

WHY LOCAL GOVERNMENT 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 former member of STAR Solutions.
- 2) Structured the study to support as large an I-81 expansion as possible.
- 3) Set up rail to be found ineffective 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.
- 4) Developed desired findings and conclusions and presented them in an Executive Summary, alluding frequently to the technical appendices for support; then told people that the Executive Summary is all they need to read.
- 5) Filled multiple volumes of technical appendices with numerical data, graphs, and tables, even though the information is scientifically meaningless, full of errors, and does little or nothing to justify the reported findings.

WHAT VDOT SHOULD HAVE DONE:

- 1) Project future levels of incremental capacity needed in the I-81 Corridor.
- 2) Rigorously assess, through side-by-side comparison, the environmental and economic costs of providing this level of new capacity via rail expansion and via highway construction.
- 3) Embrace the lowest cost, lowest impact combination of new capacity.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT TO ME?

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 resolve 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.

Although STAR Solutions' dedicated truck lanes are gone from the DEIS' recommendations, I-81 would still be subject to a massive rebuilding from border to border in Virginia. Some of it would be six lanes wide, but almost two-thirds would be eight lanes or more. The road's footprint on the land would be huge.

The additional lanes and vast interchanges would displace homes and businesses, destroy forests and farmland, and disrupt historic battlefields. Prolonged construction would discourage tourism. The cost is estimated at \$10 billion. Such a project could be financed only through tolls on cars and trucks. Tolls on I-81, while other north/south Interstates remain free, would adversely and differentially impact business, growth, and economic activity in Western Virginia.

A more sensible solution would be a plan of measured improvements, targeted at capacity chokepoints and safety problem areas. These could begin now, not wait for a 15-year construction plan to be finalized. They could be paid for incrementally like all other Virginia highway projects, not through tolls. They could be put out for competitive bids to encourage participation by local contractors and to save taxpayers money, not guaranteed exclusively to STAR.

At the same time rail upgrades, funded with federal loans, could increase capacity for handling through intermodal freight in the Corridor, extending the life of highway improvements and limiting their scope and urgency.

WHAT DO WE NEED TO DO NOW?

The public comment period on the DEIS is now running, and continues open until 10 days after the last public hearing is held. As of February 27 the schedule and location of hearings is expected any day. Watch for ones in your area. Tell VDOT that the people's views matter. VDOT is dominated by highway people who have spent their entire careers building roads. They 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 preparation and filing of comments.

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



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