



Tuesday, October 1, 2019

**Interstate I-81 Committee Minutes
3:00 p.m.
Natural Bridge Conference Center
15 Appledore Lane
Natural Bridge, VA 24578**

The second meeting of the I-81 Committee was held at the Natural Bridge Conference Center in Lexington, Virginia. The meeting began at 3:22 PM on October 1, 2019. The meeting began with opening remarks from Chairman Terry Austin.

Present: Delegate Terry Austin, Delegate Tony Wilt, Senator Bill Carrico, Senator John Edwards, Senator Mark Obenshain, Chairman Frank Friedman, Councilman Bill Bestpitch (designee for *Bradley Grose*), Chairman Michael Harvey, Chairman Dennis Morris, Chairman Tim Reeves, CTB Member Ray Smoot, Jr., CTB Member Dixon Whitworth, CTB Member Greg Yates (*proxy for CTB member Jerry Stinson*), Commissioner Steve Brich, ex-officio, Director Jennifer Mitchell, ex-officio.

Absent: CTB Member Jerry Stinson and Delegate Chris Collins

1. Chairman Terry Austin, after giving opening remarks requested a motion to approve the minutes from August 13, 2019.

Procedural action: Approval of minutes
Motion to approve: Chairman Frank Friedman
Seconded by: _____
Vote: Unanimous

2. Old business
General discussion by Ronique Day, Deputy Director of the Office of Intermodal Planning and Investment, on the roles and responsibilities of the Committee; to provide advice and make recommendations to the Commonwealth Transportation Board (CTB) regarding the I-81 Corridor Improvement program, pursuant to Chapters 837 and 846 of the 2019 Session of the General Assembly.

Chairman Austin raised additional requirements of the Committee to meet four times a year and rotate among Planning Districts.

General discussion on timeline and future meetings: The Committee discussed the intent to meet four times a year. The Committee discussed its formation after July 1, 2019. It is the interpretation of the Committee that the year follows the Fiscal Year rather than the Calendar Year. The remaining two meetings to be held in 2020. There was further discussion related to possible locations for the remaining two meetings. Several locations were suggested. Chairman Austin indicated that he intends to poll the members before a final decision is made. The Chairman also expressed that in the future he anticipates that VDOT will bring forth projects to the Committee for consideration for recommendation to the CTB on whether to fund or not.

Chairman Austin raised the potential to live-stream future meetings and the value in doing so. The Committee had general discussion and seemed agreeable.

General Discussion of Annual I-81 program update to General Assembly: The Committee discussed CTB's requirement to submit an update to General Assembly on the status of I-81 by December 15th, annually. Delegate Austin suggested that the CTB submit the program update to the I-81 Committee for review and comment before submission. The Committee seemed agreeable to this idea.

3. Chairman Austin suggested a new line item for each agenda moving forward to include "New Business". Chairman Austin returned to the concept of live-streaming the meetings. The Committee agreed that this is a good idea and it would be good if the public would have the opportunity to provide comments during live-streamed meetings. Bart Thrasher, Chief Engineer responded that VDOT could accommodate this via the project website. He also provided Mr. Dave Covington as a point of contact to direct the public to should there be questions.
4. Bart Thrasher, Chief Engineer, Virginia Department of Transportation, provided the I-81 project status and update.

Referenced presentation attached

Chief Engineer Bart Thrasher presented on the current status of the \$2 billion in I-81 projects, project development and 48 remaining capital improvements. Bart Thrasher discussed the 16 initial mainline capital improvements and capital improvements across the Bristol, Salem and Staunton VDOT Districts. Chief Engineer also discussed development of planning level cost estimates and draft schedule based on a process focused on prioritizing the priorities. VDOT's approach is a "Smart Scale-like" scoring that considers project readiness, constructability, risks, as well agency input. Two scheduling options were presented, i) existing revenue stream (pay-go) and ii)

bonding/TIFIA. VDOT is collaborating with the industry on the I-81 projects and draft schedule and receiving feedback on delivery timeframes.

The Chief Engineer before closing introduced the new I-81 Program Delivery Director David Covington.

The floor was then opened to the Committee for questions.

The Committee had questions and general discussion on the Chief Engineers presentation: on bottlenecks and capacity issues along the corridor, specifically in between Salem and Roanoke, that also worsens during special events such as football games, as well as limitations to projects proposed. Discussion also included order of magnitude range, and preliminary engineering start times

Chief Engineer provided feedback that project limitations are related to the amount of funding available and reiterated that it is an ongoing process. Commissioner Steve Brich also addressed the Committee expressing that the starting point was a \$4 billion package and that the projects represent the worst along the corridor and with this being the first step, and with a sustainable funding stream for the corridor, will redo the plan.

The Chief Engineer indicated that the order of magnitude is inflationary, based on year and averages around 3% inflation. Related to preliminary engineering, delay in project start time is attributable to the desire not to have many large projects going on at once without completely disrupting traffic, environmental and grading issues.

The Committee had general discussion about operational improvements related to truck parking, quick clearances, and safety service patrol. There was additional discussion on safety and enforcement, specific to Virginia State Police, along the corridor. There was consensus that this remains an issue that needs to be addressed.

Commissioner Steve Brich advised that the Director of Innovation and Research, Cathy McGhee is addressing truck parking strategies and forthcoming, there will be an update at a future meeting. Additionally the Chief Engineer shared that VDOT is advising the public in advance when there are incidents so they can divert.

5. Public comment

Tom Whitt, Virginia Transportation Construction Alliance
Thanks the Committee and others for support related to improvements to the I-81 committee. Construction industry has already initiated discussion with VDOT and are committed to continuing the discussions.

Kim Sandem – Rockingham County

Thanks for the reminder that this plan is not everyone's backyard plan, its data driven and objective and need to continue reminding ourselves of this. She also noted that the Plan calls multi-modal improvements – where are we right now?

Director Jennifer Mitchell, Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transit, indicated that her staff is working to identify potential projects to take trucks off the road and will be bringing that back to the Committee and are committed to do so by March. Director Mitchell also confirmed that \$200 million has been set aside for multi-modal improvements.

Darlene Lewis – Roanoke County

Saddened to hear project for Salem will take so long. Accidents between 132 and 140 are so bad and traffic gets off of 140 and goes through neighborhoods where there are children and schools. She questioned can this project be moved up?

Southern Environmental Law Center

Corridor Plan is solid blueprint for moving forward and appreciate public involvement. Would like to emphasize targeted improvements and multimodal, move people and cargo more efficiently.

Fishersville Resident

How do we proceed with bonding or pay go?

Deputy Secretary John Lawson shared the bonding procedure. Deputy Secretary Lawson discussed the funding sources from the regional fuel tax and through the statewide program. There is an opportunity to leverage the 2.1% regional fuel tax. Regarding seeking debt authorization, it would be backed by those revenues and would look like debt issued by HRTPO and NVTA. It would be 9(d) debt, which will have to be approved by the General Assembly. It is the plan to structure it so it is standalone debt supported by the region.

Currently the Secretary's office and VDOT are in discussions with USDOT to use the TIFIA program, which provides good interest rates. Legislation will be introduced at the 2020 GA session, to be acted on by the Assembly. He also clarified that while it would be debt of the Commonwealth, it should not be considered tax supported since backed by revenues associated to the particular region.

Public comment period concluded.

Procedural Action: Motion to endorse seeking action to obtain bonding made by Bill Bestpitch

Seconded by: Frank Friedman

Vote: Unanimous

**Procedural Action: Motion to approve (endorse) the prioritization and scheduling process at the discretion of the Department and approved by the Chief Engineer made by Tim Reeves.
Seconded by: Dixon Whitworth, requested amended motion
Motion amended to include language “recommend approval by CTB”
Vote: Unanimous**

6. Chairman Terry Austin gave closing remarks, the next meeting date was deferred.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at approximately 4:38 p.m. The next meeting date and location will be determined upon call of the Chair.