

DRAFT Bowers Hill Interchange Study Working Group Minutes – February 26, 2021

Pursuant to the declared state of emergency in the Commonwealth of Virginia in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and to protect the public health and safety of the Working Group members, staff, and the general public, the Bowers Hill Interchange Study Working Group meeting was held electronically via Webex.

Attendance:

Troy Eisenberger – Chesapeake
Bryan Stilley – Newport News
Deborah Mangiaracina – Norfolk
Carl Jackson – Portsmouth
Todd Halacy – VDOT
Samba Secka – VDOT
Scott Smizik – VDOT
Eric Stringfield – VDOT
Ray Hunt - VDOT
Nina Ullrich – VDOT
Barbara Nelson – VPA
Pavithra Parthasarathi – HRTPO
Rob Case - HRTPO
Keith Nichols – HRTPO
Dale Stith – HRTPO

The meeting started at 9:50 am.

- Ms. Parthasarathi read the introduction detailing that this was an electronic meeting.
- Item 2 – Approval of Agenda
 - The agenda was approved by consensus.
- Item 3 – Public Comments
 - No comments from the public were received prior to the meeting.
- Item 4 – Approval of Minutes
 - The minutes of the January 22, 2021 meeting were reviewed. Mr. Jackson made a motion to approve the minutes and Mr. Stilley seconded. The minutes were approved by consensus.
- Item 5 – General Study Update and Item 6 – Next Steps
 - Mr. Smizik made a presentation on the Bowers Hill Interchange Improvements Study, which included Items 5-6 on the agenda.

- Mr. Smizik began the presentation by going over meeting objectives, which included the study schedule, citizen comment opportunity, range of concepts, and future uses of the median.
- Mr. Smizik highlighted the study schedule. He noted that the schedule hasn't changed but that they are more confident in meeting these dates. He added that with all of the recent changes FHWA might take a harder look at the Notice of Intent (NOI), but that will not impact the study timeline.
- Mr. Smizik also added that there is ongoing discussion regarding the impacts the recent changes will have on the permitting process at the end of the study. His goal is to have a clear path forward on this to share by May.
- Mr. Smizik introduced the citizen comment opportunity, which will be entirely virtual. He noted that the information and public survey is currently available and the survey will remain open until March 25th. He also noted that a narrated presentation will be added in March.
- Mr. Smizik noted that Ms. Kaelyn Davis will no longer be a point of contact for the public involvement effort since she no longer works for VDOT. Mr. Smizik will become the point of contact.
- Mr. Smizik transitioned to the Range of Concepts. He noted that the Managed Lane alternatives were modified based on feedback from the last meeting to include 16-foot part-time drivable shoulders. Mr. Case responded that the shoulders should be referred to as "Managed Part-Time Drivable Shoulders" in the typical section drawing, to which Mr. Smizik agreed.
- Mr. Smizik discussed the Potential Future Uses of the Median, specifically related to the freight rail corridor in a portion of the median.
- Mr. Smizik noted that they have been talking with FHWA on how to handle the median rail, especially since the definition of "reasonably foreseeable" has changed in recent months. They will have more discussion on this over the next few weeks.
- Mr. Smizik added that we can probably concur on the range of alternatives without completely answering the rail question, but for the purpose of the study schedule we probably need to figure this out by May.
- Mr. Smizik wrapped up the median discussion by noting that the median width is not consistent in the corridor, nor is the position of the railroad within the median.
- Mr. Smizik went over the Range of Concepts table. The concepts are largely the same as were introduced at the last meeting except for the addition of the drivable shoulder. Mr. Smizik will be looking for concurrence at a future meeting that it is a comprehensive enough list of alternatives for the study.
- Mr. Smizik detailed the next steps. He highlighted that the NEPA starts once the NOI is issued, which for now will still hopefully occur in May. At that point stakeholders will receive formal invitations from FHWA/VDOT to participate in the study.
- Mr. Smizik noted that once the NOI is issued, progress will be displayed on a public permitting dashboard. This dashboard will indicate why there are any delays in the study and who is responsible for them.

- Mr. Halacy wrapped up the meeting by noting that this study was presented to the TPO Board last week and will be presented to the TTAC next week. He also added to expect this working group to meet again in March and April.

The meeting adjourned at 10:25 am.

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