



MEETING OF THE I-81 ADVISORY COMMITTEE

July 14, 2025 - 3:00 P.M.

Blue Ridge Community College
Robert E. Plecker Workforce Center
57 College Lane
Weyers Cave, Virginia 24486

Members of the Committee Present: Senator Travis Hackworth, Senator Mark Obenshain, Senator David Suetterlein, Delegate Terry Austin, Delegate Bill Wiley, CTB Member Tom Fowlkes, CTB Member John Good, Jr., CTB Member Raymond Smoot, PDC Chair Frank Friedman, PDC Chair Phil North, PDC Chair Steven Gobble Jr., Commissioner Steve Brich, Director Tiffany Robinson.

Members of the Committee Absent: Delegate Sam Rasoul, Delegate Jason Ballard, PDC Chair Dennis Morris, PDC Chair Hil Johnson

1. Call to Order - Senator Mark Obenshain, Chair of the Committee
Opening remarks from Senator Obenshain thanking everyone for coming out to attend the meeting and expressing that the I-81 corridor remains critical to the commonwealth.
2. Discussion and approval of minutes from December 13, 2024 - Senator Mark Obenshain, Chair of the Committee

Motion to Approve: Delegate Wiley
Second: Delegate Austin
Vote: unanimous

3. I-81 Corridor Improvement Program Update
Bart Thrasher, Chief Engineer, Virginia Department of Transportation
Update provided on the status of the 65 Capital Improvement Projects within the program - updates are provided on the map (*reference the map included in the presentation*)
85% of the 65 are in construction or are completed
What's left are complex or high risk

Bristol, 7 projects, 4 under construction

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Salem, 9 projects, 2 under construction, 5 planned

Staunton, 11 projects, 4 under construction, 4 planned improvements

Final slide of the presentation summarizes the status of capital projects looking ahead

Senator Obenshain: Why did the Harrisonburg project get pushed back? Bart Thrasher will check on this, Bart, yes that is correct, December said 2025, but it will be 2026

4. I-81 Multimodal Improvements Update

Update on the Virginia Breeze - Zach Trogdon, Chief of Public Transportation, Department of Rail and Public Transportation

Virginia Breeze is the inner-city bus service, funds are received from a federal program

Provide meaningful connections

Launched in 2017, \$243,000 annual funding

Reference made to Virginia Breeze Routes and schedule

Funding is provided from the I-81 MM funding through 2026

Largest subsidy from the inner-city federal bus program

Working to establish a better stop in Wytheville and hope to have it established by the end of the year, great partnership with the town and the community

Establishing a route from Harrisonburg to Virginia Beach

Delegate Austin: Very much appreciates the Virginia Breeze, moves people along the corridor and wanted to just say thank you

New River Valley Passenger (NRV) Extension - DJ Stadtler, Executive Director, Virginia Passenger Rail Authority

8½ % increase year over year in ridership

Growth showed year over year, see Growth of Amtrak slide

The NRV extension, Lynchburg 2009, Roanoke 2017 and second trip 2022, the Roanoke trip will be extended to NRV

NRV is on schedule, 2027 will have operating trains

April 2025 broke ground on the extension

The project has become a success, thanks to the help of the community, Norfolk Southern, the community, has been a great collaborative project

Overhead look for Cambria provided, it's the stop from 1904 – 1979 and the building will be used, it will be a nice historic station, VPRA is responsible for the sidetrack, parking, platform NRV passenger station authority is responsible for the building itself, likely won't be open when service is started, but that won't delay service; Radford Layover facility, about nine miles down the road, is also under construction

Long Bridge package is moving forward and the Franconia Springfield Bypass which allows freight and passengers to be separated, both are on the way

Long Bridge is the lynchpin, must be completed before any further trains or extensions are done – NRV will be a 50-minute commute, would like to get it down

Long Bridge is on schedule

Delegate Austin: thanks DJ and the Secretary for the work that has been done, it will be greatly used and thank you to VPRA and the team.

5. I-81 Corridor Finance Update

Laura Farmer, Chief Financial Officer, Virginia Department of Transportation

Commonwealth Transportation Fund was updated and provided some uplifted revenue, but due to inflation and other needs in the maintenance scheduled, paving, HRBT to run additional tunnels, resulting in changes to the formula distribution.

I-81 receives approximately 40% based on truck VMT, fuel tax adjustments were a reduction of \$28.5M, IOEP was reduced by \$62M

Additional adjustments to projects underway, \$3.6 – 3.9M increase, primarily for Ironton Widening segment

General Fund support \$245M, \$70M and \$175M, this funding was included in December

Revenue and Expenditures to date reflect sources on the left-hand side based on preliminary close from FY2025 and the GF dollars and other sources have \$1.22B committed to the program, in addition to bonds/TIFIA at \$199.4B; on the right, total expenses \$542M and remainder of table shows balances

Next table on slide 4 highlights sources of revenues to date, totaling \$3.5B committed to the program

The next slide, slide 5, reflects the uses funds through FY 2031

Extended Financial Outlook – the estimated costs for all improvements are \$3.9B all to be funded by 2035

The next slide shows the graphical form funding by year and source

The following slide shows funding potential has been updated, based on modeled expectations of funds available for I-81 each year, assumes use of \$1B debt and the remainder pay-go. Update \$2-2.5B with significant resources in FY2034

Senator Obenshain: One of the questions from December and the report today appears to be a reduction in the available amount of funding, can you explain why? And what can we do about it?

Response: Reference slide 1, VDOT relies on taxation's fuel estimate, tax rate changes at rate of inflation, and that changes the tax rate, when VDOT adjusts and makes adjustment recommendations to the Board, the way the formulas work, construction funding crosses over to maintenance to cover, budgetary assumptions impact how much money is available.

Sec. Miller – two pots of money – 1) fuels tax and 2) comes out of our normal slice of the construction fund, IOEP is 20% of that 51% maintenance, 49% construction. If maintenance is short, money is taken from construction, which has a trickle effect. When the I-81 fuel tax was put in, there is no fuel charge for EV's, how many of them up there, how much does that generate, some, but relatively a low number.

Senator Obenshain: Combo of marginal decrease in available funding plus a \$300M increase due to inflation which is creating a real problem.

Secretary Miller noted we were \$660M over on maintenance this year, not expected, combo of storm and snow, plus \$40M maintenance of the two new tunnels in Hampton Roads, plus adding the inflation, crushing us. Secretary Miller could have reduced the SMART SCALE funds by \$200M but chose not to. This will only get worse, it will be a constant battle due to maintenance, inflation also is significant, this is the current fight and won't improve.

Delegate Austin questions are authorities helping?

Secretary Miller noted not directly, when TAC turns tunnels over to us in a year or so, this is a new expense that won't go away, gets higher and higher, 92% was given by the funding from transportation authorities, \$200M from the state for HRBT.

Delegate Austin notes we have no transportation authority here along the corridor, and we must find a way to come up with these dollars, we are short revenue and costs continue to increase. Can't keep robbing the necessary to take care of maintenance.

Secretary Miller noted HRTAC's revenue stream is very much almost at max and to take it back, it's a bonding issue for them. It's not a simple problem, a real one, but he is willing to continue working with them.

Senator Obenshain: Is there anything that can be done related to the ongoing \$40M?

The Secretary further noted there is no revenue stream for the ongoing maintenance of the new tunnels, in retrospect, should have included language to address the ongoing maintenance.

6. I-81 Corridor Improvement Plan Update

Ben Mannell, Director, Transportation and Mobility Planning Division, Virginia Department of Transportation

First slide shows the schedule for the upcoming CIP Update

As a reminder, 65 projects are either advanced or are advancing along the corridor. Why is it important for us to look at it now? need to identify the next slate. Projects are large and require much up-front work

This is a performance driven process, a SMART SCALE like process is being used

CIP Work to Date

Performance measures analysis done and Round 1 public engagement completed

As a reminder Performance Measures, looked at top 25% severity, frequency, person hours and incident delay, same measures as the 2018 plan

Excluded pandemic year date from 5-year data set

Summary by district in the Performance Measures summary slide 7

Virtual public outreach done, with over 4,000 comments, asked the public to validate where performance measures identified

Outreach was put out via email to large list serve and a social media push

Looking at location specific comments received, the top four issues accounted for 92%

Open ended comments summary showed correlation between top four issues

Took a deep dive into written comments, validated work that has been done

The second set of meetings, tonight and throughout the week, to include an online survey presenting all potential solutions under consideration, hope that citizens will answer survey online.

Presentation slides provided several examples of boards and summary of potential solutions.

Financial Constraints, as mentioned by Laura Farmer, of the 40, we cannot fund them all, we have \$2-2.25B available to advance the potential solutions, but not enough funds for all, will be using a prioritization process to identify what can be funded, based on what is available.

Next steps will be taking information from public meetings this week for consideration of the prioritization process, in the fall, October will be briefing the Committee and public again

Senator Obenshain: His understanding is following the completion of public meetings and surveys, VDOT will go work and make presentations to the CTB in SEPT and OCT, and we will be getting back together in November or December for the recommendations in order to adopt a final plan. CTB will adopt the final plan.

7. Public Comment - None

8. Closing Remarks - Senator Mark Obenshain, Chair of the Committee

Extended his appreciation for clarifications and presentations, Secretary Miller's efforts to advance projects along the corridor, up and down 81 and more often than not it's a fiery crash involving fatalities and the need is immense, appreciates the administrations' efforts and the Commissioner and department, need to continue pushing the envelope and be creative and come up with creative solutions, sometime not conventional.

Delegate Austin, Vice Chair of the Committee

Thanks to VDOT and the administration for all the work done and hopes they all identify with the efficiencies of revenues moving forward, inflation set us back a bit, but we must find a path forward, \$160M in 2035 is not even a project so there is a lot of roadways and it's not getting any less expensive to do. Around the table, please keep eyes open for revenues to be found, not sure if fuel tax is appropriate or to consider something else but have not found a revenue stream to support needs.

Senator Obenshain: Delegate Austin and I have been fighting this for quite some time, I say this with all respect for my colleagues watching GF dollars to go to another place, Interstate 64, which were important, but even those dollars are worth a lot less now than they were then. We secured assurances then that we are not forgetting about I-81, a GF commitment is important, education, transportation, law enforcement, if these are priority, we must commit to transportation, we have catching up to do to make sure we can completely fund the 81 CIP. Everyone around the table is committed to it and expresses gratitude towards the department and all those involved to make it a success. Encourages everyone to stick around and view the boards and speak with staff before the public comes in.

Meeting adjourned at approximately 4:33 p.m.

All presentations made to the committee can be found at:

<https://improve81.vdot.virginia.gov/get-involved/advisory-committee/>