

May 21, 2003

**Alternatives to I-66 Widening
Arlington Coalition for Sensible Transportation**

Congestion is a serious problem on all major roads in the Washington region, including I-66. Even on a normal day, there are significant capacity issues, particularly during peak hours.

Unfortunately, there is no single solution for reducing traffic congestion. Sound transportation policy requires multi-modal solutions that provide people with real options for getting where they need to go. These solutions should be built upon rigorous and open community involvement, ensuring that the people who use the transportation system have an active say in the development of that system.

In the aftermath of September 11, there have been renewed calls to widen I-66 through Arlington County. The principal rationale has been that the additional lanes are necessary to ensure appropriate evacuation capacity.

There are more effective ways to enhance transportation capacity than widening I-66. Widening I-66 will not provide enough capacity to make a meaningful contribution to an evacuation. In fact, it will not even address the traffic capacity problems that exist on a normal day. As noted by Chris Zimmerman, former Chair of the Arlington County Board and of WMATA, "the long term result of widening I-66 from four lanes to six would surely be swapping a four lane traffic tie-up for a six lane traffic tie-up."

ACST believes that changes to I-66 should occur only as part of a broader regional plan that:

- assesses local and regional transportation needs;
- considers and, where appropriate, attempts all reasonable alternatives (including public transit, pedestrian, bicycle, and other alternatives);
- preserves quality of life and community integrity;
- minimizes impacts on the environment;
- is viable for local communities as well as the entire region;
- is cost-effective in the long term; and
- is arrived at with community consensus.

To facilitate enlightened discussion, ACST offers the following list of alternatives that can help address congestion and evacuation concerns. These alternatives, taken together, are cleaner, better, and smarter than widening I-66, the result of which would only be more traffic and more pollution in the core of our region.

Alternatives Specific to I-66

- Regularly monitor and enforce existing HOV restrictions. Stopping violators will substantially increase the available capacity on I-66.
- Study the existing hours and occupancy requirements for HOV restrictions inside and outside the Beltway to determine whether modifications would reduce congestion on either portion
- Promote a study of value-pricing for I-66 that focuses upon value pricing options for the existing lanes.
- Implement “spot” improvements to I-66 congestion, such as better ramps, merge lanes and altered ramp metering. These options should be designed to improve traffic flow and reduce crashes, which are a significant cause of delays.
- Study the feasibility of reversing the east bound lanes in the event of an evacuation emergency, thus providing 4 outbound lanes without any additional construction.

Alternatives Related to Transit Service

- Better promote existing bus service to Tysons Corner and the Dulles Corridor, especially for "reverse-commute" travel, and expand or enhance this bus service as necessary, possibly by creating a bus rapid transit (BRT) system. Existing service in the region, like the Fairfax Connector, demonstrate that bus service, if done right, can be extremely popular.
- Address Metrorail capacity and operational issues, including upgrading Metrorail to 8-car trains, extending platforms, encouraging better bike and pedestrian access to rail stations, and improving train flow to reduce choke point delays, such as the Rosslyn Tunnel. This will take pressure off of I-66 by attracting more people to Metrorail.
- Use signal priority and preemption technologies on buses, thus helping to make bus service more attractive than driving on I-66.
- Let the private sector serve unmet transit needs. Where permitted, private sector coach and other services have proven very popular. Enabling the private sector to compete for transit services could help limit the number of cars on I-66.

Policy Alternatives

- Expressly adopt a "fix it first" policy for highways and transit, ensuring that the existing infrastructure is safe and maximized before building new infrastructure.
- Expressly link land use planning, transportation, planning, and the air quality conformity process through a regional authority that has real jurisdiction over each of these issues. This will help put an end to bad planning that, among other things, encourages sprawl and wastes valuable land around Metro stations. It also will begin creating real accountability in the planning process.
- Develop performance standards to measure the value of new transportation investments and ensure that all new projects meet those standards.

Other Alternatives

- Continue investing in better signal timing on arterials, thus maximizing the capacity of parallel routes.
- Continue developing better traffic and transit information systems (e.g., NextBus, traffic alerts, etc.) so that commuters can make real time mode choices. This should include information alerts at stations as well as on the internet and through cell phones.
- Increase teleworking to help reduce peak-period travel.
- Eliminate parking subsidies so that people are not encouraged to drive. For example, eliminate tax deductions for employer sponsored parking or require WMATA to charge market rates for parking.

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