Tolling, Trucking and the Interstate 81 Corridor in Virginia

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February 1, 2007
Today’s Topics

• What Makes I-81 Unique?
• Truck-Toll Proposal
• NEPA Study and Tolling Application
• Freight Rail Study
What Makes I-81 Unique?
• Mostly rural, with rolling and mountainous terrain
• Designed for 15% trucks; now 30%-40%
• International link from southern U.S. economic hubs and Mexico to the northeast states and Canada
Virginia's I-81 Corridor
Available Sites
50 Acres or More

Available Site
US Interstate Highway
County Boundary

Sources
Virginia Department of Transportation
Virginia Economic Development Partnership

Miles
0 10 20 40

Area of Interest
Rural, but Growing

- 5 MPOs – only 2 before last census
- Only 25% of population included in MPO
- One million population
- More than 8,000 businesses in Roanoke, Harrisonburg, Wytheville metro areas alone
Virginia’s Unique Terrain

The terrain of I-81 from Tennessee to West Virginia

[Diagram showing the terrain profile along I-81 with elevations and mile markers.]
Public Private Transportation Act of 1995

- Law allows solicited and unsolicited proposals
- Early 2002 – private consortium, STAR Solutions, proposed building separate truck lanes and partially financing them with electronically-collected tolls on trucks
  - Toll revenues would support revenue bonds
Was the proposal feasible? What does I-81 need?

- March 2003 – applied to FHWA for tolling (TEA-21)
- January 2004 – launched I-81 Corridor Improvement Study (NEPA)
Parallel Initiatives

- NEPA process helps determine what to build, not private proposal
- FHWA/VDOT agreed on a tiered NEPA study
- VDOT worked on tolling application requirements
Questions to Answer

• How many lanes will I-81 need?
• Does truck separation work?
• Are rail improvements the answer?
• Is tolling feasible as a funding source?
I-81 Corridor Study

- Included Road and Rail in Virginia
- Completed Tier 1 DEIS in November 2005
Key Findings of Study

• Truck separation doesn’t work because it provides too much capacity

• Rail alone does little to meet future needs

• Traffic volume will nearly double by 2035

• In 2035, 37% needs one more lane in each direction; the rest needs more

• With tolling, truck diversion is fairly low
Public Involvement

- Coordination with MPOs and PDCs
- Presentations to hundreds of groups
- Public hearings held in April 2006
- About 3 in 4 responders were strongly opposed to using tolls on I-81 as a funding source
Virginia’s transportation policy-making body, the Commonwealth Transportation Board, took action in October 2006 by directing:

- VDOT to complete Final EIS with concept to build not more than one or two lanes in each direction

- VDOT to continue tolling application for possible funding source and/or way to manage traffic (SAFETEA-LU continues toll pilot program)

- Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT) to launch a multi-state freight rail study
Freight Rail Study

- Tier 1 DEIS projected traffic to nearly double by 2035, with truck volume growing fastest
- With Virginia-only rail improvements, just 3-6% diversion of trucks to rail possible
- What will it take to divert more freight to rail and relieve stress on I-81?
Freight Rail Study

- Public agency (DRPT) working with private sector (Norfolk Southern)
- Study will extend at least 500 miles into Pennsylvania and Tennessee
- Achieves truck-competitive transit times
- Includes roll on/roll off and other rail technologies
- Considers options of new rail ROW
What’s next?

• Final Tier 1 EIS to FHWA in early 2007

• Possible Record of Decision from FHWA in first quarter 2007

• Freight Rail Study to be complete mid-2007

• Outstanding issues:
  – Virginia law allows tolling only on trucks on I-81
  – FHWA says toll revenue from I-81 cannot be used to enhance rail capacity
Welcome to the I-81 corridor in Virginia

What's New:
- CTB endorses I-81 improvement strategy - Oct. 11, 2006
- CTB to hold monthly meetings in Virginia - widely limit for public comment period included - Oct 5, 2006
- CTB considers improvements to I-81, highway and rail infrastructure - Sept. 25, 2006

Quick Links:
- I-81 Tier II (DEF)
- I-81 Fact Sheets
- Toll Impact Analysis Study
- Freight studies 1 2 3 4
- Interstate 81 Update newsletter
- Improvement Projects
- I-81 Multi-State Meeting
- Frequently Asked Questions
- Federal Transportation Bill FAQ
- ODOT
- Comment Online
- PTA Proposals

Get the facts at www.I-81.org