

Harrisonburg Southeast Connector

Citizen Information Meeting—March 24, 2005—4:00-7:00PM—Turner Ashby High School

The Virginia Department of Transportation is conducting a location study for the Harrisonburg Southeast Connector. The steps involved in the study are described inside this brochure. The schedule is listed on the back page.

At this point in the study, we seek your input on the transportation needs identified and the conceptual alternatives proposed to meet those needs. This meeting is being conducted in an open forum format with no formal presentations. The displays placed around the room provide information on the transportation needs and the conceptual alternatives. Representatives of VDOT and its consultant are stationed around the room to answer your questions and listen to your thoughts and concerns.

Public Scoping Meeting

A Public Scoping Meeting was held on July 22, 2004 to receive citizen comments to help define the scope of the study. An informational brochure was distributed, which is available to tonight's attendees. Maps of the study area and informational displays helped outline project issues and information. 189 people signed the attendance list, while 110 people submitted comments orally, in writing, or both.

The purpose of the scoping meeting was to receive input on sensitive resources and issues to address in the study. Comments ranged from simple statements of opposition against a "loop road" to identification of very specific transportation problems and recommendations. The following list highlights some of the main issues revealed by the comments.

- The greatest perceived transportation need is to accommodate east-west travel movements.
- Some see a need to accommodate travel generated by growth and development; others oppose additional development.
- Environmental concerns mostly related to historic properties (particularly the Cross Keys Battlefield) and farmlands.

- Comments about farmland varied in theme: economic importance of agriculture in Rockingham County, the rural lifestyle and scenery provided by farms, potential losses of prime farmland and food production capacity, agricultural and forestal districts, and ability to move farm equipment from one side of the road to the other.
- Suggested alternatives ranged from doing nothing, to improving existing roads, to a new freeway on new location. Many clearly oppose a new freeway-type highway across the study area, particularly in more rural outlying areas and near the Cross Keys Battlefield, and support improvements to existing roads. Less clear is which specific existing roads should be improved, as a number of different possibilities were suggested.



Please review the maps and displays and share your thoughts by using the comment sheet provided with this brochure. You can leave your comments in the box provided on one of the tables. You may also record your comments orally at the designated recording station. If you are not ready to provide your comments tonight, you can submit them within 10 days to the following address, which also is preprinted on the back of the comment sheet:

Jim Clarke

Location Studies Project Manager
Environmental Division
Virginia Department of Transportation
1401 East Broad Street
Richmond, VA 23219

You also can submit comments by e-mail to james.clarke@vdot.virginia.gov

If you need additional information after tonight's meeting, please call Mr. Clarke at 804-371-6845

or refer to the study web site at: <http://www.virginiadot.org/projects/SEConnector.asp>

How The Location Study Process Works

1 SCOPING

- Determine issues to be addressed
- Identify sensitive resources

2 PURPOSE AND NEED

- Study transportation problems within the study area
- Identify Project Needs

3 ALTERNATIVES DEVELOPMENT

- Conceptual Alternatives to address Project needs
- Screening Process to produce Candidate Alternatives
- No-Build Alternative
- Transportation Systems Management Alternative
- Mass Transit Alternative

4 EVALUATION OF IMPACTS

- Air Quality and Noise
- Historic Properties
- Hazardous Materials
- Wetlands and Streams
- Farmland
- Threatened and Endangered Species
- Parks, Recreation and Open Space
- Social and Economic Issues

5 DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT (EIS)

6 LOCATION PUBLIC HEARING

7 COMMONWEALTH TRANSPORTATION BOARD ACTION

8 FINAL EIS

9 RECORD OF DECISION

Local & Regional Transportation Planning

Before location studies are initiated, local governments conduct comprehensive planning to identify the needs for such studies. Rockingham County and the City of Harrisonburg recently completed updates to their long-range comprehensive plans. Both plans contain transportation elements that indicate a need for improved mobility across the study area between Route 11 and Route 33.

On a regional level, the Harrisonburg-Rockingham Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) is working on its first long-range transportation plan. MPOs are established for each urbanized area with a population greater than 50,000 for purposes of comprehensive transportation planning and programming in order to be eligible for federal transportation funding. Development of the multi-modal regional long-range transportation plan includes comprehensive data collection for travel origins and destinations, traffic volumes, and locations of congestion and other deficiencies. The new plan will replace the Harrisonburg Area Transportation Study (HATS) Plan.

The Harrisonburg Southeast Connector Location Study uses the traffic analyses supporting the local and regional plans as the basis for identifying the project purpose and needs. VDOT builds on this work through further traffic analyses and alternatives evaluations. This effort provides a fresh look at travel issues and defines the purpose and needs for transportation improvements in the study area.

Purpose and Need

Input received during the scoping process, previous planning efforts, land use patterns, and travel characteristics all point to a need to enhance east-west mobility and serve projected travel demand across and within the study area.

- ▶ Mobility is the ability to travel freely from place to place. It implies unimpeded movement over relatively direct links in the transportation system. Direct east-west links across the study area are limited. Except for arterial routes along the western, eastern, and northern perimeter, the study area contains secondary roads which are mostly narrow, winding, hilly, and discontinuous—some are dirt roads little more than one lane wide. Travel is hampered by low speeds (because of poor road alignment), stops at intersections, and turns due to discontinuities in the routes.
- ▶ Rockingham County's comprehensive plan calls for residential, commercial, and industrial land uses for most of the study area, and proposes extensions of water and sewer service to serve that growth. Both population and employment within the study area are projected to grow 77% by 2030. This transformation is apparent already in areas close to Harrisonburg, along principal travel routes, and even along secondary roads throughout the study area. Travel demand will grow as population and employment increase and development continues. Existing roads will not have sufficient capacity to handle this increased travel demand.
- ▶ Traffic forecasts call for considerable increases in average daily traffic (ADT) along existing east-west routes: Between now and the Year 2030, these projections indicate that:
 - » East of Route 681 (South Whitesel Church Road) ADT on Route 682 (Friedens Church Road) will grow from 2,100 to 5,870, an increase of 180%.
 - » On Route 276 (Cross Keys Road) north of Route 682, ADT will grow from 4,000 to 8,720, an increase of 118%.
 - » On Route 704 (Cecil Wampler Road) east of Pleasant Valley, ADT will grow from 3,500 to 7,810, an increase of 123%.
 - » On Route 710 (Ridgedale Road), ADT will grow from 3,700 to 9,560, an increase of 158%.
 - » On Route 33 (Spotswood Trail), ADT will grow from 24,000 to 52,670, an increase of 119%.

Conceptual Alternatives—What are the Possible Solutions?

Maps in the room illustrate possible solutions to the study needs, called conceptual alternatives. The alternatives to be studied in the Draft EIS range from major improvements (build alternatives) to doing nothing at all (No-Build Alternative).

Build alternatives include highways on new location or improvements to existing roads. Several alignments are depicted on the maps around the room. A Transportation Systems Management (TSM) Alternative would provide less-intensive, 'spot' improvements to existing roads and would involve little or no land acquisition.

Considerations in developing conceptual alternatives included the following:

- ▶ Alternatives represent solutions to the identified needs.
- ▶ Engineering constraints (primarily topography at this stage of study) were taken into account.
- ▶ Adverse effects on protected and sensitive human and natural resources were avoided or minimized to the extent possible.

The conceptual alignments shown on the maps are represented as 500-foot wide corridors. This does not mean that the right of way needed to construct any of the alternatives would be 500 feet wide. It simply means that at this stage of alignment development, the specific features of the alternatives have not been developed and some flexibility is needed to allow for shifts and adjustments. Your recommendations will help in deciding which alternatives to carry forward for detailed study in the Environmental Impact Statement!



Travel demand will grow as population and employment increase and development continues.

Anti-discrimination Policy

It is the responsibility of VDOT to ensure that all members of the community are afforded the opportunity to participate in public decisions on transportation systems and projects affecting them. Under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, no person shall be excluded from participation in or be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under, any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance. If you feel you have been denied participation, denied benefits, or been subjected to discrimination in regard to this project development, or otherwise discriminated against because of your race, color, national origin, gender, age, or disability, you may contact the Virginia Department of Transportation, Office of Equal Opportunity located at 811 Commerce Road (Route 11 Bypass) in Staunton, Virginia, or telephone 540-332-9075 or TDD 800-307-4630. Contact with the Office of Equal Opportunity should be as soon as possible but no later than 180 days after the alleged discrimination occurred. If there has been a continuing course of conduct, contact should be made no later than 180 days after the alleged discrimination was discontinued.

HARRISONBURG Southeast Connector

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NEXT STEPS

The study team will review the comments you provide to us and continue to refine the conceptual alternatives based upon engineering and environmental issues. The alternatives then will be screened and reduced to a set of Candidate Alternatives. These alternatives will be evaluated in greater detail and documented in a Draft Environmental Impact Statement that will be available for your review. A Location Hearing will be held in Fall 2005 to present the Candidate Alternatives and get your input. The schedule below outlines the study milestones.

SCHEDULE

Scoping	Spring and Summer 2004
Data Collection	Spring, Summer, Fall 2004
Citizen Information Meeting	Spring 2005
Draft Environmental Impact Statement	Summer 2005
Location Public Hearing	Fall 2005
Commonwealth Transportation Board Action	Fall 2005
Final Environmental Impact Statement	Summer 2006
Record of Decision	Summer 2006

