Danville MPO, WPPD Localities Submit Round 3 Smart Scale Applications

In August, the Danville Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), staffed by the West Piedmont Planning District Commission (WPPDC), submitted a Virginia Smart Scale application requesting funding for a proposed connector road to extend from the Berry Hill Industrial Park in Pittsylvania County east to the Oak Ridge Farms interchange at the Danville Expressway (U.S. 58 Bypass). The connector road, which is planned to be 2.3 miles in length, is anticipated to cost $33,456,704 to construct, of which $30,931,704 is being requested via Smart Scale, and the remaining $2,525,000 is anticipated to be covered by match amounts provided by other sources.

The connector road is the preferred alternative to provide improved access to the Berry Hill Industrial Park, as articulated within the Southern Virginia Mega Site at Berry Hill Transportation Update, prepared by Dewberry Engineers for the MPO. This study is an update of a former transportation study Dewberry prepared in 2009 to promote accessibility and mobility around the industrial park. As part of this most recent study, the MPO held a public hearing in late June to solicit public input into the concept of the connector road, which is imperative to promote the development of the industrial park, as well as to ensure efficient and safe operation of its surrounding roadways. The Berry Hill Industrial Park, comprising more than 3,500 acres, is one of the largest industrial parks on the East Coast. Multiple sites of varying sizes are available to fulfill the needs of a large cross-section of industrial operators. Furthermore, a rail spur and the Williams Transco gas pipeline are located on-site.

Localities within the West Piedmont Planning District also submitted applications, which include:

Franklin County

- Intersection improvements at Route 122 (Booker T. Washington Highway) and Route 636 (Lost Mountain Road) to include the addition of right– and left-turn lanes with median separation. This project would also involve the construction of median-separated right– and left-turn lanes On Route 122 at the Booker T. Washington National Monument, a multi-use path along Route 122, and access management.
- Intersection improvements at U.S. Route 220 and Route 613 (Naff Road) to include the installation of a non-signalized Continuous Green-T (innovative) intersection, which is a design promoting safer left-turn movements. The design would also include a right-turn lane on U.S. Route 220 South, and an extended acceleration lane on U.S. Route 220 North.
- Intersection improvements at U.S. Route 220 and Route 919 (Grassy Hill Road), which would include the construction of a non-signalized Continuous Green-T. The project would include an extension of the existing acceleration lane on U.S. Route 220 North, a conversion of a driveway along U.S. Route 220 North to right-turn only, and a right-turn lane at this driveway.
- Intersection improvements at U.S. Route 220 and Route 619 (Pleasant Hill Road and Sontag Road) to include the construction of a “Restricted Crossing U-Turn” (R-CUT) (innovative) design at U.S. Route 220 and Pleasant Hill Road, which would include median separation and the requirement that drivers wishing to turn left onto U.S. Route 220 first turn right and then loop around at a new U-turn facility. A southbound left-turn lane would be included in this design. A separate R-CUT configuration would also be constructed at the intersection of U.S. Route 220 and Sontag Road.

Henry County

- Enhancements on Route 174 (Kings Mountain Road) would include the construction of left-turn lanes at both the east and westbound directions at the intersections with Route 609 (Daniels Creek Road) and Route 1118 (Plantation Drive) to mitigate traffic congestion and enhance safety. Left-turn lanes would be constructed at both of these intersections, an additional eastbound lane would be constructed on Route 174, and the lanes would be reconfigured. Curb-and-gutter and sidewalk space would be provided as part of the construction of this new lane, and a retaining wall would minimize impacts to adjacent properties.
- Reconstruction of the two northbound lanes of U.S. Route 220 at approximately 1.06 miles north of Route 817 (Tower Road) to approximately 1.54 miles north of Route 817 so that the lanes would be shifted approximately 100 feet closer toward the median to eliminate or minimize a dangerous curve. The new con-
Patrick County
- Roadway improvements on Route 614 (Squirrel Spur Road) from 1.7 miles south of Route 638 (Bell Spur Road) to 1.1 Miles south of Route 638 would include the reconstruction of approximately 0.58-mile of roadway.
- Safety improvements at the intersection of Route 103 (Claudville Highway) and Route 645 (Archie’s Creek Road) to include lowering the grade of Route 103 and grading of the embankment at the intersection to improve driver sight distance.

Pittsylvania County
- Intersection improvements at Route 40 and McBride Lane in the Town of Gretna to enhance safety and promote a growing healthcare and commercial presence in the area.
- Safety improvements including an R-CUT-designed intersection at U.S. Route 29 and Route 642 (Shula Drive) in Hurt to address a history of serious accidents.
- Intersection and access improvements on Kentuck Road in the vicinity of the Ringgold West Industrial Park to address increasing traffic volumes due to an expanded distribution center.

City of Danville
- A roundabout at the intersection of Mount Cross Road and Dimon Drive to promote safe, efficient movement of traffic to include improved access to and from Averett University’s North Campus.
- The construction of a third travel lane on the westbound portion of South Boston Road (U.S. Route 58 Business) between Kentuck Road and Airport Drive.
- Pedestrian mobility improvements in the vicinity of the Danville Mall to include sidewalks, crosswalks, and signalization.

Virginia’s West Piedmont Local Foods Guide Updated
Virginia’s West Piedmont Local Foods Guide, originally published in August 2017, has been updated. This publication includes more than 60 additions compared to the previous iteration, among other changes. While the updated guide is currently available on the West Piedmont Planning District Commission website, hard copies will be printed. In fact, Go Healthy West Piedmont has agreed to fund the printing of 500 guides and 1,000 rack cards, which will be placed at various venues around the region. The rack cards promote awareness of the agricultural heritage of the region, advise consumers that purchases of local products support the area’s economy, and articulate that local food production is responsible for more than $1 billion in economic impact while supporting over 7,000 jobs throughout the region.

Virginia’s West Piedmont Local Foods Guide is divided into multiple sections. The first section is an introduction to the guide, and this is followed by a list of establishments categorized by various products. These categories include Artisan Foods, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), Family Farms, Farm Tours, Farmers’ Markets, Lodging (namely, guest houses and bed & breakfasts), Nursery/Greenhouse, Restaurants, Roadside/Farm Markets, Specialty Products (Organic & Others), Spirits (these include wineries and breweries), and YOU-Pick Farms. The guide includes a matrix which conveniently displays categories of products sold by each establishment. A notable feature of the guide is an interactive map displaying information about each of the establishments. The guide and map can be found at [http://www.wppdc.org/documents-publications/economic-development](http://www.wppdc.org/documents-publications/economic-development).
In June, the Danville Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) Policy Board adopted a study conducted by Dewberry Engineers and Ramey Kemp & Associates. The MPO employed the services of Dewberry in 2017 for the purpose of updating a similar 2009 study it had conducted entitled Transportation Study Mega Park. The intent of this original study was to configure an efficient transportation network to service the Berry Hill Industrial Park. Dewberry identified a connector road between this industrial park and the U.S. Route 58 Bypass (Danville Expressway) as the preferred alternative by which traffic could segue between the industrial park and the Expressway. Since eight years had passed between the time the original study was adopted to the time Dewberry’s services were again utilized, it was determined that an update of that plan was critical to determining the cost and feasibility of the connector road.

Three different connector road alignments were presented within the study, the development of which is planned via a multi-phase approach. Phase I is projected as the 2,500 employee level (Year 2022), Phase II improvements would consist of the 5,000 employee level (Year 2032), and Phase III would comprise the 11,500 employee level (Year 2047). Phase I presents the connector road as a two-lane facility with shoulders as well as improvements to Berry Hill Road and other area roads. Phase II proposes the connector road to be widened to four lanes, additional improvements to be made to Berry Hill Road, the addition of turn lanes at various intersections, and signalization at numerous intersections as employment increases at the Berry Hill Industrial Park. Phase III improvements would include further capacity enhancements to Berry Hill Road, modifications at the Oak Ridge Farms Road interchange to facilitate direct access to the connector road, and further addition of turn lanes and signalization at intersections as the industrial park is built out. As noted in an earlier article within this newsletter entitled Danville MPO, WPPD Localities Submit Round 3 Smart Scale Applications, a Smart Scale application the MPO submitted requesting funding for the connector road utilized this study as a basis for the application.

WPPDC Administers RIDE Solutions Program to Diversify Transportation Options

Beginning July 1, the West Piedmont Planning District Commission (WPPDC) began to administer the RIDE Solutions program throughout the West Piedmont Planning District. This program, formerly administered by the West Piedmont Workforce Investment Board (WIB), provides more options for employees to get to work and for employers to access employees with reliable transportation. The way the program works is that an individual lacking reliable transportation to work, for instance, signs up for the program. An individual who has access to a vehicle also enrolls in the program. Online software, via the RIDE Solutions program, matches individuals with vehicles to those without vehicles who are commuting to and from similar geographic areas. While comprehensive transit systems in developed urban areas such as Danville efficiently transport people to and from work and other destinations, most rural areas, like most of the West Piedmont region, lack such infrastructure, thereby leaving many residents with few transportation options aside from the single-occupancy automobile. The program is administered via grants from the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT).

The WPPDC plans to officially launch the program in September, after which a WPPDC staff member, representing RIDE Solutions, will partner with multiple large employers within the region to promote the program to employees. The goal of the WPPDC will be to sign up numerous employees with and without vehicles, so that an effective carpooling program can be launched throughout the region.

The RIDE Solutions program is based at the Roanoke Valley-Alleghany Regional Commission in Roanoke. Other regions participating in this program include Region 2000, which encompasses the City of Lynchburg and several of its surrounding counties, as well as the New River Valley. In addition to carpooling, RIDE Solutions supports other means of alternative transportation including public transit, bicycling, and walking. The RIDE Solutions website can be visited at https://ridesolutions.org/
Complete Streets Grant Nears Completion, Progress Noted

Since late 2015, the West Piedmont Complete Streets Coalition has advocated for Complete Streets policies to be adopted by localities within the West Piedmont Health District, which is comprised of Franklin, Henry, and Patrick counties, as well as the City of Martinsville. Complete Streets are streets that are designed for all users including automobile drivers, pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit (where applicable). In the urban context, a complete street might include—in addition to vehicular travel lanes—bike lanes or sharrow arrows, sidewalks, and potentially transit accommodations. In the rural context, a roadway with a rideable shoulder or a parallel multi-use trail may comprise a Complete Street. This program has been funded since 2015 by a U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) 1422 Grant, which is intended to minimize obesity and prevent chronic diseases such as diabetes and heart disease via the promotion of active living. While the encouragement of active lifestyles is the main intent of the grant, Complete Streets also facilitates a multi-modal transportation system, whereby residents can more easily travel by foot or bicycle. The grant period concludes in late September, therefore the majority of the work involving Complete Streets will come to a close. However, the Coalition will remain intact and will continue to meet periodically to promote activities related to Complete Streets. The Coalition is comprised of planning, health, disability advocates, and other local government professionals, as well as the proprietor of a local bike shop. In addition, the West Piedmont Planning District Commission (WPPDC) serves as a partner of the Coalition, and Joe Bonanno, a Regional Planner with the WPPDC, serves as the Coalition’s chair.

In its three years of existence, the Coalition has held numerous meetings to further define the concept of Complete Streets and more specifically define its focus. A walkability subcommittee was formed whose responsibility it was to evaluate walkability in the Health District and formulate recommendations related to promoting greater pedestrian mobility and safety. As this effort evolved, the focus was narrowed down to activity centers in the region such as the City of Martinsville and a number of towns spread throughout the Health District. Walkability assessments were subsequently conducted in these areas, and a Virginia Tech graduate student became involved in the initiative. This student tabulated the assessments and compiled the results, as well as recommendations, into a final report. The report, entitled West Piedmont Complete Streets Walkability Assessment Report, can be accessed at http://www.wppdc.org/content/wppdc/uploads/PDF/docs_publications/transportation/wppd_complete_streets_coalition_walkability_assessment_final_report.pdf.

Over the past year, the West Piedmont Regional Bicycle Plan, originally adopted in 2005, was updated by WPPDC staff members. The original plan included a series of mostly on-road recommended bicycle routes, which served as a guide for localities within the WPPD to establish official bicycle routes. The updated plan built upon this effort by forcing additional connections between recommended routes established as part of the original plan, and setting forth priority corridors for bicyclists; a section encouraging localities to promote bicycling via the economic development and health aspects of bicycling was also included in this iteration of the plan. The updated West Piedmont Regional Bicycle Plan can be accessed at http://www.wppdc.org/documents-publications/transportation. This plan will be critical to efforts to implement Complete Streets within the region because it sets out recommendations for where bicycling can best be accommodated.

Numerous successes have recently been realized regarding Complete Streets in the region, and they include the following:

- Henry County is about to update its comprehensive plan, and intends to include provisions for Complete Streets therein.
- The City of Martinsville has a goal within its comprehensive plan to institute Complete Streets policies. Furthermore, the City includes principles of Complete Streets within its new zoning ordinance, and its subdivision ordinance includes references to pedestrian-oriented development.
- Franklin County plans to include a Complete Streets practice recommendation within its updated comprehensive plan, which is anticipated to be completed in 2019.
- The Town of Ridgeway worked with members of the Complete Streets Coalition, as well as a Virginia Tech graduate student as part of a photovoice project in which local residents photographed sidewalk deficiencies and explained what the issues were. This was an initial step in a process of improving pedestrian infrastructure in the town.