

Community Context Audit Interview Summary

July 2023



EASTERN FREDERICK COUNTY
TRANSPORTATION STUDY

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Interview outreach of up to 15 stakeholders began on July 14, 2023, via phone. Stakeholders who were reached were given the option to take the interview at the time of the phone call or to schedule a future date for a phone, Microsoft (MS) Teams video, or in-person interview. Barry Schnoor, Director, Physical Plant, Shenandoah University, and Jeff Buettner, Interim Economic Development Authority Executive Director, opted for a phone interview. Eight interviewees opted for an MS Teams video interview. All interviews were recorded for accuracy and with permission from each interviewee. No one requested an in-person interview. By July 18, 2023, the initial outreach to the 15 stakeholders was completed. If the phone was not answered, a voice mail was left. Follow-up emails were sent if our initial calls were not returned as requested. Ten stakeholders were interviewed. There were four stakeholders who did not respond to the invitation to take part in the interviews.

It is also worthy of note that the information received and summarized below represents the collective opinions of the interviewees. This feedback and summary information will only be utilized for the purposes of the community context audit.

Completed Interviews (10):

- Larry Oliver, Frederick County Fire and Rescue
- Whit Wagner, Fort Collier
- Chris Durant, Navy Federal Credit Union
- Cynthia Schnieder, Top of VA Chamber
- Jeff Buettner, City of Winchester Economic Development Authority
- Gray Farland, Shockey Companies
- JP Carr, Glaize Development
- Nick Sabo, Winchester Regional Airport
- Barry Schnoor, Shenandoah University
- Patrick Barker, Frederick County Economic Development Authority

Unsuccessful Interview Contacts:

- Lenny Millholland, Frederick County Sheriff's Office
- Seth Levy, Shenandoah Agency on Aging
- Abbey Rembold, Valley Health System
- Justin Kerns, Winchester Frederick County Convention & Visitors Bureau

Themes

- Alleviating traffic congestion and reducing crashes on I-81 is key to improving mobility in Frederick County.



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- Traffic congestion and tractor trailers on local roads are caused by drivers avoiding traffic congestion on I-81.
- Traffic congestion on I-81 causes challenges for emergency services to reach emergencies.
- There is concern that the roads where development is planned or underway, like in northern Frederick County, are not sufficiently sized for future traffic and that the development will worsen traffic congestion.
- Alternative forms of transportation are valued and need to be improved and expanded: walking, biking, public transit.
- Frederick County's location (proximity to I-81, Virginia Inland Port, Frederick County Regional Airport) is ideal for the warehouse/manufacturing/freight industry, which is resulting in increased truck/tractor trailer traffic.
- Roadway infrastructure capacities at present are not enough for the scale and volume of planned developments.
- Frederick County is becoming a less affordable place to live, causing people to live further away from their jobs in Frederick County.
- Proximity to congested commuter routes has a detrimental impact on housing purchase choices.
- Frederick County is becoming a suburb of Washington, D.C. As a result, morning and evening rush hour has worsened, despite of an increase in remote work since the COVID-19 pandemic.



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Interview Summaries by Topic

Commuter Concerns

- I-81 has a perceived high volume of traffic and a perceived high rate of crashes.
 - Capacity does not appear to be, based on interviewee input, sufficient for the needs of the community.
 - Safety appears to be an issue on I-81. There is a high concentration of crashes on I-81 and the interchanges – this will be verified and validated through the study traffic analysis.
 - The partial clover leaf and diamond shape designs of the I-81 interchanges are thought to contribute to traffic congestion.

- I-81 interchanges/exits of concern:

Interchanges where development is occurring are problematic at peak times. At these locations there is limited land, which is challenging for making improvements. Interchange traffic levels appear to be maxed out and the known growth that is occurring cause concerns that level of service below expectations.

- 317
- 310
- 313: Signal timing causes traffic to back up.
- 315: Where Route 7 comes in, especially going westbound in the evening
- Route 11 & I-81 interchange (north of Winchester City): On-off ramp, convergence of major arteries, unsynchronized signals, industrial park, and manufacturing plant appear to contribute to congestion.
- I-66 and I-81 interchange: When there is a crash, there is 5 to 10 miles of traffic congestion between Winchester City and the interchange.
- Route 50 and Route 522 interchange with I-81: Especially during rush hour.

Future growth/developments are planned and could contribute to congestion in the following areas:

- 321 (Route 672)
 - 323 (Route 669)
 - 307 (Stephen City) & Stephen's City Bridge (Route 277 – south of this study area)
 - 302 (Middletown) Route 627 – south of this study area
 - 277 (south of Winchester City) -Bowman's Crossing, Route 614
- Development and growth in other areas, combined with cars and trucks trying to bypass traffic on I-81, is increasing congestion on other routes.



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- 7/Leesburg Pike: especially during rush hour since it catches commuters from DC to the Winchester area.
 - 37
 - 50/17
 - 522
 - 11 (Clearbrook and Stevenson areas)
 - Between Route 50 and City of Winchester, especially at Victory Avenue.
 - Currently, Route 50 has two lanes in each direction with turning lanes at some intersections. Will the length of these turning lanes be sufficient for future traffic?
 - 661/Redbud Road: On-off ramps are misaligned, and traffic signal sequences are off.
- Local roads are also seeing increased traffic.
 - Senseny Road: Experiencing a lot of development growth; two-lanes might not be sufficient for future traffic.
 - Tasker Road: Tractor trailer traffic
 - Pleasant Valley Road at Millwood Avenue (near Shenandoah University)
- Other Areas experiencing traffic congestion:
 - Bottlenecks around the West Virginia border.
- Rush hour
 - Exists and is getting worse: 8:00 AM, 3:30/4:00 PM
 - Commuter Destinations outside of Frederick County:
 - Washington, D.C. (Frederick County is the “new suburb of Washington, D.C.”)
 - Cumberland, Maryland
- Lack of public transit in Frederick County.
- Lack of alternate routes:
 - There are limited east-west connections through the County.
 - Many roads feed right into downtown Winchester City, instead of being able to bypass.

Development/Growth

- Infrastructure
 - Capacities at present are not enough for the scale and volume of developments coming up.
 - Development needs to happen where infrastructure (utilities, water/sewer, roads) already exists or where it can be delivered in a short time period. Those areas are few and far between.



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- A lot of development and growth in the County, especially in the north and towards the eastern side.
- Residential, retail, and mixed-use developments causing more traffic:
 - Crosspointe Center
 - Crossover Boulevard: Recently completed road improvements.
 - The Shops at Crossover Boulevard: >20 acres of developable commercial land
 - 311-unit apartment complex
 - Home2 Suite by Hilton hotel: 90 guests
 - Trex Co, Inc.
 - Hang 10 Car Wash
 - Carmax Dealership
 - First Bank & Trust Co
- Known planned industrial developments bringing more traffic:
 - Carmeaus: Stone manufacturer with several stone quarries in Clearbrook and Middletown
 - One Logistics: Route 50 connection to the airport. (Also known as Carpers Valley project: 300 acres under development located on Route 50.)
 - “Fruit Hill” mixed use development: 2.1 million square feet of warehouse space. Equus Development: Application has been withdrawn.
 - Valley Innovation Park: A 147-acre development with advanced, bioscience manufacturing located southwest of 310 Interchange with access to I-81.
 - Planned industrial zoning near Exit 321/323
 - More industrial land uses are being developed towards the northern part of the study area.
- Other development concerns:
 - Development near northern part of I-81, near Exit 319 – a JJJ bus stopping area.
 - Concerns about traffic management during planned construction at the Route 50-522 and I-81 interchange.
 - Speculated expansion of airport could, if ever realized, bring more traffic congestion.
 - Route 37 east bypass will have on-ramps to Route 50, causing more traffic congestion.
 - Subdivisions cause sprawl and require people to drive to their destinations.
 - People who work in Frederick County can’t afford to live in Frederick County, causing people to commute further to/from work.
- Developers work closely with the County to minimize negative impacts to the community:
 - Developer participation in transportation improvements through revenue-sharing, proffers, and “smart-scale” projects (essentially formula grants)
 - Developers can be asked to put up money, about \$10,000 per acre, plus setbacks, easements, and right of way



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Historical Resources/Environmental Concerns

- Air pollution from tractor trailers.
- Lack of EV infrastructure in the County.
- “Every field” is a historical site from the Revolutionary War era.
- Natural beauty and history of Frederick County provides a sense of identity and quality of life
- Excessive transportation infrastructure can also negatively impact water runoff etc.
- If uncurbed, development moving westward can threaten natural and agricultural land that forms an economic and cultural foundation for the area.
- Expanding Route 37 on the west side of Frederick County can help relieve traffic, but it is important to see how its building will impact the environment.

Large Trucks/Tractor Trailers

- The area is generating more truck traffic every year. I-81 is the only major north-south route on the east coast that has no major cities or bridges. This allows truckers to move more quickly than other interstates, like I-95. As a result, the Winchester City and Frederick County area is a major hub for industrial/warehouse/trucking.
- Major distribution hubs cause a large volume of freight flowing through the area.
- Large trucks/tractor trailer travel patterns:
 - Most trucks are on I-81 or the major arteries.
 - Truckers use a few local roads to get between industrial parks and I-81.
 - Truckers stop between Exits 317 and 323 before crossing over into the West Virginia border.
 - Truckers use “all the local roads” along I-81 to avoid traffic congestion on I-81 and the interchanges.
 - GPS is rerouting tractor trailers to local roads to avoid traffic congestion.
 - A lot of truckers have no option but to go through downtown, because of the way exits are designed.
 - Route 50 to Route 522: Truckers coming from Maryland or West Virginia
 - Welltown Pike (coming from Stonewall Industrial Park): When traffic is backed up on Exit 317.
- Fredrick County retail industry generating freight:
 - Amazon
 - Walmart
 - Lowe’s
 - Home Depot
 - Trex



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Emergency Services

- Traffic congestion on I-81 and the interchanges causes the volunteer fire company and emergency services to use circuitous routes to reach emergencies, especially during rush hour:
 - Route 522-50 corridor at Millwood Pike.
 - Intersection of I-81 and Berryville Pike (around Route 7).
 - In the City of Winchester, because of delays at traffic signals.
- Reducing emergency response time is always a priority for the airport.
- By Shenandoah University, there is a planned replacement of the Route 50 bridge over I-81. As a result, Route 50 entry/exit to residential halls will close. Concerns about fire rescue response time and ability to get to that part of campus.

School Bus Traffic Concerns

- Some issues with people passing stopped school buses with red lights activated.
- Some concerns of speeding in residential areas.
- Could be congestion concerns for schools near industrial areas, such as Stonewall Elementary on Route 11 north.
- Potential concerns on hilly roads:
 - Armel Elementary on Route 522.
 - Blind spots at Greenwood Mill Elementary School, off Channing Road and High Cliff Drive.

Frederick County Regional Airport/Virginia Inland Port

- Currently, neither location is a heavy node for freight operations, so they don't attract large volumes of truck traffic
 - However, several Frederick County businesses and industrial warehouses and manufacturing companies heavily rely upon the airport and Inland Port.
 - Manufacturing companies rely on private plane delivery of parts (faster than FedEx).
 - Manufacturing companies have several trucks (sometimes 20) that travel to/from Inland Port every day.
 - Some freight comes in from arterial highways, namely Routes 50 and 522.
- Connections to airport and Inland Port could be a need in the future depending on the regional growth and expansion of the manufacturing and trucking industry. Current connections might impact freight movement timeframes.
- If future plans for airport expansion would materialize, an increase in truck traffic would need to be considered.



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- Aircraft manufacturing is a targeted growth sector, which could generate new activity in freight and handling.
- Virginia Inland Port
 - Located in Warren County.
 - Currently, the four-lane road system at the Inland Port feels sufficient.
- A lot of freight is transported by train (Norfolk Southern and CSX).

Other Transportation and Demographic Studies

- Logistics One Traffic Study
- Study of traffic light at Route 50 and Independence Avenue
- Crosspointe TIA, by Glaize Development
- Carpers Valley project TIA
- Equus Development TIA
- Rumor of a private entity in talks with the State to add a toll road and build and manage the third and fourth lanes of I-81.
- Transportation and demographic studies concerns:
 - 2020 Census could be underestimating total population in Frederick County.
 - Understand “real” versus “projected” traffic numbers. VDOT’s guidelines overestimate traffic projections, and most developers who carry out their own studies are meant to follow them. Some might have published their actual counts in a traffic impact analysis or an appendix as part of a rezoning study.
 - Reevaluation of Route 522, and a potential relocation and realignment of the intersection of Routes 50 and 522

Pedestrian/Bicyclist Concerns

- Most local roads are like country roads with soft shoulders, no curb, gutter, or walking paths; though people regularly try to walk and bike to/from downtown.
- No shoulders on rural roads.
- No sidewalks in subdivisions.

Other Recommended Stakeholders

- Public Safety Communications Department
- Planning Department, Frederick County and Winchester City
- Charles Daniels, VP, Fortessa, and Chair of the Board of Top of Virginia Regional Chamber [crdaniels@fortessa.com]
- Chris Boies, Clarke County Administrator [cboies@clarkecounty.gov]
- Adielle Rivera, Loan Officer with a local business, can reach out to Hispanic residents and business-owners [adielle.rivera@guildmortgage.net]
- Ed Podboy, Logistics One, 703-608-9393 (mobile)



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- Facebook group: “What’s Happening in Winchester and Frederick County, Virginia”
- Jason Akins Developments
- Industry: HP Hood, Trex, Rubbermaid, Southeastern Container, American Woodmark Cabinetry
- Mike Perry of Perry, civil contractor who deals with traffic and trucks in the area
- Denny Perry, quarry owner and truck operator
- Dave Foley, Cargo Operator, Winchester Regional Airport
- Chris Rucker, Valley Health System [crucker2@valleyhealthlink.com]
- Jason Craig, EdD, BCBA, VHS Director, Community Health, 540-536-5949 (direct line) [jcraig@valleyhealthlink.com]
- Winchester Wheelmen
- WinFred MPO bike and pedestrian advocacy committee

Other Groups

- Spanish materials (18% of the City of Winchester are Hispanic)
- There is not an overarching voice for businesses. The Chamber and “EDOs” can help promote public engagement opportunities to the businesses.

Stakeholder Ideas

- Build safer connectors (better shoulders and curbs) to enable people to walk and bike.
- Expand public transit to the County, especially the Westview Business Park Center, and major industrial and manufacturing employers. This could help attract talent.
- Expand bike lanes and sidewalks.
- Create a parkway with at-grade crossings and traffic moving at 45-55 mph, instead of a limited access highway. This would help move domestic traffic stuck in I-81 traffic congestion.
 - Would also allow for more development that can tie in with secondary feeder roads coming in at at-grade crossings.
- Realign Redbud Road on the east side of I-81 to fix signal timing issues.
- Coordinate with City of Winchester on improving bike-ability, walkability, and public transportation, including on-demand transit.
- Efficiency measures need to be put in place on I-81 so there aren’t issues/interactions between tractor trailers and personal vehicles.
- Improvements to Coverstone Road through the One Logistics Park could help with reducing emergency response time.
- Improve Route 522 connection between airport and Inland Port; currently traffic congestion prohibits truckers to arrive on time.
- Install shoulders on the rural/county roads to benefit the safety of bicyclists and drivers.