

# Moving in a New Direction

## State and Local Perspectives

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*The Urban Construction Initiative was established as the result of a modification to the Code of Virginia in 2003. Traditionally in Virginia, cities identified construction projects, which VDOT would construct and the locality would subsequently maintain. Over the past several years, increasing emphasis has been placed on local administration of construction projects. The Urban Construction Initiative moves local administration from the project level to the program level, providing Virginia's municipalities with the opportunity to manage their entire construction program.*

### **Town of Blacksburg:**

While locally administering the construction of a \$12M interchange project, the Town of Blacksburg learned of the Urban Construction Initiative (UCI). This program was initiated to assist localities in streamlining the project delivery method for major projects that involve state and federal dollars. Under the UCI program, localities are solely responsible for completing the Urban Program which includes long range planning, preliminary engineering, environmental, federal compliance, and construction administration.

Throughout each project, VDOT remains an important partner by providing oversight and giving final approval of major phases in the project. After evaluating the pros and cons of participating in the UCI, the Town of Blacksburg officially joined the program on July 1, 2008 and has experienced significant improvements in delivering transportation projects to its citizens.

The Urban Construction Initiative's major advantages for the Town of Blacksburg:

1. Moves the service provider closer to the customer.
2. Project delivery is streamlined because it is designed around the Town's exact needs, enabling more projects to be accomplished more quickly with the same funding.
3. Gives the locality greater flexibility to select, manage, and schedule projects.
4. Enables the Town to have more control in the design and construction for context sensitive solutions.
5. The Town can resolve issues (citizen driven and design driven) during construction in an efficient manner since the prime contractor is under direct contract with the Town.

The Town's main challenge in the UCI is that the Town is solely responsible for the success of the urban program. The benefits, however, have already been recognized by the Town, especially during these rough economic times by being able to evaluate situations where cost savings can be implemented. Who knows better than the Town what items and details can be altered or eliminated in a project? To sum it up, the UCI program allows the right people to make the right decisions.

### **Virginia Department of Transportation:**

Undertaking this program was a significant change in direction for VDOT but one that has resulted in great benefits. The initiative places greater responsibility and accountability for the urban construction program in the hands of the local government. This includes the responsibility for meeting all federal and state legal/regulatory requirements, and Commonwealth Transportation Board policy. VDOT retains an oversight and stewardship responsibility for the federal funds that are provided to the locality. VDOT approaches this as a partnership and remains committed to ensuring successful program delivery.

VDOT's Local Assistance Division (LAD) provides ongoing program level support to municipalities participating in the initiative. LAD coordinates quarterly meetings with participating municipalities. LAD also plans and prepares workshops and training opportunities periodically throughout the year.

VDOT's Construction Districts are the primary contact for project implementation support, technical assistance, and oversight. This approach ensures that localities have support for their program, but the ultimate responsibility and public accountability for the program lies with the local government.

Both VDOT and our local government partners continue to look for ways to improve this initiative as we gain more experience working together. Over the past year, we have worked cooperatively with FHWA to develop a certification program to provide greater streamlining and flexibility for the most experienced localities. VDOT expects that the certification program will be implemented in the coming year.

For more information on the Urban Construction Initiative visit the Virginia Department of Transportation's webpage at: <http://www.virginiadot.org/business/local-assistance.asp> ■