out of control. The litter is not only waterborne from Potomac flooding, but also from visitors. I therefore strongly urge that the parking lot not be expanded and that access not be made easier than it now is by such schemes as a pedestrian walkway over the GW Parkway."

"By law, we have been subjected to vehicle emissions standards and other techniques to reduce air pollution. Widening the Parkway will negate these air quality control efforts, and that is why it is illegal. Too many people drive now that don't have to. You must not encourage more shifting from mass transit to the Parkway."

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