

I want to share some URGENT news about the Albemarle schools, the “western bypass” and your child’s health.

Alarming, newer scientific studies on children’s health impact the “29 Bypass” transportation decision. The route 29 western bypass passes closely around six area schools: Albemarle High School, Jack Jouett Middle School, Mary Greer Elementary School, Ivy Creek, Agnor-Hurt Elementary, and STAB.

Since 2007, several new studies have shown, that some normally healthy **children who live or go to school near busy highways can suffer permanent lung damage as they grow up.** In addition, children with asthma and bronchitis suffer more frequent and severe illness when close to highways. Environmental studies based on this new and emerging information have NOT been applied to the route 29 bypass project.

Several states now have regulations regarding this issue. Virginia is not one of them.

The EPA has just (2011) issued new preliminary draft voluntary guidelines about this issue of schools in proximity to highways, or "near road exposures" that are expected to be finalized by the end of this year:

<http://www.epa.gov/schools/siting/issues.html#Air%20Pollution>

Recent research has demonstrated a link between exposures to air pollutants from traffic emissions near large roadways and adverse human health effects. The Health Effects Institute (HEI) recently completed a review of a large number of health studies, concluding that near road exposures “are a public health concern.” (<http://pubs.healtheffects.org/view.php?id=334>) Although the link between adverse health effects and near-road exposures has been made, the science has not yet progressed to an understanding of how some key elements affecting these associations, such as the type and size of roads of concern, the vehicle fleet mix and activities leading to highest exposures, and the distance from the road at which near-road health impacts subside. Most studies on traffic and health focus on roads with high levels of traffic (for example, 100,000 annual average daily traffic (AADT) or higher). **A few studies have reported health effects associated with smaller traffic volumes, with one study showing effects at volumes as low as 10,000 AADT in an area. .”** VDOT has projected that the "bypass" will carry 24,400 vehicles per day within 10 years (2022) and traffic volumes are projected to grow at least 1.7% per year. (28,880 vehicles/day in 20 years) VDOT projects that diesel freight truck use of the Route 29 "bypass" is projected to be a growing portion of the total traffic.

Our local, regional and state officials should be pressed to follow the new EPA guidelines. The Guidelines state that every school within one half of a mile of a freeway be independently evaluated by an “environmental professional” using the new standards. This needs to be done prior to siting this “Bypass so close to our schools.

All of the six schools are well within “one half mile” of the proposed “bypass”. Many of the affected schools have playgrounds and athletic fields within 500 feet of the “route 29 bypass”: Mary Greer playground is within 200 feet, Jack Jouett soccer field is within 200 ft, AHS Lacrosse field 1200feet, AHS softball field 750 ft, Agnor-Greer baseball field within 400 feet.

Previous environmental impact reviews of the proposed 29 "bypass" are over ten years old and did not address this newly identified health concern. VDOT studies used older air pollution standards. The impact of the roads in close proximity to schools impact on children’s respiratory health was not and will not be addressed in the environmental impact assessments.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

These EPA draft standards are currently voluntary, meaning than the county and VDOT can legally ignore them. Therefore, parents with children in the effected Albemarle schools must advocate on behalf of their children. The last effective chance to apply these newer standards to the route of the proposed “Bypass” is at the LOCAL LEVEL **before** July 27th, 2011.

1) Write or email your Board of Supervisors, the school board and most importantly the Metropolitan Planning Organization and show your concern. Consider asking them to officially inform all the parents of the six effected schools about this new information, so they can participate in decisions, ask questions, and speak to their elected officials. Ask for more information about the health effects of this “bypass.” Ask them for a new environmental assessment based on the EPA standards, before the Bypass Route is finalized.

- Board of Supervisors: ejordan@albemarle.org
- Metropolitan Planning Organization: info@tjpdcc.org.

2) Show up and speak out at the last meeting of the Metropolitan Planning Organization, July 27, 4pm, in the Lane Auditorium of the County Building.

3) Please help me get this information out to all the involved parents, school and community leaders on behalf of the children of Albemarle County. Email this to all your friends.

Besides the clear health implications, the decision to site this highway next to six schools where our children spend one third of their lives in study and play and where the community comes for the athletic fields is simply appalling. It clearly says to our children: “You are not precious to us”.

Thank you,

Donna Vande Pol

Some recent relevant references include these studies:

- 1. Repeated respiratory hospital encounters among children with asthma and residential proximity to traffic**, J Chang, R J Delfino, D Gillen, et al., *Occup Environ Med* 2009 66: 90-98 doi:10.1136/oem.2008.039412
- 2. Effect of exposure to traffic on lung development from 10 to 18 years of age: a cohort study.** W James Gauderman, Hita Vora, Rob McConnell, Kiros Berhane, Frank Gilliland, Duncan Thomas, Fred Lurmann, Edward Avol, Nino Kunzli, Michael Jerrett, John Peters. *Lancet* 2007; 369: 571–77
- 3. The Influence of Neighborhood Roadways on Respiratory Symptoms Among Elementary Schoolchildren.** Robert Dales, MD, MSc Amanda J. Wheeler, PhD Mamun Mahmud, MSc Anna-Maria Frescura, MSc Ling Liu, BMD, MMD, PhD, *JOEM* • Volume 51, Number 6, June 2009.

Additional information:

Other notable recent news on this topic:

- EPA Mobile Source Air Toxics Rule (2001) raised near road exposure concerns.
- American Academy of Pediatrics recommended siting schools and child care facilities away from high-traffic roadways (2004).
- FHWA/Sierra Club settlement agreement in Las Vegas (2005).
- California School Siting Legislation requiring environmental assessment for new schools to be located near large roads (2005).
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) “Healthy People 2020” seeking to decrease the number of schools near large roadways (2009.)
- HEI summary report “Traffic Related Air Pollution: A Critical Review of the Literature on Emissions, Exposure and Health Effects” (2009).
- NO₂ NAAQS requiring near road monitoring (2009).