

IN NEWS

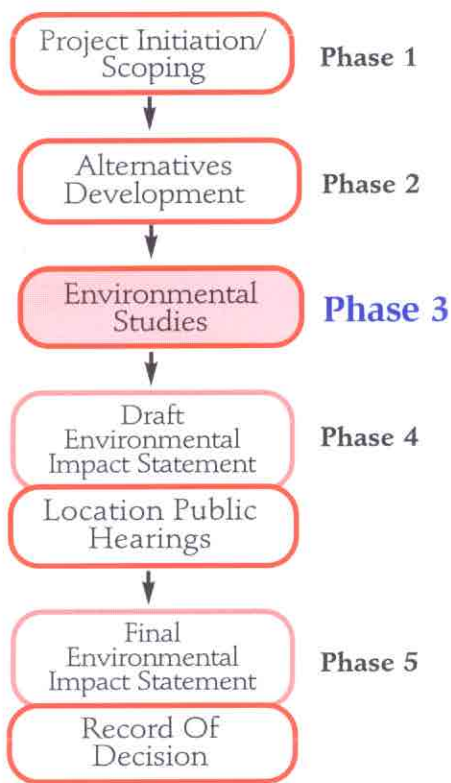


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A newsletter designed to inform, assist, and engage the public in developing the best alternative for I-73.

Steps to Success: Where are We?



The I-73 Location Study is in Phase 3 of the study. Phase I began with defining the need for an interstate highway between the Roanoke Valley and North Carolina.

During Phase 3, the remaining options undergo detailed environmental and technical analysis. Information discovered during these studies has led to the need for additional environmental and technical evaluation to assure that the study is complete.

In Phase 4, the data developed in Phases 1, 2 and 3 will be compiled into the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS), which will be available for public review and comment after it is approved by the Federal Highway Administration. The target date for location public hearings is late 1999.

New Information Results in Need for Additional Study for I-73

The I-73 Location Study Team has been hard at work in the field conducting detailed environmental and technical studies on the proposed I-73 alternatives. Information learned from these studies will require additional investigation in order to complete a thorough, unbiased evaluation of the alternatives. This additional information must be incorporated into a document called the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) before the Study can be complete.

"Several natural and historic resources and the need for expanded traffic information are areas that need further study," said Fred Altizer, administrator of VDOT's Salem District. "We have received a large amount of input from the public, and we need to make a thorough evaluation of potential impacts along the study alternatives. We want to reduce or eliminate impacts to significant resources," said Altizer.

The I-73 Study Team identified many historic structures, seven of which need to be further evaluated. The Boones Mill Historic District needs further evaluation. Similarly, an area between Riverland Road and the Roanoke River in the City of Roanoke may qualify as an historic district.

In December, the Blue Ridge Concerned Citizens presented a report to VDOT that identified the Virginia Sneezeweed, a plant recently named to the Federal threatened and endangered species list. The Study Team conducted additional research and determined that the habitat of the plant was not found in or near any of the specific options.

The Blue Ridge group also identified two possible public groundwater sources, major and minor Glade Creek Aquifers, which now are being evaluated by biologists.

Additional traffic counts will be taken along I-581 and U.S. Route 220 to ensure the completeness of traffic estimates. Information from VDOT's recently completed studies on the widening of I-81 also must be incorporated in the study. The proposed I-73 traffic forecast may impact I-81.

"It's not uncommon that additional cultural, historic and natural resources are identified in a study of this type," said Altizer. "That's the purpose of the study in the first place. However, these additional studies require more time to complete a comprehensive document that is acceptable to the Federal Highway Administration."

Once the I-73 Study Team completes the DEIS, it must be approved by the Federal Highway Administration. Afterward, VDOT will hold location public hearings. The DEIS document will be available for review before, during and after the location public hearings. The target date for location public hearings is late 1999.

In This Issue

Natural Resources ♦ Historic Resources ♦ Public Participation

Environmental Studies Key to Successful Study

In addition to engineers, the I-73 Location Study Team includes environmental scientists and other experts in cultural and natural resource preservation. Their job is to evaluate the alternatives to determine what the impact would be. Here's an inside look at the work of two of the scientists.

Wetlands, Plants & Animals

Marty Mitchell, a geologist with Hayes, Seay, Mattern and Mattern is responsible for uncovering any wetlands not previously identified on existing maps. For example, Marty's team discovered a 3.5 acre wetland along U.S. Route 220 in Franklin County. Their first clue was the identification of a woolgrass plant which is only found in wetland areas.

When wetlands or other environmentally sensitive environments are discovered within a study area, every attempt is made to adjust the potential alignment out of the area or to seek another alternative. When an alignment is moved, the new area must undergo the same rigorous evaluation.

Marty's team also investigates plant and animal life in the study area. The endangered Roanoke Log Perch was found in the Roanoke, Pigg and Smith Rivers and the Orange Fin Madtom in the Salem area and in the Pigg River. These fish are protected by state and federal law and their discovery affects stream crossings and bridge design. Potential alignments were moved in Franklin County to avoid encroaching upon the habitat of the smooth coneflower, an endangered plant that grows in western Virginia.

Historic & Cultural Resources

Loretta Lautzenheiser is an archeologist whose firm, Coastal Carolina Research, specializes in cultural resource management. Loretta's team is responsible for identifying cultural and historic resources that might be impacted by the alternatives.

They spend countless hours researching historic and cultural data on the study area available through the Virginia Department of Historic Resources, county libraries, historical societies and courthouses. Knowing this information beforehand helps engineers avoid known historic and cultural sites in the planning process. For example, engineers were able to create an alignment that avoided the Cahas Mountain rural historic district which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Loretta's team also goes into the field to conduct physical surveys of structures and districts to determine their eligibility for historic status. As a result of their work, alignments were shifted to avoid a potentially eligible historic district in the northern part of Franklin County. An alignment near Martinsville was moved to avoid Eltham Manor. After extensive research, seven historic structures and two potential historic districts in the study area remain for further evaluation because of their proximity to the study alternatives.

Loretta's team also conducts an archeological assessment of the study area. One of the more interesting discoveries in Franklin County was the Great Wagon Road, used in the 19th century as a market road. This discovery also led to a shift in the alignment.

Your Involvement Counts

*Public involvement has played an important role in the I-73 Location Study. Citizens have suggested potential alignments, provided valuable information about natural, historic and cultural resources and shared their opinions. We want to continue hearing from you! To learn more about the I-73 Location Study, call the telephone information line at: **1-888-I73-PLAN** (TTY users call **1-800-307-4630**). Visit the Web Site at: www.vdot.state.va.us*



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