



# Public Involvement

Your Guide to Participating in the Transportation Planning and Programming Process



# We Need Your Voice In Transportation Decisions



The Commonwealth of Virginia believes in the importance of an informed public and the value of input from all citizens. This input is especially important regarding decisions affecting roadways and transit systems. An open exchange of information among transportation users and government officials leads to better decision making. With increasing demands on limited public resources, transportation projects cannot proceed without public support through open and inclusive planning and programming processes.

## Americans with Disabilities Act

VDOT and DRPT encourage full citizen participation and provide accommodations for persons with disabilities in the public involvement processes by:

- ◆ *Holding meetings in a fully accessible facility*
- ◆ *Providing documents in alternate formats upon request*
- ◆ *Considering accessible presentation alternatives such as videos with real-time captioning, the use of interpreters, or the provision of documents in Braille*

This guide is meant to inform you of the processes and your role in them, and also to educate you as to how you can become involved. Only through direct public participation by all stakeholders can we create a transportation network that will serve all citizens and carry Virginia into the future.

## You Can Make A Difference

All citizens are affected by transportation decisions. Whether you drive, ride, walk or bike to get around, transportation systems impact your daily life. By voicing your ideas at Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) and Department of Rail and Public Transit (DRPT) meetings and through other means outlined in this document, you can help change transportation in Virginia for the better.

## Public Involvement in Action

***Here is an example of citizen participation that helped guide transportation plans to suit the individuality of a region:***

When citizens of Aldie, Middleburg and Upperville disagreed with plans to correct traffic problems on Route 50 in their downtown areas, they organized to discuss alternatives. The result was the Route 50 Corridor Coalition and the Route 50 Traffic Calming Task Force. Comprised of local citizens, community groups, business people, elected officials, designers, and VDOT staff, the groups created a new traffic design for the project based on traffic calming techniques. In the end, the award-winning roadway was beneficial for all those involved.



# Public Involvement Goals and Objectives

Our goal is to provide all citizens with ongoing opportunities to participate in the transportation project development process, which includes planning, programming, design, right of way acquisition, construction, operation, and maintenance of roadways.

*Transportation planning* is the process of defining problems and opportunities, identifying potential courses of action, evaluating the alternatives, gathering public input, and recommending a set of specific improvements.

*Transportation programming* entails deciding when specific project stages should be funded, or programmed, within budgetary constraints.

Our goals for public participation during planning and programming are to:

- ◆ Identify improvements to the transportation system that will help citizens meet their mobility needs
- ◆ Identify and document community support or concerns with planned transportation improvements, and carry that information forward for consideration in project development decisions
- ◆ Prioritize proposed improvements and recommend which should be programmed and moved forward in the project development process

The primary objectives of this public involvement guide are to:

- ◆ Educate citizens about the planning and programming processes
- ◆ Explain where in those processes the public can participate
- ◆ Explain how the public's input will be used

## Take a Look Around



Consider the roads and streets around your home, neighborhood, city and state. Do they seem more congested than before? Do you worry about urban sprawl or air quality? Do you want to see more opportunities for multi-modal transportation in your area? VDOT and DRPT work to ensure that roadways, rail and transit efficiently move people and goods. We need your comments to determine where to concentrate our efforts. By attending meetings, writing letters, speaking to your local officials and VDOT or DRPT representatives, and keeping current with information, you can help plan for Virginia's future.

## ***The Stages of Road Building***

1. Planning and Programming (6-24 months)
2. Design (15-24 months)
3. Environmental Studies (9-36 months)
4. Purchase of Right of Way (6-21 months)
5. Construction (12-36 months)

The length of time between the conception of a transportation improvement and its completion can take between two and 10 years, or longer. The planning and programming processes discussed in this guide are just a part of the development of transportation projects from conception to completion.

***The public participation opportunities outlined in this brochure are not the only ways for citizens of the Commonwealth to influence VDOT's and DRPT's actions. Each VDOT construction project offers public involvement opportunities so that citizens may voice their opinions throughout a roadway's development.***

# The Details: Planning

Citizens play an essential role in the development of transportation plans by helping identify community goals and objectives, establishing a common vision, identifying transportation problems and potential solutions, and helping decision-makers set priorities. Important products of the transportation planning process are the Statewide Transportation Plan, the State Highway Plan and the State Rail Plan. These, along with small urban area studies and corridor and feasibility studies, help guide transportation improvements needed for the future.

## *The Statewide Transportation Plan*

The Statewide Transportation Plan (VTrans) represents the Commonwealth's commitment to uniting all modes of transportation in Virginia (highways, bike and pedestrian facilities, rail and public transportation, ports and aviation) into a coordinated planning effort spearheaded by the Virginia Secretary of Transportation. Updated every five years, the plan sets forth transportation policies, strategies, and programs to guide Virginia's transportation agencies (VDOT, DRPT, Virginia Department of Aviation, and Virginia Port Authority) for the future. The VTrans public involvement process includes stakeholder and citizen meetings, special interest group meetings, surveys, brochures, videos, an e-mail address, a toll-free number and a Web site. For more information, visit [www.vtrans.org](http://www.vtrans.org).

## **Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO):**

An MPO is a federally required planning body responsible for the transportation planning and project selection in its region; the governor designates an MPO in every urbanized area with a population of over 50,000.

*Urbanized areas containing MPOs in Virginia include:*

- Blacksburg
- Bristol
- Charlottesville
- Danville
- Fredericksburg
- Hampton Roads
- Harrisonburg
- Kingsport
- Lynchburg
- Tri-Cities
- Richmond
- Roanoke
- Washington-Metro Area
- Winchester



## *The State Highway Plan*

The State Highway Plan, a long-range plan updated every five years, outlines recommended improvements to the interstate and primary road systems. Several components are combined in developing the plan, including MPO plans from urbanized areas, small urban area transportation studies, and corridor studies. Analysis used in the development of the State Highway Plan serves as a foundation for identifying highway needs in the Statewide Transportation Plan.

There are several key opportunities during the development of the State Highway Plan for citizens to get involved. VDOT holds annual public information meetings in each of VDOT's nine construction districts to seek public input on identifying State Highway Plan goals and objectives and transportation issues, or to receive comments on draft highway recommendations on the interstate and primary road systems. VDOT's Web site lets the public review recommendations and provide feedback on the State Highway Plan. In addition, the draft and final versions of the State Highway Plan will be made available on the Web site and at VDOT district offices for citizens to review and respond.

## ***Small Urban Area Transportation Studies***

VDOT conducts small urban area transportation studies in urban areas with populations between 2,500 and 49,999. Long-range transportation plans are developed in partnership with local officials to address travel issues and identify transportation needs in these areas for the next 20 years. Recommendations (i.e. projects) from small urban area transportation studies are incorporated into the State Highway Plan.

Public information meetings are held for each small urban area transportation study to give citizens a chance to comment on the recommendations. Small urban area transportation studies are available on VDOT's Web site, where citizens are encouraged to comment on the plan. All comments will be considered by VDOT and localities during plan development and prior to plan adoption. More information about the studies is available at [www.vdoturbanplans.com](http://www.vdoturbanplans.com).

## ***Corridor and Feasibility Studies***

Corridor studies are conducted by VDOT and DRPT for significant transportation projects, such as major highway or transit improvements. These studies seek to identify the mix of transportation improvements that would be most effective in moving people and goods in specific travel corridors and balancing those improvements with available funding and community concerns.

Feasibility studies are performed on a proposed strategy to determine the degree to which:

- ◆ The design or location is economically justified
- ◆ An alternative is considered preferable from an environmental or social perspective
- ◆ Eventual construction and operation can be financed and managed

At least one public meeting is held in a study area to allow citizens to comment on the proposed alternatives. Information on most of the corridor and feasibility studies is available through VDOT's and DRPT's Web sites. Recommendations from corridor and feasibility studies can be incorporated into the State Highway Plan, State Rail Plan or related documents such as the Rail, Public Transportation and Travel Demand Management Needs Assessment.

## ***Virginia State Rail Plan***

DRPT prepares short- and long-term need assessments for rail, public transportation and travel demand management. The DRPT Virginia State Rail Plan's principle purpose is to convey the magnitude of rail needs in the state and set forth policies, goals and objectives that guide freight and passenger service through 2025. It is built upon the Rail Needs Assessment. Public involvement for the plan is provided through the public involvement process for the Statewide Transportation Plan.

## ***Virginia Public Transportation and TDM Plan***

The DRPT Virginia Public Transportation and Transportation Demand Management Plan conveys critical information about public transportation and transportation demand management issues, needs, choices, costs, and benefits within a larger public policy context. It is designed to set forth a framework through which public transportation and demand management services in Virginia will be implemented long term.

## ***Public Involvement***

### ***Planning versus Programming***

Early public involvement in planning helps us determine solutions needed to address transportation issues.

Public involvement for programming helps us decide where to concentrate the state and federal funding VDOT and DRPT receive.



## The Details: Programming

The programming process represents the public's final opportunity to comment on a project before funding determinations are made. This public participation is paramount in today's tight financial environment where VDOT and DRPT must make decisions with limited resources. By participating at the programming stage, citizens can help determine where those resources are focused.

### **Commonwealth Transportation Board (CTB)**

The CTB guides the work of VDOT and DRPT, much like a board of directors. The board is comprised of 17 members who are appointed by the governor and confirmed by the General Assembly. The CTB is a policy board, meaning that it declares the policies and regulations used by VDOT and DRPT. It meets on the third Thursday of most months to discuss the location of routes, the approval of construction contracts, the creation of traffic regulations, the naming of highways, and the allocation of the Transportation Trust Fund. For more information on the CTB, their meeting schedule, and the guidelines for offering comments at CTB meetings, visit [www.virginiadot.org/](http://www.virginiadot.org/) or call 804-786-3090.



### **Statewide Transportation Improvement Program**

The Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) is a federal programming document used to commit federal funds to projects for the next three years. The program includes projects identified in the Commonwealth's 14 MPO area Transportation Improvement Programs (TIPs), as well as all roadway and transit projects outside MPO areas that will receive federal funding. The MPOs are required to carry out separate public involvement processes for their TIPs. VDOT and DRPT conduct public involvement processes for those roadway and transit projects outside MPO areas.

The Six-Year Improvement Program (SYIP) is a state document, updated annually, that earmarks funds for transportation projects proposed for construction, development or study in the next six fiscal years. All projects in the SYIP that are eligible for federal funding are included in the STIP. The public involvement process for the STIP and SYIP occur concurrently and include the following:

- ◆ Public information meetings are held annually in nine regions across the Commonwealth to give citizens a key opportunity to comment on what transportation improvements should be programmed next. The public input received at these meetings is used in the development of a tentative SYIP.
- ◆ A public hearing is held by the CTB in the spring each year for comment on the tentative SYIP. The tentative program undergoes a 45-day review period, where copies of the program are available for public review online at VDOT's Web site, on DRPT's Web site and at main VDOT and DRPT offices.

## ***DRPT and the Six-Year Program***

Every winter, usually in December, DRPT advertises through newspapers the availability of federal and state funding for public transportation, transportation demand management, and human service agency program grants. Local officials with existing or new programs may apply for the grants online at DRPT's Web site. The applications are reviewed and selected under the CTB public involvement process, and grants are awarded for the fiscal year that begins in July of the following year. The tentative allocations of the available federal and state funds to support the DRPT projects are included in the SYIP. Those programs or projects eligible for federal funds also are included in the STIP.

## ***County Secondary Six-Year Plan***

State law requires the development and publication of separate programs for the secondary system of state highways in each county, known as the Secondary Six-Year Plan. Secondary roads are state maintained roads generally numbered 600 and above.

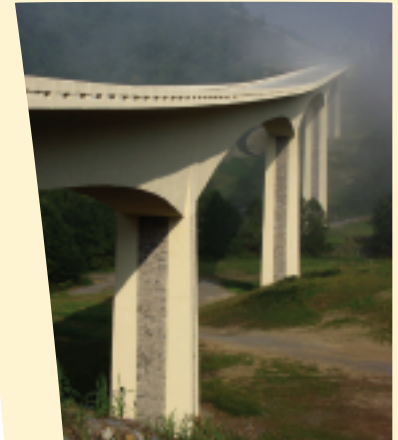
The process of developing Secondary Six-Year Plans is a partnership between VDOT and local governments. The process begins when the VDOT resident engineers recommend projects to their respective counties for inclusion in the county Secondary Six-Year Plan. These secondary projects can come from current VDOT improvement programs, citizen requests, requests by the county, and needs identified by VDOT. The board of supervisors establishes project priorities and VDOT residency staff prepares a draft Secondary Six-Year Plan.

Public hearings are generally conducted between October and December to collect citizens' comments on secondary road needs and the draft program. Following the public hearings, the board of supervisors formally establishes project priorities by adopting a resolution approving the project list and budget for the upcoming fiscal year. Once the Secondary Six-Year Plan is completed for each county and administrative determinations are made regarding the type of funding applicable to each project, the program becomes a component of the STIP.



## ***Transportation Enhancement Program***

The Transportation Enhancement Program is a federal program administered by VDOT that provides funds to communities for projects that strengthen the cultural, aesthetic, or environmental value of the transportation system. Transportation enhancement projects are selected through a competitive process, and the funds are provided through reimbursement, not grants. Any local government, state agency, group or individual may initiate a transportation enhancement project. Prior to submission, all projects require formal endorsement by a local jurisdiction or public agency and an advertised public hearing. The public is encouraged to provide comments during public hearing workshops and to VDOT as part of the transportation enhancement application package. Selected transportation enhancement projects are incorporated into the STIP.



## ***VDOT and DRPT Don't Do It Alone***

Transportation plans and programs result from a collaborative effort between many players and partners. Roadway, transit and bicycle and pedestrian needs are balanced with funding constraints and political and citizen influence. Working together, citizens, politicians and transportation officials can create solutions to the issues facing the transportation system.

# How Does It All Fit?

## PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

### Planning

Transportation planning refers to the process of identifying transportation problems and creating appropriate long-term solutions to those problems. Planning efforts that you can get involved in include:

- ◆ Statewide Transportation Plan
- ◆ State Highway Plan, Rail Plan, Public Transit & TDM Plan
- ◆ Small Urban Area Transportation Studies
- ◆ Corridor/Feasibility Studies
- ◆ MPO Constrained Long-Range Plans

### Programming

Programming is the process of scheduling and funding projects envisioned in long-range transportation plans by committing expected revenues to transportation projects over several years.

Programming efforts that you can get involved in include:

- ◆ Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP)
- ◆ Six-Year Improvement Program (SYIP)
- ◆ MPO Transportation Improvement Programs (TIP)
- ◆ County Secondary Roads Six-Year Plan
- ◆ Transportation Enhancement Program

### Project Implementation

Project implementation is the process of making all the preparations to construct a programmed project. Major activities in project implementation include:

- ◆ Field work and land surveys
- ◆ Engineering design and environmental work
- ◆ Public hearings and/or public information meetings
- ◆ Right of way acquisition and utility relocation

## PUBLIC NOTIFICATION

### Construction

After all of the preparations above, the project is ready for construction.

Key elements of the construction stage include:

- ◆ Clearing and grading of construction area
- ◆ Maintenance of traffic through work zone
- ◆ Continuous inspections and environmental monitoring

### Operations and Maintenance

After a project is constructed, the focus shifts to operations and maintenance.

Key operational and maintenance activities include:

- ◆ Pavement and bridge repair
- ◆ Traffic markings and signal modifications
- ◆ Snow removal, mowing, ditch cleaning, etc.
- ◆ Transit operations and maintenance



# Learn About Public Involvement Opportunities

Public meetings give citizens the opportunity to talk to transportation officials face to face. VDOT and DRPT alert citizens to these meetings by:

- ◆ Announcing public meetings in local newspapers 30 days in advance and again a week before the meeting
- ◆ Using kiosks, mass mailings, or television and radio ads
- ◆ Sending press releases to the media, which often generate news stories
- ◆ Web site notices such as [www.virginiadot.org/projects/publicinvolvement.asp](http://www.virginiadot.org/projects/publicinvolvement.asp) or [www.drpt.state.va.us/events/meetings.aspx](http://www.drpt.state.va.us/events/meetings.aspx)



Citizens who wish to view the technical or policy information used to create the plans and programs before they are discussed at the meetings can contact VDOT or DRPT. Meetings may be formal, informal or a combination of the two.

**Formal** - VDOT or DRPT speakers present material and the public makes comments for the official meeting record.

**Informal** - One-on-one interaction among citizens and agency staff; comments are gathered.

Regardless of the format of the meeting, public input is always welcomed. At the meetings, information will be provided to participants about making follow-up comments. You don't have to attend the meeting to make comments. Written and telephone comments are accepted at any time and in the following ways:

- ◆ Writing to VDOT at:  
State Transportation Planner  
1401 E. Broad St.  
Richmond, VA 23219
- ◆ or DRPT at:  
Planning Director  
P.O. Box 590  
Richmond, VA 23218
- ◆ Calling specific numbers outlined in the notice or the meeting.
- ◆ E-mailing VDOT at [planning@VDOT.Virginia.gov](mailto:planning@VDOT.Virginia.gov)
- ◆ Checking VDOT's or DRPT's web site for other ways to contact us.

Following the meeting, a summary of comments directed at the plans and programs with official responses is available upon request. Comments resulting from meetings are often posted on VDOT's or DRPT's Web sites.

After public involvement activities, VDOT or DRPT create a draft plan or program. Copies of the draft document are available for public review and comment at a number of sources, including VDOT and DRPT main offices. The procedures for commenting are outlined in the draft document. After considering the feedback from the review and comment period, VDOT creates a final plan document. A public notice is issued following the methods previously outlined informing citizens how they can obtain copies of the final plan.

## **Nondiscrimination Policy**

VDOT and DRPT ensure nondiscrimination in all programs, services and activities in accordance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and other nondiscrimination authorities.

If you feel you have been excluded from participation in, denied benefits of, or subjected to discrimination regarding programs, services and/or activities on the basis of your race, color, national origin, sex, age or disability, you may contact:

VDOT - Civil Rights Division  
1221 East Broad Street  
Richmond, Virginia 23219  
804-786-2935  
TTY/TDD statewide 711  
(for hearing impaired)  
Toll Free Voice (888) 508-3737

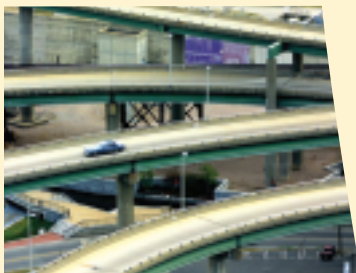
Virginia Department of Rail  
and Public Transportation  
P. O. Box 590  
Richmond, VA 23218-0590  
(804) 786-4440

## Want to Learn More?

There are many ways to learn about VDOT's and DRPT's plans and programs.

- ◆ Check your local newspaper, or our Web sites such as [www.virginiadot.org/projects/publicinvolvement.asp](http://www.virginiadot.org/projects/publicinvolvement.asp) or [www.drpt.state.va.us/events/meetings.aspx](http://www.drpt.state.va.us/events/meetings.aspx) for news on upcoming meetings
- ◆ Write to:  
VDOT  
State Transportation Planner  
1401 E. Broad St.  
Richmond, VA 23219  
or  
DRPT  
Planning Director  
P.O. Box 590  
Richmond, VA 23218
- ◆ Call VDOT at 1-800-367-ROAD or DRPT at (804) 786-4440
- ◆ E-mail [planning@VDOT.Virginia.gov](mailto:planning@VDOT.Virginia.gov)

Then attend the meetings, write letters, make phone calls, and spread the word.



## Get Involved Locally

VDOT, DRPT and the Commonwealth Transportation Board play a significant role in deciding which projects are programmed and constructed by determining priorities for many of Virginia's ground related transportation programs and projects. However, there are other key organizations in the decision-making process, including:

### Metropolitan Planning Organization

(See [www.ampo.org/links/mposnet.html#VIRGINIA](http://www.ampo.org/links/mposnet.html#VIRGINIA))

- ◆ Comprised of state and/or local officials
- ◆ Chooses priorities for certain federally funded projects to be included in the MPO Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)
- ◆ Sets priorities for roadway and transit improvements in MPO areas

### County Board of Supervisors

(See [www.vml.org/Links.html](http://www.vml.org/Links.html))

- ◆ Sets priorities for improvements to the secondary highway system (state-maintained roads numbered 600 and above) in their county
- ◆ Sets priorities and provides local funding to public transportation and special transportation facilities

### City or Town Council

(See [www.vml.org/Links.html](http://www.vml.org/Links.html))

- ◆ Sets priorities for improvement on the urban street system within their corporate boundaries
- ◆ Sets priorities and provides local funding to public transportation and special transportation facilities



We encourage you to participate in the public involvement activities offered by local governments and regional planning organizations.

## Public Involvement Process Adoption Procedure

This guide documents the public involvement procedures for transportation planning and programming. VDOT and DRPT periodically review the public involvement procedures to ensure that the most effective process is in place. When the process is updated, the revised procedures must be open for a public comment period of at least 45 days before they are adopted. Comments for the statewide process will be solicited from local governments, MPOs, state agencies, transit providers both public and private, interested professional and citizen groups, planning district commissions, transportation district commissions, federal agencies, and others. By commenting on the proposed changes, citizens can influence the procedures VDOT and DRPT follow when seeking citizen participation in the planning and programming processes. Citizens are informed of the update through the same methods used to announce public meetings.



## About Us

*VDOT and DRPT prepared this public involvement guide to transportation planning and programming. In Virginia, planning for highways and bike and pedestrian facilities is one of VDOT's lead responsibilities. Likewise, planning for rail, public transit and ridesharing is one of DRPT's lead responsibilities. Together with the Department of Aviation and Virginia Port Authority, and with input from other organizations and the public, planning is provided for all modes of public transportation. VDOT and DRPT operate under the direction of the Secretary of Transportation and the Virginia Commonwealth Transportation Board. The Commonwealth Transportation Commissioner heads VDOT. The Director of DRPT is the head of DRPT.*

*VDOT's mission is to plan, develop and deliver on time and on budget the best transportation system for the traveling public. VDOT manages the Virginia highway system (about 57,100 miles) and its supporting facilities. The DRPT mission is to improve mobility and expand transportation choices in the Commonwealth. DRPT provides funds and assistance to approximately 40 public transit agencies, 50 special service providers, 11 freight railroads and 15 commuter programs.*

**To get more public involvement information  
on planning and programming, or copies of this  
document, call VDOT at 1-800-367-ROAD or  
DRPT at (804) 786-4440.**