

On the Road to a New Interchange
Ground is broken for Route 28/Willard Road project.
By Bonnie Hobbs
September 6, 2007



An artist's rendering of the Route 28/Willard Road project.



Not only was Tuesday the first day of school in Fairfax County; it was also the ceremonial beginning of work on the new, Route 28/Willard Road interchange in Chantilly.

Dignitaries including county Board of Supervisors Chairman Gerry Connolly, Supervisor Michael R. Frey (R-Sully), Sen. Ken Cuccinelli (R-37th) and Del. Chuck Caputo (D-67th) gathered for the official groundbreaking for the new thoroughfare.

"It's important," said Frey. "It's one more step in the process of trying to make Route 28 a limited-access, through road. The intersections are where the congestion occurs, so getting rid of the traffic lights will be a huge step."

WILLARD IS the eighth of 10 interchanges being built under the Route 28 Public-Private Partnership Act (PPTA) in both Fairfax and Loudoun counties. Six interchanges built this way — including the one at Route 28 and Westfields Boulevard — have opened to traffic since 2002. And the four remaining are now under construction.

"Willard will be a single-point diamond interchange," said Rick Miller, Route 28 PPTA construction manager for VDOT. "Instead of having loops going up to the bridge, there'll be ramps coming up and tying into the bridge. And a traffic light at the top of the ramp will control traffic flow there."

The first work done on the project, in early fall, will be the construction of a detour. "The alignment of Willard would shift sideways, a little to the south, so that we can construct the bridge over Route 28 in the present location of the traffic signal," explained Miller. "We've stockpiled a little dirt there for future use."

The detour plans have already been approved and preliminary excavation has begun. Miller expects it to take four months to complete the detour, put a temporary traffic signal in place and remove the old one.

"Then at that point, we can start demolition of the existing pavement and the beginning of construction of the new interchange," he said. "Construction should take about 18 months, with estimated completion in the fall of 2009."

HOWEVER, added Miller, that timetable is only viable "if we don't have a real, wet winter and we can keep working through the winter."

As for the configuration of the new interchange, Willard Road will go over Route 28, and northbound and southbound ramps will tie into the bridge. In addition, the bridge will be wide enough to accommodate a multi-use trail.

Shirley Contracting Inc. is the overall general contractor responsible for the project. And Miller said anywhere from 50-300 people will be working on it at any given time.

"This is phase two of the Route 28 project," he noted. "We're getting rid of the at-grade intersections between I-66 and Route 7 at Willard, Frying Pan Road, Nokes Boulevard and the Center for Innovative Technology/Innovation Drive."

All these intersections are able to be built because of the establishment of the special, Route 28 Tax District, nearly 20 years ago. They received a further boost from the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors in October 2006.

At that time, the board authorized county staff to move forward with a Route 28 Tax District contract amendment that provided a combination of grant and loan money from the state to construct the interchanges.

The board also authorized the sale of Fairfax County Economic Development Authority (EDA) Route 28 Tax District revenue bonds for additional funding. These actions accelerated the road improvements by at least five years from their original estimates.

Now, said Miller, "We're marching along with these projects. And the further along we get, we'll be starting to look at adding a fourth lane on Route 28 from Route 50 to Waxpool Road in Loudoun County. But there's no guarantee it will happen; it all depends on the money we have when all these interchanges are done."

MEANWHILE, area residents and motorists are looking forward to someday getting some traffic relief on Route 28, courtesy of the Willard Road interchange.

"The side roads are starting to have more traffic and cause more pressure for green time on Route 28," said Supervisor Frey. "So traffic just backs up through that light. So there's no question — the interchange will be huge."

Miller agreed. "During rush hour now, you can sail from Braddock/Walney road to Willard and hit a traffic backup there because of the signal there," he explained.

"Then it's smooth sailing again until you get to Frying Pan Road," said Miller. "And then there are no more traffic backups until Nokes Boulevard. But once we finish the construction of these four interchanges, you'll have an uninterrupted trip from I-66 to Route 7."

For further information about these projects — as well as project updates and news of traffic alerts and lane closures — see VDOT's Web site at www.28freeway.com.