

# Local funds may help

## launch Klingle project

■ **Budget:** Frustration over federal review sparks request

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Klingle Road could once again be restored for two-way traffic, but with city rather than federal funds.

Mayor Adrian Fenty is proposing to spend \$2 million next fiscal year to start reconstruction of the long-closed stretch of roadway through Rock Creek Park. Advocates on both sides of the long-running road battle are once again gearing up for a fight.

The seven-tenths-of-a-mile stretch of Klingle was closed to traffic in 1991 because of severe erosion and storm-water problems. The D.C. Council voted narrowly in 2003 to support reopening the road, with the federal government presumably bearing 80 percent of the cost. But nearly five years later a required federal environmental impact statement is still unfinished, while the old roadbed sits fenced and overgrown.

Fenty's new budget proposal



Bill Petros/The Current  
Klingle Road through Rock Creek Park has been closed since 1991.

offers \$2 million "for cleanup and work toward completion of the environmental study," according to Karyn LeBlanc, spokesperson for the District Department of Transportation. But "DDOT is continuing with the federal EIS process in hopes of getting 80 percent funding," LeBlanc said Tuesday.

Sources on both sides say the project, now projected to cost \$11 million, could end up receiving more local funding in order to pro-  
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ceed without a federal study.

That prospect delights advocates of the road repair, many from neighborhoods east of the park who want to restore their shortcut to the west. But it angers some environmental groups who decry the use of city funds to short-circuit the federal environmental process.

"If it didn't make sense with 80 percent federal funding, it certainly doesn't make sense if D.C. taxpayers must foot the entire bill," said Jim Dougherty, legal chair of the Sierra Club's D.C. Chapter.

But it makes great sense to Ward 1 Council member Jim Graham, who said Monday that he had successfully urged Fenty to include the start-up funding.

"This is our road, and people in my neighborhoods are tired of the delay," Graham said. Citing "egregious delays" by federal highway officials, he said, "We're going to

build this road, with local funding."

Graham dismissed concerns about cost and environmental impact. He noted the city is spending \$250 million to rebuild the 11th Street Bridge and "\$10 million on Ford's Theatre. We build and construct other roads all the time." He said the District's Department of the Environment can conduct its own studies. "We don't anticipate environmental problems," Graham said.

It's not clear if the council, a majority of whose members have come to their posts since 2003, will go along.

"Environmentally and economically, it's a mistake," said Ward 3 member Mary Cheh, whose constituents live on the western end of the closed road. "In a time of shrinking revenue, [local funding] is a very questionable shortcut."

Cheh said traffic studies show that reopening the closed stretch of road would do little to reduce traffic congestion. And the roadbed, in a narrow stream valley, would be subject to flooding and difficult to

maintain, she said. "It would rob us for years into the future of the opportunity to preserve that part of the park."

The idea of using local funds to rebuild Klingle evolved gradually, in the face of persistent delays in the federal approval process.

At a hearing in February 2007, city transportation officials testified that the environmental impact study, begun in January 2004, was being held up because the Federal Highway Administration wanted it submitted "in a different format."

Ken Laden, then the transportation planning chief, testified at the time that the administration wanted "a perfect study" that could withstand legal challenge. "We think we're getting close to final approval," Laden told Graham, likening the process to "Chinese water torture."

At that Graham exploded: "They can take all their format issues and stuff it somewhere," he said. "Enough. Enough. This is our road, and we want it paved."

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