

Va. Road Rerouting Aids Official

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Northern Virginia's representative on the state highway commission recommended and voted for a controversial rerouting of a proposed major Fairfax County highway that would substantially improve the value of three of his own land holdings and a 387-acre tract belonging to his lawyer.

Commissioner William B. **Wrench** proposed two significant route changes on Aug. 20 at a commission meeting in Richmond. The commission approved the changes 10 to 0, with **Wrench** voting for his own motion. The changes would divert 10 miles of the proposed 35-mile, \$200 million **Springfield Bypass**, putting a potentially lucrative interstate cloverleaf on a large tract owned by John T. (Til) **Hazel**, **Wrench's** personal attorney and one of Fairfax's most influential developers. The route of the highway, what remains in Virginia of the 1960s dream of an Outer Beltway, will help determine the direction of future development in the booming western reaches of Fairfax County.

Fairfax supervisors approved one route for the road June 29, after two years of study and public hearings. The county's route would pass by a proposed government center in western Fairfax and provide a more direct link with Shirley Highway.

But the State Highway and Transportation Commission, which has the final say, changed the route seven weeks later in a way that would benefit parcels owned by **Wrench** and **Hazel**:

- * A five-acre tract on Fullerton Road where **Wrench's** Potomac Mini-Storage Co., a firm that leases warehouse space, is located. Now on a dead-end street, the firm would gain direct access to the bypass.

- * A vacant four-acre lot of **Wrench's** adjacent to the storage firm on the same street.

- * A three-acre tract on Telegraph Road where a second warehouse owned by **Wrench** is located. It would be several hundred feet from another bypass exit.

- * And 387 undeveloped acres between Rte. 50 and I-66 in western Fairfax owned by **Hazel** and his partner, Milton V. Peterson, and already valued at \$1.7 million.

The presence of a full I-66 cloverleaf on the **Hazel-Peterson** tract should more than triple its value, if land development there follows the pattern University of Virginia researchers found in a study of the Capital Beltway. The cloverleaf, along with a planned rezoning of the land, could mean millions of dollars for **Hazel**, a zoning lawyer whose past developments have transformed Fairfax while propelling him to statewide political influence.

Hazel defended the state route last week, saying it was more direct and made more sense for the county.

"The county's selection was bizarre, it was distorted," **Hazel** said. "It's so damn obvious to a traffic engineer with integrity."

Wrench said the route he proposed was the most logical, a position supported by state highway planners, but disputed by Fairfax officials. **Wrench** said he wrote a letter to Virginia's top highway official disclosing that he owned two parcels along the proposed route, but declaring that he planned nonetheless to vote on the project. He said he "didn't even think about" his third parcel, the Telegraph Road property, when he wrote the Aug. 14 letter.

"I would assume it the state route probably will" increase the value of that land, **Wrench** said, but he said that played no part in his decision.

Wrench also said he had discussed the **Springfield** Bypass with **Hazel** from time to time, but never allowed their relationship to affect his actions.

"If you think I'm going to let a road affect my reputation, you're talking to the wrong man," **Wrench** said.

County officials, some of whom have privately questioned the propriety of **Wrench's** action, are furious about the state route. Supervisor Marie Travesky said she would prefer no road to the route selected by the commission, and Fairfax Board Chairman John F. Herrity said much of the state route has "no transportation value."

"I think it's a waste of taxpayers' money to build a goddam road to Newington," Herrity said, referring to the section of road that would go by **Wrench's** property.

The **Springfield** Bypass would curve from Herndon and Rte. 7 in northwest Fairfax to Fort Belvoir and Route 1 in the southeast. It is intended to spur economic development and relieve congestion on the county's secondary roads.

Although funding for the highway is far from assured, Fairfax and Virginia hired a consultant in 1979 to conduct what became a \$2 million environmental impact study.

Hazel and his partner had bought their 387-acre tract shortly before the study began, and from the first, **Hazel's** staff lobbied for an alignment that would provide an interchange on his land, according to state officials and the consultants.

"We knew that **Hazel's** people wanted that thing through there," said William J. Novak, a planner with Tippetts-Abbett-McCarthy-Stratton in Washington. "They came, they initiated contacts with us and they were pretty much in touch with us throughout the project."

The state initially selected **Hazel's** land as one of three possible alignments, with the support of the consultant. But the situation changed when the county picked a site east of the land for its new government center.

Hazel had tried to sell the county some of his own land for the complex, and he says controversy over the route could have been avoided if county officials had listened to him.

"The county got so preoccupied with not dealing with **Hazel** and Peterson that they went off and bought a second-rate piece of property," **Hazel** said last week. "Then they had to put a squiggle in the road."

That squiggle took the interchange away from **Hazel's** property -- although two miles of the bypass would still pass through other lands he owns -- and became one of two focal points of the state-county dispute.

The county and planners agreed that the squiggle would save several neighborhoods from being split by the highway, preventing what the consultant called "severe community impacts."

But **Wrench, Hazel** and state engineers argued that the county route was too circuitous. In addition, state planners said openly that it would not properly serve **Hazel's** development, which most county officials want to encourage.

"We don't usually talk directly to **Hazel** so much as working with his planners and engineers," said state highway planner Michael O'Neal. "From what I understand . . . he intends to build more than what's at Tysons Corner."

Given those plans, O'Neal said the state commission felt it should put the interchange near **Hazel's** land to avoid Tysons-style traffic jams.

Unlike O'Neal, **Wrench** said he talks with **Hazel** frequently. "We've been close associates, friends, for a long time," said **Wrench**, a former chamber of commerce president and unsuccessful Republican candidate for county board chairman.

Hazel was once on the board of directors of one of **Wrench**'s companies and **Wrench** employs **Hazel** as his lawyer, he said last week. Fellow Republicans, they both supported Gov. John N. Dalton, who appointed **Wrench** to the commission.

But **Wrench** said he made his decision on the I-66 interchange solely on the advice of his department's transportation planners. "If somebody could show me where this was not the best decision from a transportation standpoint, I would feel uncomfortable," **Wrench** said.

The same reasoning applied to **Wrench**'s decision on the rerouting near his own property, he said, although county officials want the bypass to hook up with Shirley Highway further to the north.

"If you do it their the state's way, then there's no point in building the road between 123 and Shirley Highway at all," said Annandale Supervisor Audrey Moore. She argued that commuters heading toward the District would not detour two miles south to Newington, but would instead leave the bypass and drive through the congested **Springfield** streets that the bypass was originally planned to avoid.

State officials say the county's proposed interchange would be too congested and too close to the Capital Beltway interchange to withstand additional traffic.

"The overriding factor which controls the location of the Bypass in this area is the tie-in to the existing interchange of Rte. 95," State Highway Commissioner Harold C. King wrote to **Wrench** in a letter dated Aug. 19. "The benefit to your business property, if any, which might result if the Department's recommendation is adopted will be insignificant."

As he studied an official highway map in his Fullerton Road office last week, **Wrench** said he might have been wrong when he acknowledged the bypass would increase the value of his property.

"If I was going to be selfish about it, I might not want Fullerton Road completed," **Wrench** said. "What do I need all that traffic coming in here?"

But several real estate experts say access to the road could only help. And the consultant's environmental impact study concluded that property along the bypass route would increase in value by between \$197 million and \$260 million.

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