



OAKLAND BYPASS

Bypass | verb [*with object*]
avoid or circumvent (an obstacle or problem)

Do you view Downtown Oakland as an obstacle or problem?

The Maryland State Highway Administration and Maryland Department of Transportation has allocated \$100,000,000 to construct a bypass to divert traffic away from Downtown Oakland, Garrett County's seat and home to the largest concentration of commercial, office, retail, and government spaces in the county.

The proposed 2.4 miles of highway will allow traffic to circumvent the downtown area at speeds of 50 MPH and possibly include a roundabout severing multiple access points between Mountain Lake Park, the most populated municipality, and Oakland. The project has been deemed by state and local officials as the "number one planning and number one safety priority."

The "safety" outcomes of the Oakland Bypass begin to pale in comparison to the untended consequences that could follow its completion. Oakland's Mayor and Town Council must determine if moving forward best serves businesses, merchants, and the economy that replenish the tax coffers.

Potential bypass negative economic impacts.



Studies show that towns with populations under 3,000 often suffer economic downturns following construction of a bypass that can leach desired traffic patterns from previously traveled commercial routes. Oakland's 2017 population is 1,925.

If the desired outcome of a bypass is to achieve a quieter downtown area, this is counterintuitive to thriving commercial districts with shopping and service businesses. Well-traveled roads and robust pedestrian traffic are a high priority for successful business locations.

Elected officials in small and medium-sized communities often view a new bypass and the undeveloped access it brings as an opportunity for economic growth. The reality is more likely to be a redistribution of economic activity from the downtown area toward the new bypass. The downtown, along with its valuable, historic infrastructure and local business, will likely experience increased vacancy rates, while new, national chain stores develop near the bypass. National chain stores typically give back less or nothing at all to the local community that supports them.

Retail stores, convenience stores and businesses that rely on continuous drive-by traffic take an average of 5 years to recover, if at all, from the changed traffic pattern created by a bypass.

Safety has not presented as a concern to insurance companies. xxx accidents in 2016-2017 have shown that xx% of accidents involved passenger vehicles and xx% commercial.

The Deep Creek Lake area may see a drastic increase in commercial truck traffic if the Oakland Bypass is completed. Through-traffic will utilize the length of Route 219 that passes the most congested part of the county during peak tourist seasons.

What a bypass won't do.

Logging and local commercial tractor trailers will still require local roads for business and deliveries. Road maintenance and snow removal will become Oakland's responsibility along 3rd street since the bypass will downgrade the current state-managed thoroughfare to a local road.

Alternate Solutions

If the goal of a bypass is to reroute only heavy commercial vehicles rather than all traffic, a designated truck route has been suggested. For a more affordable upgrade, existing roads could serve as a viable through way . Visit www.engageMMD.org to view a suggested map.



Oakland Bypass Rationale

A two primary questions spark debate about the proposed Oakland Bypass or Ninth Street Extended (truck route). Who does it serve, and what problem does it propose to solve? The State, the County, nor the Town of Oakland have shared any recent studies or reports that justify a current need for the Oakland Bypass; safety or otherwise. There is also no Economic Analysis to determine the net outcome of a bypass addressing current businesses and economic growth in the downtown area or the region.

Traffic Projections

In August of 2001 the US Department of Transportation - Federal Highway Administration and the State of Maryland Department of Transportation - State Highway Administration issued a **"Record of Decision – US 219 Through Oakland" Finding of No Significant Impact**" (FONSI) Report No. FHWA-MD-EA-99-03-F

Data from this report was used to project into the future and determine the volumes of traffic. Between 1993 and 1996 the study concluded Oakland's Level of Service (LOS) should be categorized as "Level A" or free traffic, low volumes, and higher speeds. Traffic volume projections were estimated through 2020 and under the No-Build (bypass) scenario Oakland should expect traffic volume increases leading to an LOS rating at "Level D" – approaching unstable flow, heavy traffic volumes, decreasing speeds. (Page III-8 FONSI report)

Data projections were showing an annual increase of an "assumed" 3% based on the 3-year study period from 1993 to 1996 and included extended projections from 1996 through 2006, estimating growth at an "assumed" 2% between 2006 and 2020. (page III-7 FONSI report, table III-1) Traffic data during the study period (93-96) was compiled from 6 intersections (219 traffic) in and around Oakland. Current traffic counts are compiled from sections of roadways (219) in and around Oakland.

Traffic counts are currently showing an average of a 8.95% drop, (SHA website for AADT) with an 18% drop for 219 between Memorial Drive and Kings Run Road and only one road (Memorial Drive) showing an increase at 5%. These totals are for the 10 year reporting period between 2007 and 2016. The original study (FONSI) only used a 3-year data collection period (1993 to 1996) to determine traffic volume increases until 2006 (3% annually) and again through 2020 (2% annually).

The Maryland SHA released their current **Consolidated Transportation Program** (CPT) report FY 18-23 (January 2018). Under Garrett County on page SHA-G-4 the "Oakland Bypass" also projected **Annual Average Daily Traffic** (AADT) and shows projections out to 2035 (18 years) with a 4% increase for the entire 18 year period, which would still be below the projected totals from the original FONSI study. A review of the AADTs from SHA shows, if taking a very limited selection (2-3 years) and selected specific years (consecutive), an analysis could possibly find totals that favored the current projections of 4% increases.

Safety Priority

The 2018 CPT and the Garrett County Commissioners Transportation Priorities (July 3rd, 2017) have listed the Oakland Bypass as a "Safety Priority." Accident data collected in the FONSI report from 1993 to 1996 accidents throughout the study area fell below the average for other similar State-maintained highways and that within Oakland corporate limits accident incidents were higher.

They identified the intersections of Oak and 8th and Oak and MD39 as "High Accident Intersections" (FONSI report page III-8, III-9) Previous Commissioner letters for transportation priorities included the Oakland Bypass as a priority, but it was moved up and down the list of importance, depending on higher priorities in any given year.

In 2016 the proposed bypass was designated the #1 Safety Priority with no additional documentation or updated studies to support its upgraded status for transportation needs. Consequently, there was a study for Downtown Oakland: **Downtown Parking and Traffic Study** that was completed in 2013 and presented the Town of Oakland on August 4, 2014. Within the study, accidents were tracked and labeled "Crash History" in the presentation. This history was for a 2-year time frame from 2011 to 2013 and showed accident locations within the Town of Oakland. Eighteen (18) accidents were recorded during that time with no fatalities according to SHA Accident/Data Analysis reports. During the 3-year study period of the FONSI, it was determined that there were **119.9** acc/100mvm (*accidents per 100 vehicle miles*), with the state average at **129.4** acc/100mvm between Jasper Riley Road and Kings Run Road and a higher, **265.49** acc/100mvm, in Town limits and the state average at **131.09** acc/100mvm.

Low-Cost Solutions

Over the years, monies have been spent to lessen some issues with traffic in the downtown area, including an updated and widened turning radius at Oak Street and Third Street, "no turn on red" sign at Alder Street & 3rd, center turning lanes at higher-speed traffic routes along Third Street, removing sections of sidewalk in front of the Sheriff's Department for

better parking, to outline a few. This in turn has, led to fewer accidents, according to the 2013 Accident report, and better traffic flow. Low-cost solutions and a 8.95 percent reduction in traffic have kept traffic counts far below projected totals and also keeps traffic flowing through Oakland at or near traffic levels from 22 years prior.

Economic development in historic downtown Oakland is experiencing a concerning stagnation and decline and a Study, journaled, from the United States Department of Transportation – Bureau of Transportation Statistics; **The Impacts of Bypasses on Small- and Medium-Sized Communities: An Econometric Analysis**, says that communities with populations of less than 3000 that install a bypass, experience negative impacts to existing businesses. These businesses include; gas stations, restaurants, professional services and service industries. Oakland has roughly 1900 residents and is currently home to the largest concentration of retail and commercial properties in the county.

The State has already spent millions of tax-payer dollars on the proposed bypass (over \$4 million since the mid-1990s), which could have been used to address street scaping, signage, road markings, and enforcement. Identifying the actual purpose of a bypass, its impacts on Oakland commerce and residents has yet to be determined. If the proposed bypass does not meet the criteria for construction or transportation dollars could be better spent to mitigate transportation issues of concern, reconsideration should be taken before prioritizing the project.

For the most recent information, visit: EngageMMD.org/bypass