

# Transportation Decisions - You Can Make A Difference

Because transportation projects are built to serve people, their ideas are very important to every project's success. Public involvement can make a big difference in the final product.

There are many opportunities for citizens to express their thoughts and preferences throughout the development of a transportation project – from deciding which road, public transit, rail, bicycle or pedestrian facility to fund to the project's final design and construction.

*Most projects have at least one public hearing so residents can look at proposals and comment on them. For major projects, several public meetings and hearings could be held. At these sessions, citizens discuss the need for a project or look at the proposed plans, talk with planners, transportation engineers, and environmental specialists, get an overall view of the proposed project and express their opinions. Features have been added to many projects, and construction plans have changed because of ideas and information provided by the public.*

*Here's how you can make a difference:*

## Get Involved In The Earliest Stages

- ◆ **Statewide Long-Range Transportation Plan (VTrans 2025)** – Citizens have several opportunities to help craft the transportation vision for Virginia. This plan, updated every five years, integrates long-range plans for highways, passenger rail and transit, freight rail, airports and ports, bicyclists and pedestrians. During the initial phase of VTrans 2025, discussion group meetings were held and surveys were distributed to give citizens the opportunity to provide input early on. As the process progresses, there will be additional opportunities, including feedback sessions with a broader group of stakeholders as well as the general public. By getting involved at this point, citizens have a voice in making statewide recommendations for the next 20 years or more.
- ◆ **Planning Study Meetings** – Held in the early stages of a planning study, these meetings are advertised in local newspapers so citizens can plan to participate. Some examples of these are park-and-ride or ferry feasibility studies, corridor studies, and regional bikeway and trail plans.
- ◆ **State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP)** – Regional groups called Metropolitan Planning Organizations develop Transportation Improvement Programs for urban areas of more than 50,000 citizens. Some MPOs use citizen advisory groups to help, and public meetings are

held to finalize TIPs. The MPOs submit their TIPs to VDOT; the TIPs are combined with the Six-Year Program (see below) to become the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program submitted to the Federal Highway Administration and Federal Transit Agency for approval.

## Help Identify High-Priority Projects

- ◆ **Tentative Six-Year Program (SYP) Meetings** – Every year, the Commonwealth Transportation Board holds these meetings, one in each of nine regions across the state. The public is invited – as are local and state officials – to attend and identify needs that they believe are critical in rail, public transit, bicycle and pedestrian facilities, as well as needs on the interstate, primary and urban road systems. Using input from these meetings, the CTB updates its Six-Year Program, which assigns available funding for planning, designing and building the most critically needed projects. In May 2003, the Transportation Board will vote on the tentative SYP for fiscal years 2004-2009.

- ◆ **Final Six-Year Program Public Hearings** – After the Transportation Board votes on the tentative program, the program is available to the public for review. Two formal public hearings are held – in the western region and in central Virginia. Final public comments on the proposed SYP are heard. Then the program is revised, reviewed and approved by the Board. This will happen in June 2003.
- ◆ **County Secondary System Six-Year Program Hearings** – Every year, these important public hearings are held by county boards of supervisors and local VDOT resident engineers, usually at one of the monthly county board meetings. At this time, citizens can speak about needs on the secondary system (roads numbered 600 and above). These are not held in Arlington and Henrico counties; they maintain their own county roads. Allocations for the approved county SYPs are included in the CTB’s tentative and final statewide Six-Year Program.
- ◆ **Commonwealth Transportation Board, County Board of Supervisors and City Council Meetings**  
These include public comment opportunities.

### **Suggest Where A Project Should Go And What It Should Look Like**

- ◆ **Location Hearing, followed by a Design Hearing** – For major roadway projects to be built in new locations, two separate hearings often are held. Also, projects with significant social, economic or environmental impacts, and projects with two or more feasible solutions could have two public hearings. The location hearing is held when all the feasible alternatives have been evaluated and all environmental impacts have been fully identified. The design hearing is held when the major design features of the project have been identified.
- ◆ **Combined Location and Design Hearing** – When some of the proposed improvements follow an existing road and some are on a new location, there are no significant impacts, and there is only one feasible solution, one public hearing is scheduled. The hearing is held when the location and major design features of the project have been identified.

*In all three cases, you can speak or write your comments at the hearing, or submit them by letter or e-mail up to 10 days after the hearing.*

### **Learn More About Projects**

- ◆ **Citizen Information Meetings** – Informal meetings to discuss plans and projects often are held before and/or after public hearings. These usually are held once each year during a project’s development.
- ◆ **Check the Web** – Look under Projects & Plans on *VirginiaDOT.org*.
- ◆ **Call or Visit** – Contact your local VDOT, government or planning office and ask to speak to the appropriate person for a proposed project or ask for a speaker to attend your organization’s meeting.

### **Learn The Outcome**

- ◆ **Read the Mail** – If you gave your name and address at a project public hearing, you will get a letter summarizing the CTB’s actions on the project.
- ◆ **Check the Web** – Look for the Commonwealth Transportation Board’s actions, project updates and the Six-Year Program on *VirginiaDOT.org*.
- ◆ **Call or Visit** – Contact your local VDOT, government or planning office and ask to speak to the appropriate person.