



Town of Wardensville

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November 11, 2023

Mr. Travis Long, Director
Technical Support Division
W.Va. Department of Transportation
1334 Smith Street
Charleston WV 25301

Re: Corridor H Construction:
Wardensville Park, Water
Supply, Access Points, Etc.

Dear Travis:

Greetings from Wardensville in Hardy County. Our Town Council and residents continue to follow with growing concern the fluid state of the alignment and construction plans for the completion of Corridor H from just west of our town through to the Virginia border. While the recent public informational workshop answered some questions, it has also raised a set of new concerns and questions. I hope you can provide answers and clarifications for our Council and the broader Wardensville community.

Elimination of State-Line Access & Waites Run Road Upgrade

The just-announced elimination of the access to W.Va. 55 at the top of the mountain at the W.Va./Va. state line causes us great concern, given that the response for this elimination was that your engineers were "not able to create a safe design" for this access point. As a result of this change, the first access off the Corridor in West Virginia would now be the planned exit at Waites Run Road just outside of Town and directly adjacent to our J. Allen Hawkins Community Park.

We have expressed concerns about this exit in the past — even asking for its elimination or relocation — since Waites Run Road requires significant upgrade in order to be able to accommodate any additional traffic, and especially the kind of traffic that we'd expect for the first exit off the highway in West Virginia.

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You have stated that the W.Va. Division of Highways (DoH) has no plans to update that road. We invite you back to Wardensville to take a drive down Waites Run Road from the proposed exit point into town or to W.Va. Route 55. It is narrow, unlined, has no shoulder, features a series of "S" turns and requires drivers to stop short at several points before reaching Main Street or W.Va. 55. Making this the first exit to town – directly adjacent to our public park and an existing mobile home facility – is a disaster waiting to happen. We have concerns about the safety of children using the park or walking back and forth from their homes.

Furthermore, we believe it would be nearly impossible for tractor trailers to use the exit to make deliveries to Wardensville or access our Wardensville Industrial Park via at Waites Run Road, then on to Carpenters Avenue, Sandfield Road or Furnace Road. All of these lanes are insufficient to handle traffic of this nature. As I'm sure you're aware, the truck body on a tractor trailer can range from 12 to 30 feet, and trailer lengths range from 28 to 53" feet.

The narrow lanes and absence of shoulders would make truck traffic unsafe, and none of the lanes mentioned have the 15- to 20-foot turning span required for trucks to negotiate safely. And simply posting a sign restricting truck traffic on this exit would be unrealistic and hurt the local businesses and our industrial park, which now benefits from the wide, safe standards in place on W.Va. Route 55 east of town.

And to be frank, the citizens of Wardensville have little confidence in the ability of DoH in the area of designing around a difficult situation. The current terminus of Corridor H just west of Wardensville — a sudden, sharp S-curve at the bottom of a long mountain requiring a rapid decrease in speed — has been the site of dozens of accidents since its completion due to what local DoH engineers admit is very poor design, and has already been redesigned and rebanked at least twice.

We have also been informed that, in order to cut costs, DoH is committed to designing this section of Corridor H in-house rather than putting the project design out on bid. As a result, this design will not receive the benefit of a second set of eyes in the design phase. We are concerned that our community will be a test guinea pig as a new staff is learning the ropes on a career-defining opportunity for a project design.

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New Corridor Exit for Best Access to Wardensville

As we have stated in a letter to Secretary of Transportation Jimmy Wriston in May, Wardensville Town Council recommends that the Waites Run Road exit be de-emphasized in favor of a new primary exit from the Corridor into Wardensville be developed at the point directly south of intersection of East and West Main Streets and Carpenters Avenue in town.

Now that you have eliminated the exit at the state line and the problems of the Waites Run Road exit have become more apparent, we encourage you to reconsider this option ASAP. This access would be safer, easier, less expensive to engineer and build, and provide better traffic flow to the community and its businesses.

Continuing Concerns Regarding J. Allen Hawkins Community Park

We have just approved a multiple-phase Master Plan for the development of our J. Allen Hawkins Community Park to give us a road map for fund-raising, construction, maintenance, and new uses for the park in the coming years. These include hiking and biking trails, a splash pad, tennis, basketball, disc golf, and pickleball areas, etc. This plan is available for review at the Wardensville Community Library.

As you well know, the Corridor alignment has always come exceptionally close to the park—less than a quarter-mile away from most of its southern property line—and the road also crosses Waites Run at that point. As we begin to invest time and money—including significant funding from state and federal sources—in the revitalization our Park, we want to be sure that the Corridor will not negatively affect Waites Run Road, Waites Run, or the quality of recreation at the facility or our ability to raise funds for it.

Impact on Water Supply and URGENT Need for Supplemental EIS

As you know from many, many communications from us in the past, the alignment for Corridor H goes directly through the source water projection area for our community water supply, and that has been of great concern to us now and for several years. This water supply is likely supplied from an aquifer that flows through very sensitive karst.

Months ago, we asked if the Division of Highways has ever built a road through a source water protection area that consists of a large sensitive karst formations (highly-soluble limestone) area, as the current Corridor H alignment will. We have yet to receive an answer. We need your full attention to this matter as soon as possible, so that we

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both can go forward with awareness any problems that may have been encountered and how those problems were resolved.

Our community is in the process of taking on a \$6.8-million water project as a result of DoH personnel informing us, a few years back, that the Town “would be on your own if the water source was damaged” by the Corridor H construction. We do not have the financial capability to find and develop a new water source if our water is impacted. We are three years into this project and we are working to secure binding commitment to proceed. We appreciate how the Division of Highways responded to our concerns by contracting for a well monitoring project to determine current flows and monitor potential impacts of road construction on water flow.

However, recently, we met with Steve Sites and Jennifer Belcher of Michael Baker Inc. (working under DoH contract) at the J. Allen Hawkins Park to discuss our new well. Imagine my shock when the Baker staff asked me what the Town’s plan was, if we completely lost our water source! I put the question back on them: What does the W.Va. Department of Transportation plan to do if their construction causes the loss of the community water source?

While our current water project has developed a new, deep-elevation well for our system, it could also likely be affected by Corridor H construction. Our current mitigation plan for our water project was to address lower water flow from our existing sources and groundwater incursion. There’s no way we could suddenly figure out how to get 150,000 gallons of water a day for our community if Corridor construction suddenly caused that new well to go completely dry.

It’s worth mentioning that state’s only natural lake (Trout Pond) dried up for a period of time during the Corridor H construction on Sandy Ridge west of town.

The conversation with your contractors was a huge red flag for us: Are there environmental problems that you foresee that you haven’t shared with us?

The decision to change from building the road behind our town limits below grade to building above grade also begs an important question. The last Environmental Impact Study for this section was completed in 1996; much time has passed, and your plans have changed drastically. Therefore, we believe that it’s time for a supplemental Environmental Impact Study.

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Increase of Project Demolition Scope and Taking of Private Properties

In reviewing your current plans for right-of-way acquisition, we noted that the alignment is unexpectedly encroaching into more of the town limits. The most recent surprise: Keith and Tara Aylor's home is being taken and replaced with a sediment pond, resulting in the loss of four town residents and another home.

Wardensville is a small community. We are running out of properties to rehome the families that are losing their homes to the road and that doesn't bode well as, like dozens of other small W.Va. communities, try to stem loss and keep our people.

The loss of a home and its people affects property tax revenues, sales tax revenues, and our ability to recruit volunteers and public servants.

The Corridor's original alignment didn't have it eliminating so many homes and forcing our neighbors to move away. Our community has worked hard to rebrand ourselves as a destination community. The just-opened Mack's Bingo Kitchen represents a \$4 million investment into our community. Revenues will be impacted by lack of easy access, diminished housing availability, loss of work force, and lack of safe feeder roads.

The million-dollar settlement of the early 2000s that was provided to the Town to help it prepare for the changes anticipated from Corridor H was used to enhance our community and to blunt the impact of the road. These improvements are evident today. But as you continue to change the playing field on what we can expect with this road, we are going to need your cooperation, or else those enhancements will have gone for nothing.

Also, Town and community residents really don't have a full understanding of how of the recent alignment changes and your expanded property takings will effect the area and its landscape. A set of Design Visualization (DV) three-dimensional renderings (see <https://highways.dot.gov/federal-lands/design-visualization>) of the pathway of the new construction from its current terminus west of Town to the W.Va./Va. state line would be an essential aid to help the affected parties understand the road's impact.

Another thing that could help the Town in its development efforts as part of the Corridor construction: We propose that the DoH join a planned petition by property owners adjacent to the Town and its J. Allen Hawkins Community Park to have its properties voluntarily annexed into the Town limits following state property acquisition for the road. This would allow the Town to incorporate its Park into Town limits, extend requested services to these properties, and allow these residents to participate more fully in community activities.

Summary

Travis, with this letter, we ask these questions formally and in writing, **since we have not received consistent information from your staff in the W.Va. Division of Highways during informal conversations over the past few months and years.**

To reiterate the key points:

- We object to the elimination of the Corridor exit/access to W.Va. Route 55 at the W.Va./Va. state line.
- We object to the heavy reliance of the Corridor exit at Waites Run Road, particularly without significant (and likely costly) upgrade of the lane to accommodate additional traffic, including tractor-trailers.
- We request an additional access off the Corridor near the center of Wardensville, due south from the Corridor to the intersection of East and West Main Streets and Carpenters Avenue.
- We continue to express our concern about the potential effect of the Corridor construction and completion on our J. Allen Hawkins Community Park, for which we've just completed a 10-part master plan and have solicited and received state and federal funding for segments of that plan.
- We continue to express our concern about the potential effect of the Corridor construction on the community water supply, as that construction will blast through sensitive karst formations within our source water projection area, and the Division of Highways has not shared any evidence of experience building roads through such an area.

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- Since the last Environmental Impact Study for this section of the road was completed 30 years ago, we request a supplemental EIS to take into account the modified Corridor alignment and its potential impact on the water supply.
- We request that the W.Va. DoH produce a series of Design Visualization 3D renderings of the new alignment and design from the existing Corridor terminus West of Town to the W.Va./Va. state line for public view.
- We request the W.Va. DoH join a petition (or make no objection) whereby property owners adjacent to the Town and its J. Allen Hawkins Community Park will have their properties voluntarily annexed into the Town limits.

As we grow closer to the finalization of plans and the completion of the acquisition of property for the project, **we urge the Division of Highways to address these concerns immediately, and hope to hear back from you in writing within 45 days.**

Wardensville Town Council wants to be a good partner with the Division of Highways on this project, as we have in the past. However, if Division management is unable or unwilling to hear and address these important community concerns, it would force us to seek other ways to address them and to protect our community, assets, businesses, and residents.

Sincerely,
THE TOWN OF WARDENSVILLE

Betsy Orndoff-Sayers, Mayor

cc: John R. Funkhouser, Wardensville Town Attorney
Hon. Bryan Ward, District 55, W.Va. House of Delegates
Hon. Jay Taylor, District 14, W.Va. Senate
Hon. Randy Smith, District 14, W.Va. Senate
Hon. Alex Mooney, U.S. House of Representatives
Hon. Shelley Moore Capito, U.S. Senate
Hon. Joe Manchin, U.S. Senate
Susan Pierce, Director, W.Va. State Historic Preservation Office
Stephanie Pollock, Deputy Administrator, Federal Highways Administration
Hon. Jim Justice, Governor of West Virginia