


*City of Alexandria, Virginia***MEMORANDUM**

DATE: DECEMBER 7, 2009

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: JAMES K. HARTMANN, CITY MANAGER 

SUBJECT: DIRECT ACCESS RAMP ALTERNATIVES FOR BRAC-133 IJR STUDY

ISSUE: Review of the seven direct access ramp alternatives being considered by the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) for their Interchange Justification Report (IJR).

RECOMMENDATION: That City Council receive final public testimony on the seven direct access ramp alternatives being considered by VDOT for their preliminary IJR analysis and following the hearing, adopt the following five recommendations from the Alexandria Transportation Commission:

1. Direct staff to prepare a letter to Duke Realty encouraging Duke Realty to move with all speed to complete the local roadway improvements as approved by Council;
2. Direct VDOT to retain Alternatives A1 and A2 which provide direct access from I-395 to the Department of Defense (DoD) garage;
3. Direct VDOT to pursue a design option at Sanger Avenue providing direct access to I-395 with an emphasis on transit;
4. Instruct VDOT to eliminate from consideration any access alternatives within their preliminary interchange justification report which would impact the land area of the Winkler Botanical Preserve; and
5. Adopt the City's BRAC-133 Advisory Group's guiding principles.

BACKGROUND: The City approved the Mark Center final phase of development in 2004 with the approval of the Mark Center Development Special Use Permit (DSUP). The Mark Center site was selected by the Department of Defense in 2008 to accommodate the administrative offices for units, agencies, and activities categorized under BRAC-133 as part of the Fort Belvoir BRAC initiative. Under this plan, Mark Center will serve as a workplace for 6,400 Department of Defense employees.

On June 23, 2009, City Council directed the City Manager to undertake a transportation analysis of: 1) the potential impact of the provision of a direct access ramp from I-395 into the Mark Center site; and, 2) the impact of delaying the construction and completion of the Seminary and

Beauregard local road improvements until September 2011. This analysis found that a direct access ramp from I-395 onto Mark Center is necessary to accommodate all of the future traffic generated by the BRAC-133 relocation onto the site in addition to the local roadway improvements.

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) must approve the construction of any new access points to the interstate highway system. The first step in the approval process is to complete an Interchange Justification Report (IJR). VDOT is in the process of developing an IJR for the direct access ramp. As part of this process, VDOT has developed seven alternative ramp configurations. Due to the scope of the study and detail required only two alternatives will be evaluated in the IJR. VDOT has asked the City to review the seven proposed alternatives and provide them with the two options the City would like to retain for further study.

Drawings of the seven direct access ramp alternatives are attached. A brief summary of each alternative follows:

Alternative “A1” provides access to the fifth level of the DoD garage only. The access ramp in this option starts from the left lane of the I-395 SB on-ramp (heading towards Landmark mall) at Seminary Road. The access ramp then goes up and over the I-395 southbound (SB) on ramp and connects to the DoD parking garage. In this option, the direct access ramp would be restricted to cars destined for the garage only and would only be able to accommodate 350 cars per hour. This ramp configuration will allow traffic to both enter and exit the DoD garage.

Alternative “A2” provides access to the fourth level of the DoD garage only. The access ramp in this option starts from the right lane of the I-395 SB on-ramp (heading towards Landmark Mall) midway down the ramp between Seminary Road and I-395. In this options the direct access ramp would be restricted to cars destined for the garage only and would only be able to accommodate 350 cars per hour. This alternative will require the elimination of the free right turn from eastbound Seminary Road onto the I-395 SB on-ramp. These right turns would then need to turn in two lanes at the existing traffic signal. This ramp configuration will allow traffic to both enter and exit the DoD garage.

Alternative “B1” provides access to the overall Mark Center site and would be open to all traffic. The access ramp in this option starts from the right lane of the I-395 SB on-ramp (heading towards Landmark Mall) midway down the ramp between Seminary Road and I-395. The ramp then travels along the Winkler Preserve and touches down on the Mark Center private street network. This ramp alternative will be one-way and only allow traffic onto the site.

Alternative “B2” provides access to the overall Mark Center site and would be open to all traffic. The access ramp in this option starts from the right lane of the I-395 SB on-ramp (heading towards Landmark Mall) midway down the ramp between Seminary Road and I-395. The ramp then travels along the Winkler Preserve and touches down at Mark Center Drive a public road in Mark Center. This ramp alternative will be one-way and only allow traffic onto the site.

Alternative “C” provides access to the fifth level of the DoD garage only. The access ramp in

this option starts from the northbound (NB) I-395 general purpose lanes (heading toward Shirlington) and then goes up and over I-395 to connect to the garage. This ramp configuration will allow traffic to both enter and exit the DoD garage.

Alternative “D” provides access to the overall Mark Center site and would be restricted to HOV vehicles only. The access ramp in this option starts from the I-395 HOV lanes and then goes up and over I-395 SB general purpose lanes. The ramp then travels along the Winkler Preserve and touches down at Mark Center Drive a public road in Mark Center. This configuration will provide a reversible flow ramp which will allow traffic to enter the site only in the morning and exit only in the afternoons.

Alternative “E” is similar to alternative “D” in serving the overall Mark Center site and in traveling along the Winkler Preserve, but also provides a second access to the DoD garage. This configuration will provide a two-way ramp which will allow traffic to enter the site only in the morning and exit only in the afternoons.

On November 21, 2009, City Council held their first public hearing on the above proposed seven direct access ramp alternatives. The major themes that emerged from the public hearing were as follows:

1. A direct access ramp is necessary.
2. Direct access must be to the site and not only the army garage.
3. The selected alternative must minimize automobile traffic on the local roads.
4. There were concerns about encroachment on the Winkler Preserve.
5. The ramp should accommodate non-SOV and transit vehicles.

On December 2, 2009, the Transportation Commission held the second public hearing on the proposed direct access ramp alternatives. The major theme that came from the hearing was to protect the Winkler Botanical Preserve. Consequently, the Transportation Commission unanimously passed the following motion:

1. Request that Council send Duke Realty a letter encouraging Duke Realty to move with all speed to complete the local roadway improvements as approved by Council.
2. Request that Council direct VDOT to retain Alternatives A1 and A2 which provide direct access from I-395 to the army garage.
3. Request that Council direct VDOT to pursue a design option at Sanger Avenue providing direct access to I-395 with an emphasis on transit.
4. Request that Council instruct VDOT to eliminate from consideration any access alternatives within their preliminary interchange justification report which would impact the land area of the Winkler Botanical Preserve.
5. Request that Council adopt the BRAC Advisory Group’s guiding principles.

ATTACHMENT: Presentation from December 2, 2009, Transportation Commission Meeting

STAFF:

Mark Jinks, Deputy City Manager

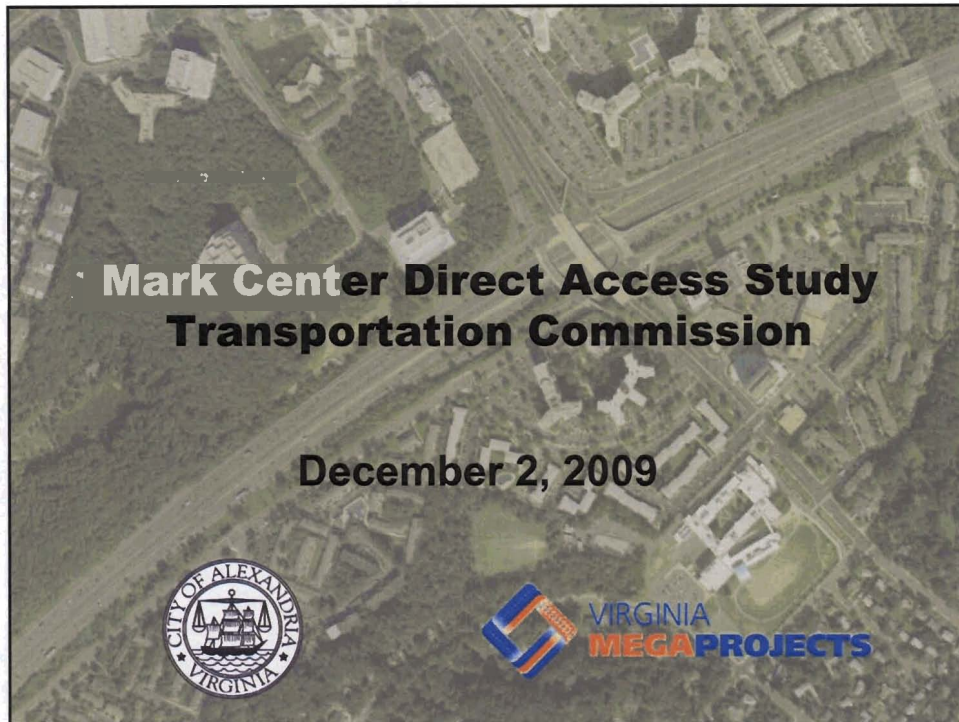
Richard J. Baier, P.E., Director, Transportation and Environmental Services

Jeffery Farner, Deputy Director, Planning and Zoning

Tom Canfield, City Architect, Planning and Zoning

Patricia Escher, Principal Planner, Planning and Zoning

Bob Garbacz, Division Chief, Transportation and Environmental Services

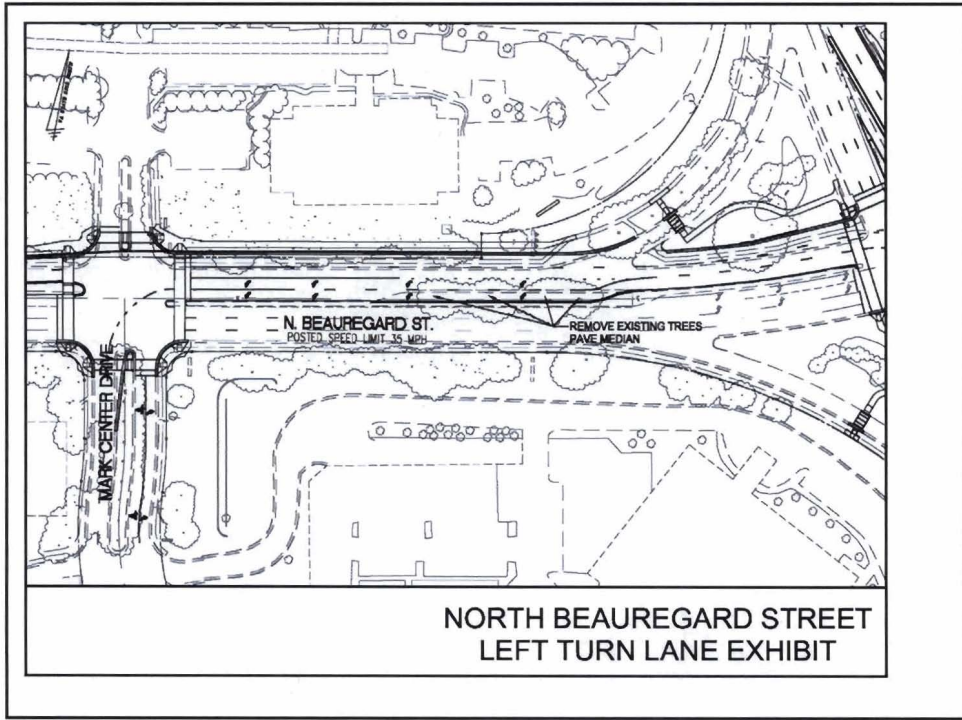
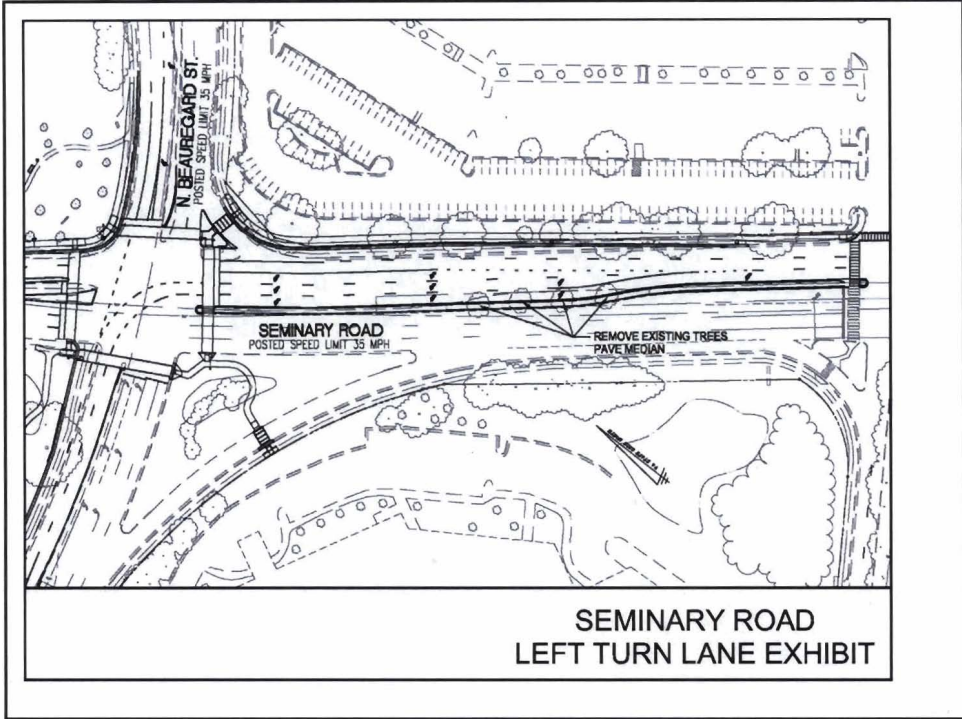


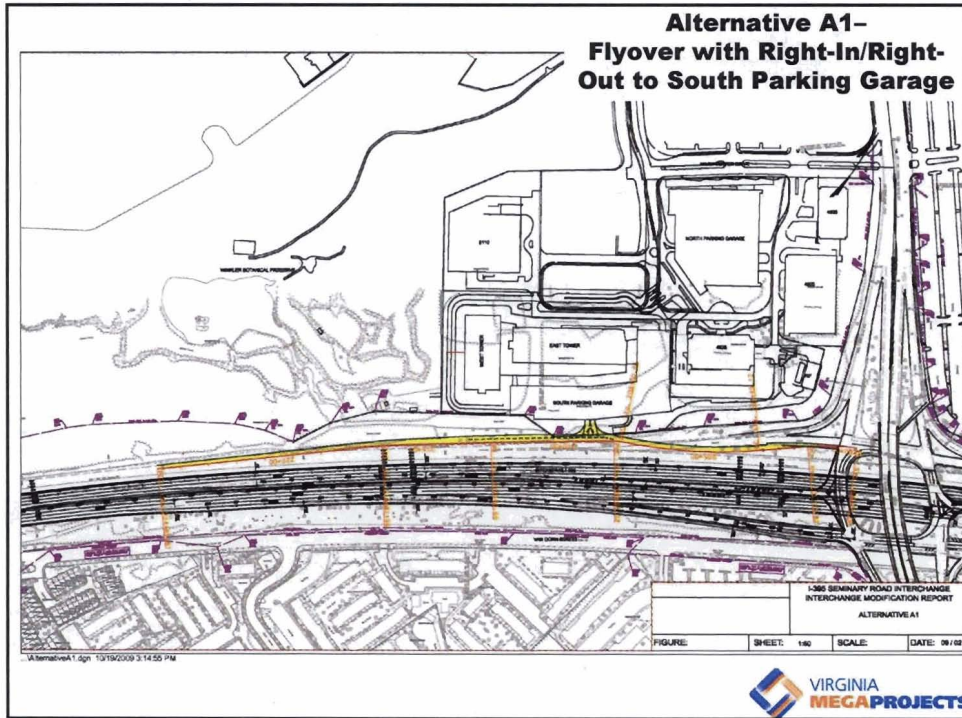
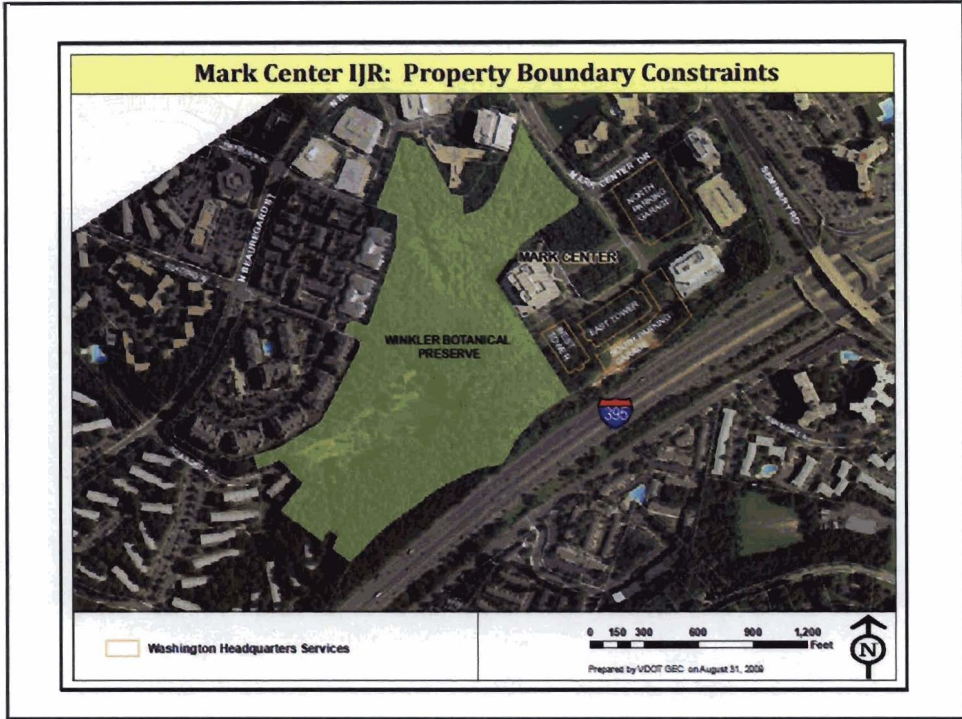
Major Themes from Community

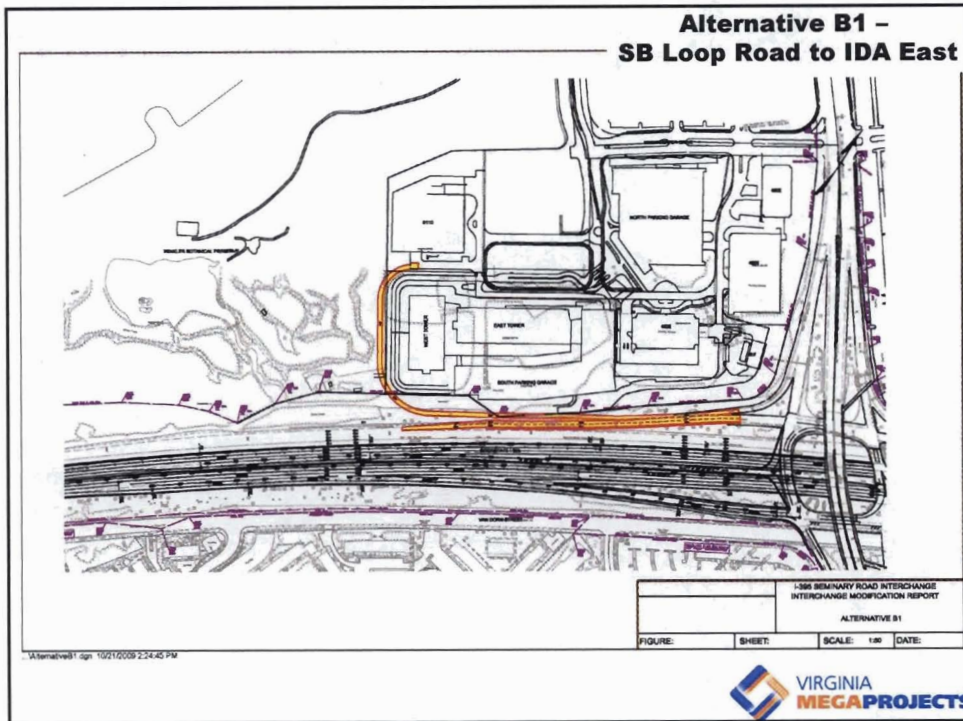
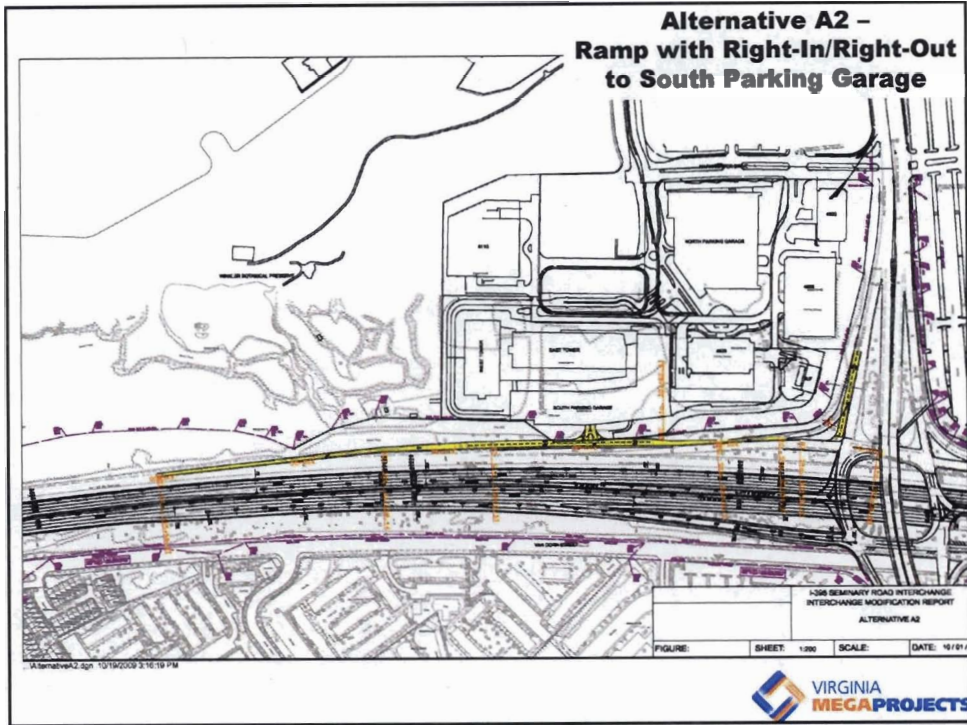
- Direct access ramp is necessary.
Direct access must be to the site and not only garage
- Minimize traffic on local roads.
Concerns about encroachment on the Winkler Preserve.
- Encourage non-SOV accommodation.

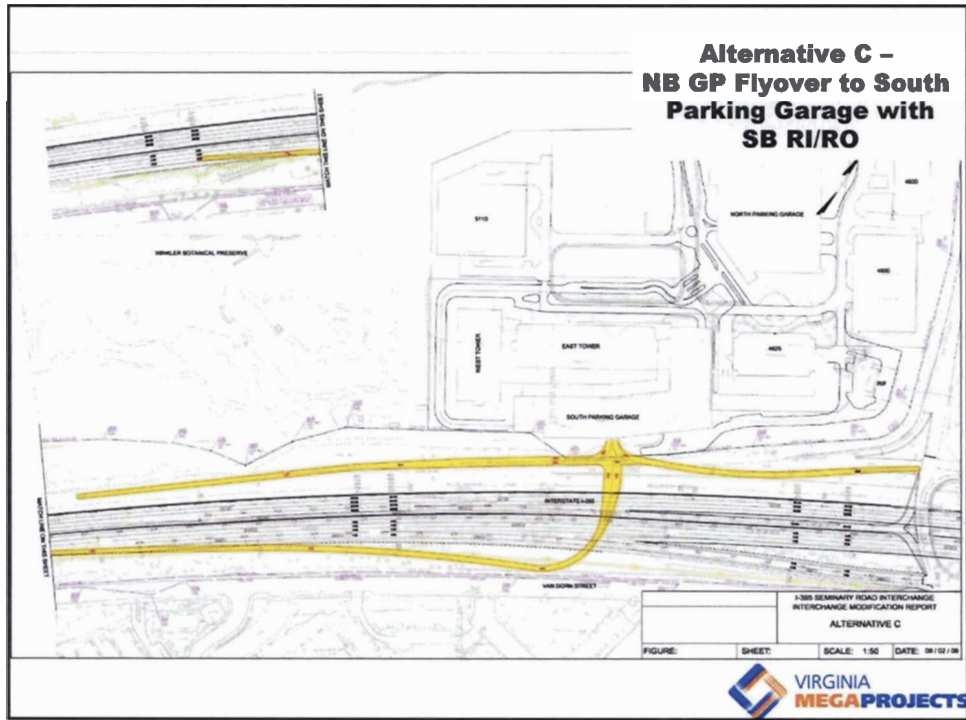
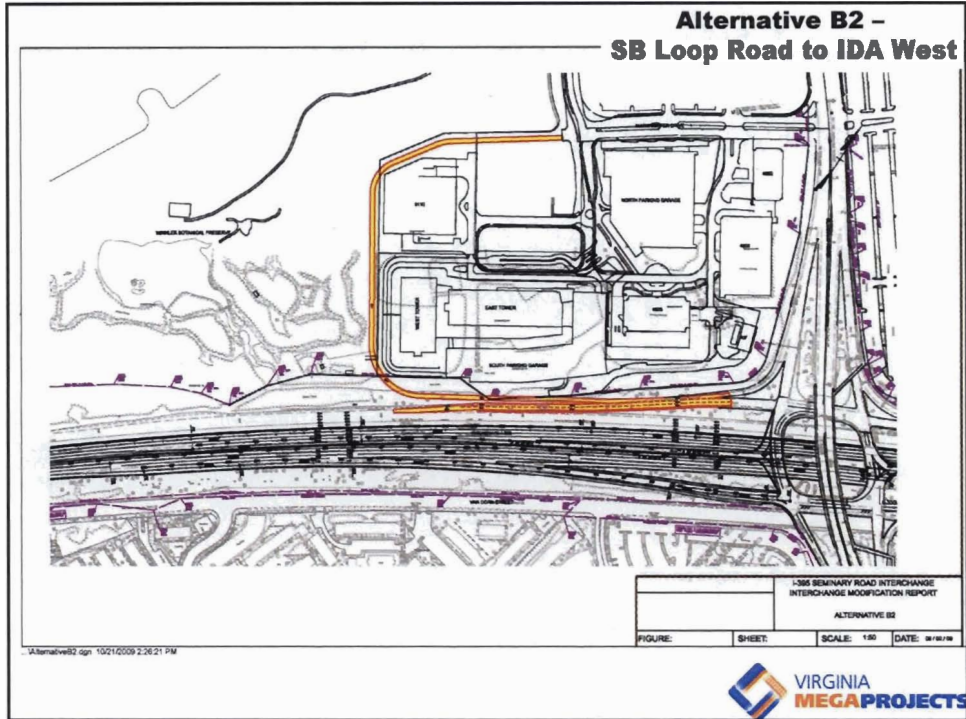
Major Themes From Council

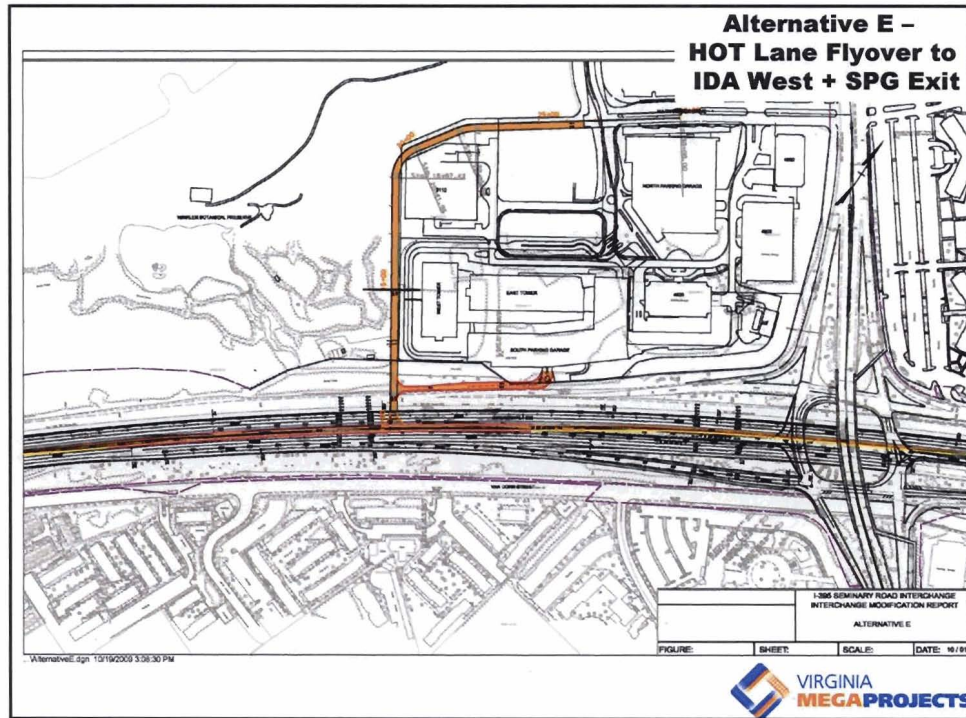
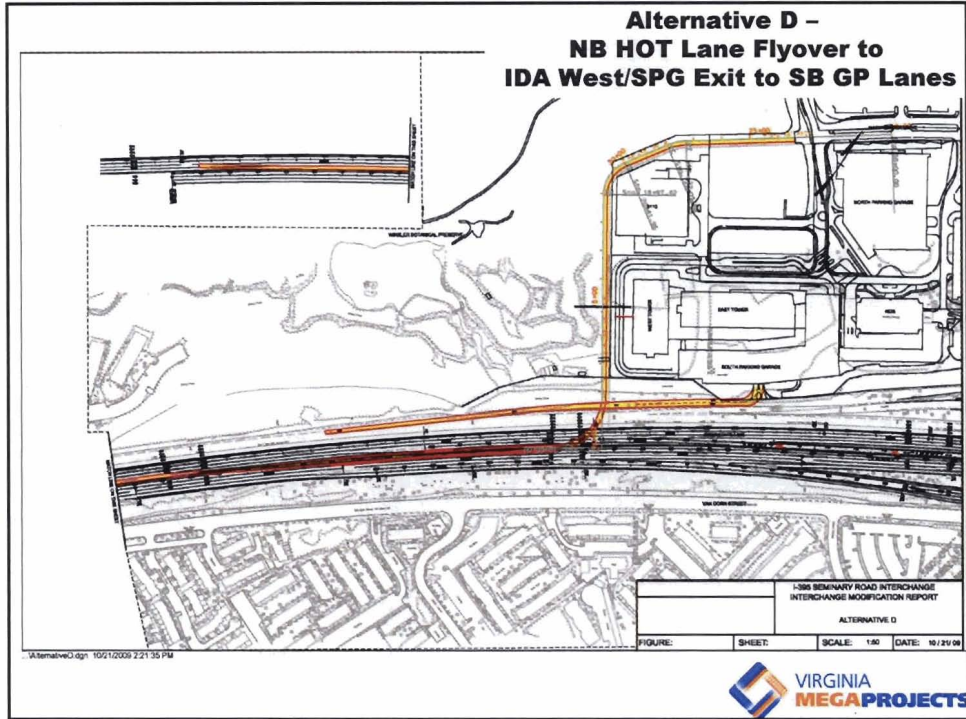
- Encourage HOV and transit use.
- Direct access must be to the site and not only the garage
- City should not have to pay for direct access ramp.
- Need more information in study related to funding and time-line
- Seminary Rd interchange capacity concern
- Short and long term solutions









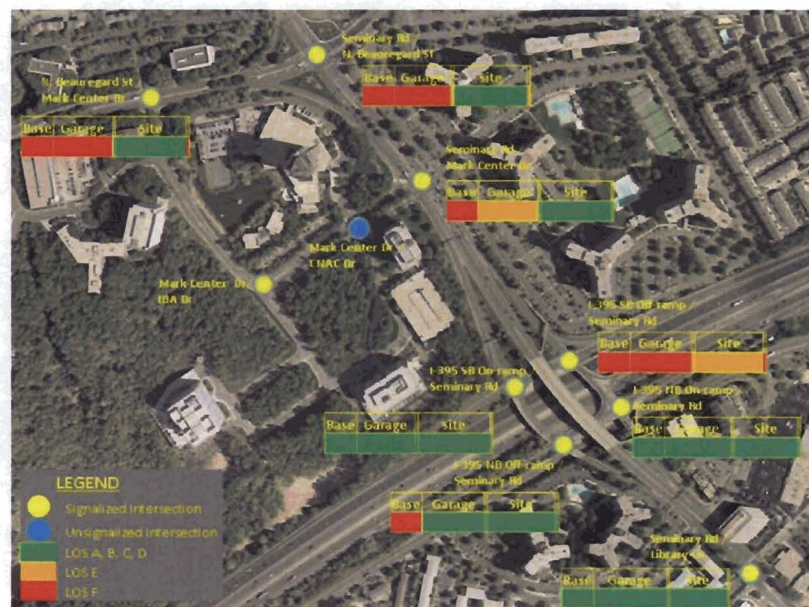


Comparison of Alternatives

Alternative	Impacts Preserve	Impacts to Local Roads	Site Access	HOV/Transit Access
A-1	No	Yes	Garage Only	No
A-2	No	Yes	Garage Only	No
B-1	Yes	Some	Full Site	No
B-2	Yes	Some	Full Site	No
C	No	Some	Garage Only	No
D	Yes	None	Full Site	Yes
E	Yes	None	Full Site	Yes

* Costs and specific environmental impacts to be determined

2013 AM Build Alternatives - Levels of Service



BRAC Advisory Group Guiding Principles

- Be transit-oriented and accommodate HOV lanes
- Be consistent with existing & prop. TMPs and City's Transportation Master Plan
- Provide amenities/incentives to encourage alternate transit use
- Reduce traffic impacts to Seminary/I-395 interchange
- Protect Winkler Botanical Preserve

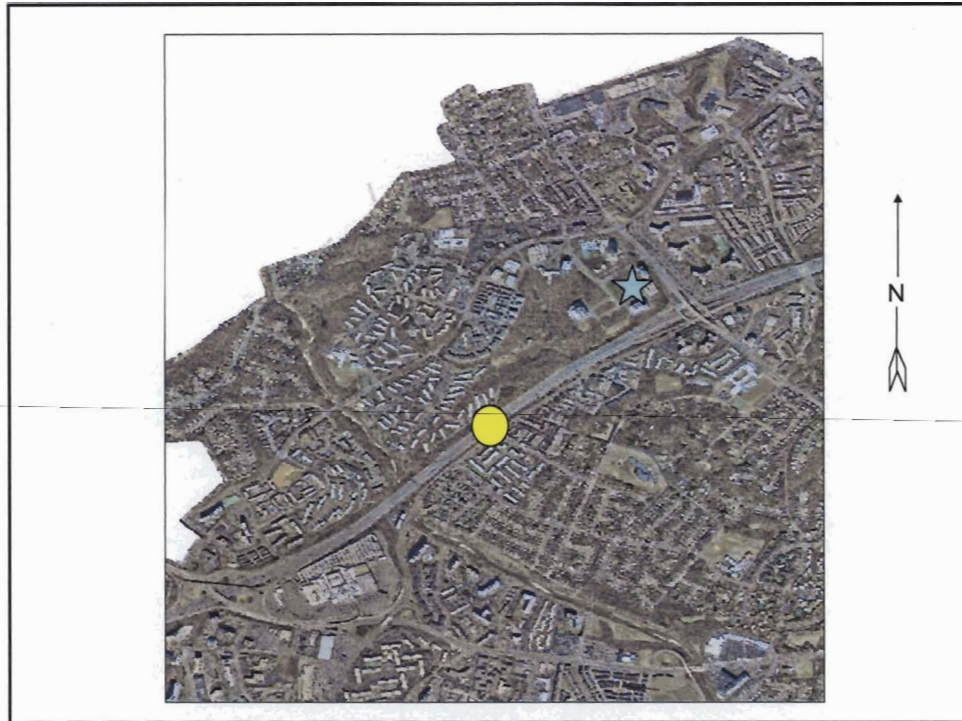
Guiding Principles Continued

- Be designed/built for long term usage, being the most transit efficient alternative, not the least expensive or most expedient
- Improvements need to consider/ accommodate future redevelopment of surrounding areas
- Be funded by the Federal Government through design & construction phases

Guiding Principles Continued

- The City should urgently work to develop and implement solutions to the current and projected traffic problems on Seminary Rd and also consider the Rt 7 corridor. The City should likewise review traffic and pending solutions along Beauregard St to the intersection with Little River Turnpike.





Next Steps

- Continued revisions to alternatives
- Short listing to 2 alternatives + No-Build
- Hold public meeting in January/February
- Finalize documentation of impacts
- Make recommendation to FHWA

