



## **MEETING OF THE I-81 ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

December 13, 2024 - 1:00 P.M.

Virginia Horse Center Foundation – The Mezzanine  
487 Maury River Road  
Lexington, Virginia 24450-3374

Members of the Committee Present: Senator Travis Hackworth, CTB Tom Fowlkes, PDC Chair Frank Friedman, PDC Chair Hil Johnson, Delegate Bill Wiley, Delegate Terry Austin, Senator Mark Obenshain, Commissioner Steve Brich, CTB member Raymond Smoot, PDC Chair Phil North, Senator David Suetterlein, PDC Chair Randy Pennington, CTB member John Good, Jr.

Members of the Committee Absent: Delegate Sam Rasoul, Delegate Jason Ballard, PDC Chair Dennis Morris and DRPT Director Tiffany Robinson.

1. Call to Order – Delegate Terry Austin, Chair of the Committee

Opening remarks from Delegate Austin included welcoming guests and extending sincere thanks for the VDOT teams for the continued support on I-81 as well introduction of the agenda.

2. Discussion and approval of minutes from October 3, 2023 – Chair of the Committee

No discussion of the minutes.

Motion to approve: Chairman Friedman

Second: Delegate Wiley

Vote: Unanimous

3. I-81 Corridor Improvement Program Update – Dave Covington, Director, I-81 Corridor Program Delivery, Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT)

Brief update on the status of the I-81 Program beginning with a reminder of the three tenants of the program, Unlocking I-81, focused on enhanced safety, reduce congestion and economic development. I-81 being a 325-mile-long corridor that traverses along over 20 counties. The takeaway scorecard highlighted both operational and capital improvements with improved incident clearance, SSP, additional cameras and message signs as well arterial and signal upgrades that are on the way, with most of the operational improvements complete. There are 35 of 64 capital projects complete, 16 active construction projects to be completed by March 2031, and 14 remaining to be completed

by 2035. Projects include widenings, acceleration and deceleration extensions, truck climbing lanes, auxiliary lanes, shoulder widening and curve improvements, and operational improvements that include signal and geometric improvements, and investments resulting in 24% reduction in clearance times.

Project status today (65 projects) reflects projects in various states of construction, zero in planning, two projects in preliminary engineering/environmental evaluation, 12 projects in design, zero projects in right of way, 16 projects in construction and 35 projects completed. Each of these projects are highlighted projects completed, under construction and upcoming in Bristol (18 completed/8 under construction), Salem (3 projects completed/3 under construction) and Staunton (11 projects completed/4 under construction), with quite a bit of construction through 2035.

4. I-81 Corridor Finance Update – Laura Farmer, Chief Financial Officer, VDOT  
Ben Mannell, Acting Director of Planning, VDOT

Legislative background provided, Chapters 837 and 846, 2019 and subsequently Chapters 1230 and 1275, 2020 session furthering funding streams and authorizing \$1 billion debt in addition to changing the mix of localities where fuel taxes are dedicated to I-81. VDOT and CTB are required to fully-fund projects in the Interstate Operations Enhancement Program (IOEP) within the six-year horizon of the Six Year Improvement Program. Funding sources of the I-81 Program include dedicated funding deposited for the Program, Regional Fuels Tax (\$96M per year on average) and allocations from the IOEP (\$119M per year on average). I-81's share of vehicle miles traveled increases year of year and about 44% of major truck traffic is on I-81 in Virginia. Additional funding for I-81 includes \$70M from General funds (FY25), Federal Earmark of \$42M, and General Fund Surplus from FY24 of \$175M, subject to appropriation during the 2025 General Assembly for a total of \$287M direct funding to I-81; to date through June 2024 \$338M this year in total spent on the Program with \$655M remaining; planned debt, revenue performance and projections also highlighted annually as well the debt issuance plan. The estimated cost of all improvements totals \$3.6B with projects funded through 2035.

VDOT has geared up in planning and engineering to advance to construction and entering a very busy period along the corridor, but not extending the program beyond capacity. Potential additional candidate projects were identified after prioritizing 64 of the 106 projects identified by the 2018 CIP. Five additional projects were identified a year ago and the CTB took action to add one additional project earlier this year (southbound widening between exits 134-128); leaving four projects to advance costing \$656M in today's dollars and an inflationary impact of approximately \$20M per year, which can be advanced to complete in the mid 2030's.

Planning for Further Improvements on Interstate 81 – four additional candidate projects from 2018 were revisited and VDOT found one, widening exit 200 – exit 195 southbound to address safety and a “gap”. There is room available in the future to start thinking about a new tranche of I-81 projects, 36 projects remaining that were in the original CIP will be re-evaluated, the CIP update is planned for 2025 which will include various public meetings and outreach, starting with data collection and final update to the Plan by December 2025; virtual meetings, surveys, in-person meetings, five CTB briefings and two Advisory Committee briefings anticipated. VDOT recommends moving forward with the five additional candidate projects.

Comment offered by CTB Member Ty Lawson for the Committee to consider adding an additional project, a three-lane extension from Frederick County to the West Virginia state line, from Route 50 interchange to the state line.

Motion to advance five identified projects: Delegate Wiley  
Second: Chairman Friedman  
Vote: Unanimous

5. I-81 Multimodal Improvements Plan – Project Updates

Virginia Breeze Intercity Bus

Zach Trogon, Chief of Public Transportation, Department of Rail and Public Transportation

New River Valley Passenger Extension

DJ Stadtler, Executive Director, Virginia Passenger Rail Authority

Virginia Breeze was launched in 2017, Virginia Flyer, funded through FTA intercity bus program, with two new routes added since then. In 2019, DRPT made a recommendation to extend the inner-city service to Bristol, \$243K per year towards operating and \$100K one-time capital funds for stop improvements along the route; Valley Flyer (receives zero funds from 81), and Hylands Rhythm. Both routes have varying ridership since 2021 with a range in fare from \$21 - \$60 depending on origin/destination.

New River Valley Passenger Rail Update, focus of today’s meeting will be center around Roanoke to Blacksburg. 2008 PRIIA was passed that allowed states to control rail decisions, and in 2017 service expanded to Roanoke. Amtrack service began in 2009 and in 2022 expanded to Roanoke in 2017. Then in 2022, working with Norfolk Southern, an extension from Roanoke, then New River Valley. There have been challenges to extend the service to NRV, in 2022 there was no design and cost to extend \$257M. In 2024, 30% design showed higher cost at \$545M. In 2024 discussions began looking at NRV alternatives and now a new agreement that extends services sooner rather than later, which involved VPRA acquiring the Manassas Line in August this year. The deal includes extend service to

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Christiansburg, sale of V-Line back to NS, new platform and layover facility constructed by NS, squire depot building, adds Bedford station stop, opens Radford service and third daily train to Roanoke, keeps Bristol expansion possible by avoiding Merrimac Tunnel; a better deal for Virginia. Funding sources for NRV includes varying sources, Appropriations Act, VPRA Commonwealth Rail Funding, Commonwealth High Priority Program (SMART SCALE), and I-81 funding, totaling \$233M. Design set to be completed of NRV station and layover facility by the end of 2024, construction at Radford and Christiansburg 2025 and passenger rail starting in 2027.

6. Public Comment

None

7. Closing remarks – Chair of the Committee

8. Nominations and formal vote for Vice Chair of the Committee - Chair of the Committee

Nomination for Chair of the Committee – Senator Obenshain

Motion: Delegate Austin

Second: Delegate Wiley

Vote: Unanimous

Nomination for Vice Chair of the Committee – Delegate Austin

Motion: Delegate Smoot

Second: Senator Obenshain

Vote: Unanimous

9. Meeting adjourned at approximately 2:52 p.m.

Video of the committee and all presentations can be found at:

[www.improve81.vdot.virginia.gov/advisory/](http://www.improve81.vdot.virginia.gov/advisory/)

## **MEMBERS OF THE I-81 ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

### **Voting**

Delegate Bill Wiley, District 32  
Delegate Terry Austin, District 37  
Delegate Sam Rasoul, District 38  
Delegate Jason Ballard, District 42

Senator David Suetterlein, District 4  
Senator Mark Obenshain, District 2  
Senator T. Travis Hackworth, District 5

Chair Frank Friedman, Central Shenandoah PDC  
Chair Phil North, Roanoke Valley/Alleghany PDC  
Chair Hil Johnson, New River Valley PDC  
Chair Dennis Morris, Northern Shenandoah PDC  
Chair Randy Pennington, Mount Rogers PDC

Ray Smoot, Jr., Salem District CTB Member  
Tom Fowlkes, Bristol District CTB Member  
John P. Good Jr., Staunton District CTB Member

### **Ex Officio**

Stephen Brich, Commissioner of Highways, VDOT  
Tiffany Robinson, Director, DRPT