

WHY BUSINESS AND DEVELOPMENT LEADERS SHOULD BE CONCERNED ABOUT THE I-81 DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT (DEIS)

WHAT VDOT HAS DONE:

- 1) Selected, to do the DEIS study, a firm that had been a member of STAR Solutions. VHB resigned from STAR to be VDOT's contractor.
- 2) Structured the study to support as large an I-81 expansion as possible. VDOT's preferred option involves some six-lane sections, but almost two-thirds of I-81 in Virginia would be eight lanes or more.
- 3) Made tolls unavoidable, on both cars and trucks. There's simply no other way to finance the huge \$10 billion cost of a border-to-border I-81 rebuild.
- 4) Exaggerated the need for future capacity by projecting trucking growth based on years of much lower fuel prices and without today's chronic driver shortage.
- 3) Shortchanged the role rail can play in reducing the scope of highway construction, by failing to look beyond the 325 miles of I-81 in Virginia to a multi-state corridor of sufficient length for effective through-freight diversion to rail.
- 5) Developed desired findings in an Executive Summary, referencing technical appendices for support. Told people the Executive Summary is all they need to read.
- 6) Filled multiple volumes of technical appendices with numerical data, graphs, and tables, even though much of it is scientifically meaningless, full of errors, and does little or nothing to justify the reported findings.

WHAT VDOT SHOULD HAVE DONE:

1. Determine future levels of incremental freight capacity needed in the Corridor.
- 2) Rigorously assess, through side-by-side comparison, the environmental and economic costs of providing this level of new capacity via rail and via highway.
- 3) Embrace the lowest cost, lowest impact combination of new capacity.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

I-81 would be rebuilt over its 325-mile length. Tolls on I-81, while other north/south Interstates remain free, would adversely and unfairly impact business, growth, and economic activity throughout Western Virginia. Additional lanes and vast interchanges would displace homes and businesses and destroy forests, farmland, and historic battlefields. Prolonged construction and high tolls would discourage tourism.

A more sensible solution would be targeted improvements, aimed at capacity chokepoints and safety problem areas. These could be: 1) started now, not wait for a 15-year construction plan; 2) paid for like other Virginia highway projects, not through tolls; and 3) put out for competitive bids to encourage participation by local contractors and to save taxpayers money, not guaranteed exclusively to STAR.

Furthermore, rail upgrades, through the \$35 billion federal Railroad Rehabilitation and Improvement Fund (RRIF), could increase capacity for handling through intermodal freight in the Corridor, extending the life of highway improvements and limiting their scope and urgency.

There is broad-based citizen support for a meaningful role for rail in the future I-81 Corridor. Fifty local governments and MPOs have passed resolutions in support of rail. People recognize that relying on ever more lanes of pavement to solve each problem of congestion and growth is not a viable transportation paradigm for the 21st Century. We can be smarter in Virginia. We don't have to repeat mistakes made on the West Coast and Northeastern U.S. at great cost to our economy and environment.

WHAT DO WE NEED TO DO NOW?

The public comment period on the DEIS is now running, and continues through most of April. Tell VDOT that the people's views matter. The hearing schedule is on www.I-81.org VDOT is dominated by highway people who have spent their entire careers building roads and want to go on building roads. The highway engineering and construction lobby is a powerful ally. State and federal politicians are pushing hard, too.

To counter these entrenched interests, it is vital that there be input from towns and counties in the Corridor. Many citizens' groups such as Rockbridge Area Conservation Council, Shenandoah Valley Network, and RAIL Solution have spent a lot of time and effort analyzing the DEIS and its shortcomings. We can be helpful to you in providing additional materials and information to facilitate your filing of comments.

But most importantly, you must do this now, during the public comment period.



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