

To: Virginia Secretary of Transportation, VDOT, Fairfax Board of Supervisors, Virginia legislators of the Accotink Creek watershed:

The <u>Friends of Accotink Creek</u> offer our comments on the 495 to Haymarket proposal for I-66. Some of our recommendations are specific to the Accotink Creek watershed, but others apply generally. We have participated in the recent presentations on the proposed I-66 expansion.

Our comments are informed by our experience during VDOT's 495/HOT expansion, where the <u>Friends of Accotink Creek</u> documented and reported hundreds of construction-related sediment pollution events, including incidents where heavily sediment-contaminated water was being pumped directly into Accotink Creek and her tributaries. The Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation issued a stop-work order, and the Friends of Accotink Creek partnered with the <u>Potomac Riverkeeper</u> on a lawsuit under the Clean Water Act, which was preempted by state action, resulting in a Consent Decree. Documentation here: <u>http://www.accotink.org/HOT.htm</u>

The <u>Friends of Accotink Creek</u> participated in the <u>Fairfax County Restoration Project's</u> discussions with State, Regional, and County agencies, local environmental non-profits, and VDOT and her partners, that resulted in significant improvements to the final landscaping for the 495/HOT project. We appreciated VDOT's implementation of environmentally responsible practices in the final landscaping that went above and beyond their required practices, and encourage VDOT to approach the proposed I-66 Expansion in an environmentally responsible manner from the beginning.

The <u>Friends of Accotink Creek</u> will participate as an advocate for the Accotink Creek watershed through the life of this project, and we welcome constructive conversation and engagement with all parties. VDOT has an opportunity to set a high standard for environmental stewardship on this project, and the Friends of Accotink Creek encourage all interested parties to join us in supporting such an initiative.

The Friends of Accotink Creek recommend:

- No net loss of natural areas/wooded areas inside or outside the right of way. If clearing of wooded areas is unavoidable, then the loss should be mitigated by equal nearby replanting.
- No use of invasive species in seed mix or plantings during and after construction. We have in mind especially Chinese lespedeza (lespedeza cuneata, lespedeza sericea).



- Limit planting to species native to this region of Virginia, allowing regrowth in harmony with surrounding habitats and wildlife that will also help minimize upkeep and mowing expense.
- Reevaluate the Tier 1 Environmental Impact statement, which indicated that no impaired waters would be impacted. However, the project crosses Bear Branch, Long Branch, Hunters Branch, Hatmark Branch, and headwaters of Accotink Creek, which are all certainly impaired, if anyone would care to collect data. Certainly, much data exists about the impairment of Accotink Creek itself.
- Take advantage of this rare opportunity to make up for past construction done with inadequate stormwater controls by finding imaginative ways to **provide stormwater controls above and beyond the legally required minimums**. With a bit of creativity, it should be possible to do this at little or no cost, given the level of construction already required. Local jurisdictions are likely willing to contribute design ideas and possibly funding.
- Oversight and enforcement of erosion and sediment controls, which were lax to the point of invoking legal penalties during construction of the 495 Express Lanes. Cleanup after construction was also a disappointment. This must not be the case again when local jurisdictions and the Commonwealth are pouring so many resources into keeping sediment out of our waterways.
- **Mitigation for wetlands disturbed within the affected watershed**, not at a remote artificial wetlands bank. Fairfax County has a ready list of watershed projects available for mitigation purposes within all county watersheds.
- Collaboration with Fairfax County to **incorporate elements of county watershed management plans into stormwater controls and stream crossings**. Numerous proposed projects exist which may be suitable for synergistic achievement of mutual goals. Likewise for other jurisdictions.

