



“Ask the Expert”

Why are you studying the Route 29 corridor?

The Route 29 corridor is a major north-south link for through and local traffic in the Commonwealth’s transportation network. In recent years, increasing traffic volumes coupled with significant development in key areas has created conflicts resulting in congestion and safety concerns. Although numerous segments of Route 29 have been studied in the past, none have addressed these issues along the entire length of the corridor – from the North Carolina state line to Interstate 66 in Prince William County. In light of these concerns – and with a focus on ensuring the corridor’s role as a key contributor to the state’s economic potential – the Commonwealth Transportation Board initiated this first-ever, comprehensive Route 29 Corridor Study. Ultimately, findings from this study will help to guide future transportation improvements.

How is this corridor study different from other Route 29 studies done in the past?

The primary difference between this study and past Route 29 studies is that we are looking at the entire length of the corridor – 219 miles – from the North Carolina state line to Interstate 66 in Prince William County. Past studies, though valuable, looked only at specific portions of the corridor. In addition to this comprehensive focus, our study is also unique in the fact that we are addressing vital corridor-wide issues such as “ownership”, i.e., how VDOT can work more closely in partnership with the localities on issues like access use. This Route 29 study also is multi-modal in its approach, meaning that we are considering various modes of transportation, including passenger rail service. Finally, our study will also address issues related to funding, options for effective implementation, and policy recommendations that will ensure the continued viability of Route 29 as a major transportation corridor in the commonwealth.

What will be the final “result” of the Route 29 Corridor Study?

As you may know, the overall goal of the Route 29 Corridor Study is to develop a draft Blueprint, to be delivered to the Commonwealth Transportation Board (CTB) by November 2009, which will identify short, intermediate and long-range improvements. These recommendations will focus on increasing safety, enhancing mobility through choice of transportation modes and boosting economic activity within the corridor. Additionally, the Blueprint will also include policy recommendations that will help ensure the continued viability of Route 29

as a major transportation corridor in the commonwealth. Ultimately, the study team is focused on building consensus with various governments and citizens along the corridor on these “common ground” recommendations. Following CTB action, an effort will be undertaken to have all localities along the corridor pass a resolution indicating their support for the Blueprint.

Much has been said about the need for greater access management along the Route 29 corridor, but aren't there currently access requirements already in place?

Yes. In 2007, after a lengthy public review process, VDOT's Commissioner approved access management regulations and standards. Subsequent legislation approved by the 2008 General Assembly established that the access management program be implemented in phases, with the first phase, scheduled to take effect July 1, 2008, focused on principal arterials, due to their importance for travel within the state, transporting of goods, commuting to work, tourism, and emergency evacuation. Principal arterial routes, like the Route 29 corridor, provide the highest level of mobility and convey large amounts of traffic over relatively long distances. Care must be taken with principal arterial routes to balance the need for direct property access while avoiding unsafe and congested traffic operations.

Access management takes into account these various needs and serves as a comprehensive approach for controlling the location, spacing, design and operation of entrances, street intersections, median openings, and traffic signals. Each of these creates conflict points where vehicles have to stop or slow down, disrupting the flow of traffic. As the number of conflict points increase, so does traffic congestion and traffic crashes affecting the traffic carrying capacity of the road. Managing access, therefore, seeks to limit and separate entrances, intersections, median openings, and traffic signals in order to maintain and improve the flow of traffic and enhance public safety.

The reason so many principal arterials are congested and have high traffic crash counts – like many parts of the Route 29 corridor – is because multiple entrances, intersections, and traffic signals have been allowed to serve development, affecting the arterial's primary function to move traffic. In the case of the Route 29 corridor, much of this development occurred prior to the approval of the guidelines described above. Now, the Route 29 Corridor Study is tasked with addressing past issues while looking at future land use throughout the corridor. Such considerations include limiting the number of new entrances and safely spacing them from each other and requiring lots created from the subdivision of a parcel to access the highway using an internalized street circulation system. The team's access management goal is to seek to best balance the right of property owners to reasonable access to the highway with the right of users of the roads to mobility, safety, and efficient expenditure of public funds.

I’ve heard some talk that the Route 29 corridor study may negatively impact the area’s rural, historical areas like Buckland. Can you explain how you plan to address the concern of many that we maintain the current feel of the corridor and protect Virginia’s historical and cultural resources?

As part of the listening tour that was held early in the Route 29 Corridor Study process, many attendees highlighted the importance of preserving the rural character of much of the Route 29 corridor, as well as key historical features such as the Journey Through Hallowed Ground corridor (which follows portions of the study corridor where Route 29 and Route 15 overlap) and the Buckland historic area. The rural and historic character of a corridor can be negatively impacted by high levels of development that often lead to stretches of roadside retail (or “strip” development), the proliferation of traffic signals, as well as transportation projects such as new or widened roadways that can negatively affect the character of an area. In recognition of these important concerns, the Route 29 study is developing recommendations to enhance the ability of VDOT and local government, in partnership, to better control growth along the corridor. The study is also developing recommendations for a corridor master plan that can assist local governments to control both the amount of growth and the location of growth so that more and more travel could potentially be made by rail, walking, biking, and transit. The study will also recommend roadway enhancements, not only to improve safety but also to ensure that both safety and capacity improvements are completed within a logical planning framework rather than simply reacting to changes as they occur. While this type of planning certainly does not alleviate all of the potential impacts of roadway improvements, it does ensure that needed projects are sized and located in ways that minimize impacts wherever possible. We believe that the combined tools of growth management, land use planning, access management, and sound multi-modal transportation planning provide the best chance for helping Route 29 maintain its scenic and historic value while continuing to serve the needs of the corridor as a whole.

How will this study affect my property values?

The Route 29 study will not likely have an immediate or direct effect on property values since it will not change underlying regulations pertaining to permitted land uses that are established by the individual localities that regulate development in the corridor. However, the study will include recommendations to better manage access along the corridor and to improve capacity and safety that may eventually result in changes in local planning policies and zoning regulations or access standards that could influence market decisions about property values. Such changes to local policies or regulations would be subjected to public review and public hearing to provide individual property owners an opportunity to assess the potential impact of proposed changes.

Since property values are driven by many factors, including the free market, it is difficult to predict what indirect impacts the Route 29 study may ultimately have

on property values in the corridor. However, we believe that planning for the Route 29 corridor in a regional context and using sound planning tools combined with sound multi-modal transportation initiatives will maintain the function and economic vitality of the corridor which will help maintain overall property values in the long term by reducing congestion and focusing development in the most appropriate locations.

Are mass transit and rail improvements being considered as part of the study?

Yes, mass transit and rail improvements are being considered as part of the study. In fact, the VA Department of Rail & Public Transport (VDRPT) is serving alongside the VA Department of Transportation (VDOT), the Commonwealth Transportation Board (CTB), and state and local officials in spearheading the study.

More specifically, mass transit and rail improvements are key components of the Route 29 Corridor Study Blueprint, which will identify short, intermediate and long-range improvements. The Blueprint will focus on existing congestion and how best to accommodate future travel demand – addressing not only needed highway improvements and alternatives but also public transit and rail passenger service in the corridor. Areas of focus include recommending short-term improvements for transit, rail, or other passenger services; enhancing existing rail and regional transit and improving freight movements; and ultimately, designing a multimodal vision plan for the entire corridor that provides additional capacity for highway, transit, and rail modes.

How do you propose funding the recommendations that emerge from the Route 29 corridor study?

Improvements to Route 29 will require significant future funding. We cannot depend on the traditional funding methods to implement corridor improvements. As part of this study, we are evaluating possible financing options such as Transportation Improvement Districts and public–private partnerships. However, under any financing option, it may take several years to accumulate funds needed even for smaller projects.

What additional public involvement opportunities will be available once recommendations are complete?

Local elected officials, transportation experts (including bicycle/pedestrian, transit, roadway, etc.) and others interested in the future of the corridor will be invited to participate in the second round of our Citizen Information Meetings, currently slated for mid-to-late September.

During our first round of meetings held earlier this year, we gathered input and ideas for attendees that were used to help develop basic policies and direction for

the corridor study. Now that the study is nearing an end, we will hold the second series of meetings to report the themes that have emerged during the course of the study, as well as to present the preliminary recommendations that have been compiled by the study team. The information presented at these meetings will also be posted on VDOT’s website.

As previously mentioned, these meetings will be scheduled for mid-to-late September and will be held throughout the corridor. Specifically, we will hold meetings in the Danville, Lynchburg, Charlottesville, Warrenton, and Culpeper areas. More details on the meetings will be announced at a later date.

What effect will the Route 29 Corridor Study have on safety?

The Route 29 Corridor is a major north-south link for through and local traffic in the Commonwealth’s transportation network. In recent years, increasing traffic volumes coupled with significant development in key areas has created conflicts resulting in congestion and safety concerns. First and foremost, the study team is focused on how best to integrate safety improvements along the entire corridor to help ease these points of conflict. For example, in order to address issues related to congestion in many parts of the corridor, we are considering the introduction and/or improvement of various modes of transportation, including passenger rail service. Additionally, we are also addressing safety concerns by integrating better access management standards to help avoid unsafe and congested traffic operations. Specifically, we will seek to limit and separate entrances, intersections, median openings, and traffic signals in order to maintain and improve the flow of traffic and enhance public safety.

How can recommendations be made for the entire state, when the Route 29 corridor is so diverse in terms of traffic, population, etc.?

The diversity of the Route 29 corridor has been taken into account in this study. First, the study’s public input process included an extensive series of listening sessions and planning forums to garner input and concerns from communities along the entire 219-mile length of the corridor study area. Secondly, the analysis has focused both on corridor-wide common themes, as well as community-specific problems and opportunities.

The recommendations will mirror these two basic focus areas as well. They will be organized into two basic scales of recommendations – recommendations for broad, corridor-wide concepts as well as recommendations for specific “hot spots” for congestion and safety. In addition, recommendations will also cover various modes of transport, from passenger to freight, and from vehicular to rail to bicycle/pedestrian. Finally, recommendations will be arranged into short, medium and long-term action steps.

To that end, the project approach and the final recommendations have taken into account the diversity of conditions and concerns along the corridor in order to

frame a master plan that has long-term benefit for the people of the corridor and the Commonwealth.

How will this study affect the businesses along the Route 29 corridor?

The Route 29 Corridor Study will recommend a variety of projects, policies, and procedural changes in the corridor that will provide substantial long-term benefits for businesses in the corridor, but could also result in some short-term negative impacts on some businesses. For the corridor as a whole, and over the long term, the recommendations seek to preserve and enhance long-term transportation efficiencies and safety across all modes so that people can get to work, shopping, and recreational activities, and businesspeople can travel for their jobs. These include short trips within a region as well as trips from, say, Lynchburg or Charlottesville to Washington DC. As with the efficient movement of people, businesses will also benefit from improvements that seek to make the movement of goods smoother and safer; whether by reducing delays for trucks, or by intermodal recommendations that seek to continue to enhance the competitive advantages of freight rail service.

The implementation of individual improvements included in the Route 29 Corridor Study could certainly result in some short-term negative impacts on businesses in the corridor. For some businesses located directly on the corridor, access changes to their businesses may result in the need for their customers to change the way they get to them. Some of the larger, longer-term recommendations may also result in the need for acquiring some right-of-way from businesses. Despite some unavoidable impacts, all of the study’s recommendations will seek to minimize and/or mitigate any adverse impacts on businesses and other land uses in the corridor and long-term planning plays a big role in helping to ultimately reduce impacts by allowing people to plan accordingly. It is important to note that, in some areas, many businesses would be as likely to be negatively affected by continued growth in congestion and safety issues as they are by proposed improvements (because customers do start to avoid areas with high congestion and safety problems). On balance, this study believes that having a comprehensive plan of improvements that can be implemented through a cooperative effort of state and local governments, and in which the business community can contribute as well, provides the best opportunity for building and maintaining an active and vibrant business community over the long term.

What do you plan to discuss in the Citizen Information Meetings? What can we expect to see or find out?

Next week, the Route 29 Corridor Study Team will begin holding the second round of Citizen Information Meetings. This series of five meetings held along the corridor will provide the study team with an opportunity to present and gain feedback on the preliminary recommendations for the Route 29 Corridor Blueprint – A Vision for the Future. These recommendations will include the

identification of achievable short, intermediate and long-range improvements which will improve safety and enhance mobility within the 29 corridor from the North Carolina state line to Gainesville, Virginia. The study team will also be sharing policy recommendations to ensure the continued viability of Route 29 as a major multi-modal transportation corridor in the commonwealth.

More specifically, the meetings will be held from 5:00 – 8:00 p.m. and will provide you with an opportunity to look at preliminary drafts of the study’s efforts to date. We will be holding a series of presentations throughout that time period, in an effort to better describe our plans and recommendations. In addition, you will see a number of presentation boards explaining how the overall corridor recommendations may affect your specific area. The study team will be on hand to discuss these recommendations with you and answer any questions you might have. For more detailed information on the dates/times of these meetings, visit: <http://virginiadot.org/projects/resources/Rt.29.Corridor.ad.pdf>.

I understand that you will be finalizing a list of recommendations for the Route 29 corridor. Do you have specific ideas for funding the projects that you recommend?

Funding considerations are a very important focus for the study team as we finalize our recommendations for the Route 29 corridor. In fact, we are proposing a number of different existing and proposed mechanisms to fund the needed improvements for the corridor in the future. One of our primary recommendations is that future projects requiring funding in the corridor be established in a Corridor Implementation Plan. This plan would be developed over the next one to two years by VDOT and the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation in partnership with each locality in the corridor and would be the primary mechanism for approving the design and funding of all future improvements and access in the Route 29 corridor.

One option is the creation of Transportation Districts along the corridor. Specifically, we are recommending that the existing Transportation Improvement District enabling legislation in the State Code be expanded to apply to all corridor jurisdictions. Each transportation district would have a plan for improvements as established by the Corridor Implementation Plan and would be able to finance future projects with revenues coming from special assessments such as a surcharge on the local real estate tax for the properties in the district.

I’m concerned that some of the recommendations that suggest the construction of new roadways will negatively affect the rural landscape of much of the Route 29 corridor. How will you address this issue?

The Route 29 Corridor Study Team shares your concern about the proliferation of roads. While our study does recommend that planning corridors be established to allow for the possibility of the new roadways, it also focuses very heavily on ways

that the existing Route 29 corridor can be preserved so that new roadways would not be needed for some time. One of the methods that we look at to help preserve the existing Route 29 corridor is access management. We know that new access and development that has multiple direct access points onto the Route 29 corridor chips away at the capacity and safety of the road. Therefore, one of our key recommendations is to develop plans, as well as changes in procedures, to ensure that the Route 29 corridor does not become a roadway full of strip development and traffic signals.

I’ve heard the study team refer to “land use planning” in their recommendations for the Route 29 corridor, but I’m unsure of exactly what this means – can you explain how land use planning is involved in the transportation plan for Route 29?

It is important to keep in mind that land use planning takes place at the local level in Virginia – whether town, city, or county. Land use planning is generally done through a locality’s Comprehensive Plan, which identifies how the locality plans to develop its territory over the next 20 years or so (including commercial, residential, industrial, and business land uses). Quite often, the first development in a previously undeveloped area is residential, followed by commercial. This commercial development typically occurs along major arterials (like Route 29), as they initially provide good mobility and access, along with steady traffic flow. As commercial development continues, however, these major arterials can become clogged with one entrance after another, due to a lack of coordination in land use approvals. In recent years, VDOT and the localities have begun requiring the larger parcels of land to have an access plan. This helps ensure that the plan for the property promotes good traffic flow – for example, in a shopping center it could ensure that the access points are set far enough back from intersections to exit the site safely and not create a back-up in the traffic stream. The plan could also ensure that the out parcels (adjacent to the road, like fast food restaurants and gas stations), are then served from an internal circulation road rather than entrances on the adjacent road.

Although the land use planning generally occurs at the local level, it is important to address the wider impact of these land use decisions. The Route 29 corridor, for example, is a statewide transportation resource, so it is important to coordinate local land use with regional or statewide transportation planning. This coordination is especially important for managing access, as described above, and preserving the corridor’s transportation function.

To that end, a key aspect of the Route 29 Corridor Study is to recommend ways that local land use decisions can better align with the needs of the regional transportation system. The general goal is that the transportation system can serve the land uses both now and in the future, and that the arrangement of land use doesn’t create long-term transportation problems. In particular, this study will develop a series of examples of best practices for “transportation-efficient land use patterns” – that is, land use patterns that efficiently support the

transportation resources. For example, a transportation-efficient land use pattern would locate access points along parallel low-speed collector roadways rather than along higher-speed regional arterial roadways such as Route 29. When land use and transportation planning are done in concert, we can better ensure that our communities will accommodate all modes more efficiently – whether cars, transit, freight, walking, or biking, and that the Route 29 corridor can continue to serve the communities along it as an efficient transportation resource into the long-term future.