

COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR
Neil A. Morgan



BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
Walter C. Zaremba
District 1
Sheila S. Noll
District 2
W. Chad Green
District 3
Jeffrey D. Wassmer
District 4
Thomas G. Shepperd, Jr.
District 5

March 29, 2016

Marty Williams
At Large Urban Representative
Commonwealth Transportation Board
8858 River Road
Richmond, Virginia 23229



Dear Mr. Williams:

As Chairman of the York County Board of Supervisors, I am writing in reference to the HB2 process and the results of the recently completed project scoring and ranking process for the FY2017 Six-Year Improvement Program (SYIP) cycle. The Board commends the staff at VDOT for accomplishing an incredible amount of work in a very short time to develop the project prioritization and scoring methodologies and complete the project scoring once the applications were submitted. We also appreciate both the opportunities that were provided to local governments to have input into the process and the assistance York County received from local VDOT staff in the Williamsburg Residency and the Hampton Roads District office in preparing our project submissions.

As directed by the General Assembly when it passed House Bill 2 in 2014, the HB2 process is an objective and transparent data-driven process in which applications for funding are ranked against one another on the basis of numerical scores derived from quantifiable measures of effectiveness and efficiency related to safety, congestion mitigation, and other factors. In that respect, it is a significant improvement over the previous SYIP development process. Of course, it is not perfect, and I know that in the months ahead the Commonwealth Transportation Board (CTB) and VDOT will be looking at ways to refine the process for the FY2018 SYIP cycle.

One specific concern we have is that the HB2 scoring process tends to favor large cities over smaller localities – and counties in particular – in several ways. Since the project rankings are based on a definition of cost-effectiveness that considers only the HB2 cost rather than the total project cost, larger localities with significant financial resources are able to apply local funds to projects that might be less worthy – in terms of its true cost-effectiveness – in order to improve their project scores. In fact, this is acknowledged in the CTB's *HB2 Implementation Policy Guide*, which states that this definition of project cost tends to favor localities with more local financial resources. It should be noted that cities, unlike counties, receive Urban Allocation funds that can be used to leverage HB2 funding and thereby improve their rankings. Furthermore, most counties (with a few exceptions, such as Arlington and Henrico) do not have traffic engineering departments since their streets are under VDOT's jurisdiction. With traffic engineers on staff to do the work needed to advance projects forward (e.g., preliminary engineering and design, preparation of environmental documents, etc.), cities have a distinct advantage over counties. It is worth noting that of the 22 HB2 projects in Hampton Roads recommended by VDOT staff for funding, only five are in counties while fourteen are in cities.

We are particularly concerned about the impact of the ranking methodology on one of our proposed York County projects: the widening of Route 17 (George Washington Memorial Highway) between

Marty Williams
March 29, 2016
Page 2

Routes 630 and 173 (App ID No. 643). This project was ranked 23rd in the Hampton Roads region based on the Project-Cost Effectiveness Index (Project Benefit Score divided by the HB2 cost). Since the recommended funding scenario for Hampton Roads presented to the CTB by VDOT staff includes only the top 22 projects, this project barely missed the threshold for funding. If the projects were ranked based on their **total** cost rather than their HB2 cost, it would have been ranked 18th and would easily have met the funding threshold. There appear to be several other projects in the Hampton Roads district in the same situation.

While we understand the rationale for ranking projects based on their HB2 cost, which accounts for the financial benefit of private, local, or other funding and reflects the increased leveraging power of state resources, we also believe that in the CTB's evaluation of projects, consideration needs to be given to total project cost, which may provide a more accurate measure of the true merit of the project. It should be noted that the *HB2 Implementation Policy Guide* states that "The prioritization process does not *require* that the CTB funds projects in order of their scoring. The process is a means to *assist* the CTB in evaluating and comparing proposed improvements [emphasis added]."

As you and the other members of the CTB evaluate HB2 projects for the FY2017 SYIP cycle, we respectfully request that you look beyond the Project-Cost Effectiveness Indices and consider other factors, particularly the true cost-effectiveness of projects and the need for a level playing field for all localities in the Commonwealth. More specifically, we ask that the Route 17 widening project be given fair consideration in recognition of its true cost-effectiveness relative to other projects in the Hampton Roads region. Lastly, we urge the CTB to give consideration to these issues as you work to enhance the HB2 process in the future.

I know that you are aware of the congestion problems on Route 17 and of the many years it took for funding to be programmed for the first-phase widening project (between Route 134 and Wolf Trap Road). That project will be completed by December of this year. We have momentum. Citizens and businesses see the progress and look forward to the safe and smooth traffic operations through the widened segment. Please help sustain the positive momentum by working with your CTB colleagues and VDOT to find a way to fund the next phase of Route 17 widening between Wolf Trap Road and Denbigh Boulevard (App ID No. 643).

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Jeffrey D. Wassmer, Chairman
York County Board of Supervisors

TCC

Copy to: York County Board of Supervisors
Neil A. Morgan, County Administrator
Charles A. Kilpatrick, Commissioner, VDOT
James S. Utterback, Hampton Roads District Administrator, VDOT
✓ Robert A. Crum, Jr., Executive Director, HRTPO