

WELCOME

Tier 2 Environmental Assessment I-81 Corridor Improvement Study, SIU #4

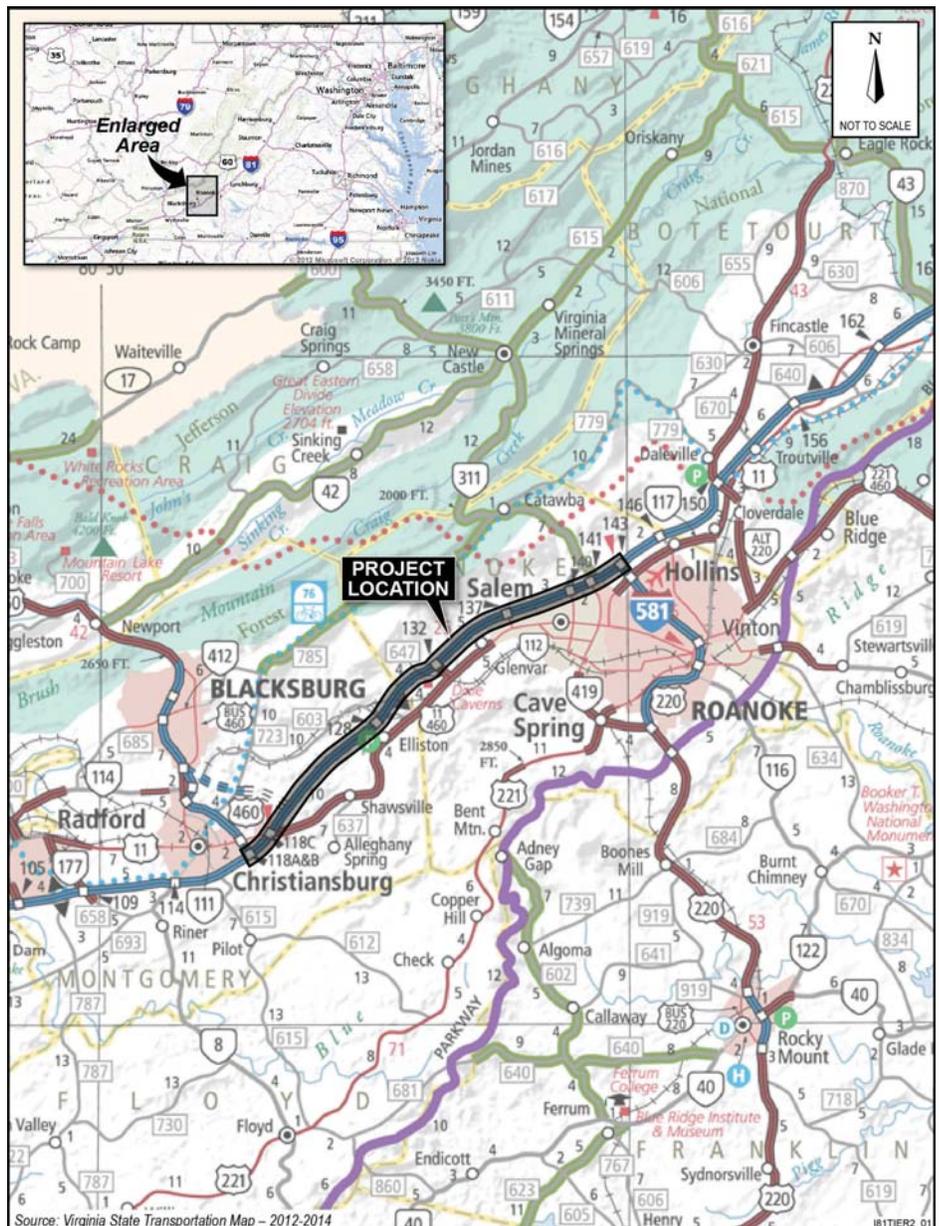
Thank you for attending tonight's Citizen Information Meeting. The Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT), in cooperation with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), is preparing an Environmental Assessment (EA) for proposed highway improvements on I-81 from Exit 118 (US 460) in the Town of Christiansburg to Exit 143 (I-581) in Roanoke County.

Goals of this meeting:

- Obtain your input on issues that should be considered in the EA.
- Share information that is available at this early stage of the study.

Please take the time to examine the information, ask questions, and provide any comments or suggestions you may have. Your input is needed as part of the environmental review process and it is important.

Comment sheets are available for written comments and may be submitted tonight or by postal or electronic mail after the meeting until **February 21, 2013**. You may also record your comments orally at the designated recording station.



PURPOSE AND NEED

The I-81 Corridor Improvement Study Tier 1 Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) established that improvements on a broad scale along the 325-mile I-81 roadway facility are needed to address existing and future capacity and safety conditions.

Traffic volumes:

- Have doubled, and in some cases tripled, in the last 30 years.
- 2035 traffic forecasts are projected to be almost two times higher than 2004 volumes.
- Truck traffic is expected to continue to grow at a faster rate than general traffic.
- Traffic studies and forecasts are being updated to a design year of 2040.



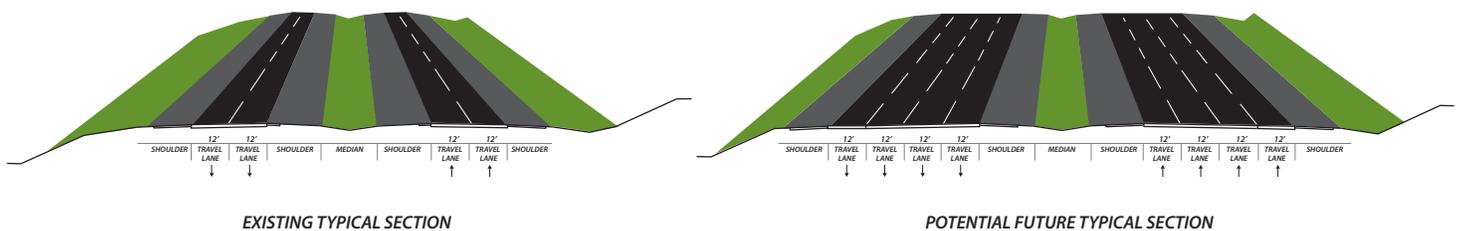
Safety:

- Is a problem along the corridor due to high traffic demands and substandard geometric features.
- Conditions are likely to worsen as traffic volumes increase and existing geometric conditions remain.

ALTERNATIVES

One conclusion from the I-81 Corridor Improvement Study was that most sections of I-81 need more than one lane in each direction in 2035. "Breakpoints" in traffic were the basis for the determination of the logical termini of eight Sections of Independent Utility (SIU) along I-81, of which one is the section between Exit 118 in Christiansburg and Exit 143 in Roanoke County (SIU #4).

In this Tier 2 Environmental Assessment, a reasonable range of alternatives will be developed to satisfy the purpose and need and advance the Tier 1 improvement concept recommended for SIU #4, which involves constructing no more than two general purpose lanes in each direction of I-81.



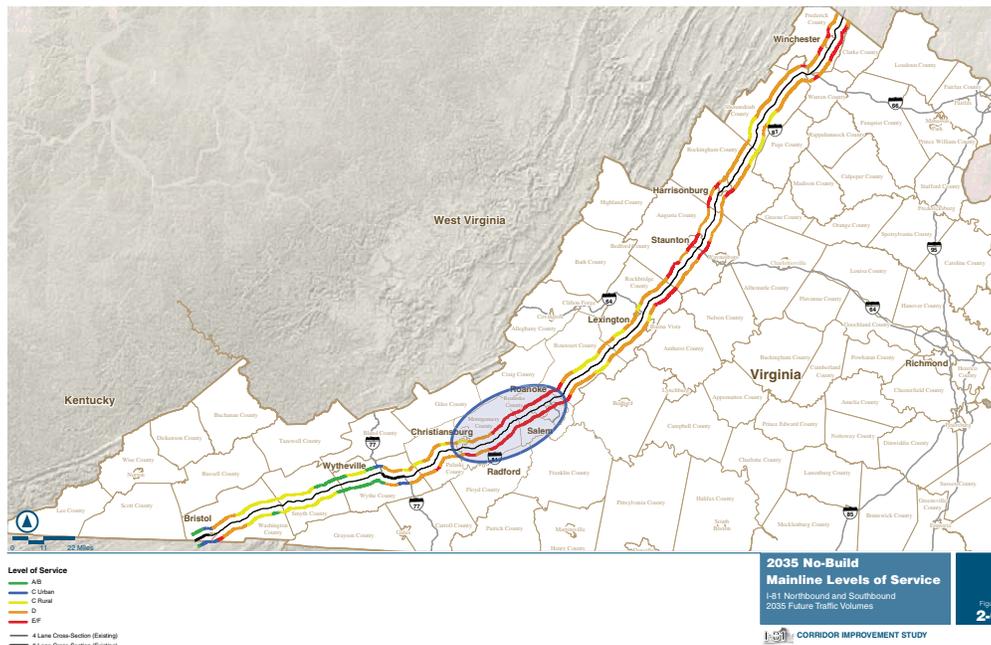
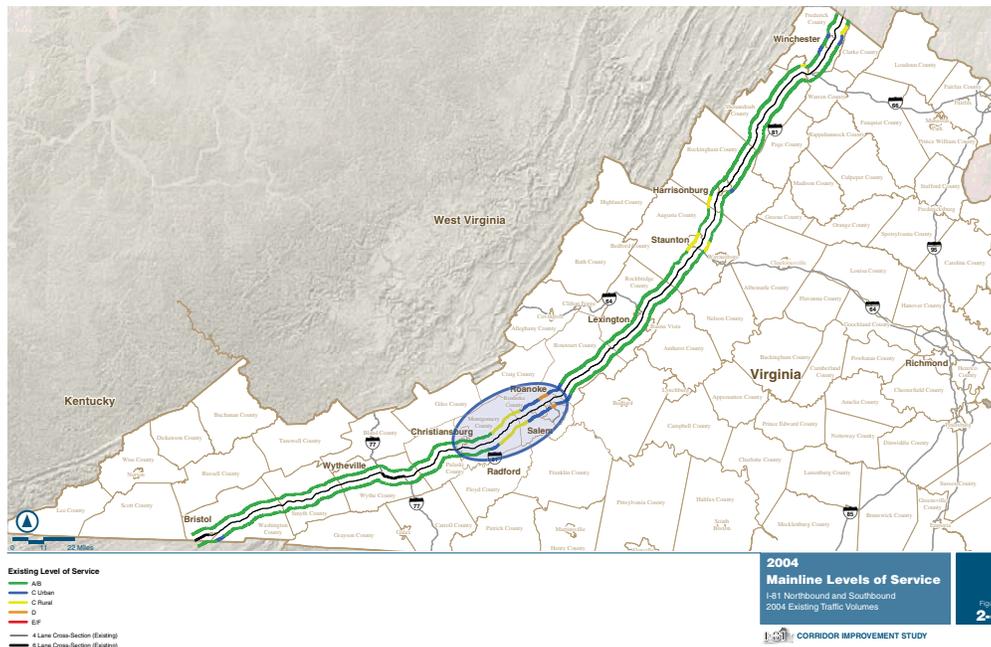
Input from you on physical and environmental constraints in the study area will be used to develop specific variations of the concept. Examples of variations may include:

- Widening to the outside of existing lanes;
- Widening to the inside of existing lanes; or
- Some combination of both.

The alternatives development process may identify a single preferred build alternative to study in detail in the Environmental Assessment.

TRAFFIC

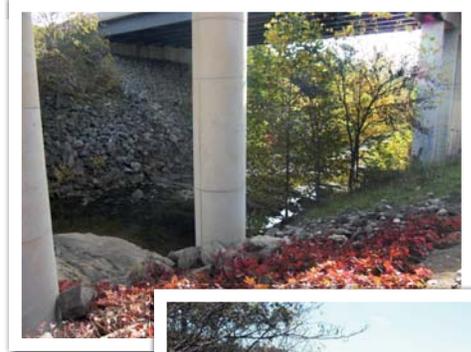
- Level of service, which provides a means of “grading” how well a roadway system serves demand and minimizes delay, is shown below for 2004 and 2035 as reported in the I-81 Corridor Improvement Study.
- The EA will update the existing traffic volumes and the future travel demands from 2035 to 2040 within the study area.
- Preliminary traffic forecasts for 2040 show expected traffic growth of 65 percent between today and the year 2040, with the highest growth rates of 85 percent anticipated to occur between VA 419 (Exit 141) and I-581 (Exit 143). These forecasts continue to support the findings from the I-81 Corridor Improvement Study that congestion will continue to increase in the absence of improvements to I-81.



ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS

Environmental resources/issues to be studied include:

- Land Use and Development
- Impacts to Communities
- Historic and Archaeological Resources
- Parklands and Recreation Areas
- Traffic and Safety
- Wetlands
- Floodplains
- Topography/Landscape
- Noise
- Water Quality
- Air Quality
- Hazardous Materials
- Cumulative Impacts
- Indirect Impacts

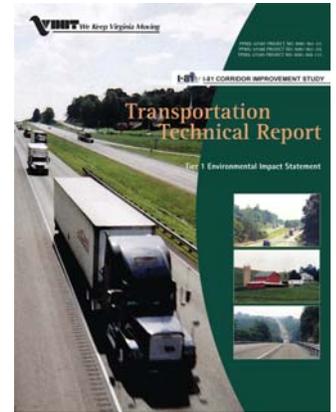


**Are there any other resources/issues that should be considered?
(Please leave a comment.)**

PROJECT BACKGROUND

Tiering is a staged approach to the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) whereby the assessment of broad programs and issues is completed in initial (Tier 1) or systems-level analyses, and the analysis of site-specific proposals and impacts is conducted in subsequent tier studies.

- The Tier 1 Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for I-81 allowed for decision-making on corridor-length capacity and safety issues associated with I-81 in Virginia.
- The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) issued a Record of Decision (ROD) in June 2007 stating that I-81 improvements would include construction of not more than two general purpose lanes in each direction, only where needed to address 2035 travel demands.



SHORT-TERM SAFETY IMPROVEMENTS FROM THE I-81 CORRIDOR IMPROVEMENT STUDY / TIER 1 EIS

The 2006 Resolution of the Commonwealth Transportation Board directed VDOT to take immediate action to implement safety and operational improvements within the corridor, which in part consist of the following:

- Construction of a truck climbing lane and ancillary improvements in Montgomery County on southbound I-81 from mile marker 120 to mile marker 125.
- Construction of a truck climbing lane and ancillary improvements on the northbound lanes of I-81 from mile marker 195 to mile marker 202 in the Fairfield area, north of Lexington.
- Other smaller independent projects (for example, bridge replacements, extending on and off-ramps at interchanges, or Transportation System Management improvements) based on demonstrated safety needs are ongoing.

RAIL IN THE I-81 CORRIDOR

The 2006 Resolution of the Commonwealth Transportation Board regarding the I-81 Corridor Improvement Study included the following directive:

"The Department of Rail and Public Transportation shall conduct an Interstate 81 Freight Rail Study in cooperation with the Office of the Secretary of Transportation and Norfolk Southern Railway, independent of the Environmental Impact Statement process, in order to expedite short term rail improvements and to study the potential long term diversion of truck traffic along the Interstate 81 Corridor to rail."

Furthermore, the 2007 Record of Decision issued by FHWA stated the following:

"If funded rail improvements emerge from that study, FHWA would evaluate the effects of those rail improvements on the projections of future travel demand along I-81 as appropriate during Tier 2."

DRPT's **Feasibility Plan for Maximum Truck to Rail Diversion in Virginia's I-81 Corridor** was completed in April 2010 and expanded on several prior studies, including the I-81 Corridor Improvement Study. The recommended action plan included the following:

- **Advance the Crescent Corridor.** The Crescent Corridor initiative is a Norfolk Southern multi-state initiative to establish a high-speed intermodal freight rail route between the Gulf Coast and the Northeast.
- **Investigate other potentially feasible truck to rail diversion strategies.**
- **Continue to advance improvements identified in the I-81 Tier I EIS.**

DRPT continues to pursue a program of incremental improvements that support both passenger and freight rail service in the I-81 corridor.

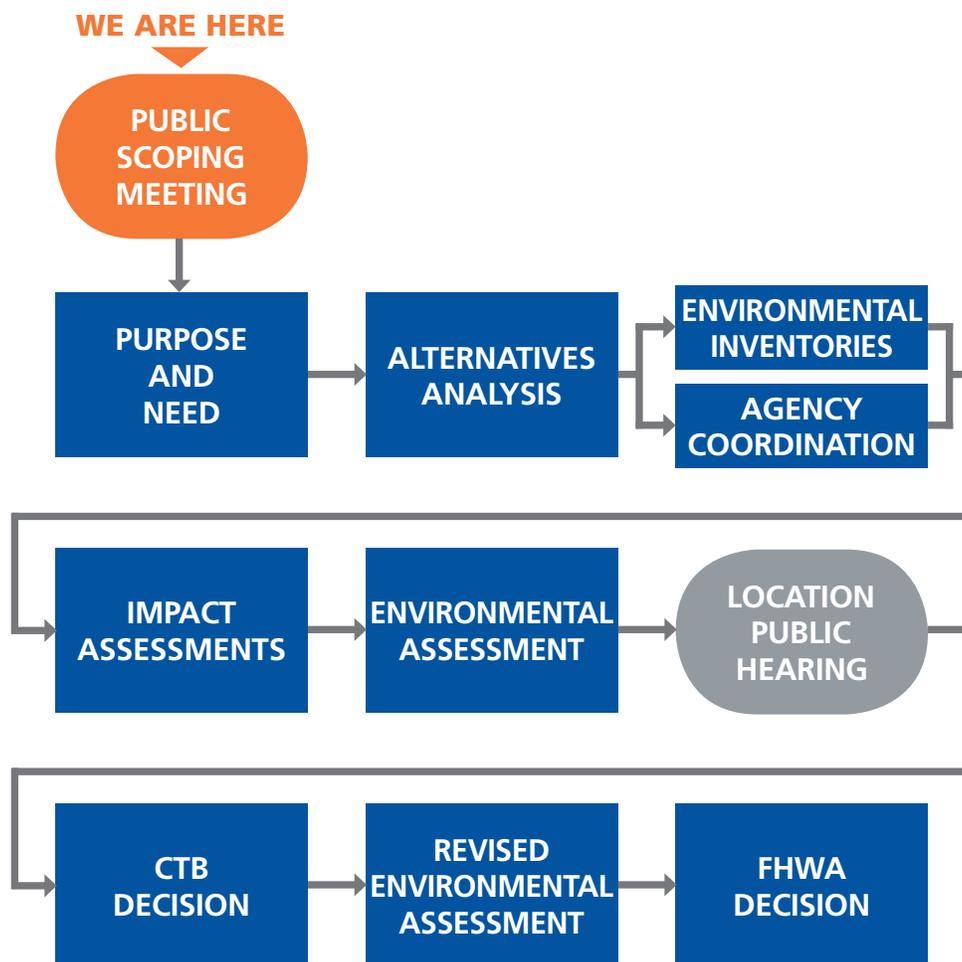
LOCATION STUDY PROCESS

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires consideration of potential environmental consequences of transportation improvements, documentation of the analyses, and making the information available for comment before a decision is made.

Tonight's meeting is a critical element in the study's initial scoping process whereby public input is gathered to help identify viable courses of action for meeting the identified travel needs and recognize the area's environmental context.

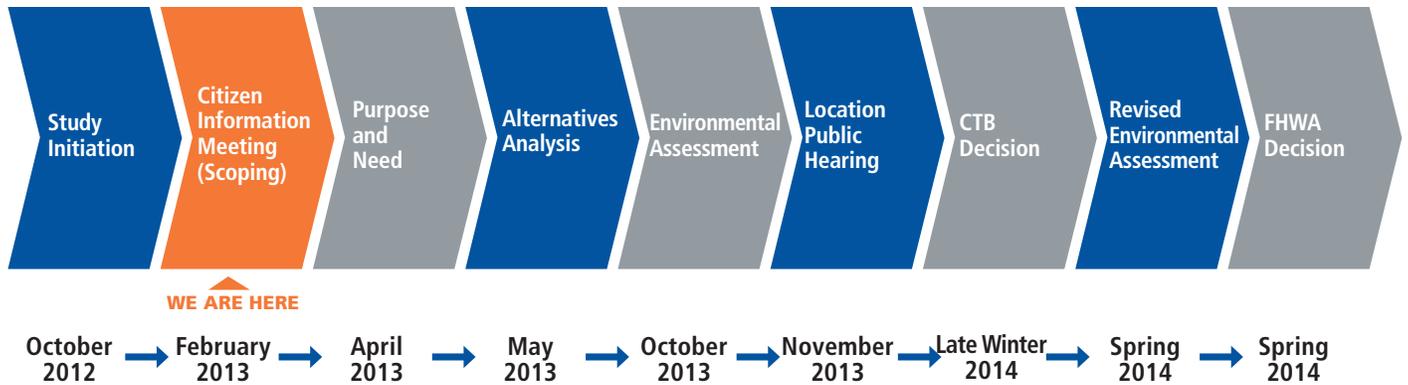
During this stage, we welcome your initial input on these important study elements:

- Purpose and Need: Confirm transportation problem(s) to be solved.
- Alternatives: Offer ideas for implementing the proposed improvement concept or suggestions for additional improvement concepts.
- Environment: Report important natural, cultural, and human environmental considerations.



STUDY SCHEDULE AND NEXT STEPS

Study Schedule



Next Steps

- Study team review of public comments.
- Evaluation of suggestions and concerns.
- Evaluation of alternatives and assessment of environmental impacts.
- Preparation of Environmental Assessment (EA).
- Location Public Hearing.
- Revision of EA, as appropriate, to reflect changes or new information resulting from comments received on the EA.
- FHWA Decision.

For Project Updates

Please visit the project website:

http://www.virginiadot.org/projects/salem/i-81_tier_2_nepa_environmental_study.asp

