

Q. NORTH GROUNDS CONNECTOR

On June 12, 1986, the Charlottesville-Albemarle Bypass Committee (composed of representatives from Charlottesville City Council and Planning Commission, Albemarle County Board of Supervisors and Planning Commission, and staff) released its final report recommending a series of projects to accommodate future area traffic needs. Among these recommendations was “*construction of an interchange on the U.S. 250 Bypass to serve the north grounds of the University of Virginia.*” This report was accepted by the Board of Supervisors on September 10, 1986 and sent to VDOT on September 11, 1986.

The Commonwealth Transportation Board (CTB) resolutions of November 15, 1990 and December 19, 1991 stated that “*access to North Grounds at the University of Virginia [should be developed] as soon as possible.*” In a March 31, 1993 letter to Leonard Sandridge (Senior Vice President, UVA) Jack Hodge (Chief Engineer, VDOT) stated, “*The North Grounds access facility will begin with access to existing Route 29/250 located just east of St. Anne’s- Belfield School The location of the connection of the North Grounds facility to Route 29/250 allows for future connection of this facility to the Alternative 10 alignment ...*” Clearly, VDOT was planning to construct an access facility to the North Grounds of UVA from the existing Route 29/250 Bypass before construction of the Alternative 10 Bypass.

Apparently, VDOT’s concern with impacts on St. Anne’s - Belfield Lower School, the Westover property, and University Village and with the redesign/reconstruction of the Route 29/250 interchange caused a shift of the Bypass’ southern terminus further east, tying in with the proposed North Grounds Connector and making it a part of the southern terminus interchange instead of a separate intersection. In a July 26, 1994 letter to Hodge, Sandridge concurred with this decision stating, “*It makes sense to delay the design of the limited access road to the North Grounds until Line 10 is designed.*”

As a result of requests from the Canterbury Hills Neighborhood Association in February 1994, including those made at the February 13, 1994 Location Public Hearing on the termini revisions, the CTB agreed, in its March 16, 1995 resolution, to revise the northern and southern termini of the Bypass and to relocate the proposed North Grounds Connector farther away from the Canterbury Hills neighborhood and closer to the University’s North Grounds. This caused a greater impact to UVA’s Darden Business School and the Law School. In his March 3, 1994 letter to Robert Garland (Secretary, Canterbury Hills Association) Hodge stated, “*This shift was done in an effort to reduce the impacts to the Canterbury Hills area as much as possible ... There are several problems associated with shifting the alignment even closer to the North Grounds Complex ... The terrain and drainage area would require a design which would virtually eliminate any usable land for The University to develop parking facilities or additional expansion of the School of Business.*” A Parsons Brinckerhoff meeting summary dated December 14, 1995 acknowledged that “*Shifting Route 250 to the south [away from Canterbury Hills] will take more land from the University of Virginia ...and generally minimizes the impact on ... Canterbury Hills Subdivision.*”

In his paper, “Proposed North Grounds Connector” (February 17, 1997), James C. Lamb, III (Civil Engineer and President of the University Village Owners’ Association) questioned the rationale of the proposed connector, citing, “*Major increase in traffic flow on Massie Road, ... higher noise levels in University Village, other nearby residential areas ...the proposed*

Manorhouse Retirement Center ...[demolition] of a building at University Village ...and excessive cost [\$4.5 million].”

Lamb sent this paper to CTB members with a cover letter dated March 2, 1997 which stated the University Village Owners’ Association’s strong opposition to the North Grounds Connector and to the Bypass as currently planned and their view of *“the entire project as an environmental and financial disaster.”*

On April 11, 1997, Thomas Saunders, III (UVA Darden School Foundation Trustee) wrote to Hovey Dabney (Rector, UVA) and John Casteen, III (President, UVA) stating the Darden School Foundation’s unanimous agreement that the *“[North Grounds Connector] will have an extremely negative impact on the Darden School’s environment and the Foundation’s ability to support the School’s needs at the level anticipated.”* The Trustees requested that the University *“join us in delaying the process at all appropriate levels until a thorough study can be completed taking fully into consideration the concerns the Darden School has with respect to this project and its long term implications for the School and the North Grounds Community.”* The letter further stated, *“key leaders of the Law School Community (Foundation and Alumni Association) agree with our position and will officially act on this resolution at their upcoming meeting now scheduled to begin May 1, 1997.”*

Accordingly, on April 15, 1997, Joseph Carter, Jr. (President, UVA Law School Foundation) wrote to the Chairman and members of the CTB his belief that *“this project appears to have a very negative impact on the Law School as well as the Darden School ...”* and his *“hope that the [CTB] will postpone official action on the interchange and connector road for additional study in conjunction with interested parties on the North Grounds and at the University.”*

On April 16, 1997, Sandridge wrote to Robert Martinez, Secretary of Transportation, suggesting that the northbound access ramps be located *“as far distant as is possible from the new Darden School of Business and Law School ...Every possible aesthetic measure should be taken to preserve and enhance the University’s considerable investment in the setting and appearance of its new Darden School of Business and the Law School ...[including] acoustic buffering using sound walls faced with materials compatible with those historically in use at the University”* and the *“intent that access from the Bypass to the North Grounds Connector be controlled by the University.”*

On April 17, 1997, the CTB adopted the design of the Route 29 Bypass in a resolution which also stated, *“Modification to the North Grounds Connector road ... shall be no wider than 33’-0” curb to curb, and its right of way no wider than would be appropriate for a roadway of that width; The northbound access ramps “E” and “F” to the Route 250 Bypass [shall be] revised to be relocated northward as close as is physically possible to the new alignment of the Route 250 Bypass, i.e., as far distant as is possible from the new Darden School of Business and Law School; [and]*

Every possible aesthetic measure [shall be] taken to preserve and enhance the University’s considerable investment in the setting and appearance of its new Darden School of Business and the Law School, including visual buffering using plant materials of appropriate size and scale, and density of coverage, as well as acoustic buffering using sound walls faced with materials compatible with those historically in use at the University. In addition, any

stormwater detention ponds which may be required in the vicinity of the University as a result of the new Bypass or the North Grounds Connector road shall be designed in conformance with the principles of the University's Water Resources Management plan. Concurrence from the Board of Visitors, of the University of Virginia, with the proposed design modifications on or before July 15, 1997."

On January 15, 1998, the CTB passed a resolution approving the design of the North Grounds Connector as a 4-lane road (not the 2-lane road approved by the CTB in its April 17, 1997 resolution).

SEE APPENDIX "Q" FOR SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS