

Statement by Bert Ely to the Alexandria City Council**the Wilson Bridge Project's Serious Financial Problems**

April 12, 2002

Mayor Donley and members of Council, I am Bert Ely and I appear before you today on behalf of the Coalition for a Sensible Bridge regarding the Wilson Bridge project's extremely serious financial problems. Alexandria could be a big loser if these financial problems are not resolved by downsizing the project, which is still quite feasible.

While Council cannot resolve the Wilson Bridge financing problems on its own, it certainly can make state and federal officials aware of them. Taking action to trigger creation of the required Woodrow Wilson Bridge Authority, which Mr. Marston has previously explained, would place Alexandria in a much better position to force the downsizing of the entire Wilson Bridge project.

Attached to my statement are four charts which illustrate these financial problems:

Figure 1 shows the steadily rising cost of the Wilson Bridge project. If the Springfield mixing bowl and Boston's "Big Dig" are any indication, the estimated cost of the project will continue to rise.

Figure 2 shows the cost components of the Wilson Bridge project, based on figures published in the project's Initial Financial Plan. Note that the estimated cost of the new bridge accounts for just one-third of the total estimated project cost.

Figure 3 illustrates how the sole bid for the new bridge's superstructure exceeded its estimated cost by 82%, or \$387 million. Although the superstructure contract is being split into three pieces, it is unlikely that its cost will decline significantly since it is now acknowledged that the initial cost estimate was far too low.

Figure 4 shows that based on the August 2001 cost estimate, the project will cost Virginia \$505 million. However, the likely additional cost of building the bridge will reduce the share of special federal funding for the Virginia interchanges. This factor could push Virginia's cost into the \$600-\$700 million range. Cost overruns for the interchanges would push the cost even higher. Faced with this huge cost, VDOT could easily cut back on the project's "bells and whistles," such as sound barriers and the Eisenhower Valley access ramps.

Downsizing the project is quite straight-forward, and still doable. Here are the steps that should be taken:

One -- Do not widen the Beltway west of the Route 1 interchange. This eliminates the need to do any work at the Telegraph Road interchange. Savings: at least \$273 million.

Two -- Hold the Beltway to just 10 lanes, and without physical lane separations, between Route 1 and Royal Street, where the new bridge will touch down. This narrowing would eliminate the need for dual exit and entrance ramps as well as HOV ramps at Route 1. Savings: at least \$250 million.

Three -- Maryland should be asked to narrow the deck of *each* of the two new spans of the new bridge to 84 feet, which will accommodate five lanes, plus two breakdown lanes, but without physical lane dividers. The foundations now being built for the new bridge could readily support the narrower spans as well as any later widening of the bridge deck, should that be necessary. Savings: Possibly several hundred million dollars.

Leadership is needed at this time to downsize the Wilson Bridge project while there still is time to do so. Alexandria should take the lead in working with our new Governor, and fellow Alexandrian, to bring fiscal sanity to this project.

Mr. Mayor and members of Council, thank you for your time this morning.

Figure 1

Increases in the Estimated Cost of the Wilson Bridge Project

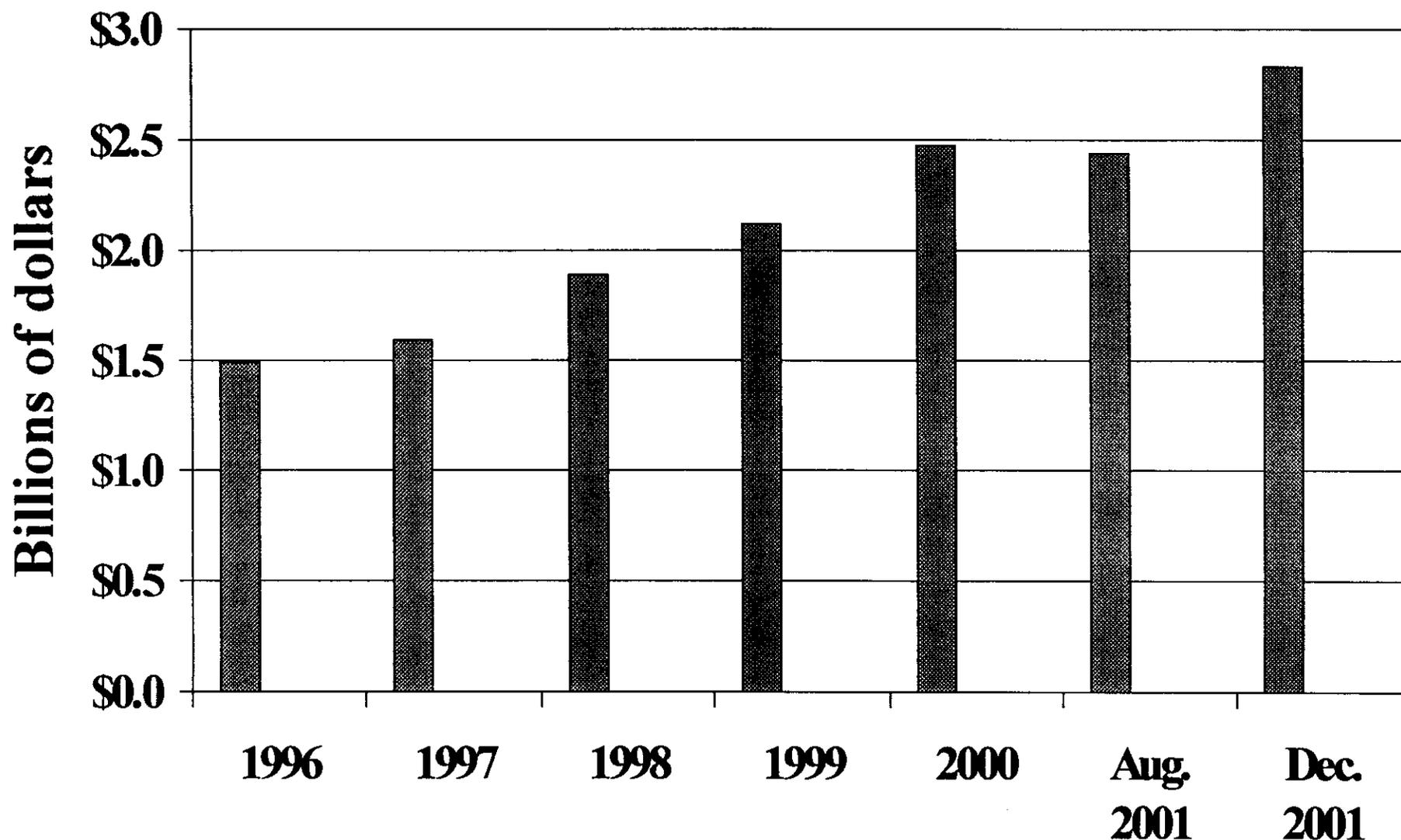
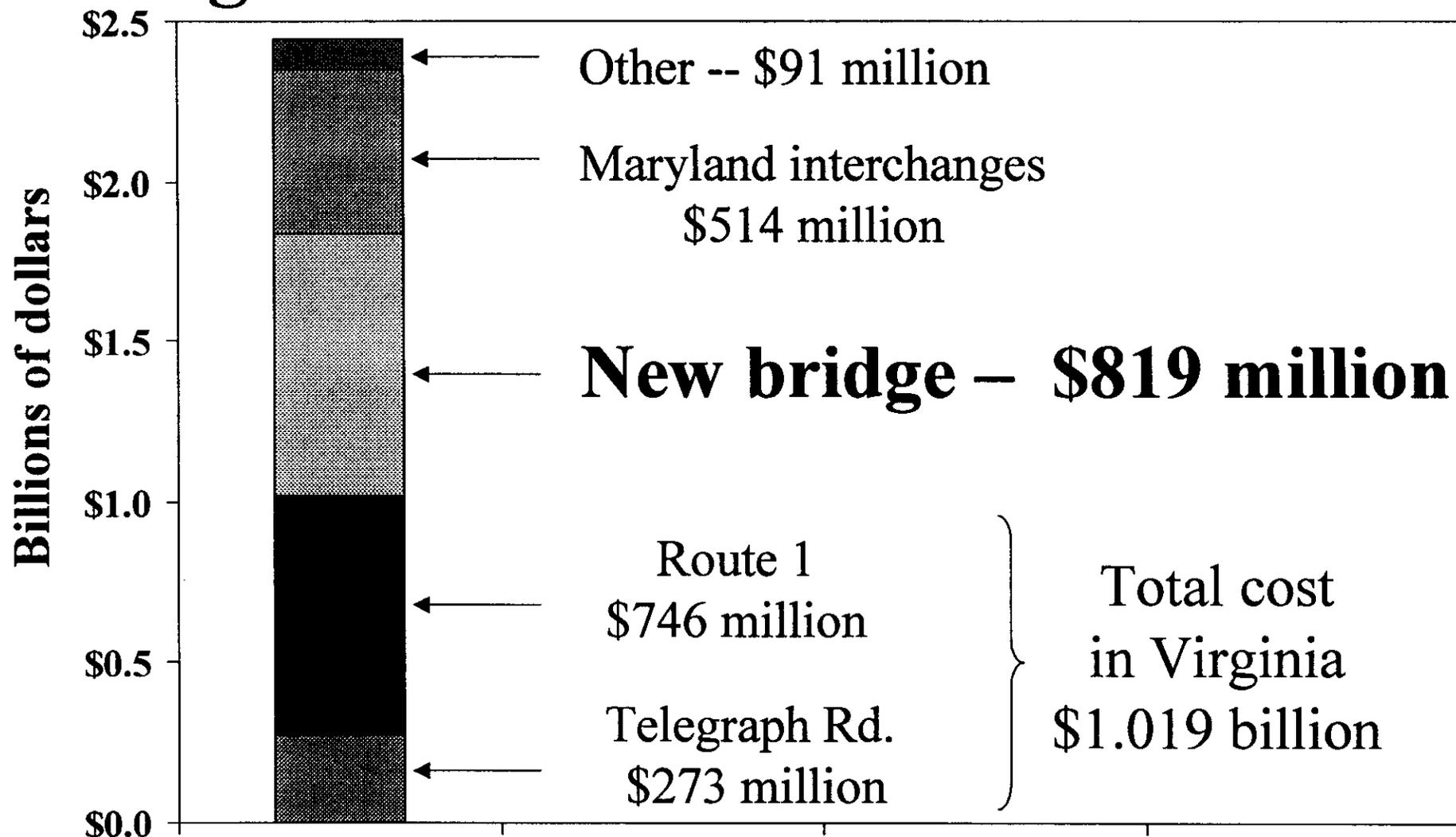


Figure 2

Components of the August 2001 Wilson Bridge Cost Estimate of \$2.443 billion



The Bid for the Bridge Superstructure Exceeded Its Estimated Cost by 82%

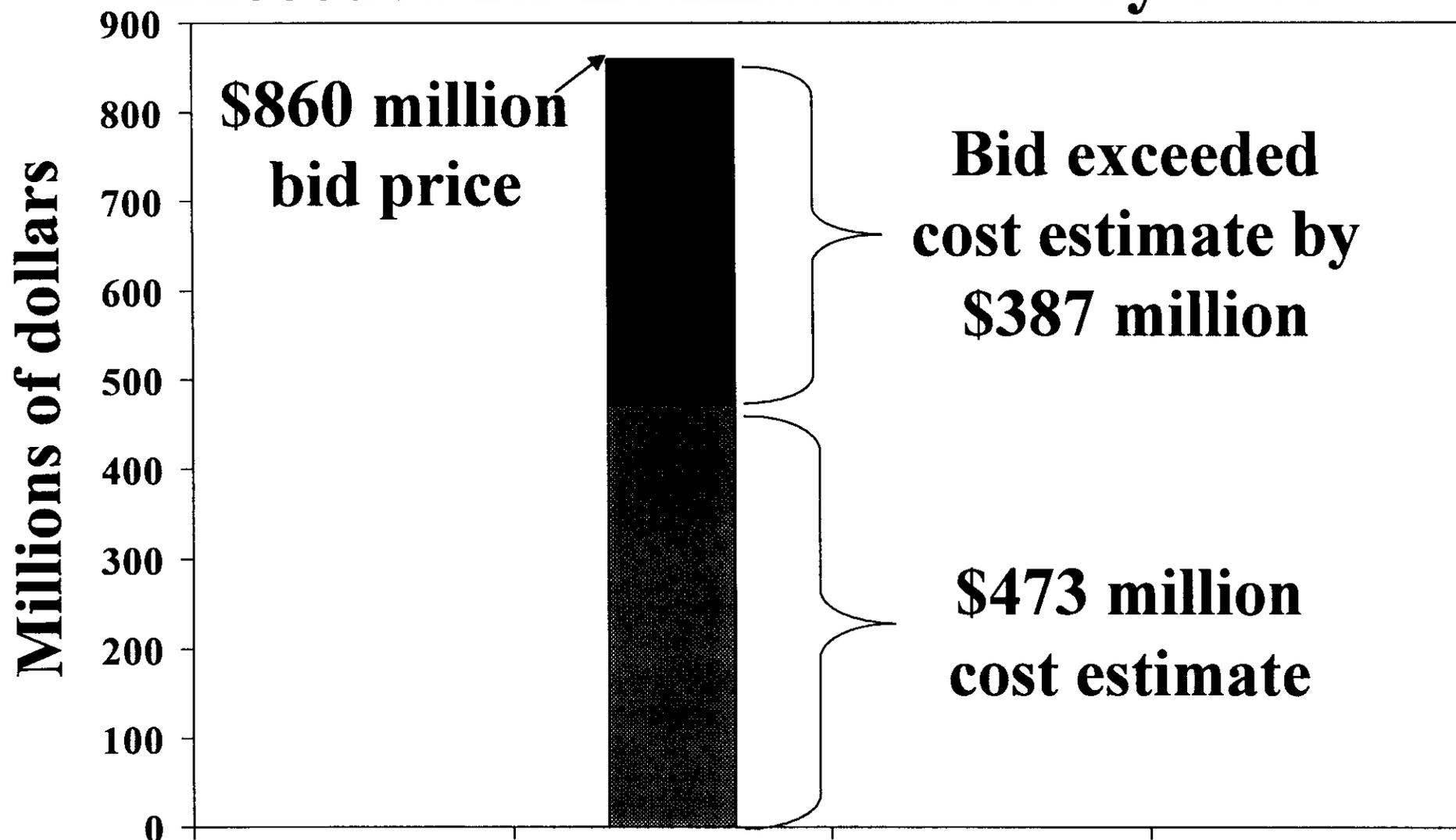


Figure 4

Paying for the Virginia portion of the Wilson Bridge Project -- \$1.019 billion

