



# Town of Ashland

Center of the Universe

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September 12, 2017

Ashland Citizens, Friends, Neighbors and Community Members,

The final DC2RVA Community Advisory Committee (CAC) meeting was held last night, and I want to provide you an update on what happened, why it happened, and what you can expect in the future.

JAMES R.  
FOLEY.  
MAYOR

STEVEN P.  
TRIVETT  
VICE MAYOR

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COUNCIL MEMBER

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JOSHUA S.  
FARRAR  
TOWN MANAGER

ANDREA E.  
ERARD  
TOWN ATTORNEY

JOSEPH A.  
COLLINS  
CLERK OF COUNCIL

### **What Happened:**

Tonight the CAC removed all eastern bypass alternatives from consideration, and chose one Western Bypass alternative to remain to represent the Western Bypass “pot” of alternatives. These actions left three alternatives on the table as the “least objectionable”. The three alternatives are the 3-2-3 as the surface option through Town, the Three Track Trench as the underground alternative through Town, and the Western Bypass as the remaining bypass alternative. The CAC gave unanimous consent that these three alternatives could move forward to the Commonwealth Transportation Board (CTB). Please be sure that regardless of what decision the CTB makes, the Town will continue to explore and advocate for less destructive alternatives.

### **Why This Happened:**

I understand why our friends in Hanover County are unwilling to support presenting the Western Bypass as the single preferred alternative. I would like to clearly explain why the Town of Ashland representatives can not support the Three Track Trench as the single preferred alternative.

Given that CSX has publicly stated that the 3-2-3 alternative would negatively impact their ability to move freight quickly and efficiently, I believe we are at a point where we have two painful options – the trench and the western bypass. What makes this decision so painful has nothing to do with the town or farmland, it has to do with *people*. The County and Town initially endorsed the Western Bypass because they saw vast expanses of farmland, not the people who live there. That was a misjudgment. Many folks in the County are excited about the trench option because they see the town’s physical landscape seemingly transformed for the better. But they don’t see the people who stand to lose so much. That is also a misjudgment.

The primary argument being made in favor of the Three Track Trench is that the impacts associated with this project are said to be “temporary” because the construction window is only three years in duration. These impacts are not temporary, they are generational. The impact of choosing the Three Track Trench will realistically last for forty years or

more. I have spent most of the past week hearing from property owners along the tracks, and talking with business owners. It is clear to me now that uniformly across both residential and commercial uses we will see a dramatic reduction in property investment for the next 15 to 25 years until construction begins. How do we convince business owners to reinvest in their existing properties along the tracks when they have this looming cloud over their head, and there is a great chance they will be forced to close once construction starts. Even as storefronts naturally turnover with businesses coming and going how can we possibly expect entrepreneurial risk takers to come and invest in downtown Ashland by starting a business or redeveloping property when they have this looming cloud over their head, and there is a great chance they will be forced to close once construction starts. All this occurs for a few decades prior to the “temporary” construction period.

During the three year construction period businesses will close, and those that don't will be dramatically impacted. Simply saying “we will commit to supporting local business” is not enough to make the Trench palatable. Small businesses typically operate on a shoestring. A temporary street closure or just one extra special event can often be the difference between a net profit or loss from year to year. Imagine what closing a street and operating within a construction zone for three years would do.

As businesses close and don't reopen during the 15-25 year lead in to construction, and then that phenomenon accelerates during construction, people seem to assume that on the other side everything is wonderful. Upon construction completion our downtown may be a virtual ghost town. We may have nice new infrastructure, but all the businesses and customers who provide the vitality associated with a thriving downtown will be gone. Once again, it's about the people, not the landscape. Downtown Ashland today is a work in progress. It has taken years and will take many more to get the right business mix in downtown. After 18 to 28 years of disinvestment it would then take another 10-20 to get the new “right mix” of businesses in our new downtown. If you need the most apples to apples comparison of this phenomenon look at the Charlottesville mall. It is a thriving business district now, but it took twenty years to get that way .....after construction!

With all this said, I still haven't even mentioned the impacts to the residential section of Town. The disinvestment will be similar in the 18 to 28 year lead up to construction completion, construction will have both dramatic and unknown effects on local properties, and in the end property owners may likely be staring at a fence out their front door rather than a wide open space.

Downtown Ashland is the heart of our community. It is how we self-identify. There are many body parts, like an arm, or a toe, or in some cases a kidney, that you can live without. You can not live without a heart. You can stop it temporarily, but unfortunately 18-28 years isn't temporary.

For these reasons, the Town of Ashland can not support the Three Track Trench as a preferred alternative. For the purposes of this committee the Town recommended the CAC pass along the three least objectionable alternatives, not because we support the trench, but because any other alternative being put forward results in a split vote of the CAC. As articulated above, Town representatives would not support the trench, and County representatives would not support the Western Bypass. This recommendation has succeeded by removing a third track on the surface through Town as an alternative, but does leave us with work to do.

**What You Can Expect in the Future:**

The Town Council and Town staff heard loud and clear from the community that the Three Track Trench is not an acceptable option. As we move forward we have to make every effort to ensure this option is not constructed. In the very near future you can expect:

- Clear instructions on how to submit comments to the State as part of the DEIS 60 day comment period which make it clear that the third rail through Ashland is unacceptable on the surface or in a trench.
- Notification of opportunities to participate in a public meeting organized by the state on the DEIS.
- Because it is so new, the Town will provide additional considerations to the State with regards to the Three Track Trench as we continue to learn more
- Continued analysis of all options by Town staff and consultants to inform the Commonwealth Transportation Board decision making process and the 60 day DEIS comment period.
- Town representatives will be contacting state and federal legislators to make it clear that the third rail through Ashland is unacceptable on the surface or in a trench.

This list is not exhaustive, and your Ashland elected officials and staff will work tirelessly to prevent a third rail through town and a three track trench.

Thanks again for bearing with us through this important, but incredibly confusing process. Your Town Council members and Town staff are always available to answer your questions and provide clarification. Please don't hesitate to reach out to us.

Sincerely,



James R. Foley  
Mayor  
Town of Ashland, VA  
*The Center of the Universe*

P.S. I would like to call upon all of Ashland to reach out and thank Mrs. Kristin Reihl for her dedicated service as the citizen representative on the Community Advisory Committee. Her input and participation were crucial to leading the Town in the right direction throughout this process.