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May 29, 2024

William Wheeler, PE, PMP, LEED AP  
Project Manager  
Virginia Department of Transportation  
1401 E Broad St  
Richmond, VA 23219

Re: Mayo Bridge Project – Response to VDOT Public Survey

Dear Mr. Wheeler,

Thank you for circulating a public survey regarding the Mayo Bridge Project. We have been looking forward to community engagement regarding this project.

Historic Richmond accepted its invitation to be a consulting party on this project as part of the Section 106 process in September 2023, but has received no communications since that time. This letter reaffirms our desire to be a consulting party with respect to this project.<sup>1</sup>

The survey begins with the statement that “. . . based on a structural and geotechnical analysis of the existing piers, the cost to reuse the existing piers increased. We then concluded that fully replacing the bridge would be in the public’s best interest.” In the interests of transparency and meaningful community engagement, we ask that you make publicly available the structural and geotechnical reports and explain the decision-making process. While a survey is an excellent first step towards meaningful public engagement, it would be helpful for the community to have more context and information before weighing in.

Additionally, we are concerned with the way the survey is worded and structured. First, the questions appear to prioritize automobile users of the bridge and focus on the current use of the bridge. With the City of Richmond’s acquisition of Mayo Island, there is an opportunity to develop a vision for how a bridge can and should be used to accommodate multiple community needs, not just transit across the river but also as a means of expanding Mayo Island as a public park to connect with the neighborhoods on either side of the river. Second, each question allows for only one response rather than a ranked choice among the multiple options, implying that each goal is individually incompatible or in conflict with the other goals. No questions address the impact of bridge design on the neighborhoods and streets on either end of the bridge. No questions address placemaking for people with art. The only questions that touch on architecture refer to “replicating existing landmark style” and do not speak

to the manner in which historic architecture resonates with the Richmond community. See the photo below of the presentation board from the community meeting held on Monday, May 20 with the significant community feedback favoring the photos depicting historic bridge architecture. We question how the responses to such a survey can be considered meaningful community feedback.

There has been a Mayo Bridge in this location since almost the beginning of Richmond. The one built at the time of unification of Richmond and Manchester is not only beautiful, but also historically, architecturally and culturally significant. It was built with the spirit of unification and optimism as a multimodal connector between the two sides of the river. If this bridge must be replaced, it should be replaced with another 100-year bridge that Richmonders will love. This is an opportunity for placemaking at its finest, with architectural significance and dedicated places for recreation and multimodal transport as well as for cars. The emphasis needs to be on people—people walking, people biking, people fishing— not vehicles.

The May 20 community-led charette clearly illustrated how much the community cares about this bridge. Attendees highlighted both the necessity of safe, designated spaces for cyclists and pedestrians, as well as an acknowledgement of the historic importance of the bridge, and a desire for something architecturally beautiful and unique. The City's ownership of Mayo Island was also a common theme, as this bridge will serve as an important connection point to that public green space. This historic structure was built as a community resource, and a new iteration should maintain that ideal, rather than simply aiming to move as many cars as possible as quickly as possible. It is our hope that the project leads will pay attention to what the people who will ultimately be using this bridge are saying, and properly launch this Section 106 process sooner, rather than later, while community input can still be easily incorporated.

One idea that arose repeatedly at the charette was the concept of retaining the original bridge as a place for people walking and biking and constructing a new bridge for vehicular traffic. We would love to see the historic Mayo Bridge preserved and revitalized as just such a place for people walking, biking, and fishing.

We hope that you will take our comments into consideration and look forward to hearing from the project team as part of the Section 106 process. Please feel free to reach out with any questions.

Thank you,



Cyane Crump

Executive Director  
Historic Richmond

cc: Martha Warthen, President, Historic Richmond Board of Trustees

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<sup>1</sup> Please include Cyane Crump, [ccrump@historichrichmond.com](mailto:ccrump@historichrichmond.com), Danielle Porter, [dporter@historichrichmond.com](mailto:dporter@historichrichmond.com), Jennie Joyce, [jjoyce@historichrichmond.com](mailto:jjoyce@historichrichmond.com) on all correspondence relating to the Section 106 process.

