

A Report on Community Forums on the CFX and Citizen's Alternatives

For the last several years our organizations and associated members have been involved in the stakeholder engagement and environmental review of the CFX. During that time, we have heard feedback from many people along the proposed route about other ways to improve transportation safety and access in far Southwest Virginia.

In this document we have compiled some of these ideas into what we have titled: *A Citizen's Alternative*. We've asked that these alternatives be considered in the SEIS being completed on Section II of the CFX. We also ask VDOT and CTB to consider these ideas in future funding and planning for transportation investments in SW VA.

In January our coalition hosted a series of Community Forums designed to provide an update on the current status of the CFX, to get feedback on the Citizen's Alternative, and to collect additional ideas. Over 80 people attended the three forums. Many were concerned, confused or frustrated with the CFX process, and many shared doubts that it was the best idea for the area.

Below you will find our original proposed Citizen's Alternatives followed by feedback from community forums attendees as well as those who submitted feedback by phone or email. This includes questions raised by attendees that we are unable to answer because inadequacy of information available to the public about the highway proposal. Generally, we would like to request more transparency and communication from VDOT about the status of the proposal, progress made on the environmental review, funding, and development of the road.

We are not transportation professionals. We are community members and organizations who care about the future of our region. We would like to see these ideas seriously considered, and implemented if possible. We are driven by deep concern about the future economic vitality of the coalfields, and by a concern that the CFX, as currently designed, would do more harm than good.

Thank you for considering these ideas and comments.

Marley Green, Homeowner and Community Organizer in Pound, VA

Jane Branham, Vice President, Southern Appalachian Mountain Stewards

Kate Rooth, Campaign Director, Appalachian Voices

Citizen's Alternatives for Transportation Spending in Consideration of CFX

Improving existing roads

- Rt. 83. Either through selective widening, or widening to a four lane road in its entirety. Many long-term residents believe VDOT purchased right of way along Rt. 83 to do this widening in the 1970's.
 - Costs Approximately \$104 million – approximately \$4 million per mile for non-median 2 to 4 lane widening, according to Arkansas Department of Transportation Turnkey Estimates
- Rt. 72 between Clintwood and Coeburn, Rt. 80 between Haysi and Honaker, and Rt. 63 between McClure and St. Paul could all be improved, straightened, or modified by including more bridges to avoid steep climbs or adding turn lanes.

Improve downtown traffic patterns in Pound, Clintwood and Haysi

- Additional traffic signals / stop lights – Approximately \$200,000 per light installation – according to single traffic signal installation costs in VDOT's 6-year plan.
- Traffic circles – Much safer and cause less congestion than existing intersections or traffic lights. Costs range, but estimate of \$500,000 per traffic circle. \$1.5 million for three in Pound, Clintwood and Haysi.
- Improve turn lanes for high congestion areas.

Improve access to existing parks and recreation areas

- John Flannagan Dam Boat Launches and Cranesnest Campground. Pave existing dirt and gravel access roads

Increase funding for rural public transportation services

- Mountain Empire Older Citizens and Four County Transit Systems already serve many in Wise, Dickenson and Buchanan Counties. VDOT could support expansion and improvement of these programs to better serve the area.

Increase funding for Rails to Trails and other trail systems that support economic development through increased tourism

- Rails to Trails - VDOT can directly support these projects, which have the potential to increase economic development through tourism while also offering ways to improve health for residents.
- The Spearhead Trails system is already bringing people to Southwest Virginia, and once completed, their expansion plans that including hiking trails, blue ways, and equestrian trails are estimated to bring in \$30 million in revenue to the region per year. VDOT should support these kinds of transportation projects that are having an immediate positive impact on our local economy.

Further Ideas From Community Forum Attendees

Rt. 83 Between Haysi and Grundy could potentially be straightened in some curvy areas.

Tourism is very important to the future economy of the area, and the strip mining associated with the CFX and the placement of the road could hurt the development of tourism.

A road like Skyline Drive could be a tourist draw in and of itself, while not needing as much infrastructure development as a 4-lane expressway.

Increasing accessibility of rail options is a significant factor for attracting potential light industry.

A roundabout at Five Points in Clintwood, intersection of Rt. 83 and Main St.

The intersection of Rt. 83 and Rt. 72 near Clintwood is a dangerous and congested intersection. Better turn lanes and/or a stop light or roundabout would be beneficial.

Steep hill up Georges Fork, Rt. 621, should be considered for turn lanes or road widening, as it is very steep and dangerous.

Add passing lanes between Clintwood and Coeburn on Rt. 72.

The need for truck climbing lanes, especially on Rt. 83 heading towards Clintwood as you approach Red Onion.

Plans to reduce congestion at the new high school in Dickenson County, which will produce significant new traffic especially during the morning, commute.

Questions from Attendees for VDOT

-Is there any way that VDOT can more regularly provide answers to questions raised by residents locally? Can VDOT provide any more detailed updates? Can VDOT host public forums with more public notice and significant notice?

There was significant concern about the length of time was given between notice of public meetings and the locations chosen for the meetings. Meetings within the localities impacted by the road will increase accessibility of residents to attend.

-Is it true that cemeteries must be registered so that VDOT is required to consider them?

Several people who attended forums had problems with family cemetery along the planned route. They were unsure if route is in fact being revised to avoid their cemeteries? How many other family cemeteries are in the route?

-What's the current status or activity of surveying along the route? If the old route is old and the new route has now been adopted, why were they recently surveying?

-2035 estimated completion date – how long for comparison might street widening and intersection improvements take? What is the estimated completion date at this point for CFX?

-Concerns that ultimate completion of the road isn't feasible due to uncertainties with funding for the full highway proposal.

-Are there sufficient coal reserves to justify the investment in four-lane: perception is that coal companies interest is to improve roads for coal trucks? Also, there is uncertainty about stability of coal companies to complete projects.