

ROUTE 221 BACKGROUND ROANOKE COUNTY

Background

Widening Route 221 starting at Route 735 (Coleman Road), where the current four-laning ends, and extending to Route 752 (Old Mill Road) in Roanoke County was first added to the Virginia Department of Transportation's Six-Year Improvement Program in the mid-1990s. The SYIP is a document that lists construction projects planned by VDOT along with their sources of funding. The document is updated every year.

Historically, an idea for a construction project was not listed in the SYIP without support from the local government and an available funding source. Once the project is included in the program, sustained funding must be identified in the program to advance a project through different phases of development and construction.

Project development

1993 – After years of public interest, a construction project to widen nearly two miles of Route 221, starting at Route 419, was completed.

June 1994 – VDOT held a citizen information meeting at Back Creek Elementary School to gauge public interest for future Route 221 improvements. Two possible corridors to continue widening Route 221 were presented. Hundreds of people attended. At the meeting, VDOT explained how improving Route 221 was not simply a matter of adding additional lanes on either side of the road. Several factors such as the presence of Back Creek close to the existing road, a large electric power line and the mountainous topography pose complications for any improvements.

July 1994 - Within 30 days of the citizen information meeting, VDOT had received 86 written comment sheets. Six people said nothing should be done. Other suggestions for improvements included relocating the road to the south of its present location; building new lanes to the north of Route 221; straightening curves and adding turn lanes; and providing bikeways.

October 1994 – VDOT produced the first of five newsletters about Route 221. The newsletter explained that a citizen advisory committee would be formed.

November 1994 – Another citizen information meeting was held and a 15-person, citizen advisory committee was assembled to identify issues and conditions that VDOT and Roanoke County needed to consider as part of the process for proposing improvements to Route 221. Those selected for the committee were charged with soliciting ideas from the various communities along Route 221 and serving as contacts for residents and other interested citizens who wanted to give input.

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December 1994 – The citizen advisory committee held the first of its nine meetings. Committee members received an overview of the highway development process including how to work with local and state officials to initiate a project and secure funding for future improvements to Route 221.

January 1995 – VDOT produced the second newsletter. The citizen advisory committee met to look at traffic volume and crash data, flooding history, road maintenance and upgrading the existing road.

April 1995 – VDOT produced the third news letter and direct-mailed it to 1,600 homes and businesses. The citizen advisory committee and VDOT presented possible solutions at a citizen information meeting held April 27 at Cave Spring Junior High School. The project alternatives included ‘no build,’ spot improvements and three corridors for widening the road.

May 1995 – A two-day corridor feasibility hearing was held on May 24 at Cave Spring Junior High School and on May 25 at Back Creek Elementary School. Visuals of the project alternatives were presented at this meeting. Approximately 634 people attended over the two days.

June 1995 – The comment period for the hearing ended. VDOT received 35 oral comments and 795 written comments as part of the official public hearing record. Almost 17 percent of the comments received expressed opposition to any type of road improvements. About 49 percent supported a corridor following existing Route 221 after the curves at the east end are improved. The second preferred corridor routing was to the south of Back Creek.

September 1995 – After holding its own public hearing on September 12, the Roanoke County Board of Supervisors passed a resolution supporting improvements as close as possible to existing Route 221. Also in 1995, VDOT was advised of residential development plans.

December 1995 – The Commonwealth Transportation Board passed a resolution selecting a location corridor with a provision for further engineering study if the selected corridor was not feasible.

February 1996 – VDOT produced a fourth newsletter explaining the CTB’s action taken in December.

July 1996 – The CTB included a total of \$2.7 million for the preliminary engineering and right of way phases of project development in the SYIP. This allocation met the estimated cost of these two phases, but no funds were identified for construction.

January 1997 – VDOT hired engineering firm Wiley and Wilson to perform engineering studies for the selected corridor and began drawing up preliminary design plans.

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July 1997 – The cost estimate for right of way and preliminary engineering increased by \$430,000 to \$3.1 million. The CTB included funds to cover the increase but revised the funding schedule for the project moving it out a year. No construction funds were identified.

November 1997 – VDOT produced the fifth issue of the newsletter announcing that the public would have a chance to view preliminary plans at a citizen information meeting held in December.

December 1997 – VDOT held a citizen information meeting on December 8 at Cave Spring Junior High School. VDOT presented preliminary project plans for the 2.3-mile section of Route 221 that starts at the end of the current four-lane section at Coleman Road and ends at Route 752 (Old Mill Road).

April 1998 – VDOT held a location and design public hearing with 162 people attending. The total project cost for the 2.3 miles of widening Route 221 including preliminary engineering, right of way and construction is estimated at \$16.3 million.

May 1998 – The comment period for the hearing ended. VDOT received four oral and 43 written comments.

June 1998 – The CTB approved the design plans for the 2.3-mile section of Route 221.

July 1998 – In the SYIP, the 0.8-mile section of Route 221 from Coleman Road to Cotton Hill Road through the ‘S’ curves became a priority. This portion of the project was fully funded for the preliminary engineering and right of way phases. Cost estimates increased by \$347,000 to \$3.4 million. The CTB included funds to cover the cost increase but revises the funding schedule for the project increasing it by a year. No construction funds were identified. The second part of the project, the 1.5-mile section from Cotton Hill Road to Old Mill Road, was not included in the plan.

November 1998 – VDOT began purchasing right of way for the project.

July 1999 – The estimated cost of preliminary engineering remained at \$1.8 million and the cost of right of way was \$1.6 million. The \$3.4 million allocation remained unchanged in the SYIP. The CTB did not include any construction funding in the plan.

June 2000 – Preliminary engineering and right of way costs remain fully funded in the SYIP. CTB noted in the plan its intention to schedule \$600,000 within the next six years of the SYIP.

July 2001 – Preliminary engineering and right of way allocations remained unchanged. However, the CTB removed the note stating its intention to schedule construction funds.

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June 2002 – VDOT halted right of way purchase.

July 2002 – Statewide funding budget cuts caused the project to drop from the SYIP entirely.

July 2005 – After three years without funding, the 0.8-mile project was added back to the Six-Year Improvement Program with full funding. VDOT provided an updated cost estimate of the project. Preliminary engineering estimate was \$2.5 million. Right of way cost was \$2.3 million and construction is \$10.8 million. The total cost estimate was \$15.6 million. VDOT proposed to advertise the project for construction bids sometime in fiscal year 2007 pending a project review.

November 2005 – VDOT resumed purchasing right of way.

July 2006 – Across the nation, costs associated with construction such as steel, concrete, and gasoline escalated causing VDOT to revise the cost estimate of the project to \$28.1 million. The estimated construction cost alone more than doubled from \$10.8 million to \$22.3 million. Due to skyrocketing costs, construction funds were eliminated. Funds are shifted from other projects to cover the cost increases for preliminary engineering and right of way.

August 2006 – VDOT met with property owners from Garden of Cotton Hill to discuss their concerns about the road's proximity to their homes. As a result, minor shifts in alignment were made requiring more right of way purchase.

April 2007 – VDOT revised the plans to include bike lane space.

July 2007 – The Six-Year Improvement Program's annual update reflected an increased total estimated cost of \$31.8 million. The cost increased \$3.7 million due to inflation and changes in right of way. Construction funds are restored to the project, but the advertisement date is pushed back three years to fiscal year 2010.

February 2008 – VDOT concluded right of way purchase from the original plans that were approved by the CTB in June 1998. However, additional right of way purchase was ongoing due to alignment shifts and changes.

July 2008 – All future allocations for construction funds are removed from the Six-Year Improvement Program. The CTB did include additional funds to meet the cost increases for preliminary engineering. No construction timetable is identified.

July 2009 – Preliminary engineering and right of way estimated costs remain fully funded. No construction funds were identified.

July 2010 – The SYIP identifies \$28.2 million in construction funding for the project as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. At its July 14 meeting in Richmond, the CTB awards a \$20.1 million contract to W.C. English Inc. from Lynchburg to build the project.

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