

Bowers Hill Interchange Study Working Group Minutes – April 23, 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:

Bryan Stilley – Newport News
Rob Brown – Norfolk
Deborah Mangiaracina – Norfolk
Carl Jackson – Portsmouth
Robert Lewis - Suffolk
Jason Souders – Suffolk
Scott Smizik – VDOT
Eric Stringfield – VDOT
Ray Hunt - VDOT
Nina Ullrich – VDOT
Barbara Nelson – VPA
Rob Case - HRTPO
Keith Nichols – HRTPO

The meeting started at 9:35 am.

- Mr. Nichols 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 February 26, 2021 meeting were reviewed. Mr. Lewis made a motion to approve the minutes and Mr. Jackson 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 started the presentation by noting that there will likely be new material that will necessitate working group meetings each month for the rest of the year.

- Mr. Smizik detailed recent coordination efforts, including communication with the public in response to accessing properties and coordination with agencies on specific topics. He emphasized coordination with the Coast Guard regarding two bridges in the corridor. The Coast Guard determined that the two crossings are exempt from requiring permits for the next five years.
- Mr. Smizik reviewed the Citizen Comment Opportunity on the Range of Alternatives. He noted that the public survey received 1,300 responses. Responses generally favored a larger build project and a preference for no tolls, which he noted was not consistent with the study's Purpose and Need. VDOT also received many comments that addressed other locations and topics.
- Mr. Jackson noted that he liked the comment from the Southern Environmental Law Center about incorporating TDM. He was glad to hear there is support on this from the public.
- Mr. Smizik detailed the range of concepts and started by showing some preliminary speed and congestion data for the alternatives. Mr. Smizik noted that there was not much variation in expected speeds between many of the alternatives.
- Mr. Nichols asked what the TTI threshold line represented on each of the graphs. Mr. Smizik responded that the TTI threshold represents HRTPO's threshold between low and moderate congestion levels for freeways.
- Mr. Smizik went over each alternative and whether VDOT is recommending retaining or not retaining each alternative moving forward.
 - **No Build – Required to retain in the analysis**
 - Concept A: Add one general purpose lane in each direction on I-664 - Recommend not retaining
 - Concept B: Add two general purpose lanes in each direction on I-664 - Recommend not retaining
 - **Concept C: Add one managed lane and a part-time drivable shoulder in each direction on I-664 – Recommend retaining**
 - **Concept D: Add two managed lanes in each direction on I-664 – Recommend retaining**
 - Concept E: Add Collector-Distributor (CD) Lanes around interchanges on I-664 - Recommend not retaining
 - Concept F: Transportation System Management (TSM) and Transportation Demand Management (TDM) - Recommend not retaining as stand-alone alternative but could be applied to the preferred alternative or advanced as independent projects
 - Concept G: Transit Only Improvements – Recommend not retaining
- Mr. Smizik noted that the NEPA document will detail each of the alternatives that are not retained as to why they weren't included.
- Mr. Smizik added that an Interchange Access Report (IAR) will be developed to analyze each interchange during the NEPA study. This allows for flexibility for interchange design. He added that decisions on widening to the outside or inside of the current lanes will be made following concurrence.

- Mr. Smizik noted that VDOT will be looking for concurrence on the alternatives at the May NEPA meeting, and that VDOT will address TSM/TDM with HRTPO and HRTAC at a point in the future. Incorporating TSM/TDM, however, could impact fiscal constraint.
- Mr. Jackson agreed that TSM/TDM as a standalone alternative won't address the Purpose and Need, but that coupling it with the preferred alternative would be good. He asked if this study will look only at transit or also park and ride lots. Mr. Smizik replied that it would not look at park and ride lots since the study is only looking at the study area of each interchange. Mr. Jackson responded that he thinks park and ride lots should be included somehow, especially if it is adjacent to Interstate right-of-way.
- Mr. Lewis noted that there is a rail study that was completed for the I-664 corridor looking at extending rail down to Bowers Hill, and he asked how this study will reflect that. Mr. Smizik responded that they are aware of the study and have looked at possible plans for this extension as well as double tracking the existing section. Mr. Smizik added that they have shared preliminary findings with DRPT and the Port, and should receive feedback from them in time for the May NEPA meeting. VDOT will share any information on this at the next meeting.
- Mr. Jackson asked if we will get pushback from EPA for not retaining general purpose lane alternatives since the public seemed to be in favor of them. Mr. Smizik responded that EPA takes part in the monthly NEPA meetings and they have not voiced any concern. He added that agencies understand that addressing the Purpose and Need is important.
- Mr. Smizik noted that the managed lane operation decision is flexible and rests with the region.
- Mr. Case noted that the rail issue has come up in other meetings and that there have been at least a couple of studies that have looked at this rail issue, at least one of which says it is not compatible. Mr. Lewis added that Suffolk has also examined this in house and there will be meetings on rail between the city, HRTPO, and HRTAC in the near future. The city is looking at a hybrid option to improve rail in the city that would take the median rail option off of the table.
- Mr. Smizik told the working group that they received approval from permitting agencies at the April NEPA meeting on about 20 permitting assumptions.
- Mr. Smizik highlighted next steps. VDOT will seek concurrence on the range of alternatives at the May NEPA meeting. They also hope to finalize the study schedule in May. The Notice of Intent may be delayed from May to June but that should not impact the study schedule.
- Mr. Smizik wrapped up the meeting by noting that letters will go out to agencies and localities in the next few weeks to formally participate in the NEPA study.

The meeting adjourned at 10:35 am.