

A Waste of Taxpayer Money.
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One of the most frustrating things in this time of personal and governmental belt tightening is seeing a project that is a waste of taxpayer money. And while I rarely delve into issues affecting local government, I must say that widening Devil's Bottom Road is a waste of taxpayer money.

Devil's Bottom Road in Lancaster County is a tiny, narrow and winding road that carries on average 346 cars per day. It is technically a "short cut" between Kilmarnock and Merry Point but it only saves a few minutes versus the "long way". Very few people live on the part of the road to be repaired.

Since it is a secondary road, upgrades are Lancaster County's responsibility – and the issue of whether to upgrade has been around a long time. The cost to repair and upgrade the TWO MILE section is just over \$3 million. The cost to rebuild is high because of wetlands and the fact that the winding road is being redesigned to newer "standards" such as a 40 foot shoulder, etc.

Back in 2002, the Board of Supervisors rationalized the work on Devil's Bottom by saying that they couldn't spend their secondary road money on primary roads where there was clearly a more pressing need. Thus, in 2003 I sponsored HB1447 so that counties could spend their money on primary roads. The bill passed and became law July 1, 2003.

The \$3 million which Lancaster may soon spend on widening Devil's Bottom could be spent on widening Route 3 – which has more than 10,000 cars a day. It could be spent on a study for replacement of the Rappahannock River Bridge.

Because of unrelated issues, the Devil's Bottom project languished. I put in another bill in 2008, House Bill 6016, to make clear to Virginia Department of Transportation engineers that improvements to secondary roads do not have to be the standard with which a new road would be built. The bill passed and became law.

So, under this bill, if VDOT is straightening curves on a country road that is 20 feet wide, it doesn't need to rebuild the road to be 40 feet wide the way a new road would be built.

The issues have recently been brought back up by the county, but for some reason, despite HB 6016, the price tag to rebuild Devil's Bottom is still more than one million dollars per mile.

VDOT, by law, has to improve secondary roads if a county chooses to spend its road money that way – but that doesn't mean it's right. In this economy, there is simply no way to rationalize spending \$3 million to "improve" a two mile stretch of road that only carries on average 346 cars per day. Think about it this way: if you charged each one of those 346 cars a "toll" of \$5 per day, it would take over 4 years to pay back the principal cost alone of the reconstruction. Since a smart consumer would not pay the extra money, it immediately brings the expenditure into question.

By any other measure, this is simply a waste of taxpayer money.