



MEETING OF THE I-81 ADVISORY COMMITTEE

December 2, 2025

1:00 P.M.

Blue Ridge Community College
Robert E. Plecker Workforce Center
57 College Lane
Weyers Cave, Virginia 24486

Members of the Committee Present: Senator Mark Obenshain, Delegate Terry Austin, CTB Member Tom Fowlkes, CTB Member John Good, Jr., CTB Member Raymond Smoot, PDC Chair Frank Friedman, PDC Chair Hil Johnson, PDC Chair Phil North, PDC Chair Steven Gobble Jr., Commissioner Steve Brich, Director Tiffany Robinson.

Members of the Committee Absent: Delegate Sam Rasoul, Delegate Jason Ballard, Delegate Bill Wiley, Senator Hackworth, Senator Sutterlein, PDC Chair Dennis Morris.

1. Call to Order
Senator Mark Obenshain, Chair of the Committee
2. Discussion and Approval of Minutes from July 14, 2025
Senator Mark Obenshain, Chair of the Committee
Motion to Approve: PDC Chair Friedman
Second: PDC Chair Hil Johnson
3. I-81 Corridor Improvement Plan Update
Rob Williams, Virginia Department of Transportation

Presentation of the I-81 Corridor Improvement Plan Update made by Rob Williams began with discussion on funding sources that support the I-81 Corridor Improvement Plan, including additional funding identified for the S-Curves in Botetourt County.

The process has been iterative since January, including public meetings in July and October, after the public meetings, potential solutions were prioritized, and the staff recommended a funding scenario. Today is the final stretch, to get the Committee's feedback on the recommended scenario. There is \$2-25 billion in funding, PE \$7 billion in potential solutions and narrowing the potential solutions list.

The July public engagement included close to 1800 participants and found they generally wanted to see continued investment in the corridor and 87% of respondents agreed with the overall list of potential solutions. Early November the staff recommended was shared, heard

similar comments from the past, the public wants to see continued enforcement, some concerns for wildlife, roadway lighting and safety improvements.

The staff recommended funding scenario, went through the SMART SCALE like process, score and rank. The blue line references the cut line based on available funding. The additional projects below the blue line represent additional projects recommended by the Committee, and the remaining are projects that did not meet the cut.

Bristol – 6 projects, \$370-486M

Salem – 3 projects, \$271- 425M

Staunton - 11 projects, \$1.0-1.9B

Advisory Committee Discussion:

Mr. Good Jr., distributed information that was based on Staunton district, moving up projects to a higher priority as improvements have already been made and the improvements have been working well, suggesting a change in the priority for Staunton.

Senator Obenshain: On the Augusta project, moving it down, those are on the way and not completed yet; Mr. Good Jr. noted that the one that is completed is the NB acceleration lane. Delegate Austin noted at NB and SB, seeking clarity on a specific location at 64; Ben Mannell clarified that the project is from Raphine Exit 205 to 209 and Exit 209 -215 is not an interchange, the project had to be cut in two.

Senator Obenshain: Looking at the two you have suggested moving out of the funded projects, \$600+ million dollars and moving in about \$230 million, are there suggestions on what to do with the balance of the money, why eliminate if we have the resources? Mr. Good Jr., thought is to leave a little room there or allow staff to review and look into it and potentially pull some other projects up to utilize leftover funds. He thought he heard that they will be updating numbers anyway but potentially move up once the numbers are reviewed again. He also noted that he was around when SMART SCALE came on and really pushed to use analytics and the data to drive decisions, much to his chagrin, it sets aside his own interest . . . we are waiting for final recommendations from VDOT for this next tranche, maybe it would be a good idea to lull over it and consider improvements that have been made and come back in February or March and consider suggestions then, in light of the final recommendations.

Secretary Miller: We reserve the right to take a different direction and if we are doing that too much, then we don't have a good process. His interest is in making things better and if we are missing it, make changes along the way. The current plan goes through 2035, and this begins 2035-36, nothing is going to dig for 11 years, and we can guesstimate numbers, but 11 years is a long time. The scores have now been added and based on a 7-year forecast in this case. A question was raised related to a Staunton Frederick County project, the lowest one, with a score of .58 and highest has a score almost 5x higher; Secretary addressed the Committee . . . either we have missed something or overlooked improvements. Our cadence right now is final approval in January, with the Board hearing feedback from the Advisory Committee next Wednesday. The Board action in January does not prevent changes from being made. Secretary

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Shep Miller committed to having additional conversation and will go back and look at it, ask staff to weigh in, and provide feedback to CTB member Good Jr. Secretary Miller also doesn't recommend making changes and leaving money on the table since we are 10 years out. Everything is contingent on resources.

Delegate Austin: Seeking clarification that the Board (CTB) will act in January.

Commissioner Brich commented, hoping that today after the meeting that some feedback will be presented to the Board for consideration by CTB from the Committee. At the January CTB meeting, it is anticipated the CTB will act on the CIP and the next tranche of projects.

Delegate Austin said there is no urgency that we act on these now, and possibly we should entertain a delay to allow staff additional time and then send a later in the future.

Senator Obenshain: What the Secretary and Commissioner are looking for from the Committee is to provide feedback to CTB. We are an Advisory Committee and do not have authority to approve or disapprove projects, but we can provide advice and revise our advice to the CTB, to those recommendations. Today, I think what is being sought is to make a recommendation based on the list in front of them, with the understanding they can come back to CTB at any time and can make suggestions or revisions and provide that advice back to the Board.

Dr. Smoot commented that he is generally in support of the staff recommended scenario, one thing he would like everyone to take a look at is the truck climbing lane Montgomery County, NB. He understands it terminates at a rest area, and wonders if it should be extended a little bit to accommodate trucks coming out of the rest area. With that request to take another look, he is inclined to support the staff recommended.

Delegate Austin noted agreement with the Secretary, we are years out and we can agree since the original plan things have changed and will continue to change. Certainly, CTB can go back and look at it, but he has no problems advancing forward, knowing it will be modified a few more times before we get the tranche to construction.

Chair Hil Johnson: During our Board meeting we had further discussions, appreciate project in Pulaski in Salem district, it's a little cloverleaf and speeds are 70 mph if doing the speed limit, going NB, the exit is 25 mph, at the same time we are looking to extend the acceleration lane, looking for consideration of the entire area to consider safety and econ dev in that area. Volvo trucking uses that area for training and has seen trucks tipped over trying to make the curve. Asking instead of a mini cloverleaf to consider a diamond instead.

Ben Mannell: We are looking at a study at the location of the mini-cloverleaf and staff is already looking at the location raised by CTB member Dr. Smoot.

Senator Obenshain: Has operational improvements been considered as part of this effort? Yes, we have looked at improvements, focused on areas with high incident delay.

Chair Friedman: In prior meetings he has raised 221-222 NB, feels like its being missed. Appeal to CTB and staff to look at this location. Also, when there are accidents on the highway, to consider that when emergency response is in route, it takes away from town resources. Correction, its included, not missed, please disregard.

Motion made to approve by PDC Chairman Friedman, that we recommend moving the staff recommended forward

Second: Dr. Smoot

Vote: Unanimous

4. Public Comment

Eric Sichau, Roanoke Regional Chamber, thanks the Committee for their feedback, from the Chamber perspective, wherever they can be a resource, and be supportive, he can speak on behalf of Roanoke Regional, chamber is standing by, thank you for your continued work on this and appreciates the work on the corridor, and on behalf of the business community, thank you.

Tim Fitzgerald Augusta County, thank you for your work here, supportive of the list and on behalf of the county thank you, and will continue to say thank you, the right steps are being taken going forward.

5. Closing Remarks

Senator Mark Obenshain, Chair of the Committee

Senator Obenshain thanks and appreciates the work of Secretary Miller and the Youngkin Administration, this started out as a bi-partisan effort working closely with Valentine and Northam as this process took root. We actually do agree on a lot of things, they are not republican or democratic problems, they are just problems that people have. Over the past two years we have not slowed down progress made. His drives have improved and it's nice to see projects complete and dirt be moved. Many thanks to CTB as well and the partnership and willingness to listen to the many stakeholders in the process, it has been a fruitful partnership. Thanks Secretary Miller again and Governor Youngkin, much progress has been made over the past four years.

Secretary Miller: Thanked Senator Obenshain, he has seen the progress, and it's been great, and the Governor is all in on 81, everyone knows how important it is and the work it needs. 81 still needs more attention, they have seen more money added beyond what is in the regular plan. We have a Board with six individuals who are from the Corridor, almost half of CTB, which is pretty powerful. He also thanks the staff, Commissioner, others who are very professional. The partisanship doesn't really come into play. He thanks the Chair for allowing him to be part of the team. Additionally, thanks Tiffany Robinson and DRPT, for her fantastic work and being part of the team.

Delegate Austin also took the opportunity to thank Secretary Miller, and everyone involved. The tunnel projects, 64 widening projects, we have spent hours trying to find solutions to problems that we didn't have revenue to solve, which is a recurring problem, we have a great CTB with six members from the corridor, but really, he sincerely says thank you to the Secretary.

Adjourned 2:05 PM

All presentations made to the committee can be found at:
<https://improve81.vdot.virginia.gov/get-involved/advisory-committee/>

MEMBERS OF THE I-81 ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Voting

Delegate Bill Wiley, District 32

Delegate Terry Austin, District 37

Delegate Sam Rasoul, District 38

Delegate Jason Ballard, District 42

Senator David Sutterlein, District 4

Senator Mark Obenshain, District 2

Senator T. Travis Hackworth, District 5

Chair Frank Friedman, Central Shenandoah PDC

Chair Phil North, Roanoke Valley/Alleghany PDC

Chair Hil Johnson, New River Valley PDC

Chair Dennis Morris, Northern Shenandoah PDC

Chair Steven Gobble, Jr., Mount Rogers PDC

Ray Smoot, Jr., Salem District CTB Member

Tom Fowlkes, Bristol District CTB Member

John P. Good Jr., Staunton District CTB Member

Ex Officio

Stephen Brich, Commissioner of Highways, VDOT

Tiffany Robinson, Director, DRPT