

Print this Page

[Return to story](#)

VDOT adjusts the light cycle at Harrison Road, U.S. 1

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AGRASS-ROOTS effort is afoot to make Alexandria a slugging destination.

The informal carpool lines that form at Fredericksburg-area commuter lots--allowing drivers to pick up two people and use the high occupancy vehicle lanes on Interstate 95--take passengers to the Pentagon, Crystal City, Rosslyn and various locations in downtown Washington.

With a healthy number of residents working in Alexandria, the slugging community is trying to start lines that would go to Metro stations at King Street and Eisenhower Avenue.

Interested? Visit the hub for the slugging community, slug-lines.com, take a poll about your preferences, and join the message board conversation.

Need help finding a shared ride or transit option to work elsewhere, even one where you think no one else is headed? I always send readers first to GWRideConnect, a free ride matching service provided by a government agency in Fredericksburg, the George Washington Regional Commission. I'm always amazed by where buses, carpools and vanpools are going, and how early in the morning! It can't hurt to check. Call 540/373-POOL or visit gwregion.org/gwrideconnect.html.

A quick reminder that the intersection of Kenmore Avenue and William Street in Fredericksburg closes to all traffic tomorrow morning at 9 a.m. and will remain closed through Friday, June 11. The city is replacing a sewer line.

Motorists are encouraged to use Hanover and Littlepage streets as detours.

Dear Kelly: From around 2:30 p.m. until 6 p.m. the signal in Spotsylvania for the westbound left turn lane to Harrison Road from northbound U.S. 1 is too short.

The light cycle leaves vehicles backed up blocking the left lane of northbound U.S. 1. Please check into it before someone gets hit.

--John Wheeler, Spotsylvania

Vehicles waiting to turn left onto Harrison Road from U.S. 1 northbound now have an additional 11 seconds on the green left turn arrow! The Virginia Department of Transportation's traffic signal engineering department visited the Harrison Road-U.S. 1 intersection to investigate your question, and subsequently added time.

The 11 seconds is enough to provide relief at that intersection, said Tina Bundy, VDOT spokeswoman.

Dear Kelly: Traffic westbound from Interstate 95 on State Route 3 has been terrible this week.

It looks like VDOT has been adjusting light sequences again. It's been miserable every night this week around 5 p.m.

--Larry Schimelpfenig, Spotsylvania

I'm sorry State Route 3 has been especially painful lately. While it's hard to pinpoint exactly what could have caused the problem the week of May 10-14, when you submitted your question, I have two theories.

First, May 10-14 was smack dab in the middle of VDOT's traffic signal optimization project to synchronize 29 traffic signals in the Route 3 area. The goal of optimization is to time all the signals so they move as many vehicles up and down the corridor as possible, reducing idling times and fuel emissions.

The signal locations are too numerous to list here, but the stretch covered starts right off Interstate 95 at the Carl D. Silver Parkway entrance to Central Park and runs west to Brock Road, which is nearly in Orange County. The signals run five patterns: weekday morning, midday, weekday afternoon, weekend peak and off-peak.

Signals on feeder roads to Route 3--Gordon, Harrison, Leavells and Salem Church roads--also were optimized.

That project is now completed, so hopefully drivers are noticing some improvement. The testing took place April 29 to May 13, so there could have been--maybe--an impact. But VDOT says that work did not cause a delay.

VDOT had a different answer as to why Route 3 afternoon traffic may have be worse than usual. Extra congestion the week of May 10-14 was likely related to construction on Bragg Road, not to any traffic signal timing, said VDOT's Bundy.

The intersection of Bragg Road and Route 3 is an active work zone as VDOT widens Bragg to four lanes. VDOT is paving in that area and building a second eastbound turn lane on Route 3, Bundy said. Once westbound drivers passes Bragg Road, they should notice a reduction in congestion, Bundy said.

Everything about that intersection screams WORK ZONE. There are orange barrels and blocked-off lanes, and sharp turns to get in and out of Bragg. I think we are all slowing down there.

The good news is that VDOT is making the project happen at warp speed, by transportation standards. The official timeline says it will be done by September 2011. VDOT cannot say it will be done sooner, since weather can always cause complications.

However, the new southbound lanes have been built and traffic is using them, and the northbound lanes are well under way. The public should see a new traffic pattern on Bragg Road within six weeks or so, so workers can tackle some median work.

When the project is done, new traffic signals will be activated at River Road and Wills Way, and a new, larger signal will go up at Bragg Road and Route 3, where it will join the optimized corridor of 29 signals.

Kelly Hannon is The Free Lance-Star's transportation reporter. If you have questions, send them to Getting There, c/o The Free Lance-Star, 616 Amelia St., Fredericksburg, Va. 22401, or visit fredericksburg .com.