

## **Bowers Hill Interchange Study Working Group Minutes – May 21, 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  
Rob Brown – Norfolk  
Deborah Mangiaracina – Norfolk  
Carl Jackson – Portsmouth  
Robert Lewis - Suffolk  
Jason Souders – Suffolk  
Scott Smizik – VDOT  
Eric Stringfield – VDOT  
Nina Ullrich – VDOT  
Kevin Page – HRTAC  
Pavithra Parthasarathi – HRTPO  
Rob Case - HRTPO  
Keith Nichols – HRTPO

The meeting started at 1:30 pm.

- 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 April 23, 2021 meeting were reviewed. Mr. Lewis made a motion to approve the minutes and Mr. Brown 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 detailing the Citizen Comment Opportunities to date, followed by the study Purpose and Need.

- Mr. Smizik went over each alternative and whether they are being retained for the study. Alternatives that are being retained include:
  - No Build – Required to retain in the analysis
  - Concept C: Add one managed lane and a part-time drivable shoulder in each direction on I-664
  - Concept D: Add two managed lanes in each direction on I-664
- Mr. Smizik added that the NEPA document will detail why each of the alternatives that are not retained weren't included.
- Mr. Smizik noted that in addition to the alternatives that received concurrence earlier this month, an Interchange Access Report (IAR) will be developed to analyze each interchange during the NEPA study. The IAR, which is currently underway, allows for flexibility in interchange design. Interchange "bubbles", which indicate the limits where interchange improvements will occur, will be approved in the NEPA study. Mr. Smizik added that a smaller, additional NEPA effort can be completed if the final intersection designs go outside of the limits included in the bubbles.
- Mr. Smizik stated that the Record of Decision (ROD) will be issued in 2023 and will have a 3-year shelf life. The EIS can be revisited after the 3-year period to update data as needed.
- Mr. Smizik discussed whether improvements would be expected to occur to the inside or the outside of the current lanes. This decision was not included with the concurrence that was received earlier this month.
- Mr. Smizik added that VDOT has had conversations with Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT) and Virginia Port Authority (VPA) staff on whether it is feasible to consider additional rail in the median throughout the corridor. The Port has plans to double track the existing section of median rail between Pughsville Road and Bridge Road, so the EIS will show outside widening in this section but will allow inside widening if future design shows it is feasible.
- Mr. Smizik added that south of Pughsville Road, the median is not wide enough for even single track assuming no design exceptions. The median would need to be 15-25 feet wider in this section. DRPT staff agreed with VDOT not to include median rail in the study for this section of the corridor, so widening will be expected to occur in the median to the greatest extent possible.
- Mr. Smizik wrapped up the presentation by noting that under current NEPA regulations, federal approval is required both through the Record of Decision (ROD) and through other authorizations such as permits. Water quality permits will be required from the US Army Corps of Engineers, the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ), and the Virginia Marine Resources Commission (VMRC). These permits do not need to be as detailed as they were previously, which allows for more flexibility in design and in reducing mitigation costs.
- Mr. Smizik added that VDOT learned from the Coast Guard that this project is exempt from their permitting process for the next five years. It was also confirmed that no FAA permits or approval will be necessary. This could be revisited as construction would begin (i.e. crane heights).

- Mr. Smizik noted that FHWA can formally initiate the EIS since they have received concurrence, but the Notice of Intent (NOI) is delayed until early June largely due to new federal regulations and requirements. This will not change the project schedule, which should still be complete in early 2023. The NOI will also require a 45-day public review period.
- Mr. Smizik noted that letters have been sent out to localities, HRTPO, and HRTAC formalizing their roles in this study moving forward.
- Ms. Parthasarathi asked when the NOI will be issued. Mr. Smizik replied that no exact date has been set but that he hopes it will occur in the first or second week of June.
- Ms. Parthasarathi asked when the study group that is being assembled will get started. Mr. Smizik replied that we will continue to have monthly VDOT NEPA meetings and Bowers Hill working group meetings as necessary.
- Mr. Lewis asked if Mr. Smizik could verify who has and has not responded to the study letters, and Mr. Smizik agreed that he would.

The meeting adjourned at 2:05 pm.

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