

## **VDOT I-81 Plans Don't Include Reasonable Solutions No Measure of Impacts As Critical Decisions Are Made**

In its draft plan for I-81, the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) could:

- Build a **massive truck highway** on I-81, with an average of 8 to 12 lanes, and potential for 20 lanes at some interchanges. See *VDOT I-81 DEIS study* at [www.i-81.org](http://www.i-81.org)
- Charge **tolls on all cars and trucks** to pay for the up to \$13 billion project. *Car tolls range from \$26 to \$45.50 and truck tolls from \$65 to \$113.75, according to the VDOT study.*
- Build a major **bypass around Harrisonburg** through the prime farmlands and by the historic battlefields of Rockingham County. See *VDOT I-81 DEIS map 6-3.*
- Disrupt Shenandoah Valley communities and businesses for **15 years to build** the truckway.

Many local governments and citizens groups support a different approach – **Reasonable Solutions for I-81**.<sup>1</sup> We believe that today's safety and congestion problems and tomorrow's highway needs can be met at far less cost and impact through spot improvements within the highway median, such as climbing lanes and redesigned exits, increased law enforcement, significant rail freight upgrades and meaningful transit options.

### **VDOT Rejects Reasonable Alternatives**

VDOT is studying various improvement projects for I-81, as required by the federal National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). But VDOT has selected only supersized options, much like the **New Jersey Turnpike**, for Virginia's rural, scenic and historic Shenandoah Valley.

Every one of the "concepts" for I-81 in the VDOT plan calls for corridor-wide expansion, which require tolls on cars and trucks to finance. These concepts include the STAR Solutions \$13 billion proposal to build an eight to 12 lane tolled truckway. The impacts on the region's economy, air and water, farms, battlefields and historic communities would be overwhelmingly negative.

VDOT rejected a host of other smaller scale, less costly options for I-81 based on questionable traffic projections that favor highway widening. VDOT rejected rail freight improvements to divert truck traffic because it only studied rail upgrades *in Virginia*, when a majority of trucks are travelling *through* the state.

### **VDOT Fails to Measure Impacts**

VDOT will be making decisions on the future of I-81 without adequately measuring any of the impacts of its massive expansion plans. VDOT opted to use a "tiered" process within the federal environmental review, as permitted by the Federal Highway Administration.

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<sup>1</sup> Reasonable Solutions endorsed by Augusta, Rockingham, Shenandoah, Albemarle and Clarke Counties; Towns of Front Royal, Tom's Brook, New Market, Edinburg, Mt. Jackson; Shenandoah Valley Travel Association, Virginia Hospitality & Travel Association; Shenandoah Valley Battlefields Foundation, Civil War Preservation Trust, National Trust for Historic Preservation; National Parks Conservation Association, Virginia Conservation Network, Shenandoah Valley Network, Valley Conservation Council; Rockingham CAP, Shenandoah Forum, Shenandoah Preservation League, Scenic 340 Project; Edinburg Chamber of Commerce.

The current study, known as the draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS), is Tier I of the process. Tier I contains cursory environmental review, as VDOT says full review is not necessary until it moves to Tier II. But **VDOT will choose which projects to pursue at the end of Tier I, before impacts are considered.** That is a terrible way to make decisions that will affect everyone in the Shenandoah Valley.

For example, 15 of 20 significant historic resources in Shenandoah County, such as the Cedar Creek and New Market Battlefields, are located in the I-81 corridor. In the DEIS study, VDOT fails to measure how widening the highway from four to eight lanes through the county would impact the battlefields. The study just lists the battlefield acres likely to be impacted.

The study is even worse when it comes to Rockingham County, where VDOT plans to bypass Harrisonburg by diverting I-81. VDOT's map and list of resources in the bypass study area fails to list: two historic battlefields, eight agricultural and forestal districts with more than 20,000 acres, a new \$40 million high school, a major poultry processing plant and the Old Order Mennonite communities within or close to the bypass corridor.

Even when it gets to environmental review in Tier II, VDOT plans to review the impacts in segments, allowing the agency to use two lesser levels of review and avoid a full blown environmental impact study. This process makes no sense and fails to protect Shenandoah Valley residents.

### **Critical Point in I-81 Decision Making**

VDOT will make decisions on the future of I-81 at the end of the Tier I process. This will preclude any new options in Tier II, where the impacts on the local and regional economy, air, water, historic, cultural and natural resources should be detailed and better understood.

By ruling out spot highway improvements, rail freight upgrades and transit options now, VDOT closes out consideration of these options in the next stage of planning for I-81. If Shenandoah Valley residents hope to see less costly, lower impact options from VDOT for I-81, it has to come now, before the Tier I DEIS study is approved.

The Valley's elected officials, business and civic leaders, and residents must turn out at the **VDOT I-81 hearings April 11 in Wytheville and Roanoke, April 12 in Bristol, April 17 in Natural Bridge, April 18 in Winchester and April 19 in Bridgewater.** Tell VDOT about the flaws in its I-81 plans. Insist that VDOT go back to options with community support.

### **Call On Governor Kaine for a Reasonable Solution for I-81**

Governor Tim Kaine can play a leading role in getting VDOT to cut costs and lower impacts by insisting VDOT officials revise plans for a massive I-81 truckway. Doing so would free up significant funds for other road projects in Virginia and provide a showcase for the Governor's call to better link road plans to local land use plans. Call the Governor's office 804-786-2211 or go to: [www.governor.virginia.gov/AboutTheGovernor/contactGovernor.cfm](http://www.governor.virginia.gov/AboutTheGovernor/contactGovernor.cfm)

***Virginians deserve less costly and less destructive options for I-81.***

***We deserve better information from VDOT about the real impacts.***

***We deserve a different future than 8 to 12 lanes dominated by truck traffic.***

For more information, go to [www.shenandoahvalleynetwork.org](http://www.shenandoahvalleynetwork.org)