



David L. Foster, Executive Director
342 High Street, Salem, VA 24153
540-389-0407/railsolution@aol.com

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

“Great news!” is how Rees Shearer, Chair of RAIL Solution, responded to the announcement Wednesday by the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) that Kellogg Brown & Root (KBR) had “declined further participation” by STAR Solutions in I-81 construction work, including planned truck climbing lanes in Rockbridge and Montgomery Counties.

Following KBR’s withdrawal, VDOT officially terminated all I-81 procurement work under the Public Private Transportation Act (PPTA). “This effectively marks the end of STAR Solutions,” said Fred Altizer, I-81 Project Manager, in a phone call to RAIL Solution Executive Director David Foster, “and KBR will have no further work on I-81 in the future.”

“RAIL Solution started fighting KBR-STAR Solutions and their \$13 billion truck tollway back in 2003. This is a huge moment,” said Shearer.

VDOT and STAR Solutions began contract talks in 2004 to form a public-private partnership to build the toll road project. But their recent focus was limited to truck climbing lanes in Rockbridge and Montgomery Counties. KBR used its influence in Congress with former House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Chairman Don Young (R-AK) to help secure a federal earmark to pay for the truck climbing lanes.

RAIL Solution has consistently questioned the exclusive entitlement of KBR to this \$145 million project on a no-bid basis. In a letter dated December 22, 2007 to VDOT Commissioner David Ekern, Foster wrote, “Such an arrangement departs dramatically from Virginia procurement practices typically governing the purchase of such services.

“Furthermore, such an exclusive entitlement could provide a troubling precedent if followed as well for future construction projects on Interstate 81. It would seem to deprive Virginia citizens and taxpayers of the intended benefits of competitive bidding to secure lowest cost contractors, and it could deprive many local firms, located in the I-81 Corridor, from participation in this work.”

[MORE]

The December 22 letter contained a request under the Virginia Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) for full information on the exclusive agreement between VDOT and KBR.

“We need a better understanding of what gives rise to such an unusual and exclusive entitlement for this work, and what kind of arrangement is in place between VDOT and KBR governing this work,” the RAIL Solution letter said.

After the news announced by VDOT today, Foster said RAIL Solution has agreed with Altizer to hold the FOIA inquiry in abeyance until the group has a chance to study the day’s developments more fully.

“While I cannot make any affirmative linkage between our FOIA request and the folding of KBR's I-81 tent, it does seem curiously coincidental,” Foster said. “Nevertheless, it's good to know that STAR is gone. If we had some part in putting the last nail in the coffin, it was well worth it.”

Michael Testerman, Vice Chair of RAIL Solution, added, “We hope that VDOT will give more consideration to diverting through trucks to a multi-state high-performance rail system in the I-81 corridor, now that the tolled-truckway proposal promoted by STAR is behind us.”

RAIL Solution is a citizens’ advocacy group formed in 2003 to combat the STAR proposal for doubling the size of I-81 from border to border in Virginia by adding exclusive lanes for trucks. The organization has contended that equivalent freight carrying capacity can be added in the corridor at lower cost and less environmental impact by upgrading and expanding the parallel rail line. Its publications tout rail as being safer and having lower emissions and greater energy efficiency than trucks in moving long distance freight. RAIL Solution, supports a higher speed, Knoxville, TN, to Harrisburg, PA, rail alternative to VDOT’s plans for a predominantly 8-lane interstate.

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RAIL Solution media contacts:

David Foster (see top of p. 1),
Chair Rees Shearer: (276) 944-5355, Emory, VA
Vice Chair Michael Testerman: (804) 649-1405, Richmond, VA

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