



# Save Rural Loudoun

## Save Rural Loudoun's Findings and Recommendations regarding Route 15 improvements

U.S. Route 15 in northern Loudoun – a National Scenic Byway within the *Journey Through Hallowed Ground* National Heritage Area and which bisects the historic village of Lucketts – clearly suffers from congestion, safety, and access problems. The current debate concerns how best to address present and projected traffic flow from Leesburg to the Potomac River. Loudoun's investment choice can only be rationally made after understanding the economic and other values of rural Loudoun, the impacts on property owners, the costs and time required, and what we can learn from traffic studies around the country that offer an alternative approach to restricted access and four-laning.

The conventional proposal proposes addressing congestion by widening Route 15 to four lanes, but citizens concerned about the historic values of Route 15 advocate a traffic management program instead. *Save Rural Loudoun* -- a group of citizen activists who seek to protect the county's rural land and economy -- strongly endorses the alternative presented to the County by *Friends of Route 15*, because it offers positive improvements to the route while avoiding the harm to the economy, history, and property of this part of Loudoun County.

The goals and adverse consequences of the proposals of development interests should make the County's choice clear, for several reasons:

- The proponents of a four-lane expansion of Route 15 accept the County's stated, and we believe misguided, goal of attracting *more* traffic from the Beltway, *more* freight from Interstate 81 and the Washington Beltway, and *more* Maryland commuters, by making Route 15 comparable in width and purpose to Route 7 through Sterling. They clearly recognize the truth of the statement: "If you build it they will come."
- The four-lane proposal ignores its adverse and unnecessary economic and environmental impacts on the unique, invaluable assets of greater Lucketts' farms, recreational assets, and residents. It would make a mockery of Route 15's 2008 designation as a National Scenic Byway and as part of the Journey through Hallowed Ground National Heritage Area.
- The proposal's limited-access feature would cause significant new problems for bordering farms, businesses, and property owners. The purpose of a scenic byway is to attract visitors to enjoy its intrinsic qualities and thereby promote economic development for small business by preserving those assets. As proponents of the alternative traffic management approach note, the four-lane divided-highway proposal ignores the basic fact that safe and easy access is essential for the local rural economy to flourish. The proposed two-lane, limited access road circling Lucketts would thoroughly intrude on rural farms and properties directly and indirectly. Those seeking the historic corridor's tourism and recreational destinations—not to mention rural residents and farmers—rely upon that facilitated access.
- In addition to the negative economic impact, the time required for construction and the huge expense of the four-lane proposal will significantly delay remedies of Route 15's pressing traffic and safety problems, with estimated completion no sooner than 2024 and more likely even later. In contrast, traffic calming improvements that manage local and through traffic better such as roundabouts, rough-surfaced and contrast-colored pavement alerting drivers to entrances and

commercial areas, and crosswalks in the village of Lucketts – as already proven successful in the villages of Aldie, Upperville, Paris on Route 50, and already approved and funded for construction in the village of Hillsboro on Route 9 – can be completed far faster at far lower cost. The roundabouts at the Gilbert’s Corner intersection of Routes 15 and 50 are the prime example of a successful, lower cost, and faster remedy to congestion, access, and safety. This approach, of course, does not aim to induce more traffic to Route 15 from other roads. This is the approach that Friends of Route 15 recommend – roundabouts and traffic-calming measures that will ease congestion and make Route 15 safer and protective of our rural economy and residents.

- The negotiation for and taking of private property will surely contribute to making the four-lane proposal unpopular and far slower than the traffic management alternative, although the County has not yet provided a cost comparison of the competing options.
- The travesty of the “Fix” Route 15 proposal is that the State of Maryland will never agree to widen the bridge at Point of Rocks over the Potomac River that lies within its jurisdiction! Imagine the gridlock experienced daily as traffic comes from Leesburg up to Maryland’s two-lane bridge!

*Save Rural Loudoun’s* Board of Directors has reviewed the proposals of the newly-formed *Fix Route 15 Now* group for an expensive four-lane “solution,” and we conclude that its rural impact, limited access to property owners, taking of land for the highway, proposed bypass around Lucketts, and its traffic-inducing goal would be a highly irresponsible, expensive, and utterly unnecessary solution to the Route 15 traffic problem. Far from “fixing” Route 15, it’s proposal would do quite the opposite, creating costly, destructive changes to the Route 15 corridor.

*Save Rural Loudoun* has also reviewed the proposal submitted by *Friends of Route 15* and has concluded that this proposal for roundabouts, proven traffic calming measures, and offers a responsible, efficient, far less expensive yet responsive and faster solution to the traffic problem. It responds to the pressing need to address the congestion, safety, and access problems in a way that preserves the community and the vitality of our rural and tourism economy while also protecting the resources that enhance our quality of life.

In conclusion, we look upon the Fix Route 15 as another example of a devastating proposal to open up rural Loudoun to costly development. This proposal would not only invite more traffic from other routes, but will, surely, encourage sales of housing subdivisions like Selma Estates. *Save Rural Loudoun* recommends that the Board of Supervisors evaluate this proposal in the context of the County’s overall approach to protecting the economy, historic, environmental and social values of rural Loudoun. We must not continue the County’s “business as usual” rural policies that will, without change, destroy these rural values and drastically raise the public service, school, road and other costs to the County and its taxpayers.