Berry Hill Connector Road Funded

In June, the Commonwealth Transportation Board (CTB) rendered a final determination of transportation projects across the state that would be funded, and the Berry Hill Connector Road in Pittsylvania County was among the projects chosen. The Danville Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), staffed by the West Piedmont Planning District Commission (WPPDC), submitted the application for the connector road in August 2018, requesting about $31 million. While the cost of the project is over $33 million, more than $2.5 million is being funded through other sources. The application scored well, ranking third out of 28 applications submitted in VDOT’s Lynchburg Construction District, and 52nd out of 433 project applications statewide. Additionally, the project received the highest economic development score in the state due to the vast amount of developable land at the nearby Southern Virginia Mega Site at Berry Hill, which the project will serve.

David Hoback, the Executive Director of the WPPDC/Danville MPO noted that this “Smart Scale application was a marvelous example of a team effort involving multiple contributors from both local and state levels and would not have happened without these efforts.”

The importance of the connector road cannot be understated, as it will provide a nearly direct route from the Danville Expressway (US Route 29/58) to the vicinity of the 3,500-acre Berry Hill Industrial Park. In the absence of this critical transportation link, vehicles, including many trucks, would have to travel more than two miles further north on the Expressway, transition onto Martinsville Highway (US 58 Business) before quickly transitioning onto Berry Hill Road and doubling-back a significant distance. Such a scenario would make access to the industrial park difficult, would inevitably result in potentially heavy congestion on Martinsville Highway, and would cause traffic volumes on much of Berry Hill Road to increase significantly; drivers may also be encouraged to use local roads so as to avoid the more heavily-trafficked main routes. The Southern Virginia Mega Site at Berry Hill is one of the largest industrial sites on the East Coast, comprising 12 individual development sites, one of which (Lot 4) has been graded, priming the industrial park for investment and development. The industrial park is anticipated to initially employ 2,500, but at full build-out, the facility is projected to accommodate 11,500 jobs. In addition to the benefits of the connector road noted herein, it will greatly enhance the marketability of the site.

The connector road will be approximately two miles in length, extending from the Oak Ridge Farms Road interchange at the Danville Expressway to Berry Hill Road in the vicinity of the Southern Virginia Mega Site at Berry Hill. The road will comprise two 12-ft travel lanes and 8-ft paved shoulders. The ample width of the shoulders will provide bicyclists a comfortable place to ride, and the connector road’s location along the general Beaches to Bluegrass Trail route, as defined in the West Piedmont Regional Bicycle Plan, may enable this road to become a segment of that route. The connector road will be able to be widened to accommodate additional travel lanes as part of future phases, as demand dictates.

The total cost of the connector road will be $33,456,704, but approximately $2.5 million of that figure will be funded by other means. The majority of the funding—nearly $31 million—will be provided by Route 58 Corridor Development Funds, rather than Smart Scale funds. These are bond funds that have been identified for use along the U.S. Route 58 corridor, and for specific projects that support this corridor. The connector road is anticipated to be completed in 2025. In the absence of this successful Smart Scale application submitted by the Danville MPO, however, these funds would not have been made available for this project.
**RIDE Solutions Offers Revolutionary Ridership App, Spreads its Wings**

In July 2018, the West Piedmont Planning District Commission (WPPDC) officially became the coordinator of the RIDE Solutions program in the West Piedmont Planning District. Since that time, staff has worked hard to promote the brand among individuals and businesses throughout the region. For those not familiar with RIDE Solutions, the program promotes transportation options apart from the single-occupancy automobile, which include carpooling, vanpooling, transit, bicycling, walking, and telecommuting. RIDE Solutions is a Transportation Demand Management (TDM) organization, an entity which facilitates the management of roadway demand by promoting alternative forms of transportation, including those just mentioned. The organization was established in Roanoke in the mid-2000s for the purpose of improving the region’s air quality by replacing automobile trips with trips using other transportation modes. From Roanoke, the program has expanded to encompass the New River Valley, the Lynchburg region, and the West Piedmont Planning District.

During the previous year, RIDE Solutions underwent revolutionary changes, rendering the brand far more marketable and user-friendly than ever before. Until earlier this year, the program utilized an antiquated database and map of commuters throughout our service area, which was required to be manually updated with participant information. In the early months of 2019, RIDE Solutions entered a partnership with Agile Mile—a Massachusetts-based firm specializing in TDM ride-matching. Now, commuters matching with one-another for the purpose of carpooling, for example, is as easy as downloading an app to one’s smartphone or spending a few seconds to set up an account on a PC. With this powerful new tool, commuters are matched instantly. Additionally, every time they embark on a green commute via carpool/vanpool, bike, walking, or transit, they accumulate points and become eligible for discounts at eateries, retail establishments, and entertainment venues in addition to qualifying to participate in generous raffles. Additionally, our website has been completely refreshed, resulting in ease of use and relevant content shown by region. Check out RIDE Solutions’ redesigned website and our new app at [www.ridesolutions.org](http://www.ridesolutions.org).

While RIDE Solutions promotes multiple modes of transportation, the main focus in the West Piedmont Planning District at this time is carpooling, since this is the most feasible form of transportation for most commuters, aside from the single-occupancy automobile. Awareness of the program throughout the region has been generated via multiple avenues. First, staff participated in career fairs and a major area trade show to promote the brand among area businesses and establish initial contacts. As a next step, staff met with local business representatives to articulate how RIDE Solutions could enhance mobility options for their employees, facilitating reliable transportation and minimizing absenteeism. RIDE Solutions also leased billboard space in strategic areas along major transportation corridors throughout the region, most recently along the U.S. Route 220 and 29 corridors. Lastly, RIDE Solutions partnered with a nationally-recognized media firm to produce short commercials for television and personal devices including smartphones and tablets.

As noted, the WPPDC’s RIDE Solutions coordinator met with representatives of area businesses to promote the program. Staff met with representatives of Monogram Foods and Radial, Inc. Most recently, staff held a sign-up “tabling” event at The Results Companies, which serves locally as a call center offering technical assistance to a nationally-known media firm, and employs more than 400. The local RIDE Solutions coordinator will continue to reach out to area businesses and establish program awareness and to communicate the many benefits the program could potentially offer.

In early August, multiple RIDE Solutions representatives attended the annual ACT (Association for Commuter Transportation) International Conference, held this year in New York City. The Conference featured numerous sessions which provided a wealth of information relating to the latest trends in TDM practices, as well as multiple networking opportunities with other professionals in the field. Some of the topics discussed included efforts employers can take to promote TDM throughout their organizations; guidance to establish effective microtransit systems; marketing strategies to “Gen-Z,” known as “the new millennials;” and many more.
During summer 2018, localities and regional organizations across the Commonwealth submitted Smart Scale applications, as part of the bi-annual submission process. As noted in the lead article of this publication, the Berry Hill Connector Road, submitted by the Danville MPO, was among the project applications selected for funding. The West Piedmont Planning District Commission, which staffs the MPO, provided guidance and information to member localities with regard to their Smart Scale applications, and hosted meetings with VDOT expertise on hand. Other successful applications submitted in the region included the following:

**Franklin County**

Improvements to U.S. Route 220 and Pleasant Hill Road / Sontag Road (Route 619): Construction of a “Restricted Crossing U-Turn” (R-CUT) (innovative) design at U.S. Route 220 and Pleasant Hill Road, which will 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 will be included in this design. A separate R-CUT configuration will also be constructed at the nearby intersection of U.S. Route 220 and Sontag Road. In contrast to a traditional intersection, an R-CUT does not permit traffic to directly turn left from a minor road onto a major road. Rather, the traffic would turn right and perform a U-Turn at a designated location to the right of the minor approach at the intersection. This configuration promotes safety, as it prevents left turns at the intersection, thereby reducing the number of conflict points. This configuration also saves drivers time and promotes more efficient use of the roadway.

**Improvements to U.S. Route 220 and Grassy Hill Road (Route 919):** This project will include the construction of a non-signalized Continuous Green-T design at this intersection. A Continuous Green-T is designed so that traffic entering a major road from an intersecting road turns right as is the case with a traditional intersection; however, left-turning traffic, when crossing the median of a major roadway, enters the traffic stream via a form of an acceleration lane to enhance safety. The project will also 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.

**Improvements to Booker T. Washington Highway (Route 122) and Lost Mountain Road (Route 636):** This project will include the addition of right and left-turn lanes with median separation at the intersection of Route 122 and Lost Mountain Road. Also to be included in this project will be the construction of median-separated right and left-turn lanes on Route 122 at the Booker T. Washington National Monument, and a multi-use path along Route 122 to provide opportunities for active transportation and exercise between Lost Mountain Road and the Westlake community. Access management will also be a component of this project.

**Patrick County**

Claudville Highway Intersection Improvement: This project will improve safety at the intersection of Claudville Highway (Route 103) and Hatcher’s Chapel Road / Archie’s Creek Road (Route 645). Specifically, the project will involve the reduction in the height of a grade just east of the intersection along Route 103, enabling better sight distance for drivers entering Route 103 from Hatcher’s Chapel Road. The project will also trim back terrain along Route 103 to the east of the intersection to improve sight distance for drivers turning off of Archie’s Creek Road onto Route 103.

**Pittsylvania County**

U.S. Route 29 and Shula Drive (Route 642): This project, located in northern Pittsylvania County, south of Hurt, will involve the relocation of the western portion of the intersection of Shula Drive further south along U.S. Route 29, while leaving the eastern segment of the intersection in its current location. This intersection has experienced a number of serious crashes involving vehicles crossing U.S. Route 29, and it is anticipated that relocating the western part of this intersection southward will dramatically increase safety at this location.
Danville MPO Begins Updating Long-Range Transportation Plan, Seeks Public Input

In early 2019, the Danville MPO Policy Board approved the retention of EPR consultants to update the Danville Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) Long-Range Transportation Plan. The MPO Long-Range Transportation Plan is a document which is required to be updated on a five-year basis and which sets forth transportation priorities over a 25-year planning horizon. The current iteration of the plan was completed in 2015 and had a planning horizon out to 2040; the updated plan will subsequently have a planning horizon to 2045. This plan is required by the federal government, via the FAST Act—the most current transportation authorization funding bill—in order for the MPO to receive federal funding for transportation projects. The Danville MPO encompasses the City of Danville and the urbanized portions of Pittsylvania County which are adjacent to the city; the agency is staffed by the West Piedmont Planning District Commission.

A main component of the MPO Long-Range Transportation Plan is the Constrained element, which consists of a list of projects reasonably anticipated to be funded over the 25-year life of the plan. A supplement to the Constrained portion is the Vision Plan, which includes proposed projects that are of a lesser priority than those in the Constrained element, and which have not been allocated funding; these are considered aspirational. The plan is multimodal, encompassing roadway, transit, bicycle/pedestrian, freight, rail, and air improvements.

The FAST Act puts forth new requirements to be incorporated into MPO long-range plans. One requirement is the inclusion of performance targets to measure and track performance of multiple components of the transportation system including safety, bridge and pavement condition, system, and transit. The intent of incorporating performance measures into the MPO planning process is to encourage MPOs to apply for transportation projects that will result in a safer, efficient, and functional transportation system. Additional requirements of long-range plans are that they include facilities which support intercity travel, as well as consider projects that enhance mitigation of stormwater, system reliability and resilience, and tourism and travel.

As noted, the process to update the current long-range plan has begun, and public and stakeholder input is being sought to incorporate improvements to the Danville MPO’s transportation system to 2045. More information about the Danville MPO Long-Range Plan can be found at https://www.danvillempo2045.com/, and we encourage you to provide input via this site. In addition, there will be upcoming public meetings at which residents and stakeholders will be able to provide input into this plan. The completion date for this plan update is August 2020.

Intercity Bus Service Announced for West Piedmont Planning District

In July, it was announced that the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT) would launch two new intercity bus routes which will serve the West Piedmont Planning District. One route will begin in Martinsville, travel east to Danville, and then continue northeast to Richmond via the Route 360 corridor, where it will terminate. In Richmond, passengers can transfer to other bus or rail services if they wish to continue to Washington, D.C., Hampton Roads, or other destinations. The second route will begin in Danville and travel north along the Route 29 corridor, terminating in Washington, D.C.

This new service is an expansion by DRPT of the Virginia Breeze intercity bus service which began operating in 2017; the route begins in Blacksburg, stops at a number of towns and cities along I-81 North, and then continues east along I-66, stopping at Dulles International Airport and Union Station in Washington, D.C. The Virginia Breeze exceeded ridership projections nearly three-fold during its first year of service.

The DRPT is currently working to identify potential bus stop locations, and service is anticipated to begin during spring 2020. The planning process for this new service took place largely during the early months of 2019, which staff of the West Piedmont Planning District Commission participated in. The West Piedmont Planning District was last served by intercity bus service in 2016, at which time Greyhound left the Danville market.

Interested in receiving this flyer by e-mail? Contact us at the following:

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