

T202107101 Old Baltimore Pike, Battle Drive to SR 72
Public Workshop - February 6, 2024
Questionnaire and Overall Comments of the
Section 106 Old Baltimore Pike Consulting Parties

Consulting Parties Workshop Response Submission: March 5, 2024

Overall Comments

Unique Nature of the National Register Cooch's Bridge Historic District and the Cooch's Bridge Historic Site – The intersection of Old Baltimore Pike and Old Cooch's Bridge Road is one of the most historic intersections in Delaware and, importantly, has been essentially unchanged for centuries. Not every historic site today is so lucky. The Cooch family, in conjunction with others over the years, has worked hard for many generations to preserve and honor, as best as they have been able, the historic site at Cooch's Bridge. The site is important not only for the 1777 battle fought at that very spot but also for the site's social, agricultural and milling history, which will be interpreted by the Division of Historical and Cultural Affairs (HCA). It has been kept an unspoiled area in the midst of much development. The intersection right where the changes are proposed is situated at the very apex of the September 3, 1777 battle. This factor makes it very difficult for DelDOT to make changes without destroying the very fabric of this intersection.

As the State approaches the 250th anniversary of our Nation's founding, and as HCA along with others develop plans to promote the Cooch's Bridge Historic Site as a heritage tourism destination, now is the time for DelDOT and others to "think big" about broader ways to preserve and protect the site, including the diversion of traffic to the extent feasible away from the site. Specific to the 250th anniversary of the Battle of Cooch's Bridge on September 3, 2027, there is likely to be a large gala event and celebration. The Consulting Parties request that DelDOT take into consideration the timing of its roadwork construction so as not to impede or interfere with the calendar year 2027 250th anniversary events.

The Consulting Parties request that DelDOT recognize and incorporate its need to balance the needs of traffic/pedestrian safety with historic preservation. In all its plans and statements, DelDOT should include brief mention of the historic significance of the affected site. The very title of the project itself (i.e., the T202107101 Old Baltimore Pike, Battle Drive to SR 72 project) omits specific mention of Cooch's Bridge.

Specific to the DelDOT plans, statements, and other associated published information pertaining to this project, DelDOT has only ONE panel board made available to the public with the National Register (NR) District depicted. The Consulting Parties are happy to see that DelDOT does mention 4(f) in one of the panels, but the implications of this section of the act are not explained to the public. Nor is the significance of NR listing explained - that NR listing brings a level of protection to this project area. The Consulting Parties request that DelDOT show the NR boundary on ALL subsequent maps and alternatives. This depicts and highlights

the historical significance of the site to the public as well as to participants in this public workshop review and comments process. It further refutes any false impressions that the landscape around this historic site is unimportant or not significant.

Collaboration With Other Stakeholders – The Consulting Parties are pointing out that significant federal and state funds have already been committed to the preservation and protection of this area, underscoring the need for a collaborative approach to designing whatever may happen here. The T202107101 Old Baltimore Pike, Battle Drive to SR 72 Project needs to be much more of a collaborative planning process between all stakeholders than has happened so far. Specifically, the Consulting Parties are requesting a comprehensive planning process that brings to the SAME table, at the SAME time, all the state agencies that are involved, with each agency (i.e., HCA, DNREC, and DeIDOT) and New Castle County (NCC) holding an equal seat at the table. None of these organizations should be doing "their" planning in isolation for this most-significant cultural resource area in Delaware. The Consulting Parties have repeatedly suggested/requested that this should be a high-level organization meeting (perhaps as high as the cabinet official level), that then develops the overarching policies for the ways the organizations must approach any project undertaken in this area. The Cooch's Bridge Historic Site is too significant for DeIDOT to act as if its plans are paramount to anything else that is occurring there. A bridge replacement project should not, must not, be the deciding undertaking in this area.

Pause in Planning – The Consulting Parties are proposing that there is a major disconnect currently between the plans of DeIDOT as with the plans of the other parties to the preservation and promotion of the Cooch's Bridge Historic Site. As such, the Consulting Parties are requesting that DeIDOT pause further active planning for this project until at least: 1) HCA is much further along in the development of its intended plans for the Cooch's Bridge Historic Site, including the location and likely access to a new Visitors Center from the Old Baltimore Pike; and, 2) the NCC-State of Delaware pedestrian/bicycle trail system linking Iron Hill Park and Glasgow Regional Park planning is also much further along. DeIDOT's statement in its public notice of the March 25, 2024 workshop that "[a]ddressing [DeIDOT's] project's Purpose and Need has the *potential* to help meet the project goals of these projects" (emphasis added) is at odds with this approach. Specifically, the best direction for DeIDOT to take is to stop and desist all efforts related to this project until HCA and NCC have properly submitted their specific needs for their respective projects because none of DeIDOT's proposed plans satisfy the envisioned plans of HCA and NCC, and actually work against them. Up to this point, it is evident that DeIDOT has wasted a lot of effort and time into plans they admit will need to be amended.

Rejection of the DeIDOT Alternatives – The Consulting Parties respectively reject the Alternatives presented by DeIDOT at the February 6, 2024 workshop. The proposed Alternatives are not acceptable since none of them take the truly unique historic site (being the only Revolutionary War battle in Delaware) into critically needed account and do not take into consideration other alternative options, such as:

1. This exploration by DeIDOT could well include the closing of Old Cooch's Bridge Road from Old Baltimore Pike to just north of "Baynard Hall". The online DeIDOT materials

state that intersection changes may well be designed by DelDOT to **allow** renewed school bus usage of Old Cooch's Bridge Road at Old Baltimore Pike. This would be counterproductive to any goal of minimizing traffic at the site. Communication has been made with the planners of the Iron Hill Park-Glasgow Regional Park trail system asking them to consider adding a potentially closed-Old Cooch's Bridge Road to its evolving trail system; this would among other things afford a great opportunity for the public to safely view the intersection where the height of the battle occurred from the *south* side of the Old Baltimore Pike, in addition to viewing and experiencing it from the north side near the house.

2. DelDOT should give the most serious consideration to seek ways to **divert** traffic from the Old Baltimore Pike and Old Cooch's Bridge Road as much as possible instead of developing a plan that is likely to increase traffic on these roads.
3. Currently, plans are under development by other organizations that would greatly impact the DelDOT plans concerning Old Baltimore Pike Battle Drive to SR 72. DelDOT should pause their plans until final plans are provided by HCA on the historic site and by NCC on the Iron Hill Park to Glasgow Park Bike/Hike Path.
4. DelDOT will need to work with HCA and NCC to provide a safe passage across Old Baltimore Pike as part of the Cooch's Bridge Historic Site and the Iron Hill Park to Glasgow Park Bike/Hike path. The Consulting Parties do not agree to a cross-walk across OBP. Rather, the Consulting Parties are requesting a tunnel underneath of or an overpass above OBP. This will ensure the safety of the public attending events at the Cooch's Bridge Historic Site on both sides of OBP as well as the pedestrians and cyclists using the regional trail.
5. Due to the anticipated and substantial increases in pedestrian and bicycle traffic in the Cooch's Bridge Historic Site district, the Consulting Parties are concerned about their safety. Therefore, there must be a requirement to reduce or calm vehicular traffic and eliminate all large truck traffic. All semi-truck traffic should be banned; no roundabouts should be implemented that would accommodate semi-trucks.
6. DelDOT should adjust its plans for Old Baltimore Pike in the vicinity of the Cooch's Bridge Historic District to:
 - Bypass Old Baltimore Pike between 896 and SR 72 and reroute the traffic flow to GBC Drive.
 - Close OCBR and install a cul-de-sac on OCBR. To support the contention that DelDOT does not close roads, there are other roads or portions of roads in northern Delaware that have been closed which include:
 - Creek Road
 - Moody Lane from Rt. 273 to the Shopping Center
 - Smalley's Dam Road
 - Thompson Station Road through White Clay Creek State Park
 - Capitol Trail access to Kirkwood Highway
 - Rt. 273 at Lowes
 - Greenbank Road at Mill
 - Eggerts Lane at Rt. 72

- Utilize the closed OCBR as a portion of the NCC Iron Hill Park to Glasgow Park Bike/Hike Path.
- Provide a gate/barrier on OBP as a way to temporarily control traffic on OBP to support specific events at the Cooch’s Bridge Historic Site.
- Support the entrance development plans and Visitor Center location already in the proposed HCA plans.

Questionnaire

1. How often do you drive through the Old Baltimore Pike and Old Cooch’s Bridge Road intersection?

- A. **Daily – Representatives of the Friends of Cooch’s Bridge Historic Site and the Consulting Parties to this Section 106 project (hereafter “The Consulting Parties) are located at and/or near the historic site and travers the local roads daily.**
- B. Weekly
- C. Occasionally
- D. Rarely

2. Please describe some of the difficulties you encounter throughout the project corridor.

- A. Narrow travel lanes and shoulders.
- B. Inadequate sight distances.
- C. Inadequate turning geometry
- D. I do not encounter difficulties throughout the project corridor.

Comments – The above roadway difficulties are experienced by representatives of the Consulting Parties. Remedies as to how to address these problems, however, are not part of the current alternatives as proposed by DeIDOT.

3. Do you support Alternative 1A (Old Cooch’s Bridge Road shifted 150 west, shared use path on the north side of Old Baltimore Pike.)?

- A. Yes
- B. **NO**
- C. Unsure

Comments – The Consulting Parties object to DeIDOT Alternative 1A that moves Old Cooch’s Bridge Road (OCBR) west onto Cannonshire Open Space and is directly in front of the entrance to the Cooch’s Bridge Historic Site homestead. There are other alternatives recommended by the Friends of Cooch’s Bridge Historic Site as described in this questionnaire response. The Consulting Parties recommend as an alternative to shifting OCBR road westbound, to close (OCBR) and install a cul-de-sac on OCBR. If closing OCBR is not an option, the Consulting Parties recommend to make OCBR one-way northbound for traffic where the only option is to turn right east-bound on OBP. The Consulting Parties also recommend to use the closed OCBR as a portion of the New Castle County Iron Hill Park to Glasgow Park Bike/Hike Path. To support the contention that DeIDOT does not close roads,

there are other roads or portions of roads in northern Delaware that have been closed which include:

- Creek Road
- Moody Lane from Rt. 273 to the Shopping Center
- Smalley's Dam Road
- Thompson Station Road through White Clay Creek State Park
- Capitol Trail access to Kirkwood Highway
- Rt. 273 at Lowes
- Greenbank Road at Mill
- Eggerts Lane at Rt. 72

4. Do you support Alternative 2A (Improvements at the existing intersection, shared use path on the north side of Old Baltimore Pike.)?

- A. Yes
- B. NO**
- C. Unsure

Comments - The current entrance to the Cooch's Bridge Historic Site homestead should be used for administrative staff located onsite. The Consulting Parties recommend DeIDOT close Old Baltimore Pike (OBP) through the Cooch's Bridge Historic Site and reroute the traffic flow to GBC Drive. In addition, the Consulting Parties recommend that DeIDOT provide a gate/barrier on OBP as a way to temporarily allow traffic on OBP for staff and particular event participants at times associated with events at the Cooch's Bridge Historic Site.

5. Do you support Alternative 4A (Improvements at the existing intersection, shared use path on the north side of Old Baltimore Pike. Similar to Alternative 2A but would widen Old Baltimore Pike 5-8 feet south.)?

- A. Yes
- B. NO**
- C. Unsure

Comments – One of the problems associated with site lines from OCBR to OBP is the issue of left turns westbound onto OBP and left turns on OBP to OCBR. The Consulting Parties recommend that DeIDOT close OCBR at OBP and install a cul-de-sac on OCBR. If closing OCBR is not an option, make OCBR one-way northbound for traffic with the only option is to turn right east-bound on OBP.

6. Do you support Alternative 6A (Roundabout - Old Cooch's Bridge Road shifted 150 west, shared use path on the north side of Old Baltimore Pike.)?

- A. Yes
- B. NO**
- C. Unsure

Comments – The problem with this DeIDOT Alternative that creates a Roundabout on OBP/OCBR is that it would increase the ease for tractor trailer traffic to use

both OBP and OCBR roads more than they do now. The Consulting Parties object to this DeIDOT Alternative that moves OCBR west onto Cannonshire Open Space and is directly in front of the entrance to the Cooch’s Bridge Historic Site homestead. Like DeIDOT, the Consulting Parties are very much supportive of enhancing roadway safety through the historic site as well as preservation of the historic nature of the site. The Consulting Parties recommend that DeIDOT install traffic calming strategies, such as traffic islands, etc.

7. Do you support Alternative 6B (Roundabout - Old Cooch’s Bridge Road shifted 150 west, shared use path on the south side of Old Baltimore Pike.)?
- A. Yes
 - B. NO**
 - C. Unsure

Comments – The problem with this DeIDOT Alternative that creates a Roundabout on OBP/OCBR is that it would increase the ease for tractor trailer traffic to use both OBP and OCBR roads more than they do now. The Consulting Parties object to this DeIDOT Alternative that moves OCBR west onto Cannonshire Open Space and is directly in front of the entrance to the Cooch’s Bridge Historic Site homestead. Like DeIDOT, the Consulting Parties are very much supportive of enhancing roadway safety through the historic site as well as preservation of the historic nature of the site. The Consulting Parties recommend that DeIDOT install traffic calming strategies, such as traffic islands, etc.

8. Other Suggestions or additional comments?

The email address on the February 6, 2024 Public Workshop questionnaire (“Santiago Rodriguez@delaware.gov”) is an invalid email address. It should be Santiago.rodriques@delaware.gov and should be corrected and communicated to the public workshop attendees.

Optional: Please provide your contact information to stay informed about this project:

Name: Richard Wadman, representing the Friends of Cooch’s Bridge Historic Site and the Consulting Parties to the Section 106 project T202107101 Old Baltimore Pike, Battle Drive to SR 72

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