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Comments and Coordination

7.1 Scoping and Process

Scoping is an early, open, and on-going process used to determine the range of improvement concepts, issues, and impacts that the Tier 1 study will address in accordance with NEPA. The scoping process includes the general public as well as the appropriate federal, state, regional, and local agencies. To initiate this process, the *Process Streamlining Agreement between the Virginia Department of Transportation and the Federal Highway Administration on the Interstate 81 Corridor National Environmental Policy Act Process* was prepared and signed by FHWA and VDOT on November 6, 2003. Subsequent to this agreement, FHWA published a Notice of Intent in the Federal Register on November 14, 2003 to announce its intent to prepare this Tier 1 study. A complete summary of the scoping process is available in the *I-81 Corridor Improvement Study Scoping Summary Report*.

7.1.1 Agency Scoping Meeting

An Agency Scoping Meeting was held on Tuesday, February 3, 2004 in Richmond, Virginia. The agencies invited included:

- Federal Railroad Administration (FRA);
- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA);
- National Marine Fisheries Services (NMFS);
- Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), Virginia State Office;
- United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE);
- National Park Service (NPS), Northeast Region;
- United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA);
- United States Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS);
- United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service (USDA Forest Service);
- United States Coast Guard (USCG);
- Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA);

- Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS);
- Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR);
- Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ);
- Virginia Department of Forestry (VDF);
- Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (DGIF);
- Virginia Department of Health (VDH);
- Virginia Department of Historic Resources (VDHR);
- Virginia Department of Mines, Minerals, and Energy (DMME);
- Virginia Marine Resource Commission (VMRC);
- Virginia Outdoors Foundation (VOF);
- Virginia Tourism Corporation (VTC);
- Blacksburg/Christiansburg Metropolitan Planning Organization (BCMPO);
- Roanoke Valley-Allegheny Regional Commission (RVARC);
- Winchester-Fredericksburg Metropolitan Planning Organization (WFCMPO);
- Harrisonburg Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (HAMPO);
- Central Shenandoah Planning District Commission; and
- Bristol (Tennessee) Metropolitan Planning Organization (BMPO).

A total of 16 federal, state, regional, and local agency representatives attended the Agency Scoping Meeting. The meeting consisted of a summary of the NEPA tiering process and introduction to the Study Team. Other issues of discussion at the meeting included sensitive features and areas of concern, rail corridor studies, cooperating agencies, legislation, schedule, and Study Team expectations.

A Scoping Information Package was distributed at the Agency Scoping Meeting. This document contained preliminary information about the proposed study, the study corridor, the need for the improvements, the decisions that FHWA and VDOT would make upon completion of the Tier 1 study, the environmental review process, public outreach, agency coordination, and the study schedule.

Agencies were encouraged to submit comments on the study scope at the Agency Scoping Meeting and in writing to VDOT. A summary of comments received from these agencies, along with the Study Team's responses, are included in the *I-81 Corridor Improvement Study Scoping Summary Report*.

7.1.2 Public Scoping Meetings

A series of Public Scoping Meetings was held between February 10, 2004 and February 17, 2004 at various locations along the study corridor, as listed in Table 7.1-1 below.

Table 7.1-1 Public Scoping Meetings

| Date | Location | Number of Attendees |
|-------------------------|----------------|---------------------|
| February 10, 2004 | Abingdon | 13 |
| February 10, 2004 | Wytheville | 34 |
| February 11, 2004 | Christiansburg | 30 |
| February 11, 2004 | Salem | 67 |
| February 12, 2004 | Lexington | 115 |
| February 12, 2004 | Harrisonburg | 31 |
| February 17, 2004 | Winchester | 68 |
| Total Attendees: | | 358 |

The Public Scoping Meetings' open house format included a repeating slide presentation and accompanying display boards depicting general information on I-81, the study schedule, and the purpose of the *I-81 Corridor Improvement Study*. The February 2004 issue of *I-81 Update*, the *I-81 Corridor Improvement Study* newsletter, was distributed as well.

FHWA and VDOT representatives were available to discuss the *I-81 Corridor Improvement Study* and answer questions at the Public Scoping Meetings. In addition to Study Team members answering questions and taking comments, a court reporter was present at each meeting to record verbal comments, and comment sheets were available for written comments. Comment sheets could be submitted at the meetings or mailed after the meetings. A summary of comments received from Public Scoping Meetings and the responses are included in the *I-81 Corridor Improvement Study Scoping Summary Report*, which is available on VDOT's *I-81 Corridor Improvement Study* Web site.

Local Government Sessions

Local government representatives from the I-81 study area were given an advance opportunity to review scoping material and provide input at meetings held in the afternoons prior to the February 10th through February 17th Public Scoping Meetings. Comments from these local government representatives are summarized, along with other scoping comments, in the *I-81 Corridor Improvement Study Scoping Summary Report*.

7.1.3 Scoping Summary

The *I-81 Corridor Improvement Study Scoping Summary Report* describes the scoping process and summarizes all scoping comments, including comments from government agencies, interest groups, and the general public. The scoping process yielded a total of approximately 1,100 comments from 244 different individuals or groups dated on or before the closing date for the formal scoping comment period, February 27, 2004. However, because scoping is continuous and on-going, FHWA and VDOT accepted scoping comments throughout the study period.

Most of the comments came from private citizens. A total of 21 federal, state, regional and local agencies provided comments as well. The remaining comments were from industry and interest groups. There were four sources of scoping comments: verbal comments made at the scoping meetings, comments made on the comment forms available at the scoping meetings, comments received as a result of scoping letters, and comments provided by e-mail. Comment forms were used by 198 individuals or groups to provide input. Scoping comments were addressed and included in the Tier 1 study where appropriate.

7.2 Federal, State, and Local Agency Coordination

In addition to scoping, other meetings were held with federal, state, and local agencies throughout the study process.

7.2.1 Partnering Meetings

In Virginia, a formal process is in place whereby all EIS-level and complex Environmental Assessment (EA)-level projects sponsored by FHWA and VDOT are coordinated through a series of Partnering Meetings with federal resource and regulatory agencies. Through this process, federal agencies are afforded an opportunity to provide early and continued input on scoping, Purpose and Need, and concept development. The *I-81 Corridor Improvement Study* was presented at three Partnering Meetings held on November 21, 2003, September 8, 2004, and November 30, 2004 in Gloucester, Virginia.

November 21, 2003 Partnering Meeting

The purpose of the November 21, 2003 Partnering Meeting was to introduce the study and solicit early input. Attendees included representatives of FHWA, VDOT, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS). The FHWA/VDOT Process Streamlining Agreement was distributed, and the NEPA tiering process was explained. Other topics of discussion included schedule, concepts, level of impacts that may be evaluated in the tiering process, the Public-Private Transportation Act (PPTA), and funding sources. Agencies had four weeks to provide comments in response to the meeting.

September 8, 2004 Partnering Meeting

September 8, 2004 Partnering Meeting attendees included representatives of FHWA, VDOT, EPA, USACE, and FWS. This meeting focused on reference material used to prepare the Purpose and Need. Agenda items included a presentation of the study area, the *I-81 Corridor*

Improvement Study Scoping Summary Report, and identification of existing rail lines and initial rail concepts. The *I-81 Corridor Improvement Study: Existing and Future Conditions Data Analysis*, which was used as the basis for the Purpose and Need, also was presented and distributed. The agencies were given approximately two weeks to comment on the existing and future conditions analysis. Comments received from the agencies were addressed and incorporated into Chapter 2, *Purpose and Need*, and Chapter 3, *Improvement Concepts*, as appropriate.

November 30, 2004 Partnering Meeting

The third Partnering Meeting, held on November 30, 2004, also was attended by VDOT, FHWA, EPA, USACE, and the FWS. This meeting focused on the process used to develop improvement concepts.

7.2.2 Other Agency Coordination Meetings

State Environmental Review Process

Prior to initiation of the federal NEPA process, a State Environmental Review Process (SERP) meeting was held on December 15, 2003 to afford Interagency Environmental Coordination Committee (IECC) members an early opportunity to review the proposed study and provide comments. The IECC consists of state environmental resource and regulatory agencies in Virginia, including the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Department of Conservation and Recreation, Department of Environmental Quality, Department of Forestry, Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, Department of Health, Department of Historic Resources, Department of Mines, Minerals, Energy, Virginia Marine Resources Commission and the Virginia Outdoors Foundation. This SERP review meeting included a description of the NEPA tiering process and an introduction to the study area. Agencies provided comments and GIS data to VDOT.

I-81 Corridor Forum

In September 2004, VDOT provided the leadership to plan and host a I-81 Corridor forum, a meeting attended by a group of transportation officials representing the states that I-81 traverses (Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, and New York). Each state was invited to present and discuss highway and rail initiatives in their state; to share information on their respective transportation challenges and on their opportunities for meeting those challenges; and to share information on current studies along I-81 in their state. These states met again in July 2005 and have a continuing commitment to work together to improve transportation conditions on I-81.

Rail Coordination

A kick-off meeting was held with DRPT on January 23, 2004. The purpose of this meeting was to obtain available information pertinent to the rail component of the study. DRPT provided preliminary information regarding Reebie Associates' anticipated *Impact of Tolls on Freight Movement for I-81 in Virginia*, which was finalized on April 8, 2004. DRPT also discussed its understanding of what may be feasible for Norfolk Southern's operations to move freight off I-81.

On April 16, 2004, a follow-up meeting was held with FHWA, VDOT, and DRPT to discuss potential rail concepts. This meeting resulted in four preliminary rail concepts that could undergo initial analysis and screening.

FHWA, VDOT, and DRPT met with Norfolk Southern on May 6, 2004 to coordinate the results of the April 16th meeting noted above and to discuss the study overall. Discussions focused on how the four initial rail concepts related to Norfolk Southern's existing and future programs and how the *I-81 Corridor Improvement Study* could best represent the range of possible rail improvement concepts. In the summer of 2004, representatives from Norfolk Southern accompanied the Study Team on a hy-rail ride along both the Shenandoah and Piedmont rail lines in Virginia. The locations of potential improvement sections were identified in the field by Norfolk Southern. Another coordination meeting was held with representatives from FHWA, VDOT, DRPT, and Norfolk Southern on January 6, 2005.

Coordination also was completed with the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) on June 22, 2004 relative to potential revisions to the Intermodal Transportation and Inventory Costs model (ITIC). The ITIC model was developed by FHWA to estimate truck-to-truck, rail carload-to-truck, and rail intermodal-to-truck diversion caused by changes in costs for truck shipments more than 200 miles and has been modified and used by FRA to predict truck-to-rail diversion.

VDOT and DRPT met on September 13, 2005 to discuss findings of the Tier 1 study. On October 17 and 19, 2005, VDOT, DRPT, and the Virginia Research Council met to resolve differences in methodologies and assumptions in the transportation data findings and forecasts.

Local Meetings

In the spring of 2004, the Study Team interviewed local officials in the I-81 study area to obtain information on each locality's plans for I-81 and the surrounding area. Thirteen meetings were held between March 15, 2004 and March 26, 2004 as summarized in Table 7.2-1 below.

Questions concerning general land use, transportation, socio-economic and environmental justice issues were posed to each locality. Requests for GIS data were made and available GIS



data were collected. Responses to questions were used in the preparation of the Tier 1 Draft EIS including the Land Use, Transportation, and Indirect and Cumulative Impacts sections.

Table 7.2-1 Local Meetings

| Meeting Date | Locality | Local Representative Name - Title |
|---------------------|--|--|
| March 15, 2004 | Shenandoah County | Robert E. Kinsley, Jr. - Director of Planning and Code Enforcement |
| March 15, 2004 | Rockingham County City of Harrisonburg | Rhonda Henderson - Director of Planning Billy Vaughan - Director of Community Development Keith Markel - City of Harrisonburg Planner Daniel Rublee, P.E. – City Engineer |
| March 17, 2004 | Pulaski County | David Tickner - Director of Community Development Dari Jenkins – Zoning Administrator |
| March 18, 2004 | Montgomery County City of Radford | T.C. "Joe" Powers, Jr. - Planning Department David Ridpath - Planning Director |
| March 18, 2004 | Washington County City of Bristol | Charles Horton - County Planner Shari Brown - Director of Community Development and Planning |
| March 19, 2004 | Smyth County | Sally Morgan - Community/Economic Development Planner |
| March 19, 2004 | Wythe County | Stephen Bear – Assistant County Administrator Jim Huffard - County Planner |
| March 22, 2004 | Rockbridge County | Sam Crickenberger - Planning Director |
| March 22, 2004 | Augusta County City of Staunton | Becky Earhart - Senior Planner Sharon Angle - Director of Planning |
| March 23, 2004 | Roanoke County City of Salem City of Roanoke | Janet Sheid - Chief Planner Anthony Ford – Traffic Engineer Joseph Yates, Jr. - Director of Planning and Development Chris Chittum - Senior City Planner |
| March 24, 2004 | Warren County | Doug Stanley - Planning Director/County Administrator |
| March 25, 2004 | Botetourt County | Chuck Supan - Planner/Zoning Administrator Mark Jordan – Assistant Planner/Zoning Enforcement Officer |
| March 26, 2004 | Frederick County City of Winchester | Eric Lawrence - Director of Planning and Development Tim Youmans - Director of Planning |

Regional Agency Meetings

On March 22, 2004, meetings were held with the Executive Directors of the New River Valley Planning District Commission (NRVPDC) and the Roanoke Valley–Alleghany Regional Commission (RVARC) to discuss traffic and transportation issues and potential impacts to

their local areas. Meetings also were held with the Mount Rogers Planning District Commission and the Executive Director of the Blacksburg/Christiansburg Metropolitan Planning Organization. The Mount Rogers PDC meeting centered around the agency's opposition to tolling I-81, right-of-way impacts, and potential concepts for I-81 and interchanges. The Blacksburg/Christiansburg MPO meeting concentrated on existing projects in the surrounding areas and opposition to tolls.

On June 2, 2004, the Roanoke Valley Alleghany Regional Commission hosted the Regional Freight Forum. The forum focused on moving freight through the Roanoke region, providing an opportunity for representatives from the public and private sectors to present information and exchange ideas.

7.2.3 Agency Correspondence

Cooperating Agencies

On January 8, 2004, FHWA invited the following agencies to be cooperating agencies on the *I-81 Corridor Improvement Study*:

- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency;
- U.S. Coast Guard
- U.S. Department of the Interior National Park Service
- Tennessee Valley Authority
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
- U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service

No agencies declined this invitation and all are considered cooperating agencies. A copy of comments on the preliminary Tier 1 DEIS received from cooperating agencies, and responses to those comments are included in *Appendix H, Correspondence*.

Data Requests

Federal, state, and local agencies were contacted during the scoping process to gain baseline information on resources within the I-81 and rail study areas. Letters were sent to all localities adjacent to these corridors requesting available data on environmental conditions, park and recreational resources, adjacent projects, planning studies, and any other available GIS data. Letters were sent out in March 2004 for the I-81 study area and May 2004 for the rail study area. Communication with these agencies continued beyond the scoping process as needed.



7.3 Other Public Involvement

Other public involvement activities were carried out in accordance with the *I-81 Corridor Improvement Study Public Participation Methods Report*. These activities included newsletters, a Web site/e-mail link, and press releases as described below.

7.3.1 Mailing List and Newsletters

A mailing list was compiled using Microsoft Access™ with names and addresses of interested citizens, businesses, and local government officials. This mailing list was compiled through contact at public meetings and research through the Virginia Review Directory of State and Local Government Officials. This mailing list was used for newsletter distribution and distribution of other study information in areas along the corridor.

I-81 Update, the official newsletter of the *I-81 Corridor Improvement Study* was distributed at the February 2004 Public Scoping Meetings. The newsletter detailed the NEPA tiering process and gave information on the history and purpose of the *I-81 Corridor Improvement Study*. It also included a map of the study area and the proposed study schedule. The newsletter also invited questions and comments on the project. A copy of *I-81 Update* is included in the *I-81 Corridor Improvement Study Scoping Summary Report*, both of which were available throughout the study process on VDOT's *I-81 Corridor Improvement Study* Web site.

7.3.2 Web Site/E-Mail Link

The I-81 Corridor Improvement Study Web site, which included an e-mail link to contact VDOT, was established and posted on VDOT's Internet Web site. Up-to-date information was provided through the Web site on study status, maps of the study area, history of the *I-81 Corridor Improvement Study*, and the I-81 PPTA process. The *I-81 Corridor Improvement Study Scoping Summary Report*, and the *I-81 Corridor Improvement Study: Existing and Future Conditions Data Analysis*, and a draft Purpose and Need chapter were posted on this Web site. Throughout the Tier 1 Draft EIS process, comments and questions received through the Web site's e-mail link were recorded in the project comment tracking database, along with responses, where appropriate. A summary of these comments, along with general comments from other sources, can be found in section 7.3.4 *Pertinent Correspondence*.

The I-81 Corridor Improvement Study Web site address is as follows:

<http://www.virginiadot.org/projects/constSTAN-I81-overview.asp>

Or

www.I-81.org



7.3.3 Press Releases

The following six press releases directly related to the process and content of the *I-81 Corridor Improvement Study* were issued since November 2003.

Table 7.3-1 Press Releases

| Press Release Date | Topic |
|--------------------|--|
| November 10, 2003 | VDOT, FHWA Sign Agreement To Begin Environmental Study Of I-81 |
| December 18, 2003 | VDOT Signs Consultant For I-81 Environmental Review |
| January 28, 2004 | VDOT Sets Public Meetings On I-81 Corridor Study |
| January 29, 2004 | VDOT Sets Public Meetings On I-81 Corridor Study (Corrected Version) |
| May 24, 2004 | VDOT Receives 1,100 Comments During I-81 Scoping Meetings; Summary Of Meetings Available On-Line |
| February 1, 2005 | VDOT Posts Draft Purpose And Need Portion of I-81 DEIS |

These press releases, along with others related to different aspects of the I-81 corridor are archived and available on VDOT's *I-81 Corridor Improvement Study* Web site at www.I-81.org.

7.3.4 Pertinent Correspondence

Letters, e-mails, and phone calls related to the *I-81 Corridor Improvement Study* were received throughout the study process. Each piece of correspondence was reviewed, recorded in the project comment tracking database, and addressed as necessary. Various groups, including DEQ, New River Valley Planning District Commission (NRVPDC), Rail Solution, Oil Price Information Service, Coalition for Smarter Growth, USDA Forest Service, and the general public shared positions and commented on the following topics:

- Support/opposition to tolls;
- Support/opposition for separated truck lanes;
- Support/opposition to additional lanes;
- Support for freight/passenger rail;
- Support for park and ride with bus service;
- Suggestions for improved rail service, including double tracking, container loading improvements, rail in the highway median, etc.;
- Suggestion to divert freight to an alternate truckway on new location;
- Concern for air quality impacts;
- Concern for safety on I-81;



- Shipper/receiver study inquiries;
- Traffic study inquiries;
- Air quality study inquiries;
- Purpose and Need inquiries;
- Study timeline inquiries; and
- Requests to be added to the mailing list.

7.3.5 Other Meetings

Meetings were held with citizens and interest groups as requested during the course of the study. Two meetings were held via videoconference on July 29, 2004. Various interest groups, FHWA, VDOT Central Office staff, and VDOT field office staff met to discuss tiering and the study schedule; historic and natural resources, including air quality and battlefields; financial feasibility of improvement concepts; rail; fuel costs; and the Tier 1 study's relationship to the PPTA. One videoconference was held from the VDOT Harrisonburg Residency at 9:00 AM, and the other was held from the VDOT Salem Residency at 2:00 PM. The following groups participated in the videoconferences:

- Rail Solution;
- Virginia Conservation Network;
- Community Alliance for Preservation;
- Shenandoah Valley Network;
- Scenic 340 Project, Inc.;
- Coalition for Smarter Growth;
- Virginia Initiative to Save and Improve Our Neighborhoods (VISION);
- Shenandoah Valley Battlefields Foundation;
- Southern Environmental Law Center; and
- Valley Conservation Council.