Transportation Priorities Submitted to CTB

Each year, planning district commissions (PDCs) and metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) submit their regions’ transportation priorities to the Commonwealth Transportation Board (CTB) for consideration of inclusion into the next fiscal year’s Six Year Improvement Program (SYIP), which programs funds for projects. The West Piedmont Planning District Commission (WPPDC) worked with its constituent localities to obtain their transportation priorities and in April 2013, submitted these to be considered for inclusion in the 2014—2019 SYIP. The CTB will receive and vote on the draft SYIP on May 15, hearings will be conducted by the CTB between May and June, and the agency will adopt the FY 2014—2019 SYIP on June 19.

Notable projects throughout the region contained in WPPDC’s priority list this year include widening the Lover’s Leap section of U.S. Route 58 in Patrick County to four lanes; the construction of a connector road between Patriot Centre Industrial Park and U.S. Route 58 in Henry County; the construction of Interstate 73 within Henry and Franklin Counties, between the North Carolina State Line and the Roanoke County Limit; the construction of a pedestrian bridge to provide a connection for existing sidewalks along Route 40 to more safely accommodate the growing student population of Ferrum College in the Village of Ferrum, Franklin County; and the continuation of development of pedestrian and bicycle trail facilities between the Tobacco Warehouse District to the Downtown Historic District and across the Martin Luther King Bridge, as well as other transportation-related improvements, in the City of Danville.

Approval of the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS)

At the March 28 West Piedmont Planning District Commission Board of Commissioners meeting, the 2013 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) was approved and was submitted to the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) on March 29. The CEDS is the guiding document in furtherance of economic development in the West Piedmont Planning District and comprises information about the region including regional assets, region-wide economic development activities over the past year, community profiles, and development strategies. Over the past year, major economic development announcements and activities have included the following:

- New College Institute’s (NCI) construction of a 50,000 square-foot building on the Baldwin Block in Uptown Martinsville to house educational programming that will provide training in advanced manufacturing, next-generation healthcare, and entrepreneurship.

- Major economic development initiatives in Danville, including development of the River District, which includes infrastructure and streetscape improvements, as well as building improvements from the Tobacco Warehouse District to the Historic Downtown District. The Danville Science Center also broke ground on a 100-seat, 360-degree dome theater adjacent to its existing facility along Craghead Street.

- Centra Health Care announced the construction of a new medical facility with a 24-hour emergency department in Gretna. The proposed 50,000 square-foot facility is planned to include a 24-hour emergency department, a 64-slice CT scanner, cardiac rehabilitation services, a wellness center, and a helipad. The facility is expected to employ 80 to 90 people, each earning an average annual salary of $50,000.

The 2013 CEDS can be found at [http://www.wppdc.org/Web_Data/WPPD/WPPD%20CEDS%202013.pdf](http://www.wppdc.org/Web_Data/WPPD/WPPD%20CEDS%202013.pdf).
Virginia Rural Center Skills Gap Analysis Presentation

On June 27 at 6:00 p.m., the Virginia Rural Center will present findings and recommendations from its Skills Gap Analysis of rural Virginia. This presentation will highlight the various skills demanded by the contemporary job market, as well as the extent of the gap in those skills needed to fill those jobs.

The Virginia Rural Center, along with its partners in this initiative, has developed a policy position which can address the skills gap in the Tobacco Region. The Center, in conjunction with the Virginia Rural Caucus, has collaborated with economic development interests to analyze and address education, skills, and the job market. The policy position developed by the Center seeks to generate jobs, business, as well as the economy in rural areas of the state. A study funded by the Virginia Tobacco Commission found that by 2017, there will be a demand for nearly 7,000 manufacturing workers throughout Virginia’s former Tobacco Region.

The presentation will take place at Patrick Henry Community College’s Frith Building exhibition hall. Local organizations supporting this event include the West Piedmont Planning District Commission, Patrick Henry Community College, the New College Institute, the West Piedmont Workforce Investment Board, the Martinsville-Henry County Chamber of Commerce, and the Martinsville-Henry County Economic Development Corporation. At the conclusion of the presentation, the New College Institute and Patrick Henry Community College will discuss their strategies for addressing the skills gap locally.

Corridors of Statewide Significance in the West Piedmont Planning District

Corridors of Statewide Significance (CoSS) in the Commonwealth of Virginia are major transportation corridors in which high-priority multimodal projects can take place and where statewide investment is to be focused. Distinguishing attributes of CoSS are that they must accommodate multiple modes of travel or be an extended freight corridor; must connect regions, states, or major activity centers; must accommodate a large volume of travel; and must provide a unique statewide function and/or address statewide goals.

The West Piedmont Planning District is served by three CoSS. These include the U.S. Route 29, Seminole Corridor; the U.S. Route 58, Southside Corridor; and the U.S. Route 220, North Carolina to West Virginia Corridor. The Seminole Corridor is a major north/south conduit throughout the state, whereas Interstates 81 and 95 are major north/south corridors on the west and east sides of the state, respectively. The Southside Corridor is the major east/west corridor for southern Virginia, and connects eastern Tennessee and western Virginia with Hampton Roads and the Port of Virginia. The North Carolina to West Virginia Corridor is a major conduit for freight, logging, and passenger movement.

General strategies to enhance CoSS and improve their function include implementing (vehicular) access management techniques, coordinating transportation and land use, addressing high accident locations, improving transit service, and enhancing railroad infrastructure. Corridor master plans (CMPs) are currently being developed to maximize the functionality of CoSS in Virginia. Two major objectives for the CMPs recommended by VTrans 2035, Virginia’s Statewide Multimodal Long-Range Policy Plan, include improving the interconnectivity of regions and activity centers, and advancing key economic drivers by making strategic infrastructure investments.
West Piedmont Regional Promotional Video

The West Piedmont Planning District Commission will be collaborating with Patrick Henry Community College to create a promotional video for the region. The video will highlight living, working, and playing in Virginia’s West Piedmont Region. It will touch on the region’s high quality of life and education, and low cost of living. Additionally, the video will showcase the wide variety of recreational and cultural opportunities available in the area including the Blue Ridge Parkway; local, state, and national parks; the Blue Ridge Institute at Ferrum College; and others.

Some other features of the video will include the benefits of doing business in the region, including the area’s labor force and land availability, and the transportation infrastructure.

Bushels & Barrels Local Food, Wine & Beer Festival

On Saturday, June 15, the Bushels & Barrels Local Food, Wine and Beer Festival, will take place at the Reynolds Homestead in Patrick County from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. The Festival will feature food growers and producers from the region, as well as local artisans and local bands. Food and crafts will be available for purchase, including wine and beer.

The Festival is sponsored in part by the West Piedmont Planning District Commission (WPPDC); Field to Friends, a local group that promotes locally-grown food in the region; the Reynolds Homestead, and others. The WPPDC will contribute to this effort by printing flyers, posters, and postcards to promote the event. The WPPDC will also have a booth at the Festival.

Functional Classification Changes in the West Piedmont Planning District

West Piedmont Planning District Commission staff has been working in conjunction with the Virginia Department of Transportation and localities to review proposed changes to the functional classification system of roads throughout the region. Functional classification determines what function a particular road will serve. For instance, the function of a local neighborhood street will differ significantly from that of an Interstate highway. Roads are proposed to be upgraded or downgraded based on the number of traffic generators they serve, such as schools, hospitals, etc.; the levels of traffic that have been recorded on them; and other considerations. Functional classification downgrades and upgrades of roadways can have financial implications for localities, as those roads classified higher are provided more maintenance funds than those in a lower classification. The road functional classifications and their respective functions include (according to the Federal Highway Administration’s [FHWA] Functional Classification Guidelines):

- **Local Roads**: These roads generally serve local neighborhoods and are the primary means of accessing individual residences.
- **Minor Collectors**: The major functions of these roads include collecting traffic from local roads, providing service to smaller communities, and linking local traffic generators with their rural hinterlands.
- **Major Collectors**: Generally, these roads provide service to larger towns and significant traffic generators such as county parks, consolidated schools, etc., and link them with larger towns and cities or higher-classified routes. In urban areas, both Minor and Major Collectors transition traffic from arterials to local streets and vise-versa.
- **Minor Arterials**: These roads link cities and larger towns and traffic generators such as major resort areas. Minor Arterials generally provide trips of greater length and higher speed than roadways of lower classifications.
- **Other Principal Arterials**: These roads serve travel consisting of substantial statewide or interstate travel.
- **Other Freeways and Expressways**: Provide for high-speed travel (high degree of mobility) with minimal land access.
- **Interstates**: Provide for high-speed interstate travel (high degree of mobility) with minimal land access (interchanges).
Commuting Patterns in the West Piedmont Planning District

The table at left, a product of the United States Census Bureau’s 2006—2010 American Community Survey (ACS), summarizes commuting patterns in the West Piedmont Planning District. The table shows workers by place of residence, or by place of work.

As illustrated, the total workers residing in the District was 103,239; however, only 81,455, or roughly 79 percent, worked in the District; the remainder commuted outside the region.

The data show that Franklin, Henry, Patrick, and Pittsylvania Counties had more out-commuters than in-commuters, while the Cities of Danville and Martinsville had a greater share of in-commuters than out-commuters.

Summer Reading Program Initiated by the Library of Virginia

The West Piedmont Planning District Commission promotes opportunities to improve educational attainment throughout the region. The Library of Virginia recently published a press release promoting “Dig Into Reading,” the summer reading program encouraging youth across the Commonwealth to read and minimize “summer reading loss.” Also included in the press release is discussion of a study initiated by the Library of Virginia to determine the impact of the summer reading program. A excerpt of the press release is provided below.

“If you don’t use it, you lose it” is a truism that applies to children and reading. Summer reading loss is a well-documented concern to educators and parents. Yet it does not need to happen. According to a study by Thomas G. White and James S. Kim, voluntary reading of books over the summer can enhance the reading achievements of ethnic minority students and reduce skill loss over the summer break if the books closely match student’s reading levels and interest.

The Library of Virginia is partnering with the 91 library systems (358 public libraries buildings) in Virginia to encourage reading and learning during the summer. The theme for this summer’s reading program is “Dig Into Reading.” Libraries across the Commonwealth offer prizes for children to earn for reading, as well as programs that encourage learning while being fun and creative.

With funding from the Institute for Museum and Library Services, the Library of Virginia provides training, manuals, clipart, posters, bookmarks and an online database for tracking reading. The Library of Virginia is also conducting a study on the impact of summer reading program with the collaboration of the Virginia Department of Education and Evanced Solutions LLC. The study is being conducted by Edvantia, Inc. Gerald Moore, Interim President and CEO of Edvantia states, “Summer reading loss is a serious issue, especially for at-risk youth, but research is showing promising results from summer reading interventions.