

Group's Concerns For Manassas Battlefield

TO THE EDITOR:

The Friends of the Manassas National Battlefield Park believe it is essential that routes 29 and 234 be removed from the Manassas Battlefield. The through traffic using these two busy commuter routes is literally choking the park. Visitors are discouraged from fully appreciating this national historic treasure, and commuters are increasingly frustrated by the gridlock within the park.

The Friends recognize two reasons for relocating the through traffic currently in the park. First, it is necessary to segregate through and visitor traffic because their needs and expectations conflict and are mutually incompatible, and the combined number of vehicles has exceeded the capacity of the roads within the park. Second, the very presence of a through highway and the noise it generates intrudes into the historic landscape, interferes with interpretation of the historic events and desecrates the hallowed ground.

The Bypass Study Group has addressed the first problem (segregating visitor and commuter traffic), but bypass alignments the Study is actively pursuing would only move, not remove, the second problem. The bypass options north of I-66 that survived the first screening are located on or near the park borders, or within the park itself, and would violate the integrity of the battlefield. In

addition, locating a major through highway like US 29 on the undeveloped border of a tourist attraction like the Manassas Battlefield will create a magnet for development.

The process calls for the Study Group to screen the existing bypass options once again, and forward two alternate bypass alignments to the Federal Highway Administration and the Army Corps of Engineers for an environmental impact assessment (EIS). The final selection will be submitted to the Secretary of the Interior, who will request Congress to appropriate funding.

If the funds are provided, the Secretary will have the bypasses built. The best time to influence selection of bypass alignment is now, while the evaluations are still being made by the Study Group and all of the options are still subject to review.

The 1988 law authorizing the Bypass Study directed that 29 and 234 traffic be relocated "...in, or in the vicinity of" the Manassas Battlefield. The Study Group has rigidly interpreted this to mean on or within the borders of the park. The law also requires the integrity of the park be protected.

We believe that locating major highways on the undeveloped park borders, along with the resulting development, would negatively impact the two primary purposes for maintaining the Manassas

Battlefield (historic interpretation and commemoration of these fields of valor). The Friends are asking that all of the bypass options be reassessed by applying criteria that protect the integrity of the park.

We were disappointed by the July *Civil War News* staff article on the Manassas Park Bypass Options which read as if the Friends are opposed to all bypasses. Nothing could be further from the truth. The Friends have submitted two constructive bypass proposals to the Study Group that have survived the initial screening. On the central issue, the necessity of relocating routes 29 and 234, Dr. Robert Sutton (the Park Superintendent) and the Friends are in total agreement.

The Friends are working to ensure that advantageous bypasses are built, and that through traffic is rerouted to the mutual benefit of the Battlefield, the visitors and the commuters. We are also working to ensure that the location of the bypasses relieves the traffic congestion within the Manassas Battlefield without causing new problems for the park.

To these ends, we need and will welcome your help. Please visit the Friends web site (<http://www.fmnbp.org>), and explore the Battlefield Bypasses section for our assessment of this issue.

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