

Virginians for Appropriate Roads



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Virginians for Appropriate Roads and Virginia Forest Watch file lawsuit against Federal Highway Administration and Virginia Department of Transportation

Plaintiffs claim federal agencies refused to evaluate U.S. 220 upgrade as alternative to building Interstate 73 through Roanoke, Franklin, and Henry Counties

Virginians for Appropriate Roads (VAR) has filed legal action against Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) seeking an injunction prohibiting FHWA from providing financial assistance for I-73 and prohibiting Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) and its contractors from commencing construction of the project.

VAR, Virginia Forest Watch, and two individually-named co-plaintiffs claim that FHWA's refusal to study a comprehensive upgrade of U.S. 220 as an alternative to building I-73 is a violation of National Environmental Policy Act.

The lawsuit cites I-73's "significant, irreversible adverse effects on natural, scenic, and ecological resources, including impacting 3,370 acres of forest habitat and more than 52,000 linear feet of stream and associated riparian corridors, exposing over 2,000 households to noise and air pollution, adversely impacting thousands of acres of natural habitat and farmland, fragmenting and disrupting wildlife corridors and destroying terrestrial and aquatic wildlife habitat, stimulating sprawl development and exacerbating air pollution and greenhouse gases, with attendant impacts on public health and global warming, and exposing children attending the Clearbrook Elementary School, and other vulnerable populations located adjacent to the new highway to airborne pollution, including particulate matter and other mobile source air toxics that cause asthma and other respiratory diseases, cancer, cardiovascular disease, and other diseases that contribute to increased emergency and urgent care, long-term hospitalization, increased medical costs, lost work and school days, and early death."

VAR was formed in 1998 as a coalition of citizen groups organized to oppose I-73. In 1999 VAR began surveying historic resources in the I-73 study area, resulting in the group's successful identification of the Southeast Roanoke Historic District and the subsequent decision in 2004 by the Commonwealth Transportation Board to reroute I-73 to avoid the historic urban area.

VAR is a chapter of Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League.

According to FHWA, the estimated construction start date for the I-73 project is 2012 and the construction completion date is 2025. FHWA's 2007 cost estimate for building I-73 is nearly \$4 billion. The agency estimated in 2007 that upgrading U.S. 220 would cost \$8.54 million.

VAR and numerous other citizen groups throughout southwestern Virginia have claimed repeatedly that fixing U.S. 220 incrementally as funding is available serves the transportation needs of our region far better than building a new interstate freeway through what remains of our region's forests, farmlands, and traditional rural communities, including the Old German Baptist farming district in Franklin County, which is bisected by the approved I-73 corridor.

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