

HAMPTON VA

NEWS RELEASE

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City, NASA, celebrate completion of Commander Shepard extension, a new area gateway

Jan. 10, 2014 - A divided roadway, sound walls, bike lanes and sidewalks are all part of a new 2-mile extension of Commander Shepard Boulevard, a new gateway to the Hampton Roads Center North Business Park, Langley Air Force Base and the NASA Langley Research Center.

The grand opening is Wednesday, Jan. 15 at 10 a.m. at the intersection of Commander Shepard Boulevard and Middle Road.

Hampton Mayor George Wallace, City Manager Mary Bunting, and a number of other officials - including former NASA astronaut Susan Kilrain of Virginia Beach - are scheduled to help celebrate completion of the project and to open it to the public.

In addition to serving as a gateway to the business park, air force base and research center - where the seven original Mercury astronauts trained - Commander Shepard Boulevard is an important east/west link between Big Bethel Road and Magruder Boulevard.

The first phase of the Commander Shepard project - from Magruder Boulevard to North Campus Parkway - included construction of a new bridge at Magruder Boulevard and establishing a grade separated interchange. City staff began working on the project in 1997 and it was finished in 2010 at a cost of \$14 million.

The second phase of the project - from North Campus Parkway to Big Bethel Road - includes new sound walls, bike lanes, landscaping and sidewalks. The project started in April of 2012 and was completed at a cost of \$9.5 million.

Leonard Sledge, director of Hampton's Office of Economic Development, said: "The first phase created regional connectivity to federal facilities that are large employers and economic drivers for Hampton Roads. Now completed, phase two links the federal facilities with related nearby developments, including the National Institute of Aerospace and Science Park at Hampton Roads Center North."

Jay Joseph, chairman of Hampton's Economic Development Agency, said: "This is the first step in creating another east-west connection, similar to Hampton Roads Center Parkway, and integrating the two main technology clusters on the Peninsula surrounding Jefferson Lab and NASA Langley."

In the next year or so, Hampton is expected to expand the gateway to Newport News by widening Saunders Road – where Commander Shepard Boulevard ends – starting at the intersection with Big Bethel Road.

Commander Shepard Boulevard is named for NASA astronaut Alan Shepard Jr. In 1961, he became the first American to travel into space as part of NASA's Mercury program. He later became the fifth person to walk on the moon, even hitting two golf balls while on the moon's surface. Shepard died in 1998.

Kilrain is a native of Georgia with degrees in aeronautical engineering and aerospace engineering. She became a naval aviator in 1987 and is a veteran of two space flights who has logged more than 900 hours in space.

“Projects like this one are important because of how they improve transportation and ease the ability to connect,” said Steve Jurczyk, acting director of NASA's Langley Research Center. “This in turn helps the more than 3,500 people who work here – and those who partner with us from around the region - complete the vital aerospace research and technology development needed by our nation.”

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