



U.S. Department of Transportation



Federal Transit Administration  
Region III  
1760 Market Street, Suite 500  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19103  
215-656-7100

Federal Highway Administration  
Virginia Division  
400 North 8<sup>th</sup> Street, Room 750  
Richmond, Virginia 23219  
804-775-3320

September 30, 2014

Secretary Aubrey Layne  
Secretary of Transportation  
Patrick Henry Building  
1111 East Broad Street  
Richmond, Virginia 23219

Subject: FY2015-FY2018 Statewide Transportation Improvement Program

Dear Secretary Layne:

The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) have reviewed the Commonwealth of Virginia's FY2015-FY2018 Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) that includes highway and transit projects to be federally funded or approved by FTA and FHWA in Virginia. Based on this review, FTA and FHWA find that the FY2015-FY2018 STIP is based on a statewide transportation planning process that substantially meets the requirements of 23 USC 134 and 135, 49 USC 5303 and 5304, and 23 CFR 450. Accordingly, as requested in your letter dated July 16, 2014, FTA and FHWA jointly approve the STIP pursuant to 23 CFR 450.218(b).

We look forward to the continued cooperation of you and your staff in efforts to carry out the statewide and metropolitan planning processes in an effective manner.

Sincerely,

  
Reginald Lovelace  
Deputy Regional Administrator  
Federal Transit Administration

  
For: Irene Rico  
Division Administrator  
Federal Highway Administration

Attachment

cc: Mr. Charles Kilpatrick, Virginia Department of Transportation  
Ms. Jennifer Mitchell, Virginia Department of Rail & Public Transportation

**FHWA Virginia Division/FTA Region III Review Documentation**  
in support of the  
**FHWA/FTA TRANSPORTATION PLANNING FINDING**  
and approval of the  
**COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA'S**  
**FY2015-FY2018 STATEWIDE TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM**

**Introduction**

In order to approve the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP), including Transportation Improvement Programs (TIPs) contained directly or by reference in the STIP, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and Federal Transit Administration (FTA) must make a finding that STIP is based on a statewide transportation planning process that meets or substantially meets the requirements of 23 USC. 134 and 135, 49 USC. 5303 and 5304, and 23 CFR 450.218 (see 23 CFR 450.2128(b) and 23 USC 135(g)). In addition, in accordance with 23 CFR 450.328(a), FHWA and FTA must make a finding that each metropolitan planning area TIP is based on a continuing, cooperative, and comprehensive planning process in accordance with federal law and regulations.

This is documentation of the review conducted to support the planning finding for the Commonwealth of Virginia's Fiscal Year (FY) 2015-FY2018 STIP and the incorporated TIPs for the following metropolitan planning areas: Blacksburg-Christiansburg-Montgomery Area, Bristol, Charlottesville-Albemarle, Danville, Fredericksburg Area, Hampton Roads, Harrisonburg-Rockingham, Kingsport, Lynchburg, Richmond Area, Roanoke Valley Area, Staunton-Augusta-Waynesboro, Tri-Cities, and Winchester-Frederick.

The joint FHWA/FTA planning regulations establish the timeframe for a planning finding and STIP approval to be made at least every four years. The last joint planning finding and STIP approval was made in September 2011.

**Background and Overview of the Process**

In a letter dated July 16, 2014, the Virginia Secretary of Transportation submitted the STIP, as well as the Commonwealth's self-certification required by 23 CFR 450.218(a). FHWA and FTA have reviewed the documentation, as well as the planning processes supporting it in order to issue the planning finding and approve the STIP. This finding and approval is also based on FHWA's and FTA's ongoing involvement in and knowledge of the statewide and metropolitan planning processes, the gathering and review of information through meetings, and discussions with the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT), Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation,

metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) and others that have been ongoing since the September 2011 planning finding and STIP approval.

### **Conditions, Recommendations, and Other Issues from Previous Planning Finding**

As part of FHWA's and FTA's planning finding for the previous (FY2012-FY2015) STIP approval, several conditions, recommendations, and other issues were identified. Over the past three years, FHWA and VDOT have met to discuss the items, and VDOT has either addressed the issues or explained the reason for them in light of Virginia's transportation program. VDOT formally responded to each condition, recommendation, and other issue via a letter dated September 5, 2013. FHWA and FTA recognize the improvements that have been made to the transportation planning and programming processes since the previous planning finding.

### **State and MPO Self-Certifications**

Self-certification statements by the State and the MPOs are important components of the STIP development process and are necessary to support the planning finding and STIP approval. These statements certify that the statewide and metropolitan planning processes are being carried out in accordance with all applicable requirements. These certifications have been completed by the Virginia Department of Transportation and the MPOs for their respective areas, and reviewed to support this planning finding. Copies of the certifications can be found in Appendix D of the STIP.

### **Transportation Management Area Certification Reviews**

Under 23 CFR 450.334(b), FHWA and FTA are required to jointly review Transportation Management Areas every four years and certify whether the planning process in those areas meets the applicable provisions of federal law. In conducting this review, FHWA and FTA review many elements of the planning process including metropolitan planning area boundaries, 3-C planning agreements, Unified Planning Work Program development, TIP development, long range transportation plan development, public outreach, air quality, and Title VI compliance. As part of the certification process, corrective actions may be made to bring the planning process into compliance.

The following is a summary of the certification review dates and corrective actions for the Transportation Management Areas (TMA) in Virginia:

- Hampton Roads (Norfolk-Virginia Beach). The certification review was conducted in 2012, and no corrective actions were identified.
- Richmond. The certification review was conducted in 2013, and one corrective action in the area of public involvement was identified.
- Tri-Cities (Petersburg). The certification review was conducted in 2013, and no corrective actions were identified.

- Washington, D.C. (including Northern Virginia). The certification review was conducted in 2010. There were four corrective actions applicable to the Fredericksburg MPO. Those corrective actions were related to the MPO's project selection process and the Title VI program, and those corrective actions have been addressed. The next certification review is scheduled to be conducted in October 2014.
- Roanoke - The Roanoke Valley Area became a TMA as a result of the 2010 Census, and a certification review has not yet been conducted for that area.

None of the corrective actions create any issues that would still need to be addressed before a planning finding can be issued and the STIP approved.

### **Metropolitan Planning Findings**

A planning finding by FHWA and FTA is required for each Virginia MPO in accordance with 23 CFR 450.328(a). The metropolitan planning finding ensures that the development of each metropolitan TIP is based on a continuing, cooperative, and comprehensive planning process in accordance with federal law and regulations. Letters documenting the planning findings, as well as recommendations are being sent to each MPO and VDOT District Office, and those letters are incorporated by reference into this document.

### **Consistency with Statewide Multimodal Transportation Plan**

VTrans is the long-range, statewide multimodal policy plan that lays out an overarching vision and goals for transportation in the Commonwealth. It identifies transportation investment priorities and provides direction to transportation agencies on strategies and programs to be incorporated into their plans and programs. The VTrans2035 Update is an update of the VTrans2035 plan and is the current version. The Update relies on much of the information provided in VTrans2035 and focuses on moving statewide multimodal planning towards a focus on performance. The Commonwealth Transportation Board approved the VTrans 2035 Update in February 2013. Revisions were made in April 2013 to incorporate the transportation funding bill (House Bill 2313/Senate Bill 1355) as amended and approved.

VTrans2035 and the VTrans2035 Update identify seven goals for the Commonwealth:

- *Safety and Security* – to provide a safe and secure transportation system
- *System Maintenance and Preservation* – to preserve and maintain the condition of the existing transportation system
- *Mobility, Connectivity, and Accessibility* – to facilitate the easy movement of people and goods, improve interconnectivity of regions and activity centers, and provide access to different modes of transportation
- *Environmental Stewardship* – to protect the environment and improve the quality of life for Virginians

- *Economic Vitality* – to provide a transportation system that supports economic prosperity
- *Coordination of Transportation and Land Use* – to promote livable communities and reduce transportation costs by facilitating the coordination of transportation and land use
- *Program Delivery* – to achieve excellence in the execution of programs and delivery of service.

### Performance-Based Planning

The development of the VTrans2035 Update focused on first adjusting priorities and strategies based on an understanding of changes in the transportation planning and funding context since approval of VTrans2035. The update process then focused on developing a more cohesive, performance-based multimodal planning framework to guide agency plans and future VTrans updates. The performance-based planning framework includes the following elements:

- Vision and Goals
- Investment Priorities
- Investment Strategies
- Rating of Investment Priorities
- Performance Reporting

### Investment Priorities

Investment priorities represent investment decisions; some describe programs such as education and planning, while others describe types of projects such as highway and transit improvements and intelligent transportation systems. Collectively, the investment priorities represent the range of activities necessary to achieve the VTrans goals.

### Rating of Investment Priorities

The investment priority rating process supports the performance-based planning and programming framework by providing a transparent method for evaluating the urgency and relevance of the priorities during each VTrans update. The rating of investment priorities is intended to guide investment choices for future funding.

The rating of investment priorities is based on need and cost-effectiveness. Need is a critical consideration in light of limited funding, as even the most cost-effective investments should not be prioritized if they don't meet the most critical needs. The rating process thus begins with a need evaluation that identifies the top tier of the investment priorities. These investment priorities are then evaluated on their affordability, ease of implementation, and the impact of not making the investment. The rating method also provides a broadly-applicable, flexible tool that can be used by the CTB, transportation agencies, MPOs and other partners to target transportation investment decisions toward the most urgent investment priorities. Transportation needs identified in the VTrans2035 Update are used to inform Virginia's Six-Year Improvement Program (SYIP) and STIP development processes. A copy of the VTrans 2035 Update can be found here: [http://www.vtrans.org/vtrans2035\\_update.asp](http://www.vtrans.org/vtrans2035_update.asp).

## VTrans2040

The Commonwealth is currently developing VTrans2040. As proposed, VTrans2040 will include full integration of performance-based planning and will also include linkages to Virginia's new prioritization process (House Bill 2). VTrans2040 is scheduled to be completed in early 2016.

## **Financial Constraint**

FHWA and FTA review the STIP to determine if it is financially constrained and that funds are available to carry out the program based upon information provided by the Commonwealth of Virginia. The STIP is required to be financially constrained by year and funding category and include sufficient financial information to demonstrate which projects are to be implemented using proposed revenue sources. Likewise, each project in the STIP, or identified phase thereof, must include an estimated cost along with the amount of federal funds proposed to be obligated in each program year.

To demonstrate financial constraint, the Commonwealth of Virginia developed Table B for transit projects and C for highway projects, which identify projected obligations versus planned obligations, using the FY2014-FY2019 SYIP. The Virginia STIP development process typically takes 12 months whereby revenues and project estimates are derived from SYIP allocations. However, the timing of the annual SYIP does not coincide perfectly with the STIP development process, and thus the revenues used to develop the FY2015-2018 STIP, especially for the first year, often reflect older SYIP information. This slight discrepancy is corrected by VDOT (for Highway projects) who works with the MPOs to adjust their TIPs retroactively to accurately reflect the current SYIP allocations and affected projects, and amends the STIP on a project specific basis by the end of the calendar year. For transit projects, the 2015-2018 STIP follows trends from past apportionments for FTA formula programs as guidance for financial constraint, including a growth rate that is similar to what is used for highways projects. In addition, funds for transit capital projects for Governor's apportionment grantees are consistent with past years' distributions.

FHWA and FTA considered recommending changes to the STIP development process to eliminate the potential for this issue in future STIP updates. However, FHWA and FTA recognize the various processes especially timing constraints the Commonwealth must balance (including the SYIP directed by Virginia State law) in developing a STIP, as well as small unforeseen funding changes that can occur during the development of the STIP. FHWA and FTA are not identifying any specific corrections to be made to the STIP development process in the area of financial constraint.

## **Air Quality- Transportation Conformity**

The Clean Air Act requires that transportation plans, programs, and projects in nonattainment and maintenance areas that are funded or approved by FHWA or FTA be in conformity with the State Implementation Plans for air quality through the process described in the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) transportation conformity

regulation. As of July 20, 2013 the EPA revoked the 1997 8-hour ozone standard for transportation conformity purposes. Therefore, the only area within Virginia that is subject to the transportation conformity requirements is the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area (including Northern Virginia), which is a nonattainment area for PM<sub>2.5</sub> and ozone. On January 22, 2014, FHWA and FTA issued a joint conformity finding for the 2013 Constrained Long Range Plan and the Fiscal Year 2013-2018 Transportation Improvement Program for the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area.

### **STIP Content**

In accordance with 23 CFR 450.216(g), the STIP includes capital and non-capital surface transportation projects (or phases of projects) proposed for funding under 23 USC. Further, in accordance with 23 CFR 450.216(h), the STIP includes all regionally significant projects proposed to be funded by FHWA or FTA or requiring an action by FHWA or FTA. Likewise, the STIP includes all regionally significant projects to be funded by others.

In accordance with 23 CFR 450.216(i), the project-level information in the STIP includes sufficient descriptive information to identify the project, its scope, and phase. The project-level information also includes an estimated total cost, the amount of federal funds planned to be obligated year and funding category, and the identification of the agencies responsible for carrying out the project.

The STIP includes projects administered by FHWA's Eastern Federal Lands Highway Division (EFLHD) (e.g., projects on public lands such as national parks, national forests, etc.). The projects administered by the EFLHD have been incorporated directly into the STIP without change.

### **Public Involvement and Participation**

23 CFR 450.210(a) states that the States shall develop a documented public involvement process that provides opportunities for public review and comment at key decision points. VDOT has developed a guide for the public titled, Public Involvement: Your Guide to Participating in the Transportation Planning and Programming Process which available on their website. The public involvement process for the STIP and SYIP largely occurs concurrently, with the public involvement requirements for the SYIP serving as the public involvement requirements for the STIP. A copy of the STIP is made available for public comment at each SYIP public meeting. A copy of the draft STIP was also made available for public review prior to its submission to FHWA and FTA. Finally, the STIP and any amendments are posted on the VDOT and DRPT websites for public review.

## **Recommendations**

Over the course of FHWA's and FTA's review of the STIP and the review of the MPOs' metropolitan planning processes and their development of the TIPs, only one issue was identified that needed further attention.

### **Public Involvement**

23 CFR 450.216(f) states that the Governor shall provide interested parties with a reasonable opportunity to comment on the proposed STIP. Based on the STIP review, dates of public meetings discussing the draft STIP were not provided to FHWA and FTA. It is recommended that VDOT and VDRPT provide FHWA and FTA with the public notices showing these announcements. Furthermore the State's Public Involvement guide should mention when the draft STIP is available for comment and not just the SYIP.

## **Conclusion and Finding**

Based upon our review documented above, FHWA and FTA hereby determine that the Commonwealth of Virginia's FY2015-FY2018 STIP is based on a statewide transportation planning process that substantially meets the requirements of 23 USC 134 and 135, 49 USC 5303 and 5304, and 23 CFR 450.