

Date

7-16-97

Park Service Unmoved By Road Project Bill

Agency Says It Won't Cede Battlefield Land

By Justin Blum

Washington Post Staff Writer

A dispute between Manassas National Battlefield Park and local political leaders over road improvements flared yesterday, as Congress prodded park officials to agree to safety improvements at a busy intersection in the park.

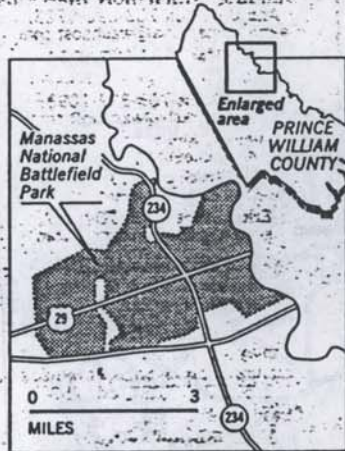
The U.S. House approved an appropriations bill last night with language designed to pressure the park to allow construction of turn lanes at the intersection of routes 29 and 234.

The legislation includes language inserted at the request of Rep. Frank R. Wolf (R-10th District) that directs the National Park Service to "cooperate" with the Virginia Department of Transportation to improve the intersection.

"In order to make the intersection safer and make the traffic flow better, we are urging the park service to work with the Virginia Department of Transportation," Wolf said. "We've been meeting with them... and nothing ever gets done. I would hope this would change it."

But park officials said the legislation, which must be approved by a House-Senate conference committee, would not change their opposition to ceding park land for road projects.

Park officials said they're already "cooperating" with the Department



BY SCOTT MCALLEN FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

of Transportation by repeatedly meeting with its officials.

"We're willing to do everything short of giving park land," park Superintendent Robert K. Sutton said. "So we feel we've been cooperating."

Asked about park officials' interpretation of the report language, Wolf declined to comment, except to say: "We will see. We'll deal with the park service."

This dispute was the latest in an ongoing battle. Wolf and Prince William Supervisor E.S. "Ed" Wilbourn III (R-Gainesville) have been trying to convince park officials to improve the intersection for

months. Park officials have resisted.

Wilbourn scheduled a meeting for this morning in which politicians, and park and transportation officials are supposed to discuss the issue. Unless park officials acquiesce, Wilbourn said lawmakers will step up their efforts.

"If they ignore Congressman Wolf's attempt to politely get them to woman Kim D. Chinn said the intersection is not among the county's most dangerous.

In December, Wolf sent a letter to park officials saying their suggested solution to the safety issue, sequencing changes to traffic signals, amounted to "a failure to address this problem. ... Have you been studying the same problem the rest of us have been looking at?"

Park officials said that the intersection is not dangerous enough to warrant expansion and that doing so

wouldn't necessarily reduce the number of accidents.

They also said that expanding the road would detract from the historic value of the battlefield.

Sutton said the Department of Transportation has not provided any statistical information showing that the intersection would be safer if the road were expanded.

Tom Farley, the department's regional administrator, said yesterday: "If you add a turn lane, you provide safety. It's not rocket science."

The dispute also has touched a nerve among historic preservationists and area residents concerned about development.

Slow-growth activist Annie Snyder, who helped fight the proposed Disney's America theme park and has been leading opposition to the intersection's expansion, said she was infuriated by Wolf's legislation.

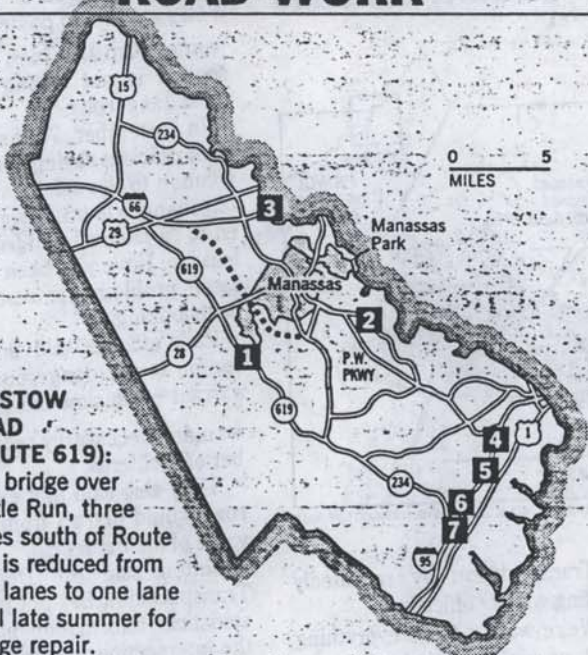
"All of our battles have been to protect [historic areas] from being ruined to accommodate developers and commuters," Snyder said.

Prince William Public Library
Manassas, Va.

The Washington Post

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*** ROAD WORK**



1 BRISTOW ROAD (ROUTE 619):
The bridge over Kettle Run, three miles south of Route 28, is reduced from two lanes to one lane until late summer for bridge repair.

2 DAVIS FORD ROAD:
The Ravenwood bridge over the Occoquan River is reduced from two lanes to one lane until late this year.

3 ROUTE 28: A lane will be closed between Residency Road and Godwin Drive from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. until Saturday.

4 I-95: One to two lanes will be closed just south of Prince William Parkway from 8 p.m. to 4:30 a.m. through Friday.

5 I-95: Three lanes will be closed between Cardinal Drive and Dale Boulevard from 11 p.m. to 5 a.m. today.

6 I-95: There will be a rolling lane closure, northbound between Routes 619 and 123, and southbound from Woodbridge and Route 619 from 11 p.m. to 5 a.m. today.

7 I-95: Three lanes will be closed between Prince William Parkway and Route 123 from 11 p.m. to 5 a.m. through Saturday.

SOURCE: Virginia Department of Transportation

Date

12/18/96

Park Service Resists Lanes At Battlefield

County Officials Say Safety Will Be Threatened by Ban

By Michael D. Shear
Washington Post Staff Writer

Elected officials in Prince William County yesterday blasted the National Park Service for standing in the way of safety improvements at the intersection of routes 29 and 234 in the Manassas National Battlefield Park.

Rep. Frank R. Wolf (R-10th District) said in a letter to Park Service officials yesterday that he was "extremely disappointed" that Park Service officials were blocking construction of left-turn lanes at the intersection, which county and state officials say often is congested and is the site of many accidents.

"[It] is a failure to address this problem," Wolf wrote. "You suggest that only minor sequencing changes to the traffic light are required. Have you been studying the same problem the rest of us have been looking at?"

County Supervisor E.S. "Ed" Wilbourn III (R-Gainesville) echoed Wolf's comments.

"The Department of the Interior has no concern for the safety of the citizens of Prince William County or the people who visit the park," Wilbourn said. "I'm extremely disappointed, given that it's probably our single most dangerous intersection."

The comments came after Wolf received a letter yesterday from a top Park Service official rejecting the state's proposed construction of left-turn lanes and expressing concern for the historic value of the park. In the letter, Robert Stanton, field director for the Park Service's Washington area office, said his agency does not believe the intersection is dangerous enough to warrant major changes.

"Traffic on routes 29 and 234 has been reduced dramatically since I-66 has been completed to Route 29 in Centreville," Stanton wrote. "Further, we have discovered that this intersection is less dangerous than other intersections."

Park Superintendent Robert K. Sutton said independent traffic consultants have concluded that the safety issue can be addressed by changing the timing of the signals at the intersection. And he said the Park Service is determined to protect the historic nature of the intersection.

"Our responsibility is to protect the battlefield," he said. "It was an historic intersection well before the Civil War. It's crucial for us. We are trying to find any way possible to not give up parkland."

Virginia transportation officials yesterday disputed the Park Service position. Tom Farley, a district administrator at the Virginia Department of Transportation, said that making the intersection safer is a top priority for the agency and that the intersection cannot be substantially improved by changing the timing of the lights.

"We have exhausted every possibility in terms of changing the timing and sequences," he said. "For years, the Virginia Department of Transportation has tried to bring this matter to the Park Service's attention. We do think it is a big deal."

Manassas Journal Messenger

DATE

7-17-97

Park service: No turn lanes

By CHRISTOPHER LANDERS
Of the Journal Messenger

Despite call to action from federal and local elected officials, Manassas National Battlefield Park continues to refuse to give up historic land for road improvements.

A funding bill for the Department of the Interior, approved 238 to 192 Tuesday by the U.S. House of Representatives, included a directive to the National Park Service requesting safety-minded improvements at the crossing of U.S. Route 29 and Va. Route 234 in the Battlefield Park.

County Supervisor Edgar S. Wilbourn III, R-Gainesville, a supporter of road work in the park, reaffirmed the need for turn lanes at a meeting in his office Wednesday, citing Virginia Department of Transportation statistics that attribute 73 accidents resulting in 87 injuries and two deaths to the intersection over the past three years.

At the meeting, Wilbourn unveiled a draft proposal to Park Service Director Terry P. Carlstrom from Thomas F. Farley, VDOT's Northern Virginia chief, outlining plans to add turn lanes at the intersection.

But Park Service Community Planner Jeff Reinbold said Wednesday morning that alterations would be approved only if confined to county and state land.

"At this point we are not going to give up park land," Reinbold said, referring to the stand taken by former Park Service director William Penn Mott

in 1988, which said the preservation of park land is of primary importance. Any change in that position, Reinbold said, would have to come from Carlstrom, who was not at Wilbourn's meeting.

The park service has no problem with most of the plans, according to Reinbold. But the proposed alterations to the south-bound Va. 234 lane, however, would require a 10- to 15-foot strip of land along the road that belongs to the park. Reinbold said that the Park Service would need more details before it can consider the proposal adequately. Farley's letter is expected to be complete by the end of next week.

Date 7-17-97

Relief pushed for battlefield traffic

By TED GOTSCH
of the Potomac News

The Virginia Department of Transportation plans next week to file a plan to enlarge the U.S. 29-Va. 234 intersection inside Manassas National Battlefield Park with federal authorities, forcing them to address the previously stalled issue.

Using legislation introduced by Rep. Frank Wolf, R-10th, and passed Tuesday by the U.S. House of Representatives to help force action, lawmakers and transportation authorities met Wednesday with a National Park Service official

to press for construction of a left-turn lane from U.S. 29 at the historic crossroads.

"Finally, we are beginning to bring it to a head," said state Del. Harry Parrish, R-Manassas, who attended the meeting at Prince William County Supervisor Ed Wilbourn III's office. "The National Park Service jealously guards all of its land."

Politicians and park activists have clashed for years over the need for the turn lanes within the battlefield. While elected officials say it's necessary for improved safety, grass-roots groups say the expansion is part of a plan to develop the surrounding area.

Despite repeated meetings, Park Service officials have refused to let the turn lane be built because its construction would require the agency to cede some of the battlefield.

But Wolf inserted language into a House Appropriations bill that "directs the National Park Service to cooperate with Virginia Department of Transportation and Federal Highway Administration officials to make necessary improvements to the intersection."

Elected officials said they are optimistic the provision, although not yet law, will force park authorities to consider the plan VDOT will submit on or before July 25 and to respond to it within 45 days.

But a park representative at Wednesday's meeting said the service's view has not changed.

"At this point, the Park Service stands by the position that it is not willing to give up land for the intersection," said Jeff Reinbold, a community planner for the agency. "I can't imagine the Park Service would change its position until it saw the final proposal."

Widening the intersection is intended to temporarily ease traffic within the park. VDOT is studying whether to build a bypass for U.S. 29, which would take the road out of the battlefield, a previous goal of Wolf's.

Local government spending its dollars in odd ways

I would like to thank our local governments for their diligent effort to spend my tax dollars wisely in an effort to improve the streets in the Prinedale and Ridgedale communities. The new asphalt is just marvelous.

The warranty for this work and materials must be pretty good, too. From the way the material is already breaking apart when I walk on it, not to mention when I drive on it and how it adheres to my car, we should be seeing the work crews resurfacing the streets again in the near future. I guess someone had extra money to spend and decided our streets needed the work. That's odd, I heard the school system was running short of cash.

Eric VanNortwick, Dale City

file Manassas Battlefield Park

The Journal Messenger

Date

12/17/96

VIRGINIANA FILE
BULL RUN REG LIB

National Park Service says new road 'unacceptable'

By DAVE MARINO-NACHISON
JM Staff Writer

Routing a new, regional road between the Manassas National Battlefield Park and the Conway Robinson Memorial State Forest is "unacceptable," according to a federal administrator.

Putting the road near the battlefield "will visually encroach on the park, substantially increase noise within the park and produce future adverse uses adjacent to the park," wrote U.S. National Park Service Field Director Terry P. Carlstrom in a Dec. 13 letter to the Virginia Department of Transportation.

Although such an option has not been approved by the state, the boards of supervisors of Prince William, Loudoun, Stafford and Fauquier counties have all endorsed such a plan.

"We firmly believe that to superimpose a regional facility over the [Va. Route] 234 bypass corridor will overwhelm the resources of and visitation to the park," Carlstrom continued. "This option is unacceptable to the National Park Service."

Alignments for such a road, which would connect Va. Route 7 near Leesburg with Interstate 95 in Stafford County, have been the topic of the Virginia Department of Transportation's Western Transportation

National Park Service officials "firmly believe that to superimpose a regional facility over the [Va. Route] 234 bypass corridor will overwhelm the resources of and visitation to the park."

Terry P. Carlstrom
field director
National Park Service

Corridor Study.

At the root of Carlstrom's disapproval of the road is the contention that such a road isn't needed. VDOT's data "does not support the need for a regional north-south transportation facility," he wrote, adding that area transportation improvements planned for the region "will adequately support the region through the year 2020."

"There's no demonstrated need for this road," agreed battlefield superintendent Robert K. Sutton, who collaborated with Carlstrom on the letter.

"We've looked at all the different alternatives," said Sutton. "The benefit of the road does not match the impact."

Since a corridor hasn't been cho-

sen by the state, said VDOT study project manager Robert MacDonald, comments such as Carlstrom's are somewhat premature.

If the corridor between the two parks is chosen, however, VDOT will likely meet with the park service to discuss mitigating impacts, MacDonald added, although such a discourse wouldn't be relevant until the design of a specific alignment was chosen.

Sutton would like to see the alignment of the road somewhere else entirely, but "solutions aren't our responsibility," he said. He did note that the letter suggested the study's westernmost possible alignment — which would run near Haymarket — might be worthy of further study.

That alignment was effectively eliminated Friday at a meeting of the study's policy advisory committee, a group composed of elected officials from the affected counties, when the committee decided to back an alignment along an existing utility corridor, bisecting the parks.

The committee's recommendation will not be official, however, until it has reconciled questions about the road's alignment both near the battlefield and in Stafford County. The Commonwealth Transportation Board will make a final decision sometime early next year.