

Second Dinwiddie High teen dies in automobile crash this month

By: Michael Campbell | Twitter: [@itsthesoup](#)

Posted: January 31, 2019 | 1:45 p.m.

Families raising money to help with funeral, burial costs after devastating losses

DINWIDDIE – The Dinwiddie community is coming to the aid of Dinwiddie High School and its close-knit group of students and teachers as they face the death of another student in an automobile accident.

Last Tuesday, Virginia State Police responded to the intersection of New Cox Road (U.S. Route 460) and Courthouse Road around 10:30 a.m. for a report of a two-vehicle crash.

According to Sgt. Keeli Hill with Virginia State Police, their preliminary investigation has revealed 2010 Honda Civic, driven by a 17-year old with McKenney local John William Dakota Reid, 17, as a passenger, was attempting to cross U.S. Route 460 from northbound Courthouse Road when they were struck by a Lexus sedan in the intersection, on the westbound side of Route 460. The Lexus then spun around facing eastbound and the Civic spun around striking a light pole on the passenger side.

The trooper said it is believed none of the occupants in either vehicle were wearing their seatbelts at the time of the crash. The driver and two passengers in the Lexus were taken to the hospital via ambulance while Reid & the driver were flown via MedFlight to VCU Medical Center in Richmond for life-threatening injuries.

Tragically, Reid was pronounced dead at the hospital.

“Our family is shattered by the sudden loss of our sweet Kota,” Ally Hodges-Reid, one of Dakota’s older sisters shared in an emotional post on a gofundme page raising funds to pay for the teenager’s funeral and burial costs.

“He has been our wild child since the day he was born, always our little trouble-maker,” she shared. “His heart was pure and unyielding. He had a smile of gold that lit up every room and warmed even the coldest heart. Everyone who met him instantly fell in love with him. From the day that he was born and the first time that we held him, he was absolutely perfect.”

“We all love you Kota,” her message closed. “We all wish that we could hear your voice and see your smile one last time. We want to hug you and kiss you and beg you to stay. We want you to know that we love you, and that we will meet again one day.”

As of this report, the family is just over \$2,000 away from their \$11,000 goal, thanks to donations by nearly 200 people.

This death comes on the heels of another Dinwiddie County High School student losing their life on the roads, this time in neighboring Brunswick County.

According to state police, 16-year-old Donovan Kendus, a junior at Dinwiddie High School died on January 13 when the 1996 Dodge Ram pickup truck he was a passenger in drove across a bridge that was iced over following a winter storm at “a high rate of speed, lost control, ran off the roadway, and struck a tree.”

The 16-year-old male driver was taken to the hospital with life-threatening injuries while Kendus died at the scene.

According to Hill, speed and alcohol were contributing factors in the crash and neither teenager was wearing their safety belt at the time of the crash.

“Almost two months shy of his 17th birthday, he lost his life on a cold winter morning,” their family shared on a gofundme page to help Donovan’s mother during their tremendously difficult time. “This unexpected and tragic event has rocked his family to the core.”

According to authorities, charges are pending in each case.

To donate to the Reid family, visit <https://gofundme.com/funeral-and-burial-costs-for-dakota-reid> and to support the Kendus family, visit <https://gofundme.com/for-the-mother-of-donovan>.

Busy Dinwiddie intersection has history of fatal crashes

TBy: Michael Campbell | Twitter: [@itsthesoup](#)

Posted: February 13, 2019 | 3:30 p.m.

Locals question if traffic light, speed drop needed at New Cox, Courthouse Road

DINWIDDIE – The community continues to mourn the loss of a young McKenney teenager who lost his life in a crash that sent four other people to the hospital with serious injuries but, as Dinwiddie comes to terms with the loss, some question whether the intersection where the crash occurred needs to be looked at for safety enhancements.

On Jan. 22, a crash occurred at the intersection of New Cox Road (U.S. Route 460) and Courthouse Road involving two cars. That crash killed a passenger in one of the vehicles, Dakota Reid, and resulted in four other people being rushed to area hospitals for treatment, the second fatal crash at the intersection in three years, state data shows.

According to information provided by the Commonwealth's TRENDS system, short for Traffic Records Electronic Data System, since 2014, there have been three fatalities at the intersection of New Cox Road and Courthouse Road, including the late Jan. crash.

Prior to that crash, the most recent fatal crash at the intersection took place on February 2, 2017, just before 3:30 p.m, which saw one person perish and three others injured. The third fatal crash since 2014, the furthest back state traffic data went back, occurred on Aug. 4, 2014, just before 7 p.m., killing one and leaving two others injured.

State data suggests, in all three fatal crashes, speed was considered to be a factor.

In total, since 2014, there have been nine accidents at the intersection. Of those, six had some form of injury reported, with three fatalities.



Some are asking if more should be done at the intersection of New Cox and Courthouse Road following the fatal crash that killed a Dinwiddie High School teenager. VDOT said they have improved sight lines and installed the flashing signals to help improve travel in the area. (Google Earth)

Following the latest deadly crash at the intersection of New Cox and Courthouse Roads, questions have been raised about ways to remedy the situation, like lowering the speed limit in the area or installing a traffic signal.

According to the Virginia Department of Transportation's records, the speed limit along Cox Road changes from a range of 50-60 miles per hour to 60-70 miles per hour just west of Claiborne Road in Sutherland. That speed is maintained for 21 miles to the Dinwiddie-Nottoway line.

VDOT data also shows this 21-mile stretch of U.S. Route 460 is the only non-interstate road in Dinwiddie County to carry this speed. Interstate 85 has speeds that range from 60 to 70 miles per hour.

The posted speed limit in the area of the intersection of New Cox and Courthouse Roads is 60 miles per hour. When it comes to adjusting, be it raising or lowering, a speed limit for a given stretch of road, VDOT engineers must execute various studies that look at a variety of factors, including traffic counts, traffic behavior, and historical crash data, among a host of others, but, in an FAQ section on their website, they admit lowering speed limits doesn't necessarily translate to drivers slowing down.

“Many people assume that reducing a speed limit will cause speeding motorists to slow down, but studies have shown that motorists tend to drive at the speed they perceive appropriate for the conditions of the roadway,” the agency explained. “When determining speed limits, engineers attempt to set a realistic limit that the majority of drivers will obey and that can be reasonably enforced.”

They continued, “A primary consideration is the speed characteristics, particularly the prevailing (free-flowing) speed, of vehicles on the roadway. Absent undue enforcement, posted speed limits that are set much lower than the prevailing speeds will not be obeyed by motorists.”

According to state data as of Dec. 2015, the section of New Cox Road that sees connects with Courthouse Road has an average daily traffic figure of approximately 7,000 vehicles per day. Drilling further into that ADT number, of those vehicles, the vast majority – 87 percent – are traditional, four-tire vehicles, like passenger vehicles.

After that, one-trailer trucks carry the next highest percentage of vehicle traffic at nine percent, with the remaining two percent being comprised of two- and three-axle vehicles and two-trailer trucks.

Extrapolating the data provided by the agency, it suggests that nearly 6,100 cars and 630 tractor-trailers move through the intersection on a given day, resulting in some asking if a traffic signal could be installed at the intersection, particularly since Courthouse Road is used as a cut through to get to the central portion of the county by some drivers, and vice versa.

Currently, there is a flashing signal at the intersection of New Cox and Courthouse Roads with stop signs on the Courthouse Road approaches but not a traditional traffic signal that manages traffic flow. VDOT representative Bob Spieldenner said that signal was installed in during the 2000s in an

effort to improve safety at the intersection and soon, stop signs will also be added to the median to require drivers crossing New Cox Road to stop before proceeding.

The nearest traffic signal to the intersection would be just east of Sutherland along Cox and Olgers Roads, save the blinking signal at New Cox and Courthouse.

One of the main tools in the pockets of VDOT when it comes to addressing an intersection or other interchange is traffic lights and, in an FAQ section, they explain the goal of the agency is to “find a point where a signal will help more than it will hinder and where it will relieve more congestion than it will cause,” with safety being the top priority of any signal decision.

According to the agency, there are two options for signals – fixed-time and traffic responsive. For fixed-time signals, a green light is assigned to different approaches to the intersection for a predetermined amount of time. They can be set to different times based on peak travel times, as well.

Traffic responsive signals change the lights according to the amount of traffic in each direction. These signals use sensors, like cameras or pavement loops, to detect the number of vehicles and automatically adjust the length of the green time to allow as many vehicles as possible through the intersection before responding to the presence of vehicles on another approach.

In any case, VDOT says they follow “federal guidelines that establish minimum conditions under which a signal installation should be considered,” which include many of the things the transportation does review as part of their signal study process, like traffic data, vehicle speeds, interviews with local police and jurisdiction officials, to name a few.



While some think the logical answer to a dangerous intersection may be to install a traffic signal, VDOT officials explained there are a number of considerations that must be looked at based on guidelines from the Federal government and, in some cases, traffic signals could contribute to issues at problem intersections, if installed.

“Traffic engineers assess whether or not a signal is a proper means of traffic control by carefully evaluating the number of vehicles and pedestrians that use the intersection, physical makeup of the intersection, roadside development, delays experienced by motorists during peak hours, average vehicle speed, and future road construction plans and the number and types of crashes that have occurred,” officials explained while noting traffic lights are not a cure-all for crashes at an intersection.

“Are traffic signals a cure for crashes? Not in all crashes,” they said. “Certain types of crashes can be reduced in number or severity by the installation of a signal, while other types might not be affected. VDOT engineers generally will recommend a traffic signal when crashes involving vehicles approaching from a different direction occur at an abnormally high frequency, but only if a signal

will have a positive effect on safety, and other remedies to prevent these crashes prove unsatisfactory.”

According to data from the Federal Highway Administration, a 2007 study that looked at fatal crashes at intersections found, of the 3,432 deaths in rural areas, 57 percent of those crashes occurred at approaches that featured regulatory signs, such as stop signs, while 27 percent of those deaths occurred at intersections either had no sort of traffic control installed or it was unknown.

Only 14 percent of the fatal crashes that year that occurred in a rural area were at intersections that had some form of a traffic signal installed. The study did not distinguish if the signals were traditional lights that fully managed traffic flow or flashing units.

“Although somewhat intuitive,” the FHWA explained, “data shows that crash fatalities are disproportionate at signalized intersections in urban areas, and a large [percentage] of rural fatalities have regulatory signs as a factor in the crash.”

In an interview regarding the roadway, Spieldenner said they are also looking to installing rumble strips along Courthouse and New Cox Roads to “make drivers pay attention to something, like an intersection, is coming up ahead.”

He added, following a traffic study in 2008, the currently installed flashing signals were installed at the intersection and a hill in the median was removed to help improve sight lines and improve safety at the intersection.

“Every time there is a serious or fatal crash, we work with law enforcement and officials to see if there are any improvements that might be needed,” Spieldenner said.

Speaking specifically about a full signalized intersection, Spieldenner explained, “When you are going for long distances and you suddenly come across a traffic light,” that can contribute to an increased risk of accidents at an intersection like New Cox and Courthouse Roads where the speed limit is 60 miles per hour.

“There are other options we have tried over the years,” he said, pointing to the flashing lights and sighting work and future plans to install a median stop sign and rumble strips in the roadway, noting that current data does not suggest a traffic signal should be installed at the intersection.

Residents, VDOT engage in dialogue over dangerous intersection

By: Michael Campbell | Twitter: [@itsthesoup](#)

Posted: February 20, 2019 | 1:45 p.m.

DINWIDDIE – After several years of accidents, some fatal, at the intersection of New Cox Road and Courthouse Road, residents believe enough is enough and are asking the Virginia Department of Transportation to do something before someone else is injured or killed at the busy crossroad.

Nearly two dozen people attended a special commission meeting at Eastside Enhancement Center in Dinwiddie County last Thursday afternoon, where members of county leadership, along with the county's fire, EMS, and law enforcement arms were joined by members of Virginia State Police and VDOT for a discussion of Dinwiddie transportation matters, with nearly an hour of the meeting dedicated to the intersection of New Cox and Courthouse Road and what can be done to make the intersection safer for those traveling it, this after a fatal accident claimed the life of Dakota Reid, a Dinwiddie High School student and McKenney resident, and left four others injured, and a second crash days prior to last week's commission meeting.

Last week's gathering was less of a formal meeting where members of the general public could only listen to the conversations being had by the members of the commission and more of an open dialogue between the community and VDOT, represented by residency leadership members Scott Thornton and Crystal Smith, moderated by Dinwiddie County Administrator Kevin Massengill, who walked through the intersection's history and how VDOT has been engaged with the county on making it safer despite the continued accidents.

“When you look at this particular intersection, we have been talking about this for the last few years,” he explained. “They have increased the stop sign size and cut the bank back. The notable change is the flashing light there and even with those, we are still seeing us having accidents here.”

The flashing signals were the result of a mid-to-late 2000s traffic study that saw the signals installed to warn drivers on both approaches at New Cox Road and Courthouse of the upcoming intersection, Bob Spieldenner of VDOT told *The Dinwiddie Monitor* in an interview earlier this month, with the bank being cut back to allow for better sight lines for drivers.



Dinwiddie supervisors, residents, and John Reid, the father of Dakota Reid, who died in a crash at the intersection last month listen to County Administrator Kevin Massengill talk about proposals for remedying crashes at New Cox and Courthouse Roads. (Michael Campbell)

With the intersection serving as the location for three fatal crashes and nine total accidents since 2014, according to state data, the question of traffic signalization of the intersection or a speed reduction in the area was floated by residents leading into last week's meeting, two ideas that continue to be declined by VDOT due to specific metrics not being present at the intersection to warrant the action.

Speaking specifically to traffic signals, Thornton with VDOT told residents at last week's committee meeting that the intersection doesn't meet the criteria for a signal, adding it is their belief a signal at the intersection would create more accidents.

VDOT's FAQ section regarding traffic signals spoke to this concern, noting they follow "federal guidelines that establish minimum conditions under which a signal installation should be considered," which include many of the things the transportation does review as part of their signal study process, like traffic data, vehicle speeds, interviews with local police and jurisdiction officials, to name a few, and they are not a cure-all for an intersection that has a history of crashes as the risk of rear-end crashes being higher at a signalized intersection, while not completely eliminating the "T-bone" crashes that are occurring there.

"We want to try and improve the intersection, not move to a different type of crash," Thornton explained as he walked through a presentation about the intersection.

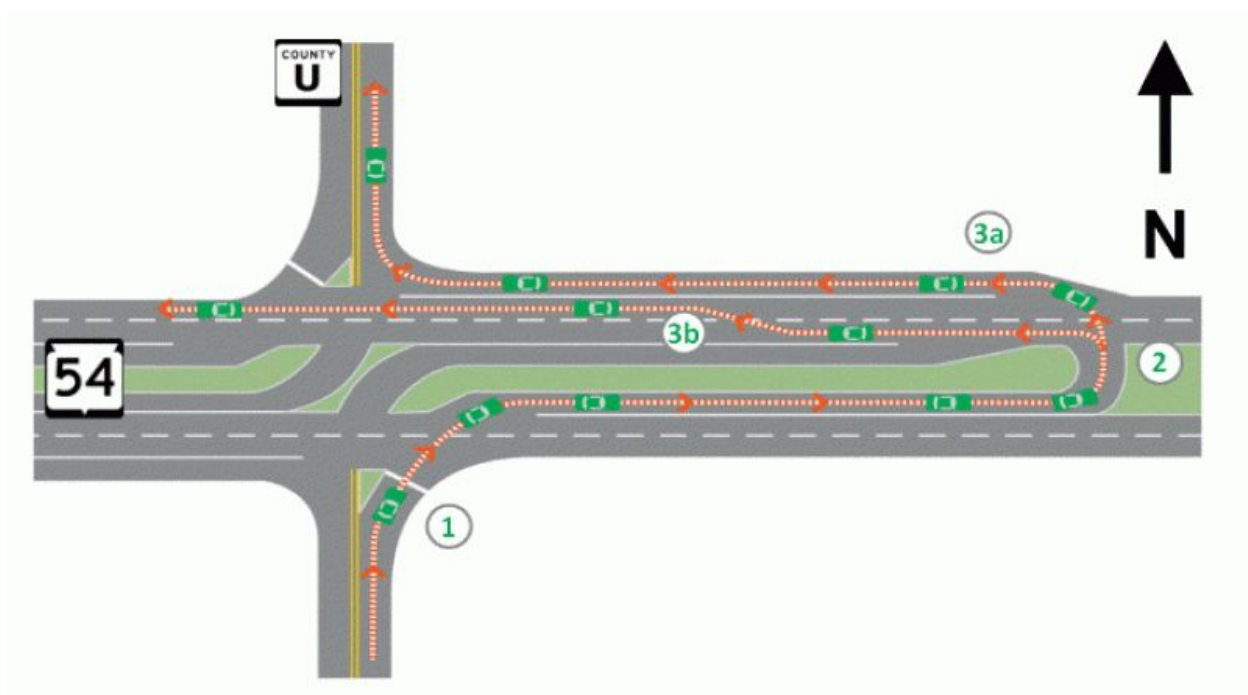
Regarding speed drops, Smith said there are currently no plans for a speed reduction in the area of the intersection. According to state records and signage in the area, from just west of Sutherland to the Dinwiddie-Nottoway line, the speed limit along New Cox Road is 60 miles per hour, with Smith noting the state government designated that stretch of road as a "limited access highway for the movement of commerce" to limit the number of stops and impacts to movement in that area.

In addition, Smith explained people generally "drive at the speed that they feel is safe for the geometry of the road" and setting a speed limit lower than what the 85th percentile of drivers would travel could result in crashes as some drivers would travel the speed limit and others would travel at the speed they feel is appropriate for the roadway.

To that end, the agency did announce some temporary solutions to try and address the issues with crashes at the intersection, with plans to add a stop sign within the median of New Cox Road to require drivers to stop midway through their crossing of New Cox Road to give them a better look at traffic approaching.

They also have plans to add rumble strips to Courthouse Road to alert drivers to be more aware as they approach the intersection.

In the long-term, VDOT envisions an intersection where drivers crossing New Cox Road from Courthouse Road never have to drive directly across the roadway to get to the other side, instead utilizing an “R-Cut” intersection where a driver wishing to travel across New Cox Road to the other side of Courthouse Road would turn right then proceed to a newly created far-left lane and perform a U-turn in a new portion of roadway, proceed with traffic and then turn right onto Courthouse Road, with officials showing residents the intersection in action in South Carolina.



An example of an restricted U-turn, or R-Cut intersection, a long-term idea proposed by VDOT for New Cox and Courthouse Road. If a driver at point 1 (Courthouse Road) wanted to cross the roadway, they would have to drive to point two, make a U-turn, then proceed in the far right lane to return to Courthouse Road, point 3a or they would stay left to go along U.S. Route 460, point 3b (Wisconsin Department of Transportation)

For those in attendance for last week's meeting, the consensus was something needed to be done, but the methods featured a variety of ideas and concepts.

"What you have here is, you are putting it in the hands of the other drivers if they obey the traffic law," John Reid, the father of Dakota Reid said to VDOT and the committee. "I know you say it's not feasible but, if they can do it other places, it can be done here."

He continued, speaking about the idea of the R-Cut intersection over a signal, "It's really not rocket science. The poles and power are there. I am not seeing why we need this big changeover and expense to taxpayers when you could just put in a traffic light and some turning lanes. They have had lots of accidents along U.S. Route 460 in Prince George and they reduced speed there."

"It doesn't control traffic," Smith said in response. "We know people run lights and our goal is to eliminate the possibility of t-bone accidents at that intersection," adding, "Even if we agreed to install traffic lights, that would be a temporary solution. You have situations where people could sit there and no one is coming the other way and they run the lights. Our goal is stopping this from happening."

Sheriff D.T. Adams, who has also been struck by a car in that intersection over a decade ago, said he was in favor of a resident's idea of having increased patrols in the area during school hours.

"I don't mind putting a deputy there as much as I can," he said. "I think the stop sign can help. They will have to stop. If they put them up, I can put a deputy there and we will ticket them if they run the stop sign," noting the idea of a traffic light there doesn't seem like the right solution.

"A traffic light there scares me," Adams continued. "If I am stopped at a light there and a truck is coming down the road and the driver is distracted and hits me ... I think flashing lights and lowering the speed down to 45 miles per hour to let them know the intersection is coming is a good solution."

Others suggested "dangerous intersection" signage and even having flashing signals similar to those in a school zone for the intersection since the intersection is a primary route for many to get to

Dinwiddie High School and Dinwiddie Middle School nearby, many of which Smith and her staff said they would look into.



John Reid, the father of Dakota Reid, a Dinwiddie teenager who died in a crash at the intersection of New Cox and Courthouse Roads talks with VDOT Residency Administrator Crystal Smith at last week's meeting. (Michael Campbell)

For John Reid, his efforts were centered on preventing another family from experiencing the loss his family suffered that January day.

“I understand some of the scenarios they are discussing, like it being hard to put a red light there but, my theory is, if they slow people down, the red light would be beneficial,” he said. “It can be done, but they just have to come up with the plans. With the sun rising and setting, there’s a two-hour period where you can’t see either way.”

“You’re depending on the other drivers as to whether they are going to abide by the traffic laws,” Reid continues. Traffic light, yes, you might have one or two who try to run the light but, that’s a needle in a haystack. Most likely, people are going to abide by the laws. Even still, if they drop the speed limit to 45, then down to 35 right at the light ... no life is worth, adult, child, or senior citizen, the risk.”

VDOT is expected to make more recommendations this week during the Dinwiddie Board of Supervisors regular meeting. Plans for the R-Cut intersection remain preliminary and funding would need to be identified in order to move forward with what the agency sees as a long-term solution.

VDOT: Speed drop, signal ‘not warranted’ at intersection following crashes

By: Michael Campbell | Twitter: [@itsthesoup](#)

Posted: March 27, 2019 | 1:45 p.m.

New signage, markings planned for early April install

DINWIDDIE – The results of a recently requested study for the area in and around an intersection where two crashes have occurred this year, including one that claimed the life of a Dinwiddie High School student and injured several others, have come back and, according to state transportation officials, the stretch of road in question doesn’t meet the threshold for either a traffic light or a reduction of speed.

That information was disseminated to the Dinwiddie County Board of Supervisors last week by the Virginia Department of Transportation and residency representative Scott Thornton during his monthly report to county leaders. In February, supervisors requested a speed study along U.S. Route 460 (New Cox Road) near the intersection of Route 627 (Courthouse Road) on the heels of two crashes, with one of those crashes resulting in the death of Dakota Reid, prompting the teenager’s family along members of the Dinwiddie community who frequent the road to ask VDOT for options to fix what is seen by many as a dangerous intersection, be it a traffic light, speed reduction, or some other form of safety measures.

Speaking specifically to the now-completed speed study, Thornton told county supervisors that VDOT’s engineers found the 85th percentile speed for that section of New Cox Road is 67 miles per hour, meaning 85 percent of all vehicles observed driving through the corridor under free-flowing conditions were found to be traveling that speed at the monitoring point during the study.

The speed limit in that section of New Cox Road is 60 miles per hour and, according to state transportation data, that speed limit is in place from the Dinwiddie-Nottoway County line to just west of Claiborne Road in Sutherland, roughly 21 miles.

When the idea of a speed reduction was floated in the wake of this year's crashes, VDOT representatives explained while some assume dropping the speed limit would result in a reduction in the frequency and severity of crashes, dropping the speed below that 85th percentile speed can create its own problems, including drivers outright not obeying the lower speed.

"Studies have shown that motorists tend to drive at the speed they perceive appropriate for the conditions of the roadway," the agency explained. "When determining speed limits, engineers attempt to set a realistic limit that the majority of drivers will obey and that can be reasonably enforced."

VDOT continued, "A primary consideration is the speed characteristics, particularly the prevailing (free-flowing) speed, of vehicles on the roadway. Absent undue enforcement, posted speed limits that are set much lower than the prevailing speeds will not be obeyed by motorists."

Those points were reiterated by Thornton as he shared the results of the speed study on U.S. Route 460 with county leaders and residents in attendance for last week's meeting.

"The highest speed posted by statute is 60 [miles per hour] so, a reduction in that location is not warranted or recommended," he said.

In regards to the traffic signal study, it was a similar outcome as the agency's engineers found no grounds for a light at the intersection across all of the various criteria that are reviewed to determine if a traffic signal should be installed.

"They evaluated it across the warrants, from the lowest to the highest threshold and, at no time did it meet any single warrant for a signal at that location," Thornton said.

To that end, he said the agency remains committed to bringing options for a permanent fix to the intersection as, in past meetings, VDOT has stated, in their perspective, options such as a traffic light

would be a temporary solution to the roadway's issues, revisiting the restricted crossing U-turn intersection proposed during a transportation committee meeting at Eastside Enhancement Center in February.

According to Thornton, VDOT is preparing to present two options for the restricted crossing U-turn, also referred to as an R-Cut intersection concept at U.S. Route 460 and Route 627. One version of the R-Cut would keep the current turn lanes, allowing for left turns from New Cox Road onto Courthouse Road from either direction.



This concept of the restricted crossing R-Cut intersection was shown to supervisors in February by VDOT. The agency is expected to walk through options, including funding in future work sessions of the county board.

The second concept would close the current turn lanes and require drivers to travel through a new path that would allow drivers on New Cox Road to make a safe U-turn, then turn right onto Courthouse Road.

In general, traffic engineers say restricted crossing U-turn intersections are safer as it greatly reduces the number of conflict points present in a traditional intersection configuration, a point made by Thornton in late February when asked about installing a traffic signal at the intersection.

“The traffic light doesn’t eliminate the conflict points and we do not want to go from unrestricted conflicts to rear-end crashes, like we see at Olgers Road and U.S. Route 460,” which, if traveling eastbound from the New Cox and Courthouse Road intersection, is the next closest full-function traffic light along the roadway.

In either case, Thornton and County Administrator Kevin Massengill said VDOT is looking at all funding sources that can help get the project going as soon as fiscally possible.

“We have also asked [VDOT] to show us how using existing funding to allow us to go ahead and implement either A or B,” Massengill said referring to the two options for the R-Cut intersection. “We’re hopeful to see what the plan would be using existing funds and how that may potentially impact your secondary six-year plan, but also attach a timeline as to when this work will be completed.”

He continued, “The thought was that any fix at this location would probably be beyond the school year. We have asked them to go back, look at that and see if there is any way to do something more expeditiously to get some things implemented there prior to that work.”

Some things discussed at the February committee meeting are close to being implemented, including the larger stop signs and new markings at the intersection that would require drivers to stop at a stop sign in the median between U.S. Route 460, forcing a full stop between the median.

According to Thornton, the signs have been ordered and things like road markings need to be done in warmer conditions. He added the last thing they want to do before moving forward with their temporary improvements, VDOT officials want to meet with Dinwiddie High School’s young drivers to give them a walkthrough of how the stop sign in the median of the roadway will work.

“We will be doing a presentation at the high school,” he said. “What we wanted to do was talk to the student-drivers in advance of Spring Break and let them know how the new signage will look so they

won't go on Spring Break and then come back to all this new signage. We want to talk to them and educate them.”

“We have been working with [Dinwiddie Schools Superintendent] Dr. Weston and [DHS Principal] Johnson on this,” Thornton remarked.

He said they expect to do all the signs and marking work during their Spring Break, which is scheduled for April 1 through 5.

For Dr. Weston, she said she has been very pleased with the engaging role VDOT has taken in regards to improving the intersection and reaching out the school division to educate students.

VDOT has taken an active role in this process and have been very responsive,” she said in an interview. “They want to ensure that they make a thoughtful decision based on data and research, praising them for the plans to visit the high school to answer questions about the road and the changes. “This is another example of a sound community partnership.”

In regards to the R-Cut intersection, transportation officials plan to present options to county leaders during their next budget worksession.

Route 460 safety improvements to begin this summer

By: Michael Campbell | Twitter: [@itsthesoup](#)

Posted: June 30, 2019 | 1:45 p.m.

DINWIDDIE – Plans to reconfigure a busy county intersection in an effort to reduce the number of crashes at the location continue to progress quickly as, following action by supervisors last week, transportation crews have the green light to start their work at one of the county's more problematic intersections.

According to county officials, the Virginia Department of Transportation will likely begin their work at the intersection of Courthouse Road and U.S. Route 460 within the next 30 days, which will consist of a complete reconfiguration of the intersection from its current form to a restricted crossing U-turn intersection, known as an R-CUT for short.

The move comes roughly six months after a series of crashes left one man dead, several others injured, and resulted in thousands of dollars in property damage. In January, Dinwiddie teenager Dakota Reid died in a crash along the roadway after Honda Civic he was riding in was attempting to cross New Cox Road when it was struck by a Lexus traveling along U.S. Route 460. The impact caused both vehicles to spin, with the Civic striking a light pole on the passenger side.

The crash left four people injured and served as an example of the issues many local residents have with the crossing, with some calling the intersection dangerous when speaking to transportation officials.

According to data provided by the state's traffic records system, the intersection of Courthouse and New Cox Road, since 2014 has had nearly a dozen accidents recording in the immediate vicinity of the intersection. Of those, at least six reported some form of injury and three people lost their lives.

Following the death of Reid, the community pressed county leaders and VDOT to take some form of action to address the intersection, resulting in the R-CUT intersection configuration slated to be installed over the summer to reduce the number of conflict points as drivers cross U.S. Route 460 by restricting left turn and through movement from Courthouse Road by requiring all traffic approaching from north and southbound on Route 627 to make a right turn followed by a U-turn along U.S. Route 460 at one of two locations, one for each direction of travel roughly 600 feet away from the intersection.

With this configuration, left turns from either direction of U.S. Route 460 onto Courthouse Road would be allowed through the installation of concrete curbing to separate turning traffic in either direction in the median area.

According to transportation officials, the new R-CUT intersection would dramatically reduce the number of conflicts that currently exist at the four-legged intersection of Courthouse and New Cox Road as the current configuration “has a total of “32 conflict points, including 16 crossing conflict points,” while the R-CUT has “18 conflicts and two crossing conflicts.”

With this information, it is estimated an R-Cut intersection could result in a 44 percent reduction in all crash types and a reduction of angle crashes “could be as high as 80 percent.”

“This intersection experienced a total of 13 crashes between December 1, 2013, and November 30, 2018, which includes 11 angle crashes,” the agency reported. “Three of these crashes were fatalities. [A] contributing cause to these angle crashes [was traffic] failed to yield to the right-of-way of Route 460 traffic while crossing [the] median from Route 627.”

While it is normal for transportation projects of this scale to take some time to be designed and funded before construction can begin, this reconfiguration moved through the state agency’s pipeline quickly, with a design being presented and approved by county leaders, the project being added their six-year secondary road plan, and funding being immediately identified and made available to get the project underway.

In an interview, County Administrator Kevin Massengill confirmed the funding for the R-CUT came from state safety dollars that had been assigned to a project along Ritchie Avenue that was slated to begin this month, featuring their own intersection and traffic signal improvements. He added it was the belief of the county that U.S. Route 460 was a priority project as they shifted the funds from Ritchie Avenue to New Cox and Courthouse Roads.

“What the taxpayer at home should know is the Board putting a greater priority on the projects now, with the acquiesce of VDOT, [we] will have Courthouse Road R-CUT begin much sooner than it would have been,” Massengill detailed last week. “Best case scenario, we would have looked at probably the end of the summer, but now we are going to be looking at having it completed by [the start of the upcoming school year]. School just let out last week, our reaffirming it tonight, and hopefully to start it in the next 30 days and hope to complete before the next school year.”

Following the deadly crash in January, VDOT and the county have been in constant communication about this and other projects within Dinwiddie’s borders about this project, a fact Chairman William Chavis, who also serves on the county’s transportation and safety committee, confirmed following their decision to give U.S. Route 460 a higher priority in the county’s secondary road plan.

“It was a lot of communication with VDOT behind closed doors and in open session so it has been all of us working together on this,” he said. “We have some good people at VDOT along with Kevin tying things together has helped this move smoothly. We have been losing some good people so I hope this can be a solution to this.”

In Chavis and Massengill’s eyes, one of the most powerful drivers of this project gaining the momentum it needed to become a top-priority project for VDOT in the county as the community forum held at Eastside Enhancement Center immediately following the death of Reid, calling it an eye opening experience for both the county and VDOT.

“For many cases, these are members of our community, as well, so it is not just a professional thing, it is personal for us,” Massengill said of their efforts to make the intersection safer over the last few months. “We have had people in our planning department, our fire, EMS and law enforcement departments, our safety committee, which hosted, what I thought was, a phenomenal meeting at

Eastside where we talked but, most importantly, we listened to the community and many of the things that the community had questions about, VDOT looked into and either agreed with them and include it in the design or they didn't agree and they justified it and showed why it couldn't be done [based on] engineering principles.”

Throughout that meeting in February, VDOT residency leaders Crystal Smith and Scott Thornton spoke directly to residents and answered their questions regarding the feasibility of a traffic light being installed at the intersection or reducing the speed limit in the area of the intersection. The agency also performed traffic studies at the request of the board on both of those topics, finding the intersection did not meet any of the state and federal criteria to warrant a full traffic light installation nor did the corridor meet the requirements to allow for a reduction in its current speed limit of 60 miles per hour.

While Dinwiddie High School students were away on Spring Break in April, VDOT did install a series of, what they called, temporary improvements at the intersection to adjust how drivers travel through the intersection.

Drivers seeking to move across New Cox Road now have to come to a complete stop at newly installed stop signs in the median of the roadway, which features new markings to denote the required stop for drivers. In the eyes of VDOT, requiring drivers to make that stop in the median will allow drivers to be able to properly judge traffic and safely navigate the intersection.

In addition, rumble strips were installed to alert drivers to the upcoming intersection, along with warning signage and a safe speed recommendation of 50 miles per hour posted under those new signs along U.S. Route 460.

All of these items were implemented as VDOT worked behind the scenes with their engineering teams to design the R-CUT intersection, which they believe is the right option for the location. According to transportation officials, the project is expected to cost roughly \$300,000.

“From VDOT’s perspective, this eliminates quite a few conflict points that you had at the intersection we have now,” Massengill said. “This, while still having conflict points, but far less and

the nature of those accidents will hopefully be less severe than what we have seen in the past few accidents we have had out there.”

The county administrator praised the state agency for its promptness and level of urgency in working with Dinwiddie to get this safety concerned address for local drivers.

“After one horrific accident, us immediately getting with VDOT and all these disciplines coming together and to do it in such a way that we can get fully funded to get it started now, it shows the importance of communication,” Massengill closed.

As for Ritchie Avenue, Massengill said that intersection will still receive its improvements, which will include a left turn lane toward the Taco Bell restaurant and signal enhancements, sometime in the fall of this year.

Planned RCUT construction delayed as more public input sought

By: Michael Campbell | Twitter: [@itsthesoup](#)

Posted: September 17, 2019 | 12:30 p.m.

VDOT expected to host meeting at Eastside Center next month

DINWIDDIE – The timetable for construction of a restricted crossing U-turn intersection at one of Dinwiddie County’s problem crossroads seems to be up in the air after state transportation officials said they plan to garner additional public input on the planned project.

In a statement last week, Virginia Department of Transportation spokesperson Bethanie Glover said the agency is “planning additional public outreach for the proposed modified RCUT” at the intersection of Courthouse Road and U.S. Route 460, which has been the site of several serious crashes over the last few years, including one this year that injured several people and claimed the life of Dinwiddie High School student Dakota Reid.

“Safety remains VDOT’s highest priority, and we want to make sure the public is engaged before next steps are taken,” she remarked, adding, “A public meeting will be held to collect feedback and give the public an opportunity to discuss the project with VDOT team members.” County officials said they have offered the agency space at Eastside Enhancement Center on Boydton Plank Road for them to host their public information meeting on the project on October 17.

The expected public information meeting in Dinwiddie County would be the first VDOT-hosted meeting on the project since its conception this year, not including updates during the agency’s monthly report to county supervisors or the February 2019 transportation committee meeting where the idea for the RCUT was presented alongside information detailing the pros and cons of speed reductions and traffic light installations.

Since the deadly crash earlier this year, residents have expressed concerns about the safety of the intersection, urging county leaders to press state transportation officials to do something to remedy what many feel is a dangerous crossroad.

Within days of the crash, during a local transportation commission meeting in February, the topic of the crossroad headlined the agenda, with VDOT using their time with Dinwiddie representatives, public safety leaders, and several community members, including John Reid, the father of Dakota, to present the concept of a RCUT intersection, which, if implemented, would restrict left turn and through movement from Courthouse Road by requiring all traffic approaching from the north and south on Route 627 to make a right turn followed by a U-turn along U.S. Route 460 at one of two locations, one for each direction of travel.

With this configuration, left turns from either direction of U.S. Route 460 onto Courthouse Road would be allowed through the installation of concrete curbing to separate turning traffic in either direction in the median area.

The concept presented during the February meeting showed an implemented RCUT in South Carolina as a visual of how the intersection would look in comparison to the four-legged intersection currently in place.

During that meeting and in subsequent reports to the county during Dinwiddie Board of Supervisors meetings, the agency's representatives at the residency level, Crystal Smith and Scott Thornton reiterated the results of various studies conducted at the request of county leaders that found no grounds to lower the speed limit along U.S. Route 460 from its current 60 miles per hour threshold in the vicinity of the intersection or to install a traffic light at the location.



February was the first time VDOT presented the idea of the restricted crossing U-turn, or RCUT intersection at Courthouse Road and U.S. Route 460. The meeting, which was a local transportation commission meeting, saw John Reid, the father of a teen killed at the intersection, and others talk to VDOT representatives about their concerns at the intersection. (Michael Campbell)

It was during those reports where VDOT representatives also showed a mock-up of how traffic would flow through the intersection once the RCUT is constructed, with a graphic provided by the agency to the county explaining the U-turn would be installed roughly 750 feet away from the intersection on either side to allow for those traffic motions, and would allow for left turns from U.S. Route 460 to Courthouse Road.

As residents and county officials alike sought to address the issues at the intersection as swiftly as possible, VDOT explained to supervisors through the spring that they would look at funding sources to determine what dollars could be used to fund the project in such a way that could allow for work to start sooner than later. While that research was done, VDOT also implemented some “temporary” improvements, including larger stop signs, new markings that require drivers to stop in the median

before crossing U.S. Route 460 to allow for more time to adequately judge distances, and rumble strips to alert drivers of the approaching intersection.

During the spring, VDOT's Thornton told county leaders that the agency was reviewing two concepts for the RCUT, a traditional RCUT layout as presented in February, and a modified version that would close the current turn lanes and require drivers to travel through the U-turn path and make a right turn onto Courthouse Road, effectively closing the opening in the median at the intersection.

In May, supervisors voted to adopt their six-year road plan with the addition of the New Cox Road intersection improvement project, with a price tag of \$310,000. The following month, transportation officials told the county development on the new intersection would likely begin in late July to early August, with an expected completion well before school resumed after Labor Day, with the project being funded by state safety dollars that had been shifted from a planned project at Ritchie Avenue, where signal work and a new turn lane were slated to be installed.

As August approached, VDOT sought to address concerns raised by drivers and residents in the county by detailing their plans for the roadway, with officials saying in an August interview that the intersection would indeed be developed into a "modified RCUT" intersection, which would eliminate any left turns from U.S. Route 460 to Courthouse Road, with an estimated cost of \$287,000, while reiterating that the RCUT is the best option for the stretch of road in terms of safety.

In addition, the timetable for construction shifted from starting in early August with a completion before schools in Dinwiddie reopened to work starting later that month and running for "approximately four weeks." Since that time, equipment and signage that had been staged in the area likely for the construction project has largely been removed, hinting at a delay.

With VDOT expected to hold a meeting in October per county officials who are providing the gathering space, questions have been raised by locals about the status of the project and if it will indeed be completed in 2019 as the agency's paving season typically concludes in November, and remains on hiatus until April, weather depending.



While the imagery provided by VDOT last month shows what a traditional restricted crossing U-turn, RCUT for short, looks like, officials confirm they will be implementing a “modified RCUT” at Courthouse Road and U.S. Route 460, which “will eliminate all left turn movements.” Signs will be posted at all approaches to guide drivers through the intersection. (Virginia Department of Transportation)

In an interview, County Administrator Kevin Massengill explained the county and supervisors rely on the expertise of VDOT’s traffic engineers to help guide the decisions they make, particularly when it comes to driver safety.

“The board of supervisors takes very seriously the experts on highway safety and when the transportation engineers make these recommendations, the board acted accordingly and swiftly as they could to ensure that this project could, from a local standpoint, have the approvals that it needed to move forward,” he detailed. “We recognize that the citizens need some kind of improvements out here and they seem to be working some,” he said, while noting there have been reports of drivers still disregarding the stop signs installed at the intersection.

“The traffic patterns needs to be adhered to like at any other intersection,” Massengill said.

With construction not moving forward currently as the agency plans for an October public meeting, the county administrator shared his thoughts on the project’s recent delays.

“On the one hand, these are Dinwiddie citizens having questions, so part of me does feel good that VDOT is taking a step back to evaluate it and answer questions that people in our community may have,” he said. “The other part is that I hope the agency is able to swiftly respond and go through their processes so this improvement can be made because people may question what is to happen there, but most people who travel through that intersection feel something needs to be done. We know this is one of the more problematic intersections that we have in this community.”

He added the Dinwiddie Board of Supervisors remains resolute in their position that a speed drop along U.S. Route 460 is needed in the area of the intersection, a position they have had since a speed study found a reduction was not warranted.

“The board unanimously feels that an average motorist speed of 67 miles per hour at that intersection is not ideal,” Massengill remarked. “We feel like people need to slow down going through that intersection.”

Comments show locals want changes at dangerous Rt. 460 intersection

By: Michael Campbell | Twitter: [@itsthesoup](#)

Posted: November 11, 2019 | 1:45 p.m.

DINWIDDIE – New public comments gathered by state transportation officials show Dinwiddie drivers want something done to help make the U.S. Route 460 and Courthouse Road crossing safer but there are differences in how locals believe it should be done.

The information comes from the now-closed public comment period connected to the Virginia Department of Transportation’s plan to build a modified median U-turn at the intersection of Courthouse Road and New Cox Road in an effort to make the crossing safer for drivers in a corridor that has seen its share of serious and deadly crashes.

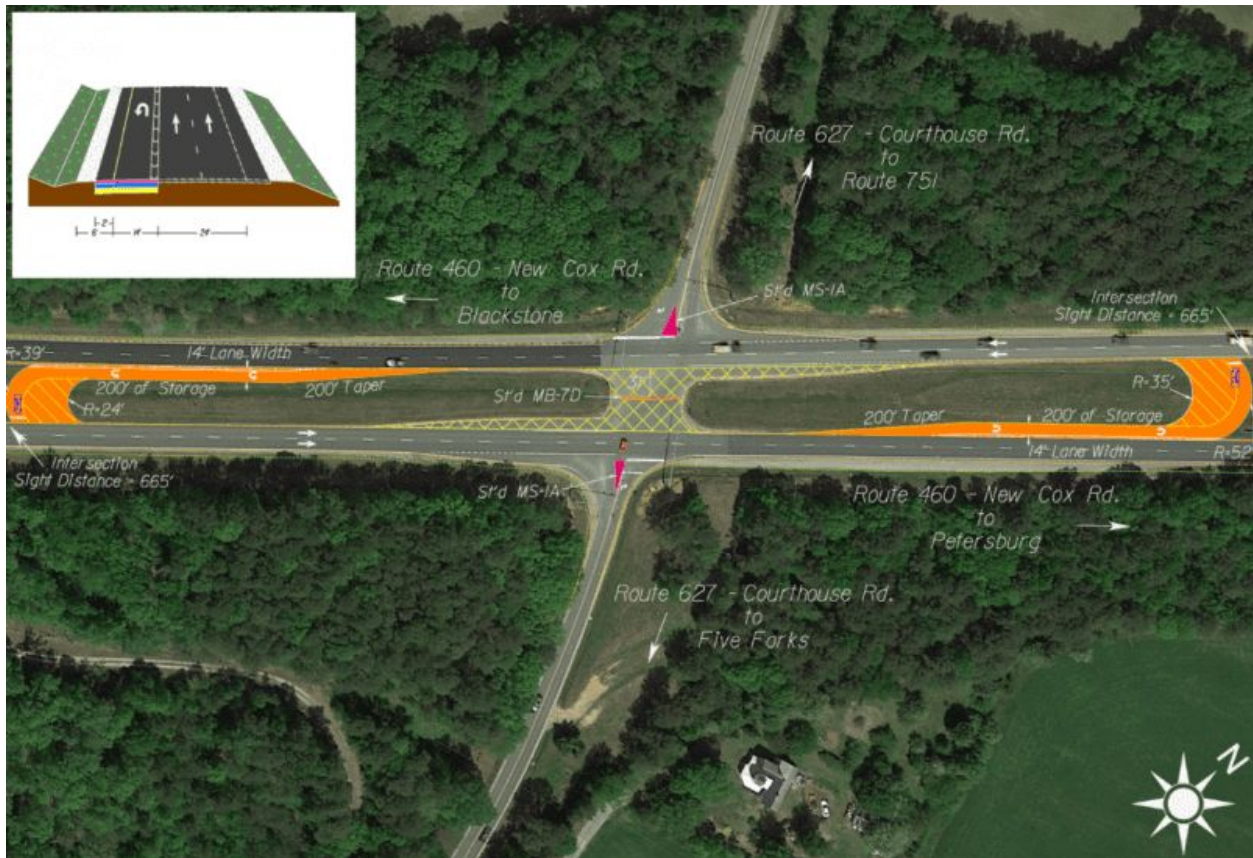
In September, following concerns from the community regarding the project and the agency’s wish to “make sure the public is engaged before next steps are taken,” as stated by VDOT spokesperson Bethanie Glover, a community meeting was held at Eastside Enhancement Center along U.S. Route 1 to help residents learn more about the project and submit their own comments, both written and oral through the end of the month.

When asked, Glover provided an overview of the 43 responses the agency received on the project, saying “Approximately 66 percent of the comments received were in support of an improvement project of some sort,” ranging from the current modified median U-turn proposal, “the current proposed project with some modifications, a traffic signal, speed reduction and speed bumps.”

The remaining 34 percent of responses, according to Glover, “felt that no changes were needed or that increased enforcement from police would be sufficient.”

As she has stated over the last two months since construction of the then-modified restricted crossing U-turn was canceled over the summer so the transportation agency could seek additional comment

from the community, Glover said VDOT's next steps are to discuss the responses they have received with their design team and the county and "make any modifications to the proposed improvements."



While two-thirds of respondents believe something should be done to make the intersection of Courthouse Road and New Cox Road safer, the way they believe it should be done differs based on the answers received during the public comment period, including options that VDOT has previously stated were not able to be implemented at the location.

Following a crash in January that claimed the life of a Dinwiddie High School student and left several others injured, the community pressed county leaders and VDOT for a solution, with residency administrators Crystal Smith and Scott Thornton presenting the concept of the restricted crossing U-turn to a local transportation committee meeting.

Additionally, within weeks of the crash, the Dinwiddie County Board of Supervisors requested that speed and traffic signal studies be conducted along the roadway by VDOT. In March, Thornton

would advise supervisors that a speed reduction, which many, including supervisors and residents as recently as last month's public comment period, have requested in the area of the intersection "is not warranted or recommended."

At that time, Thornton explained that engineers found the 85th percentile speed, or the speed at which 85 percent of traffic in the area was recorded as traveling under free-flowing conditions during the study, was 67 miles per hour, seven above the corridor's current speed limit of 60 miles per hour.

Over the course of the year, VDOT has explained lowering the speed limit below that 85th percentile speed can create its own problems, such as drivers outright ignoring the lower speed and increasing the risk of accidents as the speed differential between drivers traveling at the speed limit and those driving at the speed they feel is safe for the road grows.

"Studies have shown that motorists tend to drive at the speed they perceive appropriate for the conditions of the roadway," the agency explained. "When determining speed limits, engineers attempt to set a realistic limit that the majority of drivers will obey and that can be reasonably enforced."

VDOT continued, "A primary consideration is the speed characteristics, particularly the prevailing (free-flowing) speed, of vehicles on the roadway. Absent undue enforcement, posted speed limits that are set much lower than the prevailing speeds will not be obeyed by motorists."

Additionally, Smith told residents at the February transportation committee meeting that portion of U.S. Route 460 had been designated as a "limited access highway for the movement of commerce" by the General Assembly in an effort to limit the number of stops or other impacts to movement in the area.

Even with those assertions by the state transportation agency, officials and residents alike believe a speed reduction is needed in that area, with County Administrator Kevin Massengill explaining the board of supervisors' position on the matter in September, days after the project was delayed for additional public comment.

“The board unanimously feels that an average motorist speed of 67 miles per hour at that intersection is not ideal,” Massengill remarked, referring to VDOT’s findings in March. “We feel like people need to slow down going through that intersection.”

Since February, one month after the deadly crash at the intersection, questions about traffic signals and the possibility of installing one at the corner of Courthouse and New Cox Road to help deal with what some see as a dangerous crossing in the county. Currently, a flashing signal is place, which was installed during the 2000s to address safety concerns at the intersection at that time.

Alongside the speed study, a separate traffic signal study was conducted at the intersection prior to the installation of temporary improvements that were a holdover while VDOT and the county discussed a more permanent solution, which was comprised of new stop signs and markings that require drivers to come to a stop in the median before proceeding, rumble strips, and other modifications.



According to Thornton, that study, which uses Federal Highway Administration's Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices as a guideline for determining if a given intersection does, in fact, need a traffic signal, found no grounds to install a full-functioning traffic light at the intersection.

"They evaluated it across the warrants, from the lowest to the highest threshold and, at no time did it meet any single warrant for a signal at that location," Thornton said at the time. In past conversations with The Dinwiddie Monitor, VDOT representatives said they agency's engineers look at a number of metrics, including the number of vehicles that use the crossroad, the physical characteristics of the roadway, traffic delays in the area during peak hours, and roadside development, and other data when determining the need for a traffic signal in a given location.

"The traffic light doesn't eliminate the conflict points and we do not want to go from unrestricted conflicts to rear-end crashes, like we see at Olgers Road and U.S. Route 460," which, if traveling eastbound from the New Cox and Courthouse Road's intersection, is the next closest full-function traffic light along the roadway," Thornton explained.

When asked if VDOT would consider a speed reduction or traffic signal at the location, given the feedback received during the public comment period, VDOT's Glover noted the results of the past studies but, she added, "all comments are being taken into consideration as adjustments are made to the existing project proposal."

"Ultimately, the safest and most cost-effective option is what will be proposed and discussed as we move forward," Glover closed, with the project expected to cost roughly \$300,000, according to the agency's calculations.

With the public comment period closed, there is no timetable for when construction activities or alterations to their plans for the intersection, if any, would occur.

U.S. 460 improvement refined following public comments

By: Michael Campbell | Twitter: [@itsthesoup](#)

Posted: November 27, 2019 | 1:45 p.m.

VDOT, county hopeful to engage in further community dialogue during winter

DINWIDDIE – The Virginia Department of Transportation has made further adjustment to a proposed reconfiguration of the intersection of U.S. Route 460 and Courthouse Road following feedback from residents during last month’s public information meeting and comment submission period, with officials touting the changes as an improvement over what has previously been shown to the public.

Last week, VDOT Residency Administrator Scott Thornton presented an updated aerial diagram of the proposed modified median u-turn to be installed at the intersection of New Cox and Courthouse Road, the site of several serious accidents, including a deadly crash that claimed the life of Dakota Reid, a Dinwiddie High School student in January.

In the new design, U.S. Route 460 would be reduced from two lanes in either direction to a single travel lane roughly 820 feet in either direction of the proposed u-turns through intersection and resume its two-lane configuration 500 feet beyond the u-turn location as drivers depart the crossroads. According to Thornton, this lane reduction came about through comments from residents.

“One of the comments that we heard at the public meeting, as well in the written and mailed-in comments was ‘what about slow-moving vehicles,’ ‘I already have to cross so much real estate in traffic, how do I get across this lane with traffic running up on us at 67 miles per hour,’” he remarked, explaining this lane drop would “let traffic pull out [from Courthouse Road], get into that side lane as, at that point, they are only cross about 12 feet of open real estate. That will allow them to get up to speed and go ahead and make the u-turn movement.”

In addition, Thornton said, based on responses from those who handle heavy equipment, such as farmers, loggers, and bus drivers, adjustments were made to both of the median u-turn locations through “increasing the radius and amount of pavement being put in so, that will accommodate larger vehicles.”

“With us dropping that lane,” Thornton said, referring to reducing U.S. Route 460 to a single, 60 mile-per-hour in the area of Courthouse Road as part of the MUT, “you’re going to have 820 feet both ways, which is the design recommendation for site distance on that road. The taper is going to start 1,000 feet before that so really, at 1,800 feet before you get to this intersection, we are going to taper traffic down into that right lane.”

“When you come out of that u-turn, you can use that yellow-striped area to pull in, get up to speed and you won’t have to worry about traffic coming in behind you. You can go ahead, make the merge movement and come in,” he remarked.

Thornton also told supervisors and residents they plan to widen the radius of Courthouse Road to support the expected increase in right-turn traffic through the implementation of this proposal.

“That should help us with those turning vehicles,” he said. “I know now, even without it, we would be seeing quite a few potholes so, this will give folks more pavement to use when they come through.”

With a near-capacity audience, Thornton reiterated that this kind of intersection has been found to reduce crashes by nearly a third, citing studies from the Federal Highway Administration. Additionally, research found fatal and injury crashes, along with angle crashes are reduced by 58 and 86 percent, respectively, with many other crashes changing “from highly severe incidents to sideswipe and rear-end crashes.”

“Those are your property damage crashes and folks are still walking away from those,” Thornton said of sideswipe and rear-end crashes referred to in his report, while also noting there are nearly a dozen similar restricted crossing u-turn intersections in development in the state and three that are open to

traffic, with seven others being prepared for submission under the state's SmartScale transportation funding program.

As of August, one of those RCUTs that is currently being constructed is in Chesterfield County along Route 10 at Old Bermuda Hundred Road.

Thornton reiterated remarks from VDOT spokesperson Bethanie Glover who spoke to The Dinwiddie Monitor earlier this month and confirmed the agency had received just over 40 responses on the project during October's public comments period, with roughly two-thirds of respondents wanting to see some form of improvement, be it the MUT, a traffic signal, speed reduction along U.S. Route 460, other other remedy. The remaining 34 percent, according to VDOT "did not want to see any change to the intersection" beyond what has been done, which includes stop signs in the median area to require drivers to make an additional stop before crossing, rumble strips, and other improvements, and an increased law enforcement presence was needed in the area.

According to Thornton, public comments are playing a vital role in the project's development.

"Based on comments we received, VDOT made modifications to the design," he remarked. "While we were not able to incorporate every single requirement we received, our traffic engineers, our design folks, people at the residency looked through the design and comments, and what I am showing you addresses the design a lot of those comments we received."

"We feel like, at the end of the day, this is a better project because of public involvement we received on October 17," he said, adding, in regards to concerns about the low nature of the project's cost, approximately \$300,000, "We were not given a dollar figure to hit for this project. We were given a goal to reduce accidents at this intersection and provide the best project going forward to do that. The project is financially friendly for this location."

The project was funded through state safety dollars that had been dedicated to an intersection improvement project along Ritchie Avenue, according to county leaders.

Last week's board meeting and its public comments period served as a window into likely what some of those 43 respondents said to VDOT in October following their public information session, with

some presenting photos and their own research as part of their proposals to the agency, with some asking for speed reductions or for both the county and transportation agency to look at other options before moving forward with this proposal. The majority of speakers last Wednesday stood united in saying they want to ensure all stakeholders have a voice in the process, from everyday commuters, to bus drivers, to log truck drivers, to motorcyclists.

Dakota's father John Reid also spoke during last week's meeting, sharing his thoughts nearly a year after losing his son at the crossroads.

"I agree with a lot of the things that have been said on social media, for example, the money issue. There is always going to be a money issue, no matter what direction we go," he said. "It is not about the individuals who have the perfect driving records or those who have driven for 25, 30 years. It is about the inexperienced drivers who don't take the time to think before they act or the elderly, whose reaction time may be half that of a person my age."

Reid continued, "It is about protecting the individuals who get through that intersection, who abide by the law like they are supposed to. We have to protect the ones who do abide by the law. With VDOT trying to come with a plan with the county, doing nothing is definitely not the answer. It is a liability."

"Folks in the county are starting to pay attention to things that are being left unsaid and undone and I know you on board with trying to solve this problem. I express my sympathies to you guys on some of the hard decisions you are going to have to make from here on out. I truly hope if you find that something will be done," the father closed.

Given that winter has set in, both VDOT and supervisors said this allows more time to glean comments from the community and further refine the design before the spring of next year, when construction traditionally resumes in the Commonwealth.

"We are continuing, as we move forward with this project, to work with staff, the Virginia Loggers Association, the school transportation [department], and the agriculture community," Thornton said.

"We feel what has been presented today is better than what we brought forward on [October] 17 and

continued public input is going to improve this project. So, working with staff, in the future, we do want to have another meeting as we further refine this project and make it better.”

The latest renderings and information has been added to the Virginia Department of Transportation’s website on a page dedicated to the project, which can be found at <http://viriniadot.org/projects/richmond> listed under “proposed” projects.

Supervisors, residents critical of October VDOT meeting's format

By: Michael Campbell | Twitter: [@itsthesoup](#)

Posted: December 3, 2019 | 3:45 p.m.

County plans traditional town hall format for future meetings on project

DINWIDDIE – While members of the Virginia Department of Transportation said feedback from a public information session last month helped shape a proposed road improvement for the better, some supervisors and residents were not pleased with the format of October's meeting and hoped future meetings could be conducted differently.

During last week's board of supervisors meeting, vice-chair Daniel Lee shared his own concerns along with those of his constituents regarding the October 17 public information meeting hosted by the transportation agency in connection with a proposal to install a modified median u-turn at the intersection of New Cox and Courthouse Road in the county, the site of several serious and fatal crashes.

The meeting at Eastside Enhancement Center was to provide an opportunity for residents to share their thoughts on the proposal, get a close-up look at schematics and diagrams that detail the project's scope and other key information, along with being able to leave comments to be considered as the project is developed in a cafe-style format, as opposed to a traditional town hall format. According to VDOT spokesperson Bethanie Glover and later reiterated by residency administrator Scott Thornton last week, a total of 43 comments were received on the project through the open response period, which ran until the end of October.

At last week's meeting, Thornton said the comments offered valuable feedback for the project, which remains in development.

“We feel like, at the end of the day, this is a better project because of public involvement we received on October 17,” he remarked, saying later in his presentation to the board, “We feel what has been presented today is better than what we brought forward on [October] 17 and continued public input is going to improve this project. So, working with staff, in the future, we do want to have another meeting as we further refine this project and make it better.”



One of the complaints about October’s public information session hosted by VDOT was the room the meeting was held in, with some finding it cramped and difficult at times to see renderings of the proposed intersection. (Michael Campbell)

With the prospect of another public meeting on the horizon, Supervisor Lee said he was not pleased with how the public engagement session went at Eastside last month in terms of its organization, calling the process “not good.”

“I met with VDOT about a week ago and I was pleasantly surprised that the first words out of their mouth was [to] apologize for the public hearing they had at Eastside,” he said. “I know some of you were there and I think the whole process was not good. Board members were not happy with how that whole meeting went so, I think really and truly in my mind, I started the process all over again.”

He continued, “What you have here,” referring to updated designs for the MUT that were presented last week, “is the start of the process again with VDOT and I want to see some RCUTs and understand them a little better. I really want to take the time from now until spring to make sure, if this is what we are going to do, that it is the right thing to do and if it isn’t, make a decision on what we are going to do but, I do think the public needs to be a part of this going forward.”

In an interview after the meeting, Lee went into more detail regarding the concerns he and some constituents had with VDOT’s meeting in October, which was the first meeting hosted by the agency in regards to this project.

“Part of the problem was the room was so small for an anticipated crowd of people so, when people tried to get to the stations, the overall room was so crowded, they couldn’t get to them and there was frustration because they couldn’t see the diagrams, so I think that was a problem,” he said.

During the meeting, county administrator Kevin Massengill remarked the county “was extremely appreciative that, even in that meeting, as tough as it was that night and the way that it was designed,” there were “really good recommendations” provided by the community but, future meetings may be held in a more traditional town hall format, where information is presented and the audience can ask questions.

“The cafe-style is the way that the Virginia Department of Transportation does their public input sessions,” Massengill explained, elaborating, “What we have decided as a county, in conjunction with VDOT, there is something, at least from the county’s perspective, about the old-fashioned public hearing where, even as we go through the design and we commit this moving forward, we will have a setting like tonight where people can see the design, ask questions, VDOT engineers [can answer], and everyone gets to hear the question and the answer.

“Ultimately, for the board of supervisors, there is something pure in that in being able to figure out what is the right direction to go in,” the county administrator added.

Following last week’s meeting, Lee supported the idea of having town hall-style meetings for the project going forward.

“Once we get to where the board has made up their minds which direction we are headed, then we can have a meeting like this and hear public comments again to decide if we are headed in the right direction,” Lee remarked, adding he is appreciative to VDOT for slowing down the pace of the project and obtaining additional comments from the community as the project had been set to be constructed in August before the agency changed its posture, wishing to receive more feedback before proceeding.

“We wanted to do something with a young man losing his life and do the right thing but doing the wrong thing in a hurry was probably the wrong thing to do, I feel like slowing makes it a lot better,” he closed.

No specific timetable for additional public meetings on the project have been set.

As concerns mount, Del. Aird joins VDOT, county officials at Rt. 460

By: Michael Campbell | Twitter: [@itsthesoup](#)

Posted: December 11, 2019 | 3:45 p.m.

Possible speed drop proposal floated by VDOT engineers at meeting

DINWIDDIE – Weeks after the Virginia Department of Transportation [shared another revision](#) to the proposed modified median intersection planned to be installed at the site of several serious accidents, Delegate Lashrecse Aird (D-63) made her way to Dinwiddie to see the crossroads first-hand after her office received emails regarding concerns about the transportation agency's plans.

Last Wednesday, Aird joined VDOT residency administrators Crystal Smith and Scott Thornton, along with Sheriff D.T. Adams, Dinwiddie Fire and EMS Chief Dennis Hale, County Administrator Kevin Massengill along with representatives from the Virginia Loggers Association for a meeting at the intersection of U.S. Route 460 and Courthouse Road to learn more about VDOT plans for a modified median intersection, which the agency believes will make the crossing safer in the wake of recent crashes, including one that claimed the life of a Dinwiddie teenager in January.

Since the spring, VDOT proposed the development of a restricted crossing U-turn intersection for the crossroad, before opting to refine their plans to then eliminate left-turn movement completely through the use of a modified median U-turn, with many of the recent refinements to the intersection coming since August, when the agency opted to delay construction of the RCUT to allow for additional public comment.

During Aird's visit last week, she was briefed on the history of the intersection by Chief Hale and Sheriff Adams, who are intimately familiar with the area given their combined experience with emergency response and selective enforcement at the intersection.

“There are a couple of different types of accidents we see here,” Hale detailed. “What used to happen a lot years ago was vehicles leaving the southbound side of Courthouse Road and striking people as they went by [on U.S. Route 460]. It is like they didn’t even see them.”

He continued, “What we have seen more recently, the lights seem to do a lot with fixing this,” referring to the flashing signal installed at the intersection currently, “as we saw the number of accidents go down initially but, what we are seeing now is people are crossing, getting to the [median], and are getting struck by westbound traffic,” noting that several accidents prior to the temporary changes that were put in at the intersection in the spring – which included stop signs in the median to force drivers to observe oncoming traffic before crossing – had similar characteristics.

Since those changes, Hale said they have only had one accident at the intersection.

“What was happening in some of the accidents is people would stop [at the stop sign on Courthouse Road] and they have pretty good sight distance all the way to the end but, they weren’t stopping in the [median]. They were going all the way across so, trying to judge that distance with that speed, we just feel like that was the issue so stopping them in the middle was an interim fix until something else could be done.”



Dinwiddie Fire and EMS Chief Dennis Hale briefs Delegate Lashrecse Aird on the history of crashes at the intersection of U.S. Route 460 and Courthouse Road, surrounded by members of the county sheriff's office, county administration, VDOT and representatives from the Virginia Loggers Association. (Michael Campbell)

That “something else” continues to look increasingly like the implementation of a modified median U-turn intersection, which would eliminate left and through traffic movement at the intersection and require drivers to utilize installed u-turns on either side of U.S. Route 460 to then make their way onto Courthouse Road.

Since October, when the public was able to provide feedback on the project to VDOT, the plans have been revised, with current renderings showing U.S. Route 460 would be reduced to a single lane of 60-mile-per-hour traffic in the approach to the intersection in either direction and resuming two-lane travel roughly 500 feet after drivers pass the u-turn locations.

For the logging community, which is a key part of the county's economic makeup, both the current intersection configuration and the current proposals present challenges for drivers, according to representatives from the Virginia Loggers Association who were on-hand for last week's tour. In speaking with Aird and others, it was revealed by the association the current layout, which requires drivers to stop in the median before proceeding, causes their trailers to protrude into a travel lane of U.S. Route 460.

As a result, at times, log trucks and other vehicles with extended loads will stop at the Courthouse Road stop sign and then proceed through the intersection without stopping at the installed median stop sign, something witnessed by Aird, VDOT and local officials during their rush-hour visit to the crossroads.

When it comes to the proposed layout of the intersection, VLA has questioned if there is enough room within the u-turn paths to allow trucks to safely move through the intersection, with those concerns being shared by bus drivers and local farmers who regularly use the intersection to transport large farm equipment, according to county officials.

In November, Thornton told the Dinwiddie County Board of Supervisors the two u-turn locations were adjusted based on feedback garnered during October's public comment period, saying they have "[increased] the radius and amount of pavement being put in so that will accommodate larger vehicles."

Another aspect of the design that has drawn questions is the concern of reducing traffic down to one lane through the area of the intersection without reducing the speed limit, with some residents pointing out after VDOT's November report to the board of supervisors that they are concerned there may be a significant speed difference between someone traveling along U.S. Route 460 at speed and another driver exiting the u-turn and transitioning over to the right to turn onto Courthouse Road.



The current version of the proposed roadway shows plans to reduce U.S. 460 to one lane in each direction to help drivers in the U-turn or turning right from Courthouse Road be able to transition onto New Cox Road. Currently, the speed limit will remain 60 miles per hour but, VDOT officials said they are working with traffic engineers to determine if a five mile-per-hour drop is possible, from 60 to 55. (VDOT)

Reducing the speed limit has been something the county has vocally supported for months, with County Administrator Massengill saying earlier this year, “The board unanimously feels that an average motorist speed of 67 miles per hour at that intersection is not ideal. We feel like people need to slow down going through that intersection.” In the spring, following a county request for a speed study, VDOT told the county that a speed reduction at that section of U.S. Route 460 was “not warranted,” along with warrants not being met for a full-functioning traffic signal.

The agency has maintained that stance throughout the development of the RCUT, adding that the road has been designated by the General Assembly as a limited-access highway for the transport of commerce.

“There are still a lot of folks who believe a signalized intersection is the ideal fix here but, as far as VDOT is concerned, we feel like this is the best option to get the best results,” referring to the modified median u-turn configuration, saying a traffic light “would cost much more, you would still have the potential for conflict points with t-bones and fatalities, and we don’t meet the warrants for a signal anyway.”

According to Smith, a traffic signal, if warrants were met, would require the installation of new poles and other infrastructure, likely costing upwards of several hundred thousand dollars as the current poles were not designed to carry the weight of traditional traffic signals and, due to the width of the intersection, Thornton said it’s likely poles would have to be installed in the median.

When asked about a speed reduction by Aird and Sheriff Adams, Smith explained, “The concern here would be you would have the few people who would abide by the speed limit and the rest of them would be flying up on [other drivers] doing the speed limit they feel comfortable with,” referring back to the 85th percentile speed – which is the speed VDOT found 85 percent of drivers recorded through the area during their study to be traveling, 67 miles per hour.

In speaking with the delegate and local leaders, Smith did not rule out some form of speed reduction, saying “We have been working with our traffic engineers to see if there is a way to lower it a little bit.”

“If they can come to an agreement, it probably wouldn’t be less than 55 [miles per hour] and we probably wouldn’t see a [significant drop] in the 85th percentile,” she said, adding, as part of the modified median u-turn, they would “add double sets of rumble strips as you approach the intersection, which would naturally give people the effect of letting off the gas a little bit.”

For Adams, a lower speed limit is more enforceable for him and his deputies.

“If they lower the speed limit, I can enforce it,” he shared with Delegate Aird. “Right now, they can’t enforce it and I have heard some talk made by the state that says we are not enforcing the speed down here. We are. We right hundreds of tickets a month out here and I have a big selective enforcement program here. If they lower the speed limit, we will enforce it.”

In addition to the speed concerns and the radius of the u-turns, concerns about effectively closing the single lanes were raised as current plans call for traditional painted stripping to denote the closed section of roadway with officials arguing that would likely not be enough to stop a driver from making an illegal pass in the area of the intersection along U.S. Route 460. During last week’s meeting, Smith said she believes those occurrences would be extremely isolated.

“I don’t think you will see a whole lot of people doing that,” saying it’s not seen in areas with similar configurations elsewhere in the district. “We haven’t heard about it and we haven’t seen accidents from it.”

“I think they realized it is so financially friendly,” Smith said referring to the use of innovative intersections, “and the results that you get from that design you don’t see from other intersection designs so I think it is being promoted because of that,” adding that the intersection is “friendly to modification in the future.”

“Not that we design for changes but, if the fire department were to run into issues, we can make some modifications and things like that,” she explained to the delegate, with Thornton adding, when asked about the construction of the intersection, it is VDOT’s expectation to start “as soon as temperatures are favorable in March or April” of next year.

“We think we can get it built in about a month or a month-and-a-half,” he said, with Smith noting the project would be constructed “with state forces.” In October, VDOT said the project would cost \$295,000 based on the design presented at that time, with roughly \$300,000 in funding from a project along Ritchie Avenue being rerouted to help pay for design and construction.



Delegate Lashrecse Aird (D-63), seen on the left, speaks with VDOT Residency Administrator Crystal Smith regarding plans for a modified median U-turn at the intersection of U.S. 460 and Courthouse Road after concerns were shared with her office from local residents. (Michael Campbell)

While VDOT, according to Smith, “has met its obligations” when it comes to public meetings, referring to the meeting held in October at Eastside, she said VDOT will work with the county in holding another public meeting in February to bring forth any changes or adjustments to the current design. The meeting is one Aird and her office plans to attend even though the General Assembly will be in session after hearing from concerned residents, which led to her visiting the intersection last week.

“I saw a number of emails come to my office with questions about the proposal that had been put forth and you can’t really capture the essence of how constituents were feeling just by virtue of the

email so I wanted to say I personally understood and that I had the most accurate information as possible to respond,” she said.

The delegate continued, “Even on my way here, I could see how that intersection feels problematic. I think that, literally, the proposal that is being put forth has an impact on lives and it’s a difference between life and death. As much as we can alleviate any other accidents and or any other loss of life, it is just that important. It is not just another change, it is at a level of seriousness.”

Having a broad spectrum of leaders from Dinwiddie, including public safety, law enforcement, and the logging community, and VDOT on-hand last week was important for Aird during her visit to the intersection.

“All of these people have an entity involved in the decision being made here,” she said. “We are collectively all responsible for the final decision that gets made here so to be here, drive through it, and see it and observe it helps guide us through the decision making process in addition to hearing from the experts.”

Local leaders open up about proposed U.S. 460 intersection plans

By: Michael Campbell | Twitter: [@itsthesoup](#)

Posted: December 18, 2019 | 1:45 p.m.

If speed limit is lowered, 'we can enforce it,' Sheriff Adams says

DINWIDDIE – Next month marks one year since the death of Dinwiddie High School student and McKenney resident Datoka Reid, who lost his life in a crash at the intersection of New Cox Road and Courthouse Road, a crash that also left several others seriously injured.

That crash, along with the intersection's history of serious accidents, some deadly, prompted a call for action from the community to local leaders and ultimately, the Virginia Department of Transportation, resulting in the current proposal from the agency to develop and construct a modified median U-turn.

The proposed layout will eliminate left turn and through travel at the intersection by requiring drivers wanting to travel to or from Courthouse Road to utilize a pair of installed U-turns along U.S. Route 460, then blend onto, based on current renderings, a one-lane section of New Cox Road before proceeding to their destination.

While VDOT has repeatedly reiterated their stance, including in a July 2019 intersection evaluation report obtained by The Dinwiddie Monitor, that the proposal is the best option for the intersection based on historical crash data and a "pattern of angle crashes over the years" where "motorists on... Route 627 failed to yield right of way of vehicles traveling on Route 460," others have asked for an alternative to be considered, ranging from a decrease in the area's 60 mile per hour speed limit to traffic signals.

Two weeks ago, Adams, Supervisor Harrison Moody, Fire and EMS Chief Dennis Hale, and several others joined Delegate Lashrecse Aird (D-63) and VDOT Residency Administrators Crystal Smith

and Scott Thornton at the intersection after the delegate requested a visit to the intersection with transportation and county officials to glean more about the crossing after receiving concerns from constituents in her district.



VDOT Residency Administrator Scott Thornton observes traffic moving through the intersection of Courthouse Road and New Cox Road, which has been at the center of plans to reconfigure the intersection in an effort to make it safer and reduce serious accidents. (Michael Campbell)

After learning that VDOT has been working with their traffic engineers to see if, according to Smith, “they can lower [the speed limit] a little bit,” the sheriff said his deputies would police that lowered speed limit through their selective enforcement programs. She did stress that the speed limit would, if approved, only be lowered by five miles per hour from its current 60 mile per hour threshold, which is also the maximum it can be set based on state law but it is VDOT’s belief that a reduced speed

would not result in a significant change in the prevailing speed of drivers in the area, which is 67 miles per hour based on a February speed study.

In an interview, Adams said he wouldn't consider himself a traffic engineer but he believes whatever is developed at the intersection will have "its own set of problems."

"If you put this modified median U-turn in, [drivers] still have to get over to go around," he said, referring to the motion a typical driver would make to navigate the intersection from either Courthouse Road or New Cox Road. "I was just trying to think of alternative ways to fix the problem without doing it but, I am not an engineer."

The sheriff did say the improvements installed by VDOT in the spring, which included a new set of stop signs and markings in the median of New Cox Road requiring drivers to stop and observe approaching traffic before crossing, rumble strips, among others, has improved travel in the area and reduced the number of accidents at the intersection.

"What they have done has really helped. The accidents have really slowed down so," adding that he hopes VDOT would consider lowering the speed limit along the roadway.

According to Chief Hale, since the changes were installed, there has only been one accident at the crossroad. While accidents appear to have been reduced, the improvements have created their own problem as vehicles with extended loads, like logging trucks, struggle to position themselves at the median stop without blocking a portion of U.S. Route 460 behind them, resulting in some trucks disregarding the stop completely.

On the subject of dropping the speed in the area, Adams commented, "I just feel like [if] they lowered the speed limit here, that would help a lot because I could then start enforcing it and, once we get them on board, you will get a ticket if you come through here speeding. I have deputies on 460 all the time writing tickets," while pointing to efforts to lower the speed limit along U.S. Route 460 just west of Disputanta in Prince George County, which is 50 miles per hour.

“If you go out to Disputanta, it is pretty similar to what you see here. It might not be [absent] of businesses like this is here, but there are very few businesses there and everybody knows, if you go down Route 460 East, you better slow down because if not, you are going to get a ticket,” he said.

To that end, when comparisons have been drawn between New Cox Road, a four-lane roadway separated by a large median, and that stretch of County Drive in Prince George, which features the same amount of lanes without a dividing median, VDOT has pointed to the number of businesses connecting to the road and the lack of a median as factors that supported the decision to lower the speed limit to 50 in that area.

Speaking for himself, Adams said he would like to see VDOT try a speed reduction alongside with the current improvements in place before proceeding with the implementation of the MUT, which, according to VDOT’s Thornton, is slated for construction around “March or April.”

“I think it should be considered and maybe tried first before they go through all of the expense of putting in this proposal. They lower that speed, I will have my deputies out here,” the sheriff said.

For Supervisor Moody, whose electoral district the intersection falls within the confines of, he echoed the sentiments of the sheriff and past comments from County Administrator Kevin Massengill, who told The Dinwiddie Monitor in September that the county board of supervisors believes “some form of speed drop is needed.”



Dennis Hale, Dinwiddie's Fire and EMS chief, walks a delegation of local leaders and VDOT representatives through the intersection's history with accidents. (Michael Campbell)

“Personally, I think a reduction going through this area would help, especially with the modified MUT that they are planning that has a merge lane,” he said. “People are going to have to merge in back down a little ways and it is going to be good to have a reduction so they will know to get over instead of just rolling on through.”

Moody continued, “VDOT is probably going to say they are not going to slow down but I think if you reduce it, it will give the sheriff's department an opportunity to patrol it some, that, in itself, will help.”

When looking at the current proposal, which calls for New Cox Road to be reduced to a single lane in both directions on the approach and departure of the intersection, Moody believes that will help

reduce the occurrence of sideswipe-type accidents as drivers merge onto U.S. Route 460 but he thinks the MUT should be paired with a speed drop.

“If you do that, I think you do need to have a speed reduction because you are dealing with higher speed traffic only in one lane and I am supposed to get over into it and they have to stay in that one lane, so I think it is important to slow them down a little bit,” the supervisor shared. “I really think they should consider that.”

Moody, who has served on the county board of supervisors for several decades, said this topic has resulted in a robust conversation among those living in his district.

“This is one issue where I have heard from more citizens than any other issue in a long time,” he shared. “It is very personal for a lot of people. A lot of people use this road and have feelings and opinions on what should and shouldn’t be done so we have to take that into account but we also have to look at the sound science of it when we do make a decision. People do have their opinions, rightfully so, and they have good ideas so if can incorporate some of those ideas into the research, I think we will come out the best way.”

As of now, officials with VDOT said they will continue to refine the project and hope to proceed with construction in the spring, though, during last month’s board of supervisors meeting, County Administrator Massengill did say the county can decide to remove the project from its six-year plan, thus likely ending its implementation.

“So we are trying to balance that with VDOT, being the transportation engineers, saying to this board that it is not a matter of if this happens again, it is a conversation of when it happens again,” he said. “So we are trying to stand in the gap of [asking] should we legislate this through making additional improvements or do it legislate it out and probably look at a speed limit reduction, or do we take some of the additional advice from the public.”

A county-hosted meeting on the proposed roadway improvement project has been tentatively announced for February.

As new year begins, VDOT eyes spring for U.S. 460 intersection changes

By: Michael Campbell | Twitter: [@itsthesoup](#)

Posted: January 8, 2020 | 1:45 p.m.

VDOT 'was comfortable' with plans, ready to install last year before more comment sought

DINWIDDIE – As the new year gets underway, so too does the efforts of the Virginia Department of Transportation as officials work to further refine plans to implement a modified median U-turn at the intersection of U.S. Route 460 and Courthouse Road, with the goal of implementing the intersection configuration in the spring, even as opponents to the concept continue to advocate for options other than MUT, including ones that have been consistently rejected, such as a full-functioning traffic signal, and others that seem to now be back in consideration, like a speed reduction in the area of the intersection.

Just before the Christmas holiday, The Dinwiddie Monitor interviewed members of VDOT's team who are closely involved with the project at the residency level, Crystal Smith and Scott Thornton, along with communications manager Bethanie Glover to get an update on the project after the agency's November presentation to the county board of supervisors and visit from Delegate Lashrecse Aid (D-63) after her office received concerns from residents and area drivers about the MUT proposal.

- **RELATED: [As concerns mount, Del. Aird joins VDOT, county officials at Rt. 460](#)**

“Basically, right now, we are continuing to move forward with the project,” Smith remarked. “We are working with the Virginia Loggers Association, [the agriculture community], the sheriff's office, and school transportation. We are going to continue those communications and making any

modifications that may come out of those partnerships with them. In February, the county plans to hold another public hearing so we can share the final design of where we stand.

Since December, talk of a speed limit reduction has increased from VDOT after previous comments from the agency and documentation showed that a speed drop was “not warranted” for the stretch of roadway, which currently has a limit of 60 miles per hour and, based on a 2019 speed study, drivers typically traveling at 67 miles per hour. While it was not brought up during the November supervisors meeting, the idea of a 5 mile-per-hour drop was mentioned to Del. Aird during her visit with county officials to the intersection.

- **RELATED: March 2019 speed study report – VDOT**

When asked, Smith reiterated that a speed decrease is being looked at in conjunction with the reduction of U.S. Route 460 to one lane through the area of the MUT with its current design.

“We are still traffic engineering division to see if there is a possibility to have the speed reduced since we have really decided that we feel like dropping that median-inside lane and putting everyone in one lane of traffic, we are hoping they will reconsider a speed reduction in that location,” Smith remarked, saying, as of December, she had not received any final guidance on that request from them.



Nearly one year on, temporary improvements were installed at the intersection of Courthouse Road and U.S. Route 460 that officials say have reduced the number of crashes but, VDOT said they are prepared to implement a permanent fix this spring, the modified median U-turn. (Michael Campbell)

For some, including Dinwiddie Sheriff D.T. Adams, a speed reduction without the MUT is something they would like to see looked at, with the sheriff saying if VDOT would reduce the speed limit in the area, he would station deputies along the roadway to enforce it.

“I think it should be considered and maybe tried first before they go through all of the expense of putting in this proposal. They lower that speed, I will have my deputies out here,” the sheriff said last month.

When asked if the agency would consider implementing a speed drop without the MUT project, Smith pointed back to previous studies that said a speed reduction was not recommended for the corridor its current form.

- **Timeline: Courthouse Road, U.S. 460 intersection improvements project**

“As far as VDOT looking at that as a standalone thing, there have been multiple studies done and the answer to that would be no,” she said. “I think, from a residency and internal standpoint, we are trying to find some ways to justify a modification in the speed based on dropping the median-side lane and forcing all the traffic into the one lane.”

Smith continued, “What I will say, we have a similar type of modification by dropping the median lane in Nottoway County and there was a speed reduction to come from that one. The traffic engineers are working really hard. I know the citizens, the public, and the county are really interested in having some type of reduction there so, we are really trying to find a way to get to that point.”

While the physical project itself has been the source of much debate and discussion in the community, the financials of the project have also drawn their own questions as some have asked if the project is being developed in such a way that funding spending is being confined to a narrow window.

According to the agency’s documentation and a posting on their website, the MUT’s implementation is estimated to cost \$295,000.

When asked, Smith shared a detailed account of how this project is being funded.

“Originally, when the last fatality occurred, the county came to VDOT and asked us to come up with the project to try and improve safety at the intersection. At that point, we had our traffic engineers start looking at some options and we started considering what funding options were available,” the residency administrator explained. “At that point, the Richie [Avenue] project,” which sought to install a left turn lane from U.S. Route 1 to Ritchie Avenue near Taco Bell and a new traffic signal, “was already in the works and planned to be constructed with safety money,” which, according to Smith, “is dedicated to the residency and each district gets some and it’s separated by county.”

Smith continued, “Now we looked at how much we would have left to see if we could do something at Courthouse Road. Because of the design we were looking at was going to be more than the safety funds we would have available, we indicated to the county that it would have to wait until the following fiscal year. At that point, the county wanted to know were there any options available to expedite the project,” noting county leaders opted to use secondary six-year road plan funds through adding the project to their plan, which was adopted late last spring.

“At that point, there was no dollar amount,” Smith noted. “When we originally started on the design, there was no budget, there [were] no confinements provided to the traffic engineers, the county, or anything like that, it was about getting the best project we can get while obviously considering the financial aspects because we want to be good stewards of the public’s funds but, there was nothing that was constraining us to one particular option.”



Last month, VDOT Residency Administrator Crystal Smith walked Del. Lashrecse Aird (D-63) through the agency’s plans for the intersection after the delegate’s office received messages from

concerned citizens regarding the project. She said her office would be in attendance for a February hearing on the project. (Michael Campbell)

According to information obtained through a [Freedom of Information Act request](#), VDOT, as of December 11, 2019, has spent \$34,227 on the project. Of that, \$21,252 were part of salaries and overhead as part of “traffic engineering reviews, environmental reviews and permits, hydraulic reviews, design, public information meetings, public hearings, survey, sign installation, and other miscellaneous work.”

Equipment costs are also accounted for in the total spent so far, totaling \$8,944. The questions surrounding equipment began in August when some saw construction vehicles being staged in the area ahead of planned construction that month before being removed as the agency opted to garner more public feedback, hosting their first information session in October of 2019. Through the FOIA request, VDOT explains the cost includes “VDOT staff vehicles, survey party equipment, message boards, sign shop equipment, equipment hauling, engineering equipment, etc” while also stating the “only charge incurred on this project from staged equipment was one dozer.”

- **[RELATED: VDOT response to The Dinwiddie Monitor FOIA request](#)**

“All other equipment was rented and used on multiple pipe projects in Dinwiddie and Nottoway counties,” the agency said. “Once projects were completed, equipment was staged on Courthouse Road for pick-up and returned to the lease company.”

In response to the FOIA request, VDOT also noted the project’s original estimate was \$354,396, adding a footnote to that figure, saying “with plans to build [the] project with state forces and the modifications currently proposed, an estimate reduction is expected,” with VDOT’s projects portal showing a current cost estimate of \$295,000. “Assuming the proposed modifications are accepted, a rough estimate for construction would be below \$300,000.”

Going back to August of last year, during that summer, [VDOT stated multiple times](#) their intention to move forward with construction of the MUT, then called a restricted crossing U-turn, or RCUT, with

the goal of having it in place prior to the start of the school year for Dinwiddie students, as the intersection is a primary link to county schools. The agency then shifted its posture and said it planned to gather additional public comment, thus delaying its implementation.

While it remains unknown what caused the shift in VDOT's plans for the roadway last year, it has resulted in questions from residents and local drivers following comments from residency administrator Thornton in November of last year, where he remarked to supervisors the MUT is "a better project because of public involvement we received on October 17," referring to the public information and comment period the month prior. With those remarks, some have asked if VDOT was prepared to implement the intersection in August without many of the refinements that have been phased in to its current design over the last several months.

When asked that question, both Thornton and Smith said they "were comfortable with the design" of the RCUT as it was at that time.

"Like anything else, you have input and you take a step back from it for a minute, you can make anything a little bit better," Thornton remarked. "Overall, we kept the same traffic movement. But yes, we would have built it but, again, one of the things Crystal has always said, the type of project this is lends itself to improvements after the fact so, if we built what was proposed in August and subsequently it had been installed and somebody said 'we really would've like this' or 'this is an issue,' then we could have come back with pavement markings or anything else and made those modifications after the fact."

In regards to its implementation, Thornton noted, "while it is under construction, until both [u-turns] are complete, you can't open one side of the RCUT," saying it will cause additional conflicts.

"While the intersection is being built, both of the RCUTs will be closed off and at some point in time after we have altered the public and given them plenty of heads up, we would close the existing crossover and open the U-turns on both sides," he explained further. "We are ongoing with the educational piece of it. The thing between the actual construction and opening that would delay it would be pavement markings and five to ten days of message boards saying a new traffic pattern is

coming and an effective date on those boards. Once we hit the effective date, the center would be closed off and the RCUTs would be open.”

Smith added that barrels will be used to close off the median-inside lane to begin work on narrow the roadway to one lane along U.S. Route 460 as part of the intersection’s permanent plan.

“Once those two lanes are permanently converted to the merge and turn lane, then we will put up the message board letting them know there will be a new permanent traffic pattern on whatever the effective date is,” she said. “Once the date hits, we will remove the message boards, pull up all the barrels, put the barricades in the current median and it will be complete at the point, with the exception we will probably leave the message boards out just alerting people to the new traffic pattern for another five to seven days.”

“There are no phases to it. The construction will begin and continue until it is complete, then everything will be lifted and switched all in one day,” Smith stressed.



Dinwiddie Fire and EMS Chief Dennis Hale details the intersection's history of crashes to Delegate Lashrecse Aird (D-63). According to VDOT representatives, in speaking with Hale, they believe they can forgo plans for a mountable curb that fire and EMS crews could use to cross the roadway as the MUT will be suitable to allow apparatus to move through the intersection. (Michael Campbell)

Based on VDOT's comments last month, initial plans for a mountable curb that can be used by fire and EMS vehicles in the existing crossing have been scrapped as Smith said in December its likely the pavement will be completely removed.

"We have been working with the county and [Fire and EMS Chief] Dennis Hale and talking about getting fire trucks around that intersection and we feel like we can get rid of the existing crossover completely," Thornton said.

The agency said they are open to receiving additional comments from local drivers and residents on the project as it continues to be developed ahead of next month's county-hosted public meeting, which has not had a firm date established aside from it being held in February.