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Opinion Editor
Daily News-Record
231 South Liberty Street
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RE: BRIDGEWATER BYPASS MAKES TRAFFIC WORSE

Dear Editor:

American taxpayers are up to their eyeballs in wasteful spending. Corporate bailouts and executive bonuses leave us shaking our heads. Unfortunately we have our very own version of a “Bridge to Nowhere” right here in Rockingham County. The Bridgewater Bypass has almost as many zeros attached to it as the AIG bonuses and has equally dubious benefits to the taxpayers who will fund it.

But wait! Haven’t we been assured by town officials that “the Bridgewater Bypass will alleviate most of our traffic problems”? Discussions of the Bridgewater Bypass have been ongoing for so long that the road has almost attained the status of a sacred cow. But it is time to read the fine print.

Did you know that according to VDOT traffic data, the Bridgewater Bypass will actually make traffic worse on Dinkel Avenue and Main Street than if no road were built? You probably didn’t. That’s because you’d have to read Appendix D of a supplemental technical study to find the information. You’d never find the data in the main report. Did you know that according to the traffic engineer who conducted the study only 3% of the truck traffic will be diverted off of Dinkel Avenue? You’d have to spend quite some time looking for that information too. That means taxpayers will spend \$60 million to divert three percent of truck traffic and make overall traffic worse on existing main roads in Bridgewater.

The unsettling thing is that Rockingham County’s Board of Supervisors do know about the traffic data. We told them last spring. And yet Rockingham County supervisors are set to endorse the Bridgewater Bypass project on Wednesday (3/25) because they believe they can get future developers of the adjoining property to pay some of the construction costs. Even if developers do pony up a hearty sum taxpayers will still spend tens of millions of dollars for a road that makes traffic worse.

Wasteful spending with little to no traffic benefits is bad. But the most troubling thing about the proposed Bypass will be its impact on the character of Bridgewater. Bypasses are known for their negative impacts on main street businesses—eroding the traditional heart of town. More than ten Harrisonburg stores relocated to Harrisonburg Crossing when it opened.

Bridgewater has its eyes on a comparable big box development. The town's comprehensive plan is highly focused around a "commercial development center" with its "Future Land Use Map" showing a Bridgewater Bypass surrounded *completely* by commercial, industrial, and residential development. These plans are in direct conflict with two goals embraced by citizens of Bridgewater and listed in the town's comprehensive plan "Maintain the economic viability of the existing downtown commercial area", and "seek to retain the special features that define the existing town character". Bridgewater will neither retain its existing small town character nor the economic viability of its existing downtown if a large big box development is located nearby.

There are two steps left in the approval process for the Bridgewater Bypass. The first is consideration of endorsement by the Board of Supervisors. This will happen on 3/25. Supervisors need to hear from County residents that they don't want limited taxpayer money squandered on a road that will make traffic worse.

The second step left in the process is approval by the Commonwealth Transportation Board (CTB). The Bridgewater Bypass will be on the CTB action agenda for April 15th. VDOT officials have not told CTB members about the negative traffic data buried in the VDOT report. Instead, the CTB has been told that there is "very little opposition" to the Bridgewater Bypass.

This is the last chance to interject common sense into this road project. Contact the Board of Supervisors and ask them to reject the current plan for the Bridgewater Bypass since it will make traffic worse in Bridgewater. Then contact the Commonwealth Transportation Board and correct the record. Contact information for CTB members can be found at <http://www.ctb.virginia.gov/members.asp>.

Decision makers need to hear that this community does not want to spend \$60 million on a project that will make traffic worse and leave a legacy of sprawling development around what used to be the vibrant, traditional town of Bridgewater.

Sincerely,



Kim Sandum
Executive Director