



Will The **OAKLAND BYPASS** Cause a Downtown Downturn?

In this case, a Bypass is elective.

*Oakland officials are considering a **Bypass** for the **Heart** of its Downtown district. The Maryland State Highway Administration (SHA) and Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) estimate \$53 million in construction costs to reroute traffic around Garrett County's seat which is home to the most concentrated commercial, office, retail, institutional, and government space in the county.*

The proposed 2.4 miles of highway will divert traffic from the downtown area, whisking passengers past at 50 MPH. Main arteries between 2,000-plus Mountain Lake Park residents and Downtown Oakland would be bisected by high-speed traffic. The project has been deemed by state and local officials as the "number one planning and number one safety priority."

Decades of private and public stewardship have preserved and revitalized the downtown district resulting in the restored B&O Train Station, bricked sidewalks, period lamp posts, The Transportation Museum, walking trails, murals, Veteran's Park, and the Historic Society Facade and Gazebo.

Five committees, formed by the Greater Oakland Business Association, are now focused on bringing MORE traffic into Oakland, not less, to stimulate economic growth and commercial property values. Events like the vibrant Farmers Market and the Little Yough Music Festival fill downtown with excitement. Also, a new A&E District has just launched with state designation.

Oakland's Mayor and Town Council must determine if moving forward with a bypass serves in the best interests of businesses, merchants, and the economy that replenish the tax coffers.

Potential negative economic impacts.

The bypass has been revisited many times since the 1970s, each time it' has failed approval. SHA and MDOT have designated \$1 million for a new design study with hopes of lowering the cost and justifying the expense of a new Bypass. Additional funding will be required for an updated environmental impact study.



- ▶ Studies show that towns with populations under 3,000 often suffer economic downturns following construction of a bypass, leaching desired traffic volume from previously traveled commercial routes. Examples of these impacts include Friendsville and Hancock in Maryland and Hopwood in Pennsylvania. Oakland's 2017 population is 1,925 which would be considered a vulnerable community.
- ▶ Thriving commercial districts with shopping and service businesses rely on steady traffic flow. Residents living along established commercial routes should expect and support steady traffic as a sign of their community's economic vitality.
- ▶ Oakland's management is not responsible for an individual business' success, however, they are expected to establish and support infrastructure that is commercial and consumer-friendly. Stifling or diverting traffic from the shopping district would contradict merchant needs and discourage future interest.
- ▶ The bypass may be viewed as an opportunity for economic growth. Often, economic activity is redistributed from downtown areas toward a new bypass. Relocations can initiate vacancy and blight to valuable, historic buildings, while new national chain stores develop near the bypass and export profits to corporate HQs. **Businesses located along 3rd Street see the most traffic and enjoy the most success as a result.**
- ▶ The role of the **Oakland Economic Restructuring/Vitality Committee** should be to assist businesses in preparing for less traffic and increasing marketing efforts to attract potential customers off of the bypass in hopes of keeping these businesses in the downtown, according to **Maryland Main Street**.
- ▶ The Deep Creek Lake area may see drastic increases in commercial truck traffic if the Oakland Bypass is completed. Through-traffic will utilize the length of Route 219 that runs by way of the most congested part of the county during peak tourist seasons.

What a bypass won't do.

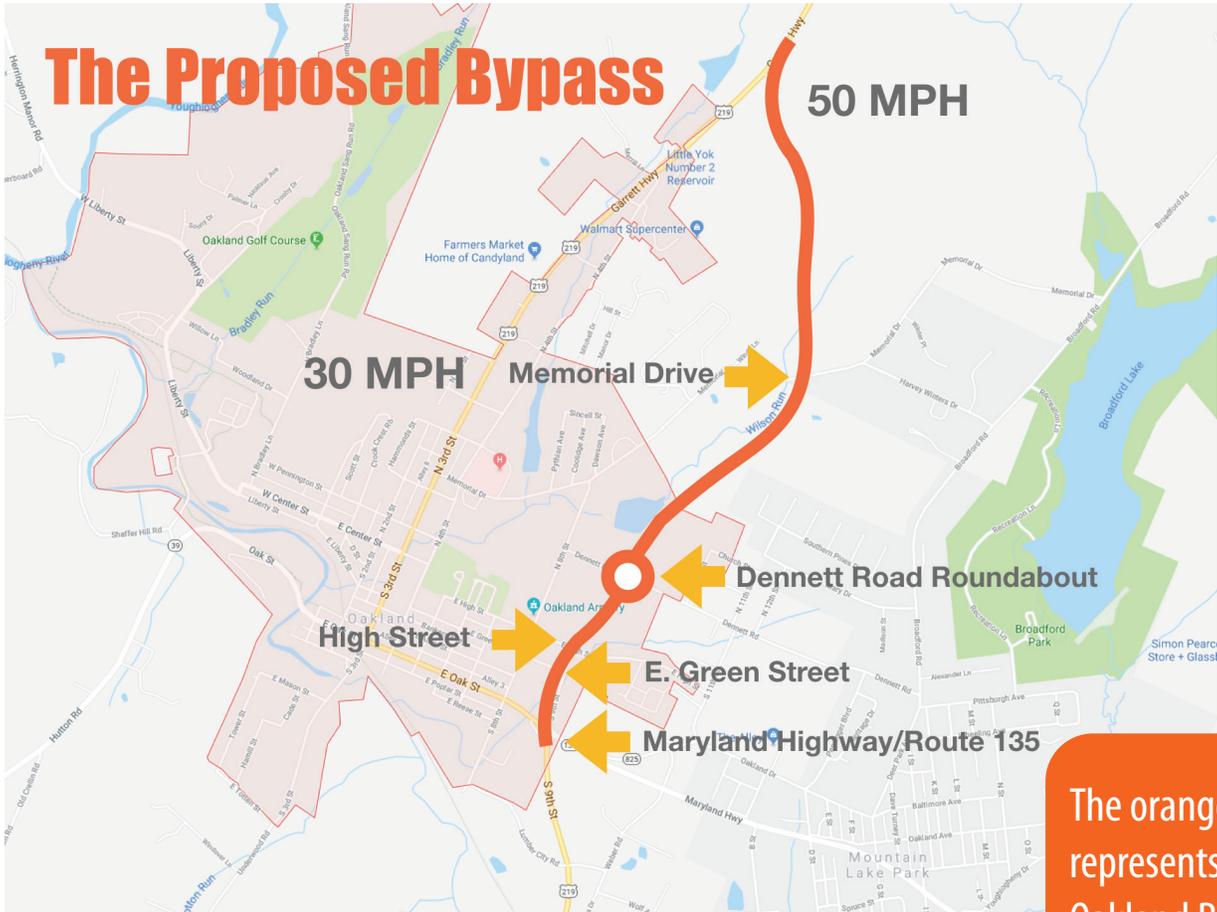
Logging and commercial tractor trailers will still require local roads for deliveries in the area. Road maintenance and snow removal will become Oakland's financial responsibility along 3rd & Oak Streets since the bypass will downgrade the current state-managed thoroughfare to a town road.

Alternate Solution

If the goal of a bypass is to reroute only heavy commercial vehicles rather than all traffic, a designated truck route using Route 495 has already been suggested and endorsed by licensed truck drivers. More affordable upgrades of existing roads could serve as a viable through-way without adversely impacting Oakland.

Safety can be addressed in an affordable way by reducing speeds back to 25 and 35 MPH through Oakland's busiest areas, synchronizing traffic signals, and enforcing protective traffic laws.

The Proposed Bypass



The orange line represents the 2.4 mile Oakland Bypass route. The 2007 estimated cost is \$53 million.

Current Traffic Flow

