

# City of Hampton

## Saunders Road Improvement Project

### Frequently Asked Questions (as of 03/01/12)

#### 1. Why are the improvements to Saunders Road necessary?

For many years, Saunders Road, with its two lane cross section and “rural feel”, adequately served the residents and commuters in that area. However, in recent years the gradual increase in traffic volume along the narrow, curving roadway has led to an increase in traffic accidents. Also, since the 1980’s, Saunders Road has been designated in the city of Hampton’s transportation plan as part of a future east-west transportation route linking areas off J. Clyde Morris Blvd.(Rt. 17) in midtown Newport News and southern York County with the northwest area of Hampton. Because of the availability of undeveloped land in this area of Hampton and the infrastructure investments made there by the city and the development community, the Magruder Blvd. corridor is poised to grow in population and jobs, which will generate demand for improvements in the area road network, including Saunders Road.

In anticipation of this growth in traffic over the next 20+ years, the needed east-west transportation route is being developed in phases. The first phase, the reconstructed interchange of Magruder Blvd and Cmdr. Shepard Blvd, was completed in 2010. The second phase of the route, the extension of Cmdr. Shepard Blvd from the Magruder Blvd. area to Big Bethel Road at the Saunders Road intersection, is about to begin construction in early 2012. When phase two is completed in 2014, additional traffic will travel along the extended Cmdr. Shepard Blvd. to Big Bethel Road, then along the Saunders Road corridor, out to Rt. 17.

Hampton was very fortunate to have obtained federal funding for the improvements to Saunders Road up to the city limits with Newport News, which represents phase three of the planned east-west transportation route. However, unless the city proceeds soon with the needed improvements to Saunders Road, the \$15M federal funding allocation for the Saunders Road project will expire and Hampton will lose the funding. And, it is anticipated that funding for the fourth and final phase of this long planned east-west transportation route -roadway improvements from the Hampton city limits out to Rt. 17, can be obtained in the years to come as traffic increases on the Newport News’ road segments, although it is not known when this would occur.

In summary, because of the projected gradual increase in traffic due to anticipated growth in the northwest area of Hampton, and because of the upcoming rerouting of traffic upon the completion of the Cmdr. Shepard Blvd. extension to Big Bethel Road, Saunders Road traffic volumes are expected to increase from 10,000 vehicles per day to 18,000, by 2030, far exceeding the capacity of this two lane roadway. Improvements to Saunders Road, including the widening of the roadway to four lanes are critical for meeting this future traffic demand and for addressing the current roadway safety issues.

## **2. What are the traffic projections for Saunders Road?**

Current traffic volumes are approximately 10,000 vehicles per day. In the coming years, as a result of a general increase in population and an increase in the number of cars per household, the volume will increase by about 1% annually. In addition, when the Cmdr. Shepard Blvd. extension is completed in 2014, the traffic count will substantially increase, especially in the pm peak hour when westbound commuters are returning to their homes. By 2030, the traffic volume is expected to be 18,000 vehicles per day, which will far exceed the capacity of the current two lane roadway.

## **3. What is the funding source for this project?**

This project is funded with \$15M from the Regional Surface Transportation Program (RSTP), which is a federal funding source authorized by Congress, and allocated to the states. The state of Virginia then allows various regional transportation planning organizations (TPO's) to determine which projects are most worthy of receiving these funds. In 2005, the Hampton Roads TPO approved the allocation of the RSTP funds for Saunders Road improvements in Hampton, because of its regional significance as a connecting link between Hampton, Newport News and York County, from the Magruder Blvd. corridor to Rt. 17.

## **4. What is the expected time frame for the project design phase, the right of way acquisition phase and the construction phase?**

The environmental documentation and the design work are expected to begin in early 2012, and depending on what issues may arise and on the responsiveness of the various state and federal review and approval agencies, this work could be completed in approximately 18 months, or by mid-2013. At that point, there would be a public hearing on the design of the project followed by the acquisition of the necessary right of way for the project. It is anticipated that the right of way acquisition could take 6-12 months to complete. After completion of the right of way acquisition phase, then the utility relocation work can begin and depending on the extent of that work, the roadway construction could be advertised for bids, followed by a contract award, followed by the start of construction. The bid/award process can take approximately 6 months, thus the start of construction could occur sometime in late 2014 or early 2015. Construction will likely take approximately 24-30 months, leading to a possible project completion date between late 2016 and mid-2017.

## **5. When is Newport News going to improve their segment of Saunders Road and Harpersville Road from the city line out to J. Clyde Morris Blvd (Rt. 17)?**

While the improvements to Saunders Road in Newport News are in its Framework for the Future (the city's Master Plan), Newport News does not have a schedule for improvement of its segment of Saunders Road west to Harpersville Road or for the segment of Harpersville Road out to Rt. 17. Newport News' current road improvement priorities include a number of other projects with greater needs, and given the current difficulties with funding for road construction, it is unknown when that segment of Saunders Road would be improved.

However, much like Hampton was able to secure federal funding for its segment of Saunders Road, it is possible that Newport News may secure similar funding in the future, particularly since this route had previously been deemed to have regional significance, serving as an east-west connector road between Rt. 17 and Magruder Blvd.

## **6. Won't there be traffic backups at the city line when the road narrows down from the proposed two westbound lanes in Hampton to a single lane in Newport News?**

Regardless of whether Saunders Road is widened or left as is, traffic volumes will increase on the roadway due to the projected gradual growth of traffic, (as a result of population growth and future development in the Magruder corridor), and due to the extension of Cmdr. Shepard Blvd. to Big Bethel Road, which is projected to be completed in 2014. This increasing traffic volume at some point in the future may result in occasional westbound traffic backups (during some portion of the pm peak commute) where merging would occur. If no improvements were made, this backup would occur near the Flinton Drive intersection, where the road presently narrows from two westbound lanes to one lane. With the proposed roadway improvements, there may be occasional backups at the Sanlun Lakes/Betz Lane intersection, near the city limits, where the widened road would narrow from two westbound lanes to one, going into Newport News. However, with the road improvements, the additional westbound lane would increase the roadway's capacity to contain the backup and would reduce its length so as to lessen the impacts to homeowners in the vicinity of the city limits.

## **7. Why not wait until Newport News gets its funding and then make the Saunders Road improvements in Hampton and Newport News at the same time?**

It would have been ideal if funding could have been obtained for both Hampton's and Newport News' segments of Saunders Road at the same time. However, Hampton's federal funding of \$15 M was allocated several years ago and it must be spent within a certain time frame or it will be forfeited. Future funding for Newport News's segment of Saunders Road is not certain, but what is certain is that Newport News' funding would not be available before Hampton's funding would expire. Thus, Hampton needs to move forward with its road improvements ahead of Newport News, while the funding is still available.

## **8. Why wouldn't a three lane roadway section be adequate to handle the traffic?**

A three lane roadway section for Saunders Road would help address the short term roadway safety issues; however, it would not accommodate the longer term higher traffic volumes projected for Saunders Road. It is possible that the roadway could be widened in two stages as traffic volumes increase, but this would prove to be more disruptive to the area residents and motorists, and it would not fully utilize the currently available federal funding. Because road planning and construction requires such long time frames, and because future funding is uncertain, implementing the long range plan now is felt to be the better option.

## **9. What progress has been made to date on the project, after the funding was authorized?**

Following the authorization of the federal funding for the Saunders Road improvements in 2005, there have been on-going discussions about the project scope and schedule, between the city of Hampton and the Virginia Department of Transportation, which provides oversight of the federal funding. Because the Saunders Road improvements were considered to be the third phase of the east-west transportation route, the city focused its efforts in 2006-2009 on completing the design of phase two of the east-west route, the extension of Cmdr. Shepard Blvd. to Big Bethel Road, and in acquiring the right of way and the environmental permits for the Cmdr. Shepard Blvd. extension. That project was advertised for construction bids in 2011 and construction is set to begin in early 2012. Once the design of that project was finalized, the city staff turned its attention to the Saunders Road improvements.

In 2008, the city hired a consultant to prepare a conceptual plan for the roadway and to gather some preliminary environmental documentation. This work was presented to the public at a meeting held at Sandy Bottom Nature Park in June, 2010. The meeting resulted in a number of public comments about the project, which the city staff has reviewed. In 2011, the city solicited design services for the project and the engineering firm of Kimley Horn and Associates was selected, along with a team of sub-consultants, one of which, URS, will work with the public to answer questions about the project

and to involve citizens in the design process. The design contract was negotiated in the summer of 2011 and it was approved by the Virginia Department of Transportation in late 2011. The design work and the public involvement process are expected to begin in early 2012.

### **10. Which side streets intersections will have traffic signals on Saunders Road?**

Traffic signal justification is guided by “traffic signal warrants”, contained in the Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD), which is recognized as the standard for all cities, counties and states in the U.S. Such warrants involve existing or projected traffic volumes, vehicle turning counts (especially left turning traffic), the number of incidents, and other factors. There are six side street intersections along the segment of Saunders Road in Hampton- Flinton Drive, Quarterpath Lane and Betz Lane on the north side of Saunders, and Edgemont Drive, Philmont Drive and Sanlun Lakes Drive on the south side of Saunders. In accordance with the MUTCD manual, none of the side street intersections would meet the necessary warrants to justify a traffic signal for the foreseeable future, including the intersection at Sanlun Lakes Drive/Betz Lane, which has the highest count for left turn traffic of all the other intersections. These traffic signal warrants are reviewed on a regular basis as a result of changing traffic counts and reported incidents, so it is conceivable that a traffic signal would be installed at one or more of the intersections sometime after the roadwork is completed.

### **11. What are the advantages/disadvantages of a raised median versus a common center left turn lane?**

The raised median has the advantages of being safer (it separates the traffic flowing in opposite directions, it allows for well- defined turn lanes, and it provides pedestrians and motorists with a “refuge area” when crossing the street), and it is more aesthetically pleasing (it allows for planting of trees and shrubs in the median- which also blocks some headlight glare and noise). The disadvantage of a raised median is that it restricts direct access to driveways and some side streets, which causes some property owners to have to make U-turns to get to/from their property. Some residents may feel that such U-turns would be unsafe, but they are safer than a common center left turn lane where traffic flowing in opposite directions could have conflicting left turns.

The common center left turn lane advantages/disadvantages are the opposite of those for the raised median above.

### **12. Will sewer service be extended as part of the project?**

The city is proposing to include some extensions of sanitary sewer as part of the roadway improvements. The extent of these extensions will not be known until the engineers develop some layout concepts and cost estimates for serving those properties that might be developed in the future and for those properties already developed with septic systems that are malfunctioning and need to be replaced. Some homeowners may have septic systems which they do not want to replace with sanitary sewer. Each of the property owners along the roadway will be polled to determine who would like to

have sanitary sewer service, and who would not, and this information will be used in establishing the sewer layout concepts and the estimated costs. Any final decisions of the extension of sanitary sewer will then be made by the city based on health/environmental impacts, property owner interest and funding availability.

### **13. Will there be bike lanes along the roadway?**

The four lane conceptual design does include 4 foot wide bike lanes along the outside travel lanes in both directions for the length of the project. These lanes will connect with other bike lanes which will be constructed with the extension of Cmdr. Shepard Blvd, from Big Bethel Road to the vicinity of Magruder Blvd, which is scheduled to be under construction in early 2012 and which should be completed in 2014. This bike lane system will also link to the Matteson Trail around The Hampton's golf course, thus providing an extensive recreational biking feature for area residents.

### **14. Will there be street lighting along the roadway?**

The Saunders Road improvements will include new street lights along the entire roadway. The lighting will be designed to provide uniform illumination onto the roadway, bike lanes and sidewalks, without casting unwanted glare on private properties.

### **15. Will the existing overhead utility lines be placed underground with the road improvements?**

Undergrounding of the existing overhead utility lines would be the preferred arrangement and the city/design consultants are discussing this with the various utility company owners, including Verizon, Cox Cable and others in order to be able to make a decision on this question. The primary determining factor in this decision is cost- the undergrounding of utility lines is not an eligible expense with the federal funding for the roadway improvements, thus the funding would have to come from the utility companies and/or city funds. Undergrounding of utility lines is very expensive; in this case, it could cost millions of dollars, due to the large number of existing poles and lines along this roadway. The city has a utility Franchise Agreement with the utility companies that requires the utility companies to move their poles and lines at no cost to the city, but only when the lines remain overhead. If the lines are undergrounded at the request of the city, then the utility companies can demand payment for the incremental cost of undergrounding, above what it would have cost to set new poles and overhead lines. Some utility companies would prefer to have their facilities underground, to lessen the risk to their poles and lines from storm damage. All of these considerations will be discussed with the utility companies in the coming months and once the cost to the city is determined, a final decision will be made on whether the utility lines will be undergrounded. If the utilities are not undergrounded, the new overhead lines will be "cleaned up", with less of a "mish mash" of utility pole heights, alignment and spacing.

## **16. Will the project include sound walls to screen my property from the road?**

Sound walls are not applicable to this project because of the high number of driveways along Saunders Road, where there would have to be an opening in the wall for property access. These openings would negate the benefits of a sound wall. However, in place of a sound wall, property owners along Saunders Road may elect to have landscaping or privacy fencing placed just behind the new sidewalks, along the frontage of their property, to provide some screening of their homes from the road.

## **17. If some, or all, of my property is needed for the project, what is the process and how will I be compensated?**

The acquisition of property for a roadway project is governed by federal and state laws to protect the property owner's right to fair compensation and due process, which collectively must comply with the Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act of 1970, as amended. Also, the state of Virginia has a brochure available on property acquisition entitled "A Guide for Property Owners and Tenants", which explains the property acquisition process in much more detail. In brief, once the roadway design is approved and the right of way needs for the project are firmly established, each property owner will be contacted by a professional property acquisition agent to discuss the project and the amount of their property needed for the roadway improvements. The property owner will be provided with a plat showing a survey of the property and a copy of an appraisal calculating the value of the property needed for the road right of way, which forms the basis for the purchase offer from the city. The property owner has the option to accept this offer or to reject it and to make a counter offer. Such counter offers are usually based on a separate appraisal provided by the property owner. The parties may further negotiate the purchase price but if agreement cannot be reached, then the city may elect to use its power of eminent domain to obtain the needed right of way, which then puts the matter into the court system for determination of the appropriate compensation. If a property owner feels it is necessary, he/she may seek private legal counsel to assist in right of way negotiations. Also, if a property is acquired in its entirety, the owner/occupant, or the tenant (if rental property), would be eligible for compensation for relocation expenses, in addition to the owner's compensation for the property purchase.

## **18. If my house is in the path of the new road alignment, how long will it take for my property to be purchased, so I can move?**

Unfortunately, there is no firm answer to this question, because there are a number of variables in the property acquisition process. Typically, the environmental documentation and the roadway design have to be completed and approved before the right of way acquisition phase can begin. There is a procedure for "advanced acquisition" of property once the alignment of the roadway is set and where there is no question that an entire property needs to be purchased, but this can still be a cumbersome

process, taking as much as a year. If your house is determined to be in the path of the widened roadway, and you are interested in advanced acquisition so you can relocate, you can make your interest known to one of the individuals listed on the next page.

### **19. Who should I talk with if I have a concern or question about the project?**

It is recommended that you first talk with the city's consultant for public information and involvement, Mr. Fred Whitley, with URS Corporation, to discuss your concern or question. Mr. Whitley can be contacted at (757) 383-6206, or via email: [fred.whitley@urs.com](mailto:fred.whitley@urs.com). Mr. Whitley will be happy to talk with you about the project, by phone or in person, at your home, if you wish. If your concern cannot be addressed to your satisfaction, then it is recommended that you talk with the city's project manager, Mr. Lynn Allsbrook, City Engineer, who can be reached at (757) 726-2930, or via email: [lallsbrook@hampton.gov](mailto:lallsbrook@hampton.gov)