FINAL REPORT

AN ASSESSMENT OF THE VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION'S PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PRACTICES AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF A PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT TOOLKIT: PHASE II

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DISCLAIMER

The contents of this report reflect the views of the authors, who are responsible for the facts and the accuracy of the data presented herein. The contents do not necessarily reflect the official views or policies of the Virginia Department of Transportation, the Commonwealth Transportation Board, or the Federal Highway Administration. This report does not constitute a standard, specification, or regulation.

ABSTRACT

Well-implemented public involvement programs have many potential benefits for transportation agencies including enhanced credibility with the public, decisions reflecting community values, and reduced risks of litigation (O'Connor et al., 2000). The objectives of this study included a broad assessment of the Virginia Department of Transportation's (VDOT's) public involvement practices and the development of a public involvement "toolkit" for use by VDOT staff. The toolkit describes an array of techniques that may be used from the earliest planning stages of transportation projects through their construction, noting advantages, disadvantages, special considerations in the use of each technique, and references and website links for further reading.

The assessment of VDOT's current public outreach practices included information gathering from citizens and VDOT staff. A total of 948 citizens attending several types of VDOT meetings and hearings completed written surveys that included questions about how they prefer to be notified about upcoming VDOT meetings, how they prefer to be informed about projects, and how they prefer to be updated on the status of plans or projects. Focus groups and written "self evaluation" surveys provided information on the perceptions of VDOT staff about the effectiveness of VDOT's public involvement approaches and their suggestions for improving communication with the public and public involvement.

Responses to the citizen and VDOT staff surveys indicated that the public is often unclear about the steps in VDOT's planning, project development, and public involvement processes. Citizens and VDOT staff also agreed that frequent updates on project status are desirable and that the public should get more feedback about how their input is really used in decision making. VDOT staff sees a need for more strategic communications planning and evaluation for major projects and more coordinated project communications within the agency. VDOT staff also believe that broader [staff] understanding of the responsibilities of different VDOT divisions in the project development process would improve communications within VDOT.

Study recommendations include the following: VDOT staff should use the toolkit and a soon-to-be released interactive public involvement tool by the Federal Highway Administration to choose effective public involvement approaches; VDOT divisions should collaborate on ways to increase the public's understanding of the planning, project development, and public involvement processes; and as soon as the state budget situation permits, the Outreach Section of VDOT's Office of Public Affairs proposed by the Governor's Commission on Transportation Policy should be staffed to provide greater in-house strategic communications planning and evaluation capability for major projects.

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INTRODUCTION

Public involvement can be defined as "the process of two-way communication between citizen and government by which transportation agencies and other officials give notice and information to the public and use public input as a factor in decision making" (O'Connor et al., 2000). There have been significant changes in the way transportation decisions are made in the last decade, evidenced by the growing use of the term *public engagement*. The factors underlying these changes include:

- the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) of 1991, with its emphasis on early, proactive, and sustained citizen input, and special outreach targeted at traditionally underserved populations

- the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21), enacted in 1998

- a 30-year trend of devolution of power away from the federal government and toward state and local government (O'Connor et al., 2000).

The benefits of a well-implemented public involvement program include (O'Connor et al., 2000):

- public ownership of policies, with supportable decisions

- decisions that reflect community values

- efficient implementation of transportation decisions

- reduced risks of litigation

- lower probability of being forced to revisit decisions

- enhanced agency credibility.

Clearly, a number of these benefits can reduce the costs of project or plan development for a department of transportation (DOT) or other public agency.

The fundamental steps in many public involvement activities in transportation include:

1. Notify citizens about a plan or project and their opportunities to learn more about it in a public forum and provide input.

2. Inform the public about the project, using any of a variety of communication approaches, and receive their input in large or small public meetings or by other means (involve).

3. Respond to the public's input, providing feedback to them about how the input has been incorporated, and provide information updates as the plan or project evolves.

Public involvement processes can be time-consuming and resource intensive for the staff of DOTs, including the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT). When citizens feel that their concerns have not been adequately addressed, however, costly project delays, lawsuits, and even project cancellations can occur. Staff of VDOT's Location & Design (L&D) Division cited a recent project (Colonial Avenue, Roanoke County) that had already been delayed 1½ years so that citizens' objections could be addressed. Although the project was scoped with the county's involvement, at least $100,000 in added construction costs (from the delay alone) is expected. Another project (Route 608, Bedford County) may be cancelled because of unresolved citizen concerns. The cost of project cancellation for Bedford County would be $180,000. These two examples suggest that the financial impact of citizen opposition to a larger number of VDOT projects (including higher-dollar projects) could easily be in the millions of dollars.

Public involvement practitioners recognize that one size does *not* fit all for involving the public in transportation decisions. Different situations and different stakeholder groups often call for different approaches. For these reasons, a detailed inventory (toolkit) of public involvement techniques has the potential to enhance VDOT's outreach and communications with the public. Such a toolkit could provide VDOT central office and district staff with a valuable resource to guide public outreach in planning processes for highway, transit, or other modal (e.g., bicycling or pedestrian) improvements and in project development.

PURPOSE AND SCOPE

The researchers were asked to develop a comprehensive public involvement toolkit by then-VDOT Assistant Commissioner for Administration Constance S. Sorrell (Ms. Sorrell is

currently VDOT's Chief of Policy and Organizational Development). As the former Richmond District Administrator for VDOT, Ms. Sorrell knew that public involvement techniques such as mediation (used in the I-95 Bryant Park interchange project) and stakeholder advisory groups (used for the James River Bridge re-decking project in Richmond) could be effective ways to resolve citizen concerns about VDOT projects. The scope of the study was subsequently expanded to include a broader assessment of VDOT's current public involvement practices, in response to suggestions from VTRC's Transportation Planning Research Advisory Committee (TPRAC) and a task group created specifically for this project. Citizens, VDOT staff, and staff from metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) were all included in data-gathering activities.

The toolkit was to describe a broad array of public involvement techniques, with information on the uses, advantages, disadvantages, and special considerations of each, with website links and references for further reading (including case studies, where possible). In addition, the toolkit was to include techniques that could be employed during the transportation planning, location, design, and construction stages.

METHODS

The following tasks were undertaken to gather information on VDOT's current public involvement practices and to assemble and synthesize information for the development of the toolkit:

1. literature review

2. personal contacts

3. written "self-evaluation" survey of VDOT staff involved in public outreach

4. focus group discussions and interviews with VDOT technical and public affairs staff

5. surveys of citizens attending VDOT project meetings and hearings

6. surveys of citizens attending VDOT's financial planning and programming (FP&P) meetings.

7. written survey of MPO staff

8. assessments of VDOT's public outreach by the Governor's Commission on Transportation Policy (CTP) and Siddall, Matus, and Coughter Consultants (SMC)

9. preparation of a public involvement toolkit.

Literature Review

There is extensive literature available on public involvement. An extensive literature review was performed at the beginning of the study, and it was supplemented with additional reviews of relevant papers and presentations during the course of the study. In the course of the review, the researchers also reviewed many websites—sites maintained by state DOTs and MPOs; sites created for specific transportation projects (e.g., Springfield Interchange [2003]); and some sites maintained by citizen proponents or opponents of specific transportation projects.

Personal Contacts

A number of groups and individuals are very active in public involvement. Through a variety of mechanisms, the researchers contacted a number of these for applicable input to the toolkit:

- the Transportation Research Board's Committee on Public Involvement in Transportation (A1D04). One of the researchers (Amy A. O'Leary) is a member of this committee, as is VDOT's Director of Public Affairs Lynda J. South.

- the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2)

- professionals in the U.S. Department of Transportation, both in the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), who advise the states on public involvement

- staff from a number of VDOT's central office divisions and districts (some of whom served on the study's task group)

- staff in Virginia's MPOs.

Written Self-Evaluation Survey of VDOT Staff Involved in Public Outreach

Another study task was to survey a wide range of VDOT staff involved in public outreach, from the commissioner's staff to district administrators and district section staff. This self-evaluation survey conducted in the summer of 2001 included questions about VDOT's citizen notification and feedback techniques and how informative different elements of VDOT's public meetings are. Additional questions on the self-evaluation survey focused on topics such as communications between VDOT divisions and districts about public outreach and the need for strategic communications planning for major projects. The self-evaluation survey instrument is provided Appendix A.

The researchers designed a sample for the self-evaluation study that included those with definite public outreach responsibilities (e.g., district administrators and resident engineers), central office and district public affairs staff, and individuals with a variety of other occupations

within VDOT who were recommended by the study task group. Table 1 shows the target sample of 194 individuals to whom the survey was initially sent.

The survey was emailed to the target sample as a .pdf document to facilitate quicker returns. One reminder email with a duplicate copy of the survey was sent to the sample. Respondents were given the options of faxing back their completed surveys or returning them by U.S. mail (for anonymity). Respondents were also invited to provide a copy of the survey to co-workers involved in VDOT's public outreach. For that reason, the sample of individuals who completed surveys differs from the sample of individuals to whom the survey was initially sent.

Table 1. Initial Sample for VDOT Public Outreach Self-Evaluation Survey

VDOT Occupation	No. Surveys Sent
District Administrator	9
District Engineer	21
Resident Engineer	48
Public Affairs Staff	28
(Central Office and Districts)	
District Right of Way Manager	9
District Environmental Manager	9
District Traffic Engineer	9
District Planner	5
Project Task Group Member	13
Others Suggested by Task Group	43
Total	194

Focus Group Discussions and Interviews With VDOT Technical and Public Affairs Staff

Focus groups were held with staff members from four VDOT technical (engineering) divisions: Transportation Planning (TPD), Environmental, L&D, and Structure & Bridge (S&B). The focus groups were held partly to help identify the responsibilities of the proposed new Outreach Section in the Office of Public Affairs. The new section, with proposed staffing of 4.0 FTEs, was recommended by the Governor's Commission on Transportation Policy (CTP), whose review of VDOT occurred early in the course of this study (CTP, 2002). The study's primary customer (VDOT's Chief of Policy & Organizational Development) suggested the four technical divisions included in the focus groups.

VDOT central office division administrators were contacted by email about the purpose of the focus groups and asked to nominate potential participants. The groups ranged in size from four participants (TPD and Environmental) to eight participants (L&D and S&B); district staff participated in some of the groups. The discussions were 2 hours in length, and a standard set of questions was used across all groups. Although not strictly a focus group in format or group size, a fifth group interview was held with approximately 20 district and central office public affairs staff members. They met in Richmond, Virginia, for one of their regularly scheduled statewide meetings during the period when the focus groups were being conducted. Individual interviews averaging 1 hour in length were also conducted with four district public affairs officers (these interviews had been planned before it was known that the larger group discussion

could be held with public affairs staff). A standard set of questions was also used for the individual interviews.

After the focus groups sessions and interviews were transcribed, they were content-analyzed for similar and dissimilar themes, which are summarized in the "Results" section of this report.

Surveys of Citizens Attending VDOT Project Meetings and Hearings

The researchers developed a written survey and mailed it to samples of citizens who attended several VDOT public hearings (Appendix B). The survey was designed to assess citizens' views about effective public involvement and communication methods and to solicit their suggestions for improvement in VDOT's public outreach.

Three VDOT highway projects were included in the citizen surveys: the Coalfields Expressway design hearings (held in three locations), hereinafter referred to as Coalfields; the Harrisonburg Eastern Loop Citizen information meetings (two locations), hereinafter referred to as Harrisonburg; and the I-73 location hearings (three locations), hereinafter referred to as I-73. These highway projects do not represent all areas of the state (e.g., the "golden crescent" from Northern Virginia to Hampton Roads is not represented). Coalfields and I-73 hearings were identified as target survey sites in earlier research by the authors on VDOT's public hearing format (O'Leary et al., 1999). Coalfields and I-73 were targeted for at least two reasons: (1) they represented major VDOT public hearings, and (2) the I-73 hearing featured an "open microphone" for citizens who signed up to make public comments. The open microphone had not been a component of VDOT hearings since the adoption of the open forum approach in the early 1990s. The Harrisonburg project was later identified as a survey site because it represented a project at a much earlier stage of development than the first two. The researchers attended a number of these meetings and observed the proceedings first-hand.

The questions developed for the citizen surveys focused in particular on citizens' (1) notification preferences, (2) evaluations of the effectiveness of various parts of the hearing, and (3) preferences for modes of communications from VDOT following the public meeting. Members of the study task group contributed to the content of the questionnaire, which became slightly more detailed from its first use to its last use. At the suggestion of VDOT Salem District staff, response categories on the I-73 survey were more specific than for the other two surveys. In addition, VDOT's L&D Division used newspaper "flexi-tags" to notify citizens about the Harrisonburg and I-73 hearings on an experimental basis but did not do so for Coalfields. (A "flexi-tag" is a plastic tag attached to the plastic wrapper on a home-delivered newspaper, with information about the hearing date, time, and location.) Newspaper "headliners" were used on an experimental basis for I-73 only. (Headliners are adhesive labels with public hearing details affixed directly above the name of the newspaper on its first page.) Since the questionnaire was virtually the same for all three meetings, only a copy of the I-73 version is included in Appendix B.

The number of surveys mailed to citizens attending each of the eight locations sampled was in proportion to the share of total attendance at all hearings for a particular highway project (e.g., if 50% of the total attendance for all I-73 hearings were at the Roanoke location, 50% of all I-73 surveys mailed by the researchers were sent to attendees at the Roanoke location).

Surveys of Citizens Attending VDOT's FP&P Meetings

A two-page written survey was designed by the researchers and mailed to all citizens whose names were listed on the attendance sheets for the district FP&P meetings held in July 2000 (these meetings were formerly called "pre-allocation hearings"). A version for the Northern Virginia District is included in Appendix C. Surveys were designed so that they could be folded for return mailing, and return postage was provided. Local officials (e.g., members of boards of supervisors) and legislators who attended the FP&P meetings were not sent surveys because a separate effort to interview those groups was being planned by a VDOT task group. (Public official interviews were later undertaken as a part of the consultant "communications audit" for the Office of Public Affairs, described later in this report.) Table 2 summarizes the initial distribution of the FP&P surveys. Interestingly, citizen attendance at the FP&P meetings tended to be higher in VDOT's less urbanized, western districts.

Although the numbers of surveys sent may seem small, the FP&P meetings are different from the other kinds of VDOT meetings and hearings that citizens typically attend. The focus is on detailed financial information, the meetings are typically held during working hours, and the agenda for the meeting may mean a long wait for citizens who wish to make a public comment.

Table 2. FP&P Citizen Surveys Mailed, by District

District	FP&P Surveys Mailed
Bristol	91
Culpeper	36
Fredericksburg	10
Hampton Roads	46
Lynchburg	45
Northern Virginia	35
Richmond	46
Salem	58
Staunton	47
Total	414

Written Survey of MPO Staff

The last group included in the data-gathering efforts comprised the nine MPOs in Virginia. Under ISTEA and TEA-21 requirements, MPOs must have public involvement plans. MPO staff often have several years of experience with public outreach and can provide valuable insights about which outreach approaches are effective and which are not. The MPO survey instrument (see Appendix D) was created to be as similar as possible to the VDOT self-evaluation survey instrument.

**Assessments of VDOT's Public Outreach by the Governor's Commission
on Transportation Policy and Siddall, Matus, and Coughter Consultants**

During the course of this study, then-Governor Gilmore's CTP spent 18 months examining many areas of VDOT policy and procedure and making recommendations for improvements. The group's membership included then-Lieutenant Governor John Hager, legislators, members of the Commonwealth Transportation Board (CTB), and members of the business community. The CTP's review included many areas of VDOT's operations, project delivery, and policies, including communications and public outreach. VDOT staff developed detailed working plans in response to the 100+ recommendations in the CTP's final report, which was published in December 2000 (CTP, 2000; VDOT, 2001).

In late 2001, VDOT's Office of Public Affairs commissioned a statewide "communications audit" to address a number of the CTP's recommendations concerning VDOT's public communications. Other state DOTs (e.g., Georgia) have found similar audits to be very useful. The audit, conducted by the firm of Siddall, Matus, and Coughter Consultants (SMC) included six studies and gathered information from numerous groups that comprise the audience for VDOT's communications: the CTB, business leaders in the state's major urban areas, legislators, local government officials, and citizens. The findings and recommendations of the CTP's review and SMC's communications audit are summarized in this report, as they represent additional sources of information on VDOT's public outreach and public communication approaches.

Preparation of a Public Involvement Toolkit

The researchers developed the toolkit (i.e., a descriptive inventory, or listing) of public involvement techniques from the literature review, compiling an extensive list of techniques, considerations in their use, and relevant case study references (where possible). The first step was to review publications with information on numerous techniques (i.e., technique inventory documents). These included:

- *Public Involvement Techniques in Transportation* (Howard/Stein-Hudson and Associates and Parsons Brinckerhoff Quade and Douglas, 1996)

- *The IAP2 Public Participation Toolbox* (International Association for Public Participation, 2000-2003).

- *Hear Every Voice: A Guide to Public Involvement at Mn/DOT* (Minnesota Department of Transportation, 1999)

- *Project Development Methodologies for Reconstruction of Urban Freeways and Expressways* (Saag, 1996)

- *Public Outreach Handbook for Departments of Transportation* (Wilson and Associates, 1994)

- *Guidebook for Transportation Case Studies: A Process for Effective Decision-Making* (Smith, 1999).

The researchers identified additional content for the toolkit using other publications by DOTs, MPOs, public involvement professionals, and other organizations and materials obtained at conferences and courses. The toolkit is provided in Appendix E.

Techniques included in the toolkit are categorized as useful for informing the public, involving the public in decision-making, or both. The toolkit does not provide specific guidance about which public involvement techniques should be used when specific kinds of issues arise, etc., for three reasons. First, the effectiveness of a particular technique in a specific context is often influenced by social and cultural factors (e.g., the most effective technique for a small, homogeneous community in Southwest Virginia may not be the most effective for a large, highly urbanized, diverse community in Northern Virginia). Second, several other guides for the use of particular techniques at different stages in project development, etc., are already available (or soon will be). The toolkit includes previously published reference tables created by staff at the Minnesota DOT. The tables show the appropriateness of specific techniques at different stages in the planning process, and at different stages of project development, and the time, money, and staff resource requirements associated with specific techniques. Third, as the toolkit was being developed, the researchers learned that FHWA was developing an interactive CD-ROM resource that would allow transportation professionals to answer a series of questions about specific transportation projects. The resource then suggests public involvement techniques likely to be most effective. (See Appendix E.)

RESULTS

VDOT Self-Evaluation Survey

Survey Return Rate

A precise survey return rate cannot be calculated for the self-evaluation survey since recipients in the original sample were invited to distribute the survey to other VDOT colleagues not included in the original sample. Some information was obtained, however, about the VDOT occupations of the survey respondents (see Table 3). A total of 139 completed surveys were received; 194 were initially sent.

VDOT Staff Ratings of Notification Techniques and Newspaper Ad Content

Two questions on the survey asked VDOT staff to identify the most effective way(s) to notify citizens about upcoming public meetings and the least effective way(s) in a check-all-that-apply question formats. Responses to both questions are shown in Table 4. Mailed postcards, newspaper advertisements or notices, and signs along the proposed route were favored most by VDOT staff. Radio announcements and newspaper feature stories were also rated as relatively effective.

Table 3. VDOT Occupations of Self-Evaluation Survey Respondents

VDOT Occupation	Number of Respondents	(% of Total)[1]
District Administrator	5	4
District Engineer	10	7
Resident Engineer	26	19
District Section Head	28	20
District Section Staff	18	13
Central Office Division Administrator	4	3
Central Office Division Staff	21	15
Other Occupation	27	9
Total	139	100

[1]All percentages shown in the tables in this report are rounded to the nearest whole number. Thus the total of the columns may not equal 100.

Table 4. Self-Evaluation Survey Respondents' Ratings of Notification Techniques

Notification Technique	% Choosing Technique As One of the Most Effective	% Choosing Technique As One of the Least Effective
Postcard in mail	80	8
Newspaper ad	60	21
TV announcement	28	12
Sign on proposed route	59	16
Kiosk	10	54
Flexi-tag on newspaper	10	30
Headliner on newspaper	8	34
Newsletter from VDOT	35	12
Newspaper feature story	45	7
Radio announcement	44	19
VDOT website	35	31
Roadway billboards	23	18
(Number of cases)	(139)	(139)

Additional questions on the self-evaluation survey asked whether VDOT needs to redesign the look of its paid newspaper notices for upcoming hearings and whether the public understands the engineering descriptions often used in such notices. A majority of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that VDOT needed to redesign its notices (Table 5). In addition, more than half (57%) of the VDOT respondents did not think that the public understands the engineering terminology used in newspaper notices (Table 6).

Table 5. Responses to Whether VDOT Needs to Redesign Look of Its Paid Newspaper Notices

Response	%
Strongly disagree	6
Disagree	33
Agree	39
Strongly agree	22
Total	100
Number of cases	113

Table 6. Responses to Whether Public Understands Engineering Descriptions Used in Newspaper Notices

Response	%
Strongly disagree	19
Disagree	38
Agree	43
Strongly agree	0
Total	100
Number of cases	113

VDOT Staff Views on Public's Understanding of Planning, Project Development, and Public Involvement Processes

The survey asked VDOT respondents to assess the public's understanding of the steps in VDOT's planning process, the steps in its highway project development process, and its understanding of the public involvement procedures for each (a total of four questions). Responses to these questions are shown in Tables 7 through 10.

A very high percentage of VDOT respondents believe that the steps in the transportation planning process are unclear to most citizens. A majority of respondents also thought that public involvement procedures for planning are unclear to most citizens. One in four respondents wrote additional comments about citizens' understanding of the planning process (themes in the write-in comments are discussed later in this report).

More than two thirds of the VDOT respondents said that the steps in VDOT's project development process are also unclear to most citizens. Approximately 20% of the respondents wrote in additional comments about citizens' understanding of the project development process.

Table 7. Responses to Whether the Steps in VDOT's Transportation Planning Process Are Clear to Citizens

Response	%
Unclear to most citizens	88
Somewhat clear to most citizens	7
Quite clear to most citizens	5
Total	100
(Number of cases)	(139)

Table 8. Responses to Whether Steps in VDOT's Public Involvement Process for Planning Are Clear to Citizens

Response	%
Unclear to most citizens	65
Somewhat clear to most citizens	29
Quite clear to most citizens	5
Total	100
Number of cases	136

Table 9. Responses to Whether Steps in VDOT's Project Development Process Are Clear to Citizens

Response	%
Unclear to most citizens	70
Somewhat clear to most citizens	27
Quite clear to most citizens	3
Total	100
Number of cases	139

Table 10. Responses to Whether Project Development Public Involvement Procedures Are Clear to Citizens

Response	%
Unclear to most citizens	50
Somewhat clear to most citizens	41
Quite clear to most citizens	9
Total	100
Number of cases	137

Fully half of the VDOT respondents thought project-related public involvement processes are also unclear to most citizens (although they think citizens understand project-related public involvement more than they understand either the project development or planning processes) (Table 10).

VDOT Staff Ratings of Public Communication Techniques

Questions on the self-assessment survey asked VDOT respondents to rate the effectiveness of specific techniques for communicating with the public (during public meetings and afterward). Table 11 shows VDOT staff's rankings of how well each of a number of techniques informs citizens who attend a hearing or meeting.

One-on-one discussions between VDOT staff and citizens received more than twice as many excellent ratings as any other technique. Nearly every VDOT respondent rated this technique excellent or good. Written handouts, followed by videos and plan displays, received a

Table 11. VDOT Staff Ratings of Techniques Used to Inform Public in Meetings

Technique	% Excellent	% Good	% Fair	% Poor	Total %	n
Written handouts	21	62	16	2	100	135
Video	29	45	21	5	100	126
Road plans or displays	30	44	22	4	100	134
One-on-one discussions with VDOT staff	65	31	4	0	100	136
Public question and answer session	16	44	26	14	100	127
Public comment session	10	32	34	23	100	128

majority of ratings of "good" or better for informing the public. Public comment sessions (i.e., individual citizens making comments into a microphone) were the least favorably rated technique. Public question-and-answer sessions were rated more positively than public comment sessions; a majority of respondents rated these "good" or better.

VDOT respondents were also asked to identify the most and the least effective techniques for providing feedback or information updates to citizens after a public meeting. These questions were in a check-all-that-apply format; responses are shown in Table 12. A high percentage of VDOT staff rated newsletters mailed to citizens as effective. Project websites, news releases or newspaper articles, and VDOT speakers at meetings of community groups (i.e., speakers' bureaus) were also rated among the more effective feedback techniques. The techniques most often rated as ineffective for providing feedback to the public included kiosks at shopping centers, Internet chat rooms, and written documents listing citizens' comments for the record. The latter technique has been used by VDOT for years (e.g., after highway design hearings).

In addition to asking VDOT respondents how feedback should be provided to citizens (i.e., what techniques should be used), the survey also asked *how often* citizens should receive "status updates" on planning activities and highway projects. Responses to the two questions are shown in Table 13. For planning activities, most VDOT staff who chose a specific time interval chose 6 months or longer.

Table 12. VDOT Survey Respondents Ratings of Post-Meeting Feedback Techniques

Feedback Technique	% Rating as One of *Most* Effective	% Rating As One of *Least* Effective
Newsletter mailed to all who attended hearing	83	4
Written document listing citizens' comments for the official record	24	40
News features on TV	22	30
News releases or newspaper articles	55	16
Kiosk at shopping center	6	55
VDOT speakers at meetings of community groups	43	10
Project website	55	19
Toll-free telephone hotline	20	31
Project Internet chat room	6	48
Radio news features	21	31
Number of cases	139	139

Table 13. Respondents' Views About How Often VDOT Should Provide "Status Reports" to Citizens (%)

Update Should Be Provided	For a Planning Activity	For a Highway Project
Monthly	3	11
Every 3 months	17	24
Every 6 months	35	26
Yearly	14	4
Never	0	0
Another time interval	32	34
Total	100	100
Number of cases	139	139

For project updates to citizens, most VDOT respondents indicated shorter time intervals as optimal: one third of VDOT staff chose every 3 months or more often, and another one fourth chose every 6 months. As was the case for planning activity updates, though, one third of the survey respondents thought a time interval other than any specified in the question was best.

Communications within VDOT and Communications Planning for Major Projects

The last few questions on the self-evaluation survey asked about the quality of outreach-related communications between VDOT divisions and districts, whether more coordination of communications about major projects is needed, and whether more strategic communications planning for major projects is needed. Responses to those questions are summarized in Tables 14 through 16.

VDOT respondents made positive assessments of the communication between VDOT divisions and field units on public outreach, with a majority indicating that the communications were generally "good" or better (Table 14). Although there were few "poor" ratings, one in four respondents rated communications within VDOT as only "fair."   Almost one third of the respondents wrote comments about ways to improve communications about public outreach within VDOT.

Although assessments of outreach-related communications within VDOT were positive overall, a majority of VDOT staff agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "VDOT needs more coordination of different divisions' and field units' communications about major projects" (Table 15). Three fourths of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that VDOT needs to do more strategic communications planning for major projects (Table 16).

Table 14. Ratings of Communications Between VDOT Divisions and Field Units Involved in Outreach

Communication is…	%
Usually very good	10
Usually good	49
Usually fair	25
Usually poor	8
It varies	7
Total	100
Number of cases	138

Table 15. Responses to Statement "VDOT Needs More Coordination of Different Divisions' and Units' Communications About Major Projects"

Response	%
Strongly disagree	3
Disagree	14
Agree	58
Strongly agree	25
Total	100
Number of cases	107

14

Table 16. Responses to Statement "VDOT Needs to Do More Strategic Communications Planning for Its Major Projects"

Response	%
Strongly disagree	4
Disagree	18
Agree	52
Strongly agree	26
Total	100
Number of cases	103

Suggestions for Improvements in VDOT's Public Outreach

The final question on the self-evaluation survey was a write-in item asking VDOT staff to suggest ways that public outreach and involvement activities could be made more appealing for citizens. More than half of the respondents wrote in one or more suggestions. Major themes identified in the comments are described here.

VDOT Should Provide More Information to the Public

The theme of the 29 comments in this category was that VDOT should provide more information to the public. Several respondents thought that more information meetings are needed, both in the early planning stages and shortly before actual construction begins. The information provided should always be well organized and free of technical jargon, and communication professionals should be involved. VDOT staff should be very familiar with the projects and able to discuss them in detail with citizens. Another suggestion was that VDOT should use information to educate citizens about the planning and project development processes.

- "Presentations should vary more to appeal and invite more conversation, exchange of ideas, understanding, and access. Timing should involve earlier and more frequent opportunity for answers and involvement during the process."

- ". . . VDOT could hold public workshops to educate the public on the transportation planning and highway project development process. Most people do not realize the impact/role that city councils and Boards of Supervisors have on these two processes. They truly think that VDOT makes all of the decisions!"

VDOT Should Publicize Its Projects and Project Meetings More

The focus of the 15 comments in this category was that VDOT should publicize its projects and project meetings more and that a variety of communication approaches should be used to reach a broad audience. Suggestions included newspapers, TV, postcards, websites, email, newsletters, radio, and message boards. Representative comments included:

- "Remember that not everyone affected has a computer to check the web site. The elderly or lower income need a process that would give them information such as a notice or newsletter in their mail."

- "Get the project experts more involved with the news media early on in the process, and keep continuous contact with them."

Stakeholder Involvement by Local Officials and Interest Groups Should Be Increased

The nine comments in this category focused on more stakeholder involvement by local government officials and by interest groups. Respondents suggested that local politicians and government officials be involved early in the planning and project development process. Some respondents suggested working closely with interest groups (e.g., environmental groups). Representative comments included:

- "[Conduct] Additional meetings with local elected officials and county/city staff prior to public meetings to bring them up to date and to enhance their ownership and 'buy-in' to the project."

- "Maybe go to our opponents, i.e., Sierra Club, Coalition for Smarter Growth, Piedmont Environmental Council, and ask them what else can we do."

VDOT Should Do More to Solicit Citizen Input

These eight comments focused on the need for additional meetings to receive citizen input on plans or projects. Representative comments included:

- "[Conduct] Exploratory or pre-public hearing meetings with citizens work well to test the waters."

- "We need to have a speakers' bureau composed of those involved with the project to get out to community groups . . . explain the projects and combat misinformation."

Other Suggestions

The remaining write-in comments by VDOT staff included the following themes:

- the importance of using the Internet effectively in VDOT's public outreach

- the importance of cross training for VDOT staff, i.e., the training for engineers in communications skills and the training for public affairs staff in the engineering aspects of project development.

Ten respondents commented on VDOT's internal organization and operations. Suggestions included:

- Decentralize public outreach to the districts.

- Allow a manageable project workload that enables a high level of outreach.

- Do not make public involvement the same for all projects.

- Distinguish between the work of the communications experts and the engineering experts.

- Communicate internally.

Focus Groups and Interviews with VDOT Technical and Public Affairs Staff

Content analysis of the transcripts from the group interview with public affairs staff and the focus groups with technical staff revealed the following seven themes:

1. objectives VDOT needs to accomplish in its public outreach

2. the environment for VDOT's public outreach

3. citizens' expectations and frustrations in the outreach process
4. public outreach challenges for VDOT

5. intra-organizational factors in the delivery of public outreach

6. how to improve the quality of VDOT's communications with the public

7. optimal roles for engineering and public affairs staff

Suggestions about the role of the CTP-proposed Outreach Section in the Office of Public Affairs surfaced in several of the theme areas (particularly improving communications with the public).

Multiple themes characterized some of the comments made in the focus groups and interviews. Nonetheless, the themes represented a useful way to categorize a large amount of interview content.

Objectives VDOT Needs to Accomplish in Its Public Outreach

The engineering focus group participants readily pointed out several broad objectives they thought VDOT needed to achieve in its public outreach:

- to meet all legal mandates for public involvement in transportation projects (specifically, those of FHWA)

- to educate citizens about how government works (public affairs staff also emphasized this objective).

The Environment for VDOT's Public Outreach

Several of the engineering focus groups said that the environment for VDOT's public outreach has prominent features, including:

- Many citizens do not understand VDOT's processes (e.g., planning and environmental) or how projects actually get started.

- Many citizens do not understand how government works in general.

- Citizens often do not think regionally (partly because of the legal separations between counties and cities).

- Design in the project development process has overarching importance.

Citizens' Expectations and Frustrations

The engineering focus group participants had a number of things to say about the expectations that citizens bring to VDOT's public outreach. One participant said "Citizens are in the door with questions before the project survey." There was much discussion about the fact that VDOT involves citizens much earlier in the project development process than it once did. Although several staff said this was a definite improvement, others pointed out problems associated with earlier public involvement (i.e., some citizens expect project details and specifics if *any* kind of public meeting is held). Citizens may be frustrated if VDOT presents only concepts, rather than specifics, at the meeting (the researchers observed this at the Harrisonburg information meetings). There were concerns that VDOT's revised project development process will result in even fewer specifics being known at the time of the earliest public meetings. Citizens' frustrations about project delays due to VDOT funding shortfalls were also mentioned.

A district public affairs officer identified another expectation that citizens have—that VDOT will notify them individually (e.g., by postcard or letter) about upcoming public hearings. She noted that hearings might occur long after property title searches, making it difficult for VDOT to do this (because the occupants living at specific addresses may have changed).

Public Outreach Challenges for VDOT

Focus group and interview respondents identified a number of challenges VDOT faces in its public outreach, including:

- well-organized opposition groups

- lack of specific federal guidance (and FHWA feedback) for some of VDOT's outreach activities

- the inherent conflict between inviting the public to provide input and the ultimate decision-making power wielded by regulatory agencies and the CTB

- engaging citizens' interest in long-range planning and meetings related to it

- tight project development schedules

- "professional citizens"—a small, not necessarily representative group of citizens who come to many VDOT meetings

- the risks VDOT takes in setting precedents in response to public input (e.g., citizens will say, "Do what you did over there")

- citizens who say they were unaware of a VDOT public meeting despite the use of multiple notification techniques.

Intra-organizational Factors in the Delivery of Public Outreach

A number of intra-organizational factors that affect VDOT's public outreach were mentioned by the technical and public affairs staff. These included:

- perceptions that the work of a division/group is not well understood by other divisions/groups or by VDOT executives

- lack of formal VDOT policies regarding review processes for written material developed for the public

- concerns that suggested revisions to written materials are not incorporated

- differences in what staff regard as a reasonable time frame to complete in-house reviews of written materials for the public

- lack of communication (or delayed communication) between the central office and the field about technical changes to projects

- doubts among some VDOT staff that the expense of some public outreach is justified by the results

- the transportation decision-making structure in Virginia (i.e., the CTB may elect not to follow VDOT's recommendations)

- questions among central office staff about differences in the way public outreach is handled in different districts

- perceptions that technical staff are not receiving enough recognition when projects are successfully completed

- time pressures in project development.

Perceptions that the work of a division is not well understood by other divisions were not limited to engineering staff and public affairs staff—some engineering divisions perceive that their work is not well understood by *other engineering divisions*. Each of the groups included in the data gathering expressed views that other groups would benefit from a more detailed understanding of what they did.

Review processes for written materials (e.g., public hearing notices) generated substantial discussion in most of the focus groups and interviews. Errors and omissions in written materials can cause problems for everyone involved in VDOT's public outreach. Technical staff identified tight project schedules and the short length of most written materials for the public as their reasons for regarding a 1-day review timeframe as reasonable. Public affairs staff mentioned that a 1-day timeframe is a problem if they happen to be out of the office for a day.

Staff groups do not agree about the extent to which VDOT's written materials can use less technical language and still fully comply with federal National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) requirements and other applicable laws. Some district public affairs staff also expressed uncertainty about whether they had authority to request changes in written material since there are no VDOT policies that confer such an oversight role. There are also different perspectives on whether VDOT's written materials are created chiefly to meet legal requirements (and therefore should not take large amounts of time to produce) or whether materials should be created with the goal of marketing VDOT ("putting a face on VDOT") in a journalistic, reader-friendly way.

Improving the Quality of VDOT's Communications with the Public

There were many suggestions in both the focus groups and interviews about how VDOT could improve the quality of its public communications. The suggested steps included:

- thinking "out of the box" (e.g., about notification methods, outreach techniques used, types of meetings held etc.)

- doing a better job with the timeliness of information delivery

- developing and distributing information from one place within VDOT versus the "shotgun" approach

- avoiding inconsistencies in public outreach

- improving the quality of project brochures

- doing newspaper advertisements differently

- focusing on "branding"—aiming for a consistent look in VDOT printed materials (as a corporation would do)

- developing more Q&A "fact sheets" and informational brochures on topics of interest to the public

- identifying the best point in project development to involve the public

- devoting more time to staff preparation before hearings

- interacting differently with the public at meetings (e.g., actively presenting the displays to citizens versus waiting for them to ask questions)

- following a consistent procedure when staff are contacted by the media

- maximizing the availability of information about VDOT on the Internet
- developing a glossary of technical and engineering terms for citizens

- developing a VDOT "style book" for written materials

- compiling a staff directory with areas of expertise noted (VDOT staff are sometimes uncertain about who in VDOT has specific technical expertise)

- publicizing how VDOT has responded to citizen input to a greater degree

- improving estimates of the time needed to do public involvement well (for more accurate project scheduling)

- developing communications plans with performance targets and evaluating outreach against the plan.

There was a number of comments about how VDOT's newspaper advertisements might be improved (apart from more in-house review to catch errors). Giving the advertisements a "fresh look" and designing them to *motivate* citizens, not just notify them, was one suggestion.

Making sure that advertisements really describe what will be done in a project (in terms that ordinary citizens can understand) was another suggestion. Revising the listed contacts in advertisements to include fax numbers and email addresses of VDOT staff was also suggested. "Stop buying ads in the back of the paper," another group said.

Both groups and individuals said that "branding," or achieving a consistent "look and feel," for all of VDOT's printed materials was a very important way that VDOT could improve its communications with the public. An engineering staff member noted: "It's not 'boilerplate'—maybe we should strive for more consistency." For VDOT, a branding approach could be reflected in templates VDOT could develop and use (or revise, if any exist) for different types of printed materials. Some respondents contended, however, that any branding initiatives in VDOT would need support from the highest levels of the organization to succeed.

Both engineering and public affairs staff agreed that VDOT could benefit from more staff preparation before public hearings. In some instances, staff are not assembled for a "pre-meeting" until a few hours before the hearing. Now that VDOT is holding more hearings with a public question-and-answer component, advance preparation is especially important, one respondent said. Another suggestion was that engineering and public affairs staffs collaborate on "talking points" for major projects. Another suggestion was that VDOT refine its use of advance press conferences prior to public hearings and evaluate the approach. "It gets factual information to people before the public hearing," one individual said.

All of the focus groups endorsed maximizing the use of the Internet to make information available. "If VDOT put extensive information on the web, 99% of the questions would be answered," several members of an engineering focus group said. Another group advocated putting all information presented at a public hearing on a website (as well as in VDOT offices) immediately after the hearing

There was more agreement between the engineering and public affairs groups on one action item than any other—*the importance of developing communications plans for major projects* (this is confirmed by the VDOT self-evaluation survey results). This step would also include measurable goals (or targets) and an evaluation component.

Some of the comments focus group participants made in discussing the need for communications plans with performance targets and evaluation were:

- "Sometimes public involvement seems to happen by accident, versus by a plan."

- "A plan could help . . . improve estimates of the time required for public involvement in project development."

- "[We] need year-by-year milestones [in communications plans]."

- "We need measurable goals and targets for public involvement."

- "Evaluation of communications plans—this is the weak link in what VDOT does. We don't go back and measure."

Optimum Roles for Engineering and Public Affairs Staff

The focus groups also had an opportunity to discuss optimum roles and/or responsibilities for VDOT public affairs and engineering staff. Many participants discussed the optimum roles they perceived for their own group (whether engineering or public affairs) and for other groups.

The following points were made in the discussion of the optimum role for the L&D Division (which has had a lead role in project public involvement) and other central office engineering divisions:

- L&D and other technical divisions are proficient at answering the public's specific questions about projects and explaining what the project will look like.

- L&D is proficient at informing citizens about what to expect and how a project, no matter how small, will affect them.

- L&D is well suited to advise VDOT districts about public outreach, in particular regulatory situations (e.g., how to address the concerns of the Park Service about a project).

- Visuals, renderings, etc., are done well by L&D and its consultants.

- L&D is proficient at the logistics and administrative work to make hearings happen within a particular time frame.

- L&D is well suited to overseeing big corridor studies (with substantial district input).

Optimum roles identified for VDOT district staff (both engineering and public affairs) included:

- overseeing smaller secondary projects (so that citizens can identify with a local VDOT district staff member)

- making presentations to community groups

- determining the best type of hearing to hold in a particular locality

- performing project development work; district engineering staff's involvement in project development work is "vital for understanding and credibility," one person said.

Optimum roles that were identified for public affairs staff (both central office and district) included:

- answering media inquiries

- serving as conduits—connecting citizens and the media with staff who can answer their technical questions

- overseeing the editing of written communications

- being involved in all projects (not just the major ones)

- answering questions about project time frames.

On one additional point—whether public affairs staff should "translate" technical information for citizens—there was less agreement. Engineering and public affairs staff agreed that some individuals are simply better communicators of technical concepts than others. Some participants in the engineering focus groups mentioned the strong communication skills that public affairs staff have. A number of public affairs staff, however, expressed the view that VDOT's engineering experts are best suited to explain technical concepts to the public.

Surveys of Citizens Attending VDOT Public Hearings and Meetings

This section summarizes the written survey responses from 978 citizens attending the Coalfields, Harrisonburg, and I-73 hearings.

Return Rates

Table 17 summarizes the overall and project-specific citizen survey return rates. The highest return rate was for the I-73 hearing, and the lowest was for Coalfields hearing. (There was, however, a longer time delay associated with the mail out of the Coalfields survey than for the other two hearings.)

Table 17. Return Rates for Citizen Surveys by Project and Hearing Location

Project/Hearing Location	Surveys Mailed	Surveys Returned	Return Rate
Clintwood	248	81	33%
Birchleaf	147	44	30
Grundy	175	42	24
Total for Coalfields	570	167	**29**
Spotswood	289	105	36
Turner Ashby	369	146	40
Total for Harrisonburg	658	251	**38**
Rocky Mount	274	122	44
Martinsville	326	121	37
Roanoke	561	317	56
Total for I-73	1161	560	**48**
Total for All Projects	2389	978	**41%**

Characteristics of Survey Respondents

The survey asked citizens how long they had been following the developments in the project that was the focus of the hearing they attended. It also asked how many VDOT hearings or meetings they had attended previously. The responses to these questions are summarized in Tables 18 and 19. Not surprisingly, the Harrisonburg respondents said they had been following project developments for the shortest length of time. Relatively many (40%-60%, depending on the project) respondents said they had never attended a VDOT meeting or hearing before.

Table 18. How Long Citizens Had Been Following Developments in Project

Length of Time	Coalfields	Harrisonburg	I-73	Overall
6 months or less	18%	52%	16%	26%
7 months–1 year	13	32	21	23
2 years	40	11	35	29
3 years	14	0	16	12
4 years	14	4	12	10

Table 19. Number of Previous VDOT Hearings Survey Respondents Had Attended

Previous VDOT Hearings Attended	Coalfields	Harrisonburg	I-73	Overall
None	47%	60%	40%	46%
1 or 2	27	25	40	34
3 or 4	13	11	16	14
5 or more	13	4	4	6

Ratings of Notification Methods

The survey asked citizens how they had been notified about the hearing or meeting they attended in a check-all-that-apply question format. Some of the response categories used on the I-73 survey were more specific than those used for the Coalfields or Harrisonburg surveys. In part, these differences reflect suggestions by public affairs staff in Salem District about the wording of the survey responses and the fact that particular notification methods were used only at the I-73 hearings (as indicated by blanks in the tables for other locations). I-73 survey respondents, for example, were asked whether they had been notified by a newspaper advertisement (placed by VDOT) or by a newspaper feature story (written by newspaper staff), whereas Coalfields and Harrisonburg survey respondents were simply asked if they had been notified by the newspaper. A "newspaper announcement" could be an advertisement or a feature story. How citizens were actually notified about the hearing they attended is summarized in Table 20.

In general, more survey respondents reported being notified by the newspaper than any other way, as Table 20 shows. The number of citizens who reported being notified by the experimental newspaper "flexi-tags" or "headliners" was comparable to the number who said they were notified through TV. The percentage of Harrisonburg respondents who said they were notified in a "grassroots" way (i.e., by a friend or neighbor) was twice as large as the corresponding percentages for Coalfields and I-73. Relatively more I-73 attendees reported

Table 20. How Citizens Were Notified About the Hearing or Meeting

Notification Method	Coalfields	Harrisonburg	I-73	Overall[1]
Newspaper[2]	80%	77%		78%
Newspaper ad[3]			63%	63
Newspaper feature story[3]			57	57
TV	23	33	42	36
Radio	13	33	18	21
Friend or neighbor	29	54	26	34
Web site[2]	3	2		2
VDOT web site[3]			8	8
Other group's web site[3]			3	3
Mailing[2]	26	21		23
Postcard[3]			37	37
Newsletter in mail[3]			34	34
Newspaper flexi-tag[4]		38	38	37
Newspaper headliner[3]			40	40
Kiosk[3]			13	13
Billboard[3]			13	13
Another method	7	12	8	9

[1] Overall percentages based on the number of citizens whose surveys included a
   specific response choice.
[2] Asked of Coalfields and Harrisonburg hearing attendees only.
[3] Asked of I-73 hearing attendees only.
[4] Asked of Harrisonburg and I-73 attendees only.

being notified by mail. Very few of the citizens in the sample reported being notified by a web site (fewer than 5%). The sample did not, however, include residents of Northern Virginia (where Internet access is higher than in many other areas of the United States).

Citizens were asked a second question about hearing notification methods: What were the *best* way(s) for VDOT to inform citizens about [any] upcoming public meetings? That question was also in a check-all-that-apply format, and responses to it are summarized in Table 21. Compared to Coalfields and Harrisonburg, only half as many I-73 respondents identified the newspaper as one of the best notification methods. This may reflect the fact that VDOT used more notification techniques for I-73 than for the other two projects. Among the I-73 respondents, some other techniques (postcard, TV) were endorsed as much (or nearly so) as the newspaper.

Citizens' Reasons for Attending the Hearing or Meeting

Survey respondents were asked to indicate their reasons for attending the hearing in a check-all-that apply format. Their answers are summarized in Table 22.

Table 21. Best Meeting Notification Methods: Citizens' Views

Notification Method	Coalfields	Harrisonburg	I-73	Overall[1]
Newspaper announcement[2]	81%	78%		79%
Newspaper ad[3]			45%	45
Newspaper feature story[3]			34	34
TV	34	53	40	42
Radio	30	54	20	30
Friend or neighbor				
Web site[2]	16	9		12
VDOT web site[3]			7	7
Other group's website[3]				
Postcard or letter[2]	54	44		48
Postcard[3]			47	47
Newsletter in mail[3]			35	35
Newspaper flexi-tag[4]		34	30	31
Newspaper headliner[3]			27	27
Kiosk[3]			4	4
Sign on proposed highway[3]			12	12
Billboard[3]			10	10
Another method	4	3	5	4

[1] Overall percentages based on the number of citizens whose surveys included a specific response choice.
[2] Asked of Coalfields and Harrisonburg hearing attendees only.
[3] Asked of I-73 hearing attendees only.
[4] Asked of Harrisonburg and I-73 attendees only.

Table 22. Citizens' Reasons for Attending the Hearing or Meeting (%)

Reason for Attending	Coalfields	Harrisonburg	I-73	Overall[1]
To see maps of the project	86%	64%	68%	70%
To see impacts on a specific property	64	48	56	55
To ask VDOT staff questions one-on-one	53	38	46	45
To make a comment for the official hearing record	34	44	46	43
General interest in community affairs	59	60	43	50
To learn about possible environmental impacts	13	41	33	31
To learn about possible social or economic impacts	46	61	43	48
Another reason (write in)	9	26	12	15

[1]Overall percentages based on the number of citizens whose surveys included a specific response choice.

Not surprisingly, many citizens reported attending so that they could see maps of the project and/or see impacts on specific properties (perhaps theirs). Somewhat fewer attended to ask VDOT representatives questions or to make comments for the official hearing record. There are interesting differences among the three hearings in the percentages of citizens who said they

attended because of a general interest in community affairs or to learn more about possible environmental or social/economic impacts.

Citizens' Ratings of Different Elements of the Hearing

Citizens were asked to rate how well different elements of the hearing informed them using a 4-point scale that ranged from "excellent" to "poor" and included a "can't say" option. The results are summarized in Table 23. Plan displays, written handouts, and one-on-one discussions with VDOT staff were rated "excellent" or "good" by 75% to 80% of the respondents overall.

Table 23. Citizens' Ratings of Different Hearing Elements

Hearing Element/Rating	Coalfields	Harrisonburg	I-73	Overall[1]
Written handouts				
Excellent	42%	15%	32%	30%
Good	49	59	52	53
Fair	7	22	12	14
Poor	1	4	4	3
Road plans or poster displays				
Excellent	50	22	48	42
Good	41	47	38	41
Fair	7	21	8	11
Poor	2	9	6	6
One-on-one discussions with VDOT staff				
Excellent	43	21	35	34
Good	41	44	44	43
Fair	13	22	15	16
Poor	4	14	6	7
One-on-one discussions with consultants[2]				
Excellent	37			37
Good	45			45
Fair	14			14
Poor	5			5
[Public] question and answer session[3]				
Excellent		16	26	22
Good		47	48	48
Fair		28	17	21
Poor		9	9	9

[1] Overall percentages based on number of citizens with valid answers to a specific question ("can't say" responses are excluded).
[2] Asked only on Coalfields survey.
[3] Asked only on Harrisonburg and I-73 surveys.

The Harrisonburg respondents' answers to some of the questions were less positive than those of the Coalfields and I-73 respondents in a number of instances. In part, these differences may reflect the fact that there are more uncertainties associated with the Harrisonburg project than for either of the other two projects (because it is at an earlier stage). Since the survey did

not include any questions about whether citizens favored or opposed the project itself, it is unknown whether there was a higher turnout of project opponents at the Harrisonburg meeting than at the I-73 or Coalfields hearings.

Citizens' Views on the Clarity of VDOT's Project Development Process and Public Involvement Procedures

Citizens were asked to assess how clear they thought VDOT's highway project development process and public involvement procedures were to "most people." Their answers are summarized in Tables 24 and 25. A majority said that both were either "somewhat clear to most citizens" or "unclear to most citizens." Compared to Coalfields and I-73, a much higher percentage of Harrisonburg respondents rated both "unclear to most people."

Citizens were also given the opportunity to write in additional comments about the clarity of the project development process and public involvement procedures. The percentages of citizens writing in comments are shown in Table 26.

Table 24. Citizens' Views on Clarity of VDOT's Highway Project Development Process

Highway Project Development Process Is…	Coalfields	Harrisonburg	I-73	Overall
Unclear to most citizens	24%	70%	30%	39%
Somewhat clear	49	23	44	40
Quite clear	27	7	26	21

Table 25. Citizens' Views on Clarity of VDOT's Public Involvement Procedures

Public Involvement Procedures Are…	Coalfields	Harrisonburg	I-73	Overall
Unclear to most citizens	19%	60%	28%	35%
Somewhat clear	55	35	45	44
Quite clear	26	5	26	21

Table 26. Citizens Writing Comments About VDOT Highway Project Development or Public Involvement Procedures (%)

Percentage of Citizens Commenting on	Coalfields	Harrisonburg	I-73	Overall
Highway project development processes	15%	30%	22%	23%
VDOT public involvement procedures	5	21	13	14

VDOT Communication Approaches for Project Updates: Citizens' Preferences

The survey asked citizens to indicate what way(s) they preferred for VDOT to communicate with them about the results of the hearing and or to provide future status reports about the project. This question was in a check-all-that-apply format, and citizens had the opportunity to write in additional comments. Their responses are summarized in Table 27.

Overall, majorities of respondents endorsed newspaper feature articles or news releases, newsletters by mail, and TV news features for project updates. Although few respondents reported having been notified about the hearing via a web site, approximately one third endorsed project web sites for providing information updates. Notably more Harrisonburg respondents endorsed radio news features as a communications approach.

Citizens were also asked how frequently they would like VDOT to provide "status reports" on the project (Coalfields, Harrisonburg, or I-73) to them, using the communications approaches they favored. Responses to that question are summarized in Table 28. A majority of citizens wanted VDOT to provide project "status reports" to them at least every 3 months (1 in 4 endorsed monthly communications).

Table 27. Best Ways for VDOT to Communicate Hearing Results or Future Project News: Citizens' Preferences

Communications Approach	Coalfields	Harrisonburg	I-73	Overall
Newsletter by mail	79%	68%	64%	68%
Written document summarizing citizen comments for the record[1]	13	30	15	18
TV news features	57	65	48	54
Newspaper feature articles or news releases	81	81	62	70
Information kiosks	8	17	8	10
VDOT speakers at meetings of community groups	40	39	20	28
Project website	30	28	28	28
Toll-free telephone hotline	24	17	12	15
Project Internet "chat room"	8	8	5.0	6
Radio news features	29	53	23	32
Another communications approach (write in item)	2	11	14	11

[1] Summary document available in VDOT or county office for review.

Table 28. How Often Citizens Want VDOT to Provide Project "Status Reports" to Them

Preferred Frequency	Coalfields	Harrisonburg	I-73	Overall
Monthly	28%	28%	23%	25%
Every 3 months	46	45	38	41
Every 6 months	21	13	22	19
Once per year	2	2	7	5
Never	0	0	0	0
Some other interval (write in item)	3	12	10	9

Citizens' Suggestions for Improvements in VDOT Meetings

The last question on the survey was a write-in item, asking citizens "What could VDOT do to make its public meetings better?" Half of the 948 respondents wrote in suggestions or comments. The highest percentage came from Harrisonburg attendees, where two thirds wrote in comments. These suggestions were content-analyzed and are categorized later in this report (with those provided by FP&P survey respondents).

Written Survey of Citizens Attending VDOT's FP&P Meetings

Return Rates

Table 29 summarizes the overall return rate (42%) for the FP&P citizen surveys and the return rate for each of the nine VDOT districts.

Although the numbers of surveys sent and returned look small in comparison to those for the other citizen surveys (e.g., for the I-73 hearing), the FP&P meetings are different than project-related hearings and attract fewer citizens. Their focus is on detailed financial information, the meetings are typically held during working hours, and the meeting agenda may mean a long wait for citizens who wish to make a public comment.

Table 29. Return Rates for Citizen FP&P Surveys, by District

District	FP&P Surveys Mailed	FP&P Surveys Returned	Return Rate
Bristol	91	25	28%
Culpeper	36	19	53
Fredericksburg	10	6	60
Hampton Roads	46	24	52
Lynchburg	45	19	42
Northern Virginia	35	13	37
Richmond	46	18	39
Salem	58	33	57
Staunton	47	18	38
Total	**414**	**175**	**42%**

Characteristics of Survey Respondents

The survey asked citizens how many VDOT highway public meetings they had attended previously. Their responses, shown in Table 30, reveal a more "veteran" group than the Coalfields, Harrisonburg, and I-73 respondents: more than half of the FP&P citizen respondents had attended at least three VDOT hearings, and many had attended five or more.

Table 30. Number of Previous VDOT Hearings Attended by FP&P Respondents

Number of Hearings	% Respondents
None	21
1 or 2	22
3 or 4	19
5 or more	39

Notification Methods

The survey asked citizens how they had learned about the FP&P meeting in a check-all-that-apply question format. Their responses are summarized in Table 31. The percentages of citizens notified by newspaper, acquaintances, and mailings were similar. The percentage notified by newspaper, however, was much lower than the corresponding percentages for the Coalfields, Harrisonburg, and I-73 projects.

Citizens who attended the FP&P meetings were also asked to rate the *best* ways for VDOT to notify the public about upcoming hearings (also a check-all-that-apply question). The answers are summarized in Table 32. The percentage of citizens who thought the newspaper was among the best notification methods was substantially higher than the percentage who said they *were actually notified* about the FP&P meeting by the newspaper. Similarly, many more citizens endorsed VDOT using radio and TV as notification methods than reported actually being notified about the FP&P meeting by radio or TV.

Table 31. How Citizens Were Notified About FP&P Meeting

Notification Method	% Respondents
Newspaper	36
TV	2
Radio	1
Friend or neighbor	30
Website	6
Mailing	34

Table 32. Best Meeting Notification Methods for VDOT to Use: Views of FP&P Attendees

Notification Method	% Respondents
Newspaper announcement	77
TV announcement	34
Radio announcement	36
Sign posted on highway	30
Website	23
Postcard or letter from VDOT	47

Citizens' Reasons for Attending the FP&P Meeting

Citizens were asked about their reasons for attending the FP&P meeting in a check-all-that-apply question format. Responses are summarized in Table 33. The most frequently-cited

Table 33. Citizens' Reasons for Attending FP&P Meeting

Reason for Attending	% Respondents
To express positive or negative views about area projects	54
To suggest additional projects for VDOT funding	38
General interest in community affairs	47
To get information about possible environmental effects of projects	15
To get information about possible economic/ community impacts of projects	34

reasons for attending were to express views (positive or negative) about area projects, and "general interest in community affairs."

VDOT's Project Development Process and Public Involvement Procedures: Views of FP&P Attendees

Citizens attending the FP&P meetings were asked to indicate how clear VDOT's highway project development process and public involvement procedures for highway projects were for "most people." The results are summarized in Tables 34 and 35. Two thirds of the respondents said that the highway project development process was "unclear to most people."

Nearly half of the respondents said that VDOT's public involvement procedures were "unclear to most people, " and nearly the same percentage said public involvement was "somewhat clear" to most people.

Table 34. FP&P Attendees' Assessments of Clarity of VDOT's Highway Project Development Process

Highway Project Development Process Is	% Respondents
Unclear to most people	64
Somewhat clear to most people	29
Quite clear to most people	7

Table 35. FP&P Attendees' Assessments of Clarity of VDOT's Public Involvement Procedures

Public Involvement Procedures Are	% Respondents
Unclear to most people	48
Somewhat clear to most people	44
Quite clear to most people	8

VDOT Communication Approaches for Information Updates: FP&P Attendees' Preferences

The FP&P survey asked citizens to identify the best way(s) for VDOT to communicate with interested citizens about the results of the FP&P meeting and the subsequent development of the Six Year Improvement Program.   Responses to that check-all-that-apply question are

shown in Table 36. There was substantial endorsement of newsletters mailed to citizens and newspaper articles or news releases, and a VDOT "speakers bureau" was endorsed by nearly half of the respondents. There was relatively little endorsement of some newer communication approaches (e.g., telephone hotlines and kiosks), but web sites were favored by relatively many respondents. A written document with citizens' or local officials' comments (available for review in a local VDOT or county office) was endorsed by only one-fourth of respondents, however. The latter communication approach has been commonly used within VDOT.

Table 36. Best Ways for VDOT to Provide Status Updates: FP&P Attendees' Views

Communication Approach	% Respondents Endorsing
Newsletter mailed to all hearing attendees	71
Written document listing meeting comments by citizens and public officials	25
TV news features	41
Radio news features	23
Newspaper articles or news releases	73
Toll-free telephone hotline	15
Information kiosk in shopping center	14
Project website	39
Project Internet "chat room"	6
VDOT speakers at meetings of community groups	49

Suggested Improvements for VDOT Meetings: Write-in Comments from Citizens

The last question on the survey was a write-in item, asking citizens "What could VDOT do to make its public meetings better?" Two thirds of the FP&P respondents wrote in one or more suggestions. These suggestions were reviewed and categorized along with the suggestions from citizens who attended the other VDOT public hearings and meetings and are discussed in the following section.

Content analysis of 670 write-in comments in response to the question "What could VDOT do to make its public meetings better?" revealed a number of distinct themes, including:

- VDOT does a good job.

- VDOT should take a particular action with regard to a specific project or VDOT should do better.

- VDOT should provide more information or be more responsive.

- VDOT should improve their meeting or hearing logistics.

- VDOT should consider citizen input more.

- VDOT should impose time limits on citizens making public comments.

- VDOT should improve its project displays.

- VDOT should publicize meetings more.

VDOT Does a Good Job

These 154 responses (representing nearly 25% of all citizen comments) noted that VDOT did a good job with its public hearings without providing any specific suggestions for improvement. More than half (58%) of these comments were from attendees at the I-73 hearings. Notably fewer of the total comments by FP&P and Harrisonsburg attendees were in this category. A typical comment was:

- "I was very impressed with the preparation VDOT put into this meeting. They seemed to have thought of everything. . . . I can't think of any improvements to be made" (I-73, Roanoke).

VDOT Should Take a Particular Action With Regard to a Specific Project or VDOT Should Do Better

These 106 comments comprised 16% of the total. This category includes statements of support or opposition for a project (e.g. "don't build I-73"), responses not directly related to the question asked (e.g., "we need a new wheel tax"), or criticisms of VDOT (e.g., "I for one do not trust VDOT's motives for public involvement").

VDOT Should Provide More Information or Be More Responsive

The 76 responses in this category were 12% of the total. They included complaints that VDOT officials were not sufficiently knowledgeable about particular topics or that VDOT failed to provide specific information of interest to the respondent. A number of citizens requested that VDOT staff make a presentation to citizens at the hearing (to provide a project overview). Other respondents (especially FP&P meeting attendees) wanted more information on the transportation decision-making process and procedures. Examples of comments in this category are:

- "Have people who are better informed of the project answer questions about the proposed route" (I-73, Roanoke).

- "A speaker at a rostrum could give a short explanation of developments/proceedings/decisions on a ½ hr. basis. Maps, displays, cost charts, etc., become quite crowded and many folks are unable to become informed" (Coalfields, Clintwood).

VDOT Should Improve Their Meeting or Hearing Logistics

These 68 comments (10% of the total) focused on when and where VDOT meetings should be held. Nearly 33% of the comments were submitted by those attending the FP&P meetings (which were held during the workday).

Some citizens who had attended an evening meeting or hearing (Coalfields, Harrisonburg, and I-73) suggested daytime or weekend meetings. Conversely, some who attended the daytime FP&P meeting suggested night meetings. A number of respondents suggested more meetings on a particular project to ensure that everyone had an opportunity to attend. Avoiding meetings during holiday seasons was another common theme (the I-73 hearings were held in December). Examples of comments in this category are:

- "Have meetings at schools on weekends during the daytime because some people work 3-11 or 11-7 and of course cannot make some of these meetings. Older people can't see to drive at night and don't want to be out" (I-73, Rocky Mount).

- "Hold meetings for longer hours and or on different dates. The CTB's financial planning and planning meetings should include evening hours for public involvement" (FP&P, Northern Virginia).

VDOT Should Consider Citizen Input More

Many of the 55 comments in this category (8% of the total) reflected skepticism or distrust about VDOT's intentions to solicit and act upon citizen input. Some respondents also said that citizen input should be sought earlier in a project. A number of citizens suggested that VDOT should take extra measures to explain how citizens' input is really used:

- "VDOT needs to instill public confidence that the public hearings are part of the planning process (if this is the case), and that the decisions haven't already been made as to (1) whether to build at all, or (2) which route is chosen" (I-73, Roanoke).

- "Local people were concerned that decisions had been made that were legally irreversible . . . procedures should be changed such that the decisions are changeable even near the end of the conceptual design process . . . the general public is not likely to get involved until the process is well along the way" (Harrisonburg).

VDOT Should Impose Time Limits for Citizens Making Public Comments

Three fourths of these 51 responses (8% of the total) were from individuals who attended the Harrisonburg hearing, which included a public comment component (i.e., an "open microphone"). They included suggestions to limit the time allocated to each speaker and/or to ensure that meetings were shorter. The researchers attended one Harrisonburg meeting that lasted until midnight.

VDOT Should Improve Their Project Displays

Many of the 38 comments in this category (6% of the total) suggested that VDOT improve its project maps (displays) at hearings. An underlying theme was that citizens attended the hearing to determine whether the project would have impacts on their properties; therefore, the displays should be detailed enough to allow them to make that determination accurately. Several respondents noted that computer simulations of the completed project would be beneficial. Typical comments in this category included:

- "[VDOT should provide] Better maps showing fields, timber, farms, business & homes that will be destroyed" (I-73, Rocky Mount).

- "[VDOT should] Present [a] picture showing a completed highway construction project with grass growing on slopes. Should rebut criticism of ugly scars on landscape by doing this" (I-73, Roanoke).

VDOT Should Publicize Meetings More

These 34 responses (5% of total) suggested improvements in the way VDOT publicizes meetings. A number of the comments suggested the use of notification approaches that VDOT had, in fact, used. Examples are:

- "Print agenda and publish in newspaper prior to meeting" (I-73, Rocky Mount).

- "Just keep people informed through the news media; if it affects personal homes or business property, a certified letter in mail would be nice!" (I-73, Rocky Mount).

- "Increase local advertisement of meeting date and location daily for 1 week prior to meeting" (I-73, Martinsville).

- "Materials need to be available and publicized BEFORE the hearing to give people time to absorb the information" (I-73, Martinsville).

Other Suggestions

There were 40 suggestions (6% of the total) that did not fall into any of aforementioned categories. A few examples are provided here because of the VDOT focus group participants' interest in "thinking out of the box."

- "Ask for written questions (as well as verbal ones) from audience to be answered by [VDOT] speakers" (I-73, Roanoke).

- "There should be a special project website for all significant projects. [It] should include time lines, diagrams, maps, costs, and the opportunity for the public to provide input" (FP&P, Staunton).

- "Allow email input" (FP&P, Salem).

- "Consider engaging a public relations consultant to keep VDOT plans and activities constantly before the public" (FP&P, Hampton Roads).

Written Survey of MPO Staff

Only four of the nine Virginia MPOs sent in survey responses in time for inclusion in this report. Responding MPOs were Hampton Roads, Richmond Regional, Crater (which includes Petersburg and Colonial Heights), and Central Virginia (which includes Lynchburg). Since fewer than half of the nine MPOs sent back responses, detailed statistics are not reported. MPO responses (particularly those to open-ended questions) are highlighted here for the insights they offer.

All four responding MPOs selected newspaper feature stories as one of the most effective ways to notify citizens about public meetings, and three selected signs on proposed highway and mailed newsletters. All four MPOs thought that the steps in VDOT's transportation planning process are "unclear to most citizens" (consistent with VDOT self-evaluation survey responses). One MPO commented: "It would be useful to have a citizens' information hand-out on the VDOT transportation planning process." Two of the four MPOs said that VDOT's public involvement procedures during the planning process are "unclear to most citizens;" the other two MPOs said they were somewhat clear. One respondent said: "Most citizens, I believe, think that the process involves alternatives, discussion/input, decision, and that their voice/input is more limited."

Two of the four MPOs also said that the steps in VDOT's highway project development process are "unclear to most citizens," and the other two MPOs said the steps are "somewhat clear." Three of four MPOs thought that VDOT's public involvement procedures during project development are "somewhat clear" to citizens, and one thought they are "unclear to most citizens." None of the four responding MPOs thought that the project-related public involvement procedures are "very clear" to most citizens.

MPO respondents were asked to evaluate how well each part of a typical VDOT meeting or hearing informs citizens or addresses their questions. Response choices ranged from "excellent" to "poor." All four MPOs rated one-on-one discussions with VDOT staff as "excellent." Written handouts, videos, and public question and answer sessions were each rated as "good" by two MPOs. "Road plans and poster displays" and "public comment session" both had two "fair" ratings from the MPOs.

The MPOs were asked to identify the most effective ways to provide post-meeting feedback or project updates to citizens. Three of four MPOs chose "newsletter mailed to all who

attended the meeting" and "news releases or articles in the newspaper." Project web sites were also endorsed by three of the four MPOs.   When asked to identify the least effective means of updating the public, three of four MPOs selected "written document listing citizens comments for the official record" (which has been a VDOT practice).

The survey also asked MPOs how often VDOT should provide status reports or updates to citizens on (1) planning activities and (2) highway projects. In each case, two responding MPOs thought communication from VDOT every 6 months was warranted. One MPO suggested, in both cases, that status reports be provided "as a significant development . . . is about to occur."

Finally, surveyed MPOs were asked to offer suggestions as to what else might be done to make the MPO's public outreach process more appealing to citizens. Several suggestions were related to the relationship between VDOT and the MPOs:

- "The VDOT process used for the annual financial planning and programming meetings and the MPO processes for TIP program development need to be integrated. Project selection authority would remain unchanged."

- "[VDOT should] Request initial comments/input from local elected officials and community leaders and work through MPOs (in urbanized areas) and PDCs (in rural areas) when conducting work on statewide transportation plans or major corridor studies."

Other comments from the MPOs related more to public involvement approaches:

- "Speak more to VDOT projects that are not just about roads. Allow citizens to understand other transportation issues VDOT is involved with."

- "Target civic association presidents to reach neighborhoods and citizens; conduct focus group discussions on controversial projects; use an open [house] format rather than public hearings to mitigate the them against us perception."

Assessments of VDOT's Public Outreach and Public Communications by the CTP and SMC

The CTP's Findings

Former Governor Gilmore's Commission on Transportation Policy (CTP) was created by Executive Order in May 1999, and it published its final report in December 2000 (CTP, 2000). In the 18 months of its work, it examined a broad range of VDOT's policies and procedures, including those that affect project delivery and operations.   The study approach included numerous interviews with VDOT staff and elected and local government officials and reviews of internal VDOT documents and audit reports.

In its *Final Report*, the CTP noted: "Scores of interviewees routinely noted that VDOT does a poor job at getting its message across to the public, elected officials, and the press." This was negatively affecting VDOT employees' morale, the CTP concluded. They added: "the public is finely tuned to what VDOT does or does not do. As such, VDOT must make sure that it speaks with a unified, clear, and unambiguous voice to the external world."

In framing its recommendations about VDOT's communications and public outreach, the CTP said: "not only does VDOT need to strengthen its communication with the outside world, it needs to improve communication between divisions in the Central Office as well as between the Central Office and the districts." The CTP's specific recommendations about public outreach included the following:

- VDOT should take a proactive role in educating the public and elected officials about the services it successfully provides across the state.

- A new Community Outreach Section, with a manager and staffing of 4.0 FTEs should be created within the Office of Public Affairs.

Key responsibilities the CTP identified for the new Outreach Section included developing strategic communications plans for major projects (with district input), coordinating communications efforts for major projects from planning to construction, and coordinating preparation for public hearings (with the assistance of L&D's Public Involvement Section).

Other CTP recommendations related to public involvement and outreach were:

- VDOT should continue its new policy of conducting public hearings for construction projects earlier than in the past (i.e., at 40% of plan completion, rather than at 70%).

- VDOT should involve local government and other important stakeholders, including transportation authorities, as early in the process as possible.

While acknowledging that the public would see a less complete view of the project at a hearing when plans are 40% complete, the CTP said that public input could be more easily incorporated at 40% plan completion than at 70%, reducing the risk of lengthy schedule delays.

VDOT divisions developed detailed work plans to address the CTP's 100+ recommendations within a few months of the release of *Final Report*. The Office of Public Affairs undertook a number of initiatives in response to the recommendations. The office was reorganized to improve its focus on outreach issues and opportunities for proactive communication. A strategic plan for VDOT's statewide public communications was developed, and a number of relevant performance measures were identified. VDOT's public website was revamped to meet the public's information needs better, and a series of question-and-answer brochures were developed. Although the CTP recommended that the Office of Public Affairs and the L&D Public Involvement Section collaborate on implementing the proposed Outreach Section, staffing of the new section has been subsequently delayed by state and VDOT funding shortfalls and associated hiring freezes. The Office of Public Affairs has also undertaken several

initiatives to improve the quality and consistency of VDOT's written and presentation materials within existing MEL (e.g., creation of a PowerPoint template for presentations by VDOT staff and a new *VDOT Style Manual*).

One of the Office of Public Affairs' responses to the CTP recommendations was to commission a consultant "communications audit," with the objectives of identifying the information needs of VDOT customers and the best ways to communicate with them. Similar audits have been valuable to other departments of transportation (DOTs) (e.g., Georgia). This audit, conducted by the firm of Siddall, Matus, and Coughter Consultants is discussed in the next section.

SMC's "Communications Audit" of VDOT

SMC performed six major studies for VDOT from September to November 2001 to conduct its communications audit for the Office of Public Affairs (shortly after the focus groups for this study were completed). The six studies included:

- in-depth interviews with 40 VDOT executives, members of the CTB, and employees of FHWA and the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ)

- discussion groups (community advisory groups) with business and community leaders in VDOT's Northern Virginia, Salem, and Hampton Roads districts

- telephone survey of 1,500 Virginia residents and focus groups with residents of VDOT's Northern Virginia, Salem, and Hampton Roads districts

- an e-mail survey and follow-up individual interviews with local public and elected officials

- a best practices analysis: a review of the best communications practices among large U.S. corporations and informal interviews with chief public relations officers of major U.S. corporations

- a [VDOT] media coverage analysis spanning the last 3 years

- an audit of VDOT communications materials (newsletters, etc.), analyzing them for purpose, target audience, consistency, and perceived effectiveness.

Detailed summaries of SMC's research findings for several of the studies may be found in Siddall, Matus, and Coughter Consultants (2002a,b). Their major findings and recommendations are highlighted here.

Some of SMC's key findings about communications within VDOT were:

- The effectiveness of VDOT's external communications is largely a product of its internal communications.

- Aspects of VDOT's culture impede good communications and contribute to [information] "silos" within the organization.

Some of SMC's key findings about VDOT's public communications and what the agency's audiences want were:

- VDOT executives said the agency's [print] hearing and meeting notices were too technical to be compelling to citizens.

- VDOT representatives in public meetings do not always have good communications skills.

- All of VDOT's audiences want more communications from the agency and more involvement in decision-making processes.

- The public expresses the view that too much time passes without communication from VDOT.

- Citizens want to know VDOT's realistic expectations for projects.

- Public officials want VDOT to provide information specific to their needs in a timely way.

A number of these findings, and others outlined in SMC's reports, are consistent with the CTP's findings, as well as those from this study's focus groups and surveys of VDOT staff and citizens.

SMC's recommendations about what the focus of VDOT's public communications should be included:
.
- There should be an agency-wide focus on strategic communications, led by the Office of Public Affairs, and the development of an overarching communications strategy.

- A "communications culture" of two-way communication should be established within VDOT—with no tolerance for withholding information.

SMC's recommendations for how the public communications function should be organized within VDOT included:

- Communications within VDOT should be consolidated and formalized, and communications policies with clearly specified roles and responsibilities should be developed.

- Three regional program/project managers within the Office of Public Affairs should be designated (each would be responsible for three VDOT districts). The three managers would be "connectors" between the Central Office functions and the districts, and they would be responsible for managing public involvement from a project's beginning to its end.

- There should be communications managers for major VDOT projects/programs who cross major functional areas.

SMC's specific recommendations about VDOT's public involvement processes and public hearing practices included the following:

- A new public involvement process with much more frequent milestones for communications with the public should be developed. Timelines, schedules, and approaches for improving public involvement should be assessed.

- Management of communications for public meetings should be moved to the Office of Public Affairs, with technical support from L&D and other VDOT divisions as needed.

- VDOT should ensure that the public input gathered at meetings and hearings is readily available to the public and should explain to the public how their input has been used.

Finally, SMC's recommendations about the content of VDOT public communications and in-house review processes included the following:

- VDOT should ensure that its communications materials are identifiable and consistent (i.e., a "branding" approach is needed). The Office of Public Affairs should also establish graphics standards for VDOT and develop communications templates.

- The Office of Public Affairs should be designated as VDOT's publications approval clearinghouse (with 24-hour, web-based approval processes).

One of the SMC's major conclusions was that: "Communications will be difficult until VDOT's structure is changed . . . it is operating under a 1970's model." Shortly after the completion of SMC's communications audit, VDOT began an extensive reorganization under Commissioner Philip Shucet, who was selected in the spring of 2002. New directorates and divisions were created, and reporting relationships were changed to clarify responsibilities and improve accountability. Some of SMC's recommendations are clearly being addressed by new initiatives, such as the public, web-based project "Dashboard" to provide up-to-date highway construction project schedule and cost information to citizens. The Dashboard is a way for VDOT to share its realistic expectations for construction projects, something that citizens clearly want. Citizens, local officials, and legislators have said that they want this kind of information about the status of projects from VDOT, and they want frequent updates. Other initiatives

include an extensive redesign and enhancement of VDOT's public website, making much more information available to citizens about VDOT and its programs.

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

Many conclusions might be drawn from a study as broad in scope as this one. The results of the surveys, focus groups, and interviews and the findings of the Governor's Commission on Transportation Policy (2002) and the VDOT "communications audit" (Siddall, Matus, and Coughter Consultants, 2002b) converge on a number of points.

Citizens' Information Needs and Preferences

- VDOT's planning process is not well understood by citizens.

- VDOT's project development process is not well understood by many citizens.

- VDOT's public involvement processes (for planning and for project development) are not well understood by most citizens.

- Most citizens indicated they wish to be updated quite often on the status of VDOT projects (i.e., at least quarterly).

- Citizens want to know VDOT's realistic expectations for projects (as do legislators and local government officials).

- Many citizens continue to rely on the newspaper and written materials (e.g., newsletters) for notification about VDOT meetings and updates on VDOT plans and project.

- Citizens (as well as VDOT staff and MPOs) rate the agency's more personal approaches to presenting project information positively (e.g., one-on-one discussions with VDOT staff and VDOT speakers at community meetings).

- Citizens would like more feedback from VDOT about how their input is really used, and VDOT staff agree that this is a need.

VDOT's Communications Approaches and Content

- Many VDOT staff doubt that the public understands the technical engineering terms that have been used in VDOT's written materials.
- There is wide agreement among the VDOT staff included in this study that strategic communications plans with performance targets and evaluation components are much needed for major projects.

- VDOT staff strongly endorse greater coordination of project communications within VDOT, from the earliest planning stages to construction.

Intra-organizational Factors in VDOT's Public Outreach

- A number of the division staff involved in VDOT's public outreach do not believe their work is well-understood by other divisions or VDOT executives.

- VDOT staff in the study's focus groups had different views about the required technical content of the agency's newspaper notices, as well as the best review process for them.

Themes to Guide Improvements

- Early and continuous public involvement in decision making.

- Frequent communications with citizens about plan or project status.

- Consistency in public communications from different parts of VDOT.

- Personalized communication approaches.

- More feedback to citizens about how their input has been used.

- More coordination of public outreach by different divisions or units in VDOT.

- More strategic communications planning and evaluation (for major projects, in particular).

The Toolkit of Outreach Techniques

How can VDOT begin to address the opportunities it has to improve its public outreach? The toolkit included in this report in Appendix E and the forthcoming interactive tool from FHWA (see Appendix E) provide information on many different outreach techniques. With the toolkit, VDOT staff could, for example, choose a technique suited for personalized communication with a small group of neighborhood residents very early in a project. For later project stages, some of the techniques included in the toolkit and the FHWA resource are especially suitable for resolving complex issues in a workgroup setting. Other techniques in the toolkit are suited for the effective presentation of information to large groups of citizens (for projects as large in scope as I-73, this is obviously very important).

Questions about how VDOT can better coordinate its public outreach, achieve greater consistency in its communications, and increase VDOT divisions' understanding of what other divisions do, etc. are not as effectively addressed by the toolkit. Having a toolkit does not address questions about which VDOT staff member chooses the technique to be used in a

particular situation or who is responsible for improving feedback to citizens about how their input has been used.   Answers to these questions depend on the overarching public involvement policy that guides VDOT or any other public agency. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, for example, recently published its revised Public Involvement Policy (Environmental Protection Agency, 2003). VDOT has re-engineered some work processes in recent years so that staff teams representing different functions follow a project from beginning to end.   This kind of multidisciplinary approach could be very valuable for public outreach.   Although beyond the scope of this study, at the request of Commissioner Philip Shucet, VDOT's Policy and Legislative Coordination Office recently began an effort to develop an overall public involvement policy for VDOT.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Many organizational changes have occurred in VDOT since this study began. The environment for VDOT's public outreach is quite different than it was at the inception of this study. Virginia and many other states are struggling with major budget shortfalls. Fewer new construction projects are being programmed as VDOT concentrates its resources on projects already underway. Work is underway on VTrans 2025, the state's long-range multimodal transportation plan.

During the course of this study, many other studies and initiatives addressed VDOT's public outreach, and a number of initiatives have been acted upon (e.g., the Office of Public Affairs developed a strategic communications plan in 2002 (Office of Public Affairs, 2002). Some recommendations that would have been suggested by the findings of this study have already been acted upon (e.g., VDOT's newspaper notices have already been redesigned by public affairs and L&D staff; this was suggested by participants in the focus groups in this study), and others are already presented in the final report from SMC's communications audit (e.g., provide communications training for staff involved in public outreach) (Siddall, Matus, and Coughter Consultants, 2002b). Such recommendations are not repeated here.

The researchers offer these recommendations for VDOT's public outreach:

1. *VDOT staff involved in public outreach should use the toolkit provided in Appendix E and the soon-to-be released FHWA electronic public involvement planning tool in selecting outreach techniques for specific plans or projects.* The FHWA tool is described in Appendix E, with contact information.

2. *VDOT's Transportation & Mobility Planning Division and the Office of Public Affairs, perhaps in collaboration with MPO staff, should explore ways to increase the public's understanding of the planning process.* A review of other states' approaches may be useful in this regard.

3. *VDOT's Office of Public Affairs, L&D Division, and other technical staff (e.g., of the Environmental Division) should explore ways to increase the public's understanding of the project development and project public involvement processes.*   A review of

other states' approaches may be useful. Although VDOT's *Public Participation Policy Manual* (Location & Design Division, 2003) is available on VDOT's public website(http://www.extranet.vdot.state.va.us/locdes/electronic%20pubs/Public%20Involvement%20Manual/Public-Involvement-Manual.pdf), it is 111 pages long and appears to have been written primarily for VDOT staff rather than the public. A shorter document (written for citizens) linking public involvement opportunities with project development steps would be useful. A new two-page brochure by VDOT's Office of Public Affairs, *Transportation Decisions—You Can Make a Difference* (Office of Public Affairs, 2003), provides a good overview of public involvement opportunities in VDOT's planning, programming, and project development. Its length, however, does not allow a detailed discussion of the project development process.

4. *VDOT's L&D Division and Office of Public Affairs should explore more effective ways to inform citizens about how their collective input has been used for project or plan development.*   Neither VDOT staff nor citizens believe that written documents summarizing citizens' comments for the official hearing record are an effective way to do this. Email or the VDOT website (or a major project's own website) could be effective mechanisms for reaching some (but not all) citizens

5. *VDOT should provide the 4.0 FTEs recommended for an Outreach Section in the Office of Public Affairs as soon as the budget situation permits.* The work of the CTP (Governor's Commission on Transportation Policy, 2002), the communications audit (Siddall, Matus, and Coughter Consultants 2002b), and this study's data-gathering from VDOT staff all point to the importance of VDOT undertaking more strategic communications planning and evaluations for major projects and the importance of more coordinated communications from different parts of VDOT.   Staffing the Outreach Section would also lessen VDOT's reliance on consultants for those activities.

6. *VDOT should consider creating a task group of engineering project managers from the L&D Division and staff of the Office of Public Affairs to identify ways to maximize the quality and consistency of newsletters for the public.* Newsletters for project updates are endorsed by many citizens and VDOT staff; it is important for them to be of high quality and informative.

7. *VDOT should periodically commission broad assessments (such as the SMC communications audit (Siddall, Matus and Coughter Consultants, 2002b) to assess the effectiveness of communications among agency staff and between VDOT, the public, local officials, and legislators.* Such assessments could also provide guidance on specific ways that VDOT's public outreach practices might be improved (e.g., the content of hearing notices for newspaper publication). The assessments should include questions about VDOT's public meetings, and the sample should include citizens who have recently attended a VDOT public meeting. Although the Office of Public Affairs can oversee such assessments (as they did for the SMC audit), VDOT's top management will need to endorse the activity.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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APPENDIX A: VDOT SELF-EVALUATION SURVEY

VDOT PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT SELF-EVALUATION SURVEY

The Research Council is conducting a study to identify a "tool box" of public participation techniques from the earliest planning stages through project construction. We would greatly value the opinions of VDOT staff on these issues. As someone who is involved with VDOT's public outreach in some way, we would appreciate it very much if you would complete the following survey and return it as instructed below. Thank you very much in advance, and please don't hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or would like to discuss any of these questions personally. Please note that the questionnaire is designed to be printed and mailed or faxed. Responses will be kept confidential. Gene Arnold 804/293-1931, FAX 804/293-1990, (garnold@vdot.state.va.us).

Your position within VDOT:

❑ District Administrator ❑ District Section staff

❑ District Engineer ❑ Central Office Division Administrator
❑ Resident Engineer ❑ Central Office Division staff
❑ District Section head
❑ Other position (please write in): _____

(1) In your opinion, what are the most effective ways for VDOT to notify citizens about upcoming hearings or meetings? (check as many as you wish)
    ❑ Postcard in mail from VDOT   ❑ Newsletter in mail from VDOT
    ❑ Newspaper advertisement   ❑ Newspaper feature story
    ❑ TV announcement   ❑ Radio announcement
    ❑ Sign posted on proposed highway   ❑ VDOT web site
    ❑ Kiosk (displays located in mall)   ❑ Roadway billboards
    ❑ White tag fastening plastic bag for newspaper ("flexi-tag")
    ❑ Stick-on label on front page of newspaper ("headliner")
    ❑ Other ways (write in):

_____

(2) What are the least effective ways of notifying the public about upcoming VDOT meetings? (*check as many as you wish*)
    ❑ Postcard in mail from VDOT   ❑ Newsletter in mail from VDOT
    ❑ Newspaper advertisement   ❑ Newspaper feature story
    ❑ TV announcement   ❑ Radio announcement
    ❑ Sign posted on proposed highway   ❑ VDOT web site
    ❑ Kiosk (displays located in mall)   ❑ Roadway billboards
    ❑ White tag fastening plastic bag for newspaper ("flexi-tag")
    ❑ Stick-on label on front page of newspaper ("headliner")
    ❑ Other ways (*write in*):

_____

(3) What could VDOT do to make it more appealing for citizens to attend public hearings and meetings? (*please write in*)
_____
_____
_____
_____

(4) Do you think the steps in VDOT's **transportation planning process** (from transportation plan development to approval of the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program) are:

❑ Unclear to most citizens
❑ Somewhat clear to most citizens, or
❑ Quite clear to most citizens?

Comments (optional):

_____

_____

_____

(5) Do you think VDOT's **public involvement procedures** during the **transportation planning process** are:

❑ Unclear to most citizens
❑ Somewhat clear to most citizens, or
❑ Quite clear to most citizens?

Comments (optional):

_____

_____

(6) Do you think the steps in VDOT's **highway project development process** (from preliminary engineering to construction) are:

❑ Unclear to most citizens
❑ Somewhat clear to most citizens, or
❑ Quite clear to most citizens?

Comments (optional):

_____

_____

_____

(7) Do you think VDOT's **public involvement procedures** during the **highway project development process** are:

❑ Unclear to most citizens
❑ Somewhat clear to most people, or
❑ Quite clear to most people?

Comments (optional):

_____

_____

(8) Please check (✓) how well you think each part of a typical VDOT meeting or hearing informs citizens and/or answers their questions

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Can't say
Written handouts					
Video					
Road plans or poster displays					
One-on-one discussions with VDOT staff					
Public question and answer session					
Public comment session					
Other part of hearing (please write in)					

(9) Other than the items listed in Question 8, what else, if anything, could be done **during the meeting or hearing** to better inform citizens about the project or plan? (*please write in*)

_____

_____

(10) What are the **most effective ways** for VDOT to **provide feedback** about the results of meetings or project updates to interested citizens? (*check as many as you wish*)

❑ Newsletter mailed to everyone who attended the hearing
❑ Written document listing citizens' comments for the official record
   (available in local VDOT or county office)
❑ News features on TV   ❑ Project web site
❑ News releases or articles in the newspaper   ❑ Toll-free telephone hotline
❑ Information kiosk (display) in a shopping center   ❑ Project Internet "chat room"
❑ VDOT speakers at meetings of community groups   ❑ News features on radio

Any other ways? (*please write in*)

_____

_____

(11) What are the **least effective ways** of **providing feedback** about the results of meetings or project updates to interested citizens? (*check* as many as you wish)

❑ Newsletter mailed to everyone who attended the hearing
❑ Written document listing citizens' comments for the official record (available in local VDOT or county office)
❑ News features on TV   ❑ Project web site
❑ News releases or articles in the newspaper   ❑ Toll-free telephone hotline
❑ Information kiosk (display) in a shopping center   ❑ Project Internet "chat room"
❑ VDOT speakers at meetings of community groups   ❑ News features on radio

Other ways? (*please write in*)

_____

_____

_____

(12) How often do you think VDOT should provide a "status report" to citizens on a **transportation planning activity** using the approach(es) you checked in Question 10?

❑ Every month   ❑ Every 3 months   ❑ Every 6 months   ❑ Once per year   ❑ Never

❑ Other time interval (*write in*)

_____

(13) How often do you think VDOT should provide a "status report" to citizens on a **highway project** using the approach(es) you checked in Question 10?

❑ Every month   ❑ Every 3 months   ❑ Every 6 months   ❑ Once per year   ❑ Never

❑ Other time interval (*write in*)

_____

(14) How would you rate the communications between the different VDOT divisions and field units involved in the Department's public outreach?

❑ Usually very good   ❑ Usually good   ❑ Usually fair   ❑ Usually poor   ❑ It varies

Comments (optional):

_____

_____

[IF YOU ANSWERED 'FAIR,' 'POOR,' OR 'IT VARIES' TO Q14]: How could the communication be improved, in your opinion?

_____

_____

(15) In your opinion, what else could VDOT do to make its public outreach/public involvement better? (Attach additional sheets as needed.)

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

THANK YOU FOR YOUR VIEWS!

Please return to Gene Arnold
Virginia Transportation Research Council
530 Edgemont Road
Charlottesville, VA 22903
FAX 804/293-1990
garnold@vdot.state.va.us

APPENDIX B

SURVEY FOR CITIZENS ATTENDING THE I-73 LOCATION HEARINGS

VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION PUBLIC HEARING SURVEY

Dear Citizen**:**

Thank you for attending VDOT's I-73 Location Public Hearing held on December 11th in Martinsville. The Virginia Transportation Research Council is helping VDOT evaluate its public involvement approach for highway projects. We are sending you the enclosed questionnaire so that you can express your views. Please take a few minutes and fill out this questionnaire as completely as possible. We will use the information you provide to identify what changes citizens recommend in VDOT's public involvement process.

Directions: Please check (✓) your answers to the questions, or write in an answer as indicated. Please follow the instructions at the end of questionnaire on how to return it to us (postage is provided). We greatly appreciate your cooperation and assistance. All answers are confidential; no names will be used in any summary of the results.

Have questions about the survey? Contact Gene Arnold or Amy O'Leary at the Virginia Transportation Research Council, (804) 293-1900 or email address garnold@vdot.state.va.us

───

(1) How did you find out about the I-73 location hearings? (*check all that apply*)
❑ Newspaper advertisement ❑ Newspaper feature story ❑ TV ❑ Radio
❑ Friend or neighbor ❑ Postcard in mail ❑ Newsletter in mail
❑ VDOT web site ❑ Other group's web site ❑ Billboard beside road
❑ Kiosk (displays in mall) ❑ White tag fastening plastic bag for newspaper ("flexi-tag")
❑ Stick-on label on front page of newspaper ("headliner")

❑ Other source (*please write in):* _____

(2) About how long have you been following developments in the I-73 project?

_____ months *OR* _____ years

(3) In your opinion, what is the *best* way(s) for VDOT to inform citizens about upcoming hearings or meetings? (*check more than one if you wish*)
❑ Postcard in mail from VDOT ❑ Newsletter in mail from VDOT
❑ Newspaper advertisement ❑ Newspaper feature story
❑ TV announcement ❑ Radio announcement
❑ Sign posted on proposed highway ❑ VDOT web site
❑ Kiosk (displays located in mall) ❑ Roadway billboards
❑ White tag fastening plastic bag for newspaper ("flexi-tag")
❑ Stick-on label on front page of newspaper ("headliner")

❑ Other ways (*write in*): _____

(4) How many VDOT highway public hearings or meetings had you ever attended *before* the I-73 location hearing?
❑ None ❑ 1 or 2 ❑ 3 or 4 ❑ 5 or more

(5) What could VDOT do to make it easier or more appealing for citizens to attend public hearings and meetings? (*please write in*)

_____

_____

(6) People attend highway public hearings and meetings for many reasons. Why did you attend the I-73 location hearing? (*please check all that apply*)

❑ To see maps showing the alternative routes for I-73
❑ To see how I-73 routes might impact a specific property (your home, your business, etc.)
❑ To ask VDOT staff questions one-on-one about the I-73 project
❑ To express my views about the I-73 project for the official hearing record
❑ I have a general interest in community affairs
❑ To get information about possible environmental effects of the project
❑ To get information about the possible economic /community impacts of the project

❑ Other reason for attending (write in): _____

(7) Do you think the steps in VDOT's **highway project development process** (from project planning to construction) are:
❑Unclear to most people
❑Somewhat clear to most people, or
❑Quite clear to most people?

Comments (optional): _____

_____

(8) Do you think VDOT's **public involvement procedures** for highway projects are:
❑ Unclear to most people
❑ Somewhat clear to most people, or
❑ Quite clear to most people?

Comments (optional): _____

_____

_____

(9) Please check (✓) how well each part of the I-73 location hearing informed you or answered your questions.

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Can't say
Written handouts					
Road plans or poster displays					
One-on-one discussions with VDOT staff					
Question and answer session					
Other part of hearing (please write in)					

(10) Other than the items listed in Question 9, what else could have been done *during the hearing* to better inform you about the I-73 project? (*please write in*)

_____

_____

_____

(11) What would be the best way(s) for VDOT to communicate with interested citizens about the results of the I-73 location hearings and future news about the project? (*check all that apply*)

❑ Newsletter mailed to everyone who attended the hearing
❑ Written document listing citizens' comments for the official record (available in local VDOT or county office)

❑ News features on TV   ❑ I-73 project web site
❑ News releases or articles in the newspaper   ❑ Toll-free telephone hotline
❑ Information kiosk (display) in a shopping center   ❑ Project Internet "chat room"
❑ VDOT speakers at meetings of community groups❑ News features on radio

Other way (write in)
_____
_____

(12) How often would you like VDOT to provide a "status report" to you on the I-73 project using the approach(es) you checked in Question 11?

❑ Every month   ❑ Every 3 months   ❑ Every 6 months   ❑ Once per year   ❑ Never

❑ Other time interval (write in)
_____

(**13**) In your opinion, what could VDOT do to make its public hearings and meetings better?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

THANK YOU FOR YOUR VIEWS!

✉ To return survey: (1) fold on dotted lines on back of this page so return address shows, and (2) fasten closed with tape or staple. Postage is provided. ✉

APPENDIX C

SURVEY FOR CITIZENS ATTENDING THE DISTRICT FINANCIAL PLANNING AND PROGRAMMING (FPP) HEARINGS

VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION PUBLIC HEARING SURVEY

Dear Citizen:

Thank you for attending the recent VDOT Richmond District's Financial Planning and Programming Meeting in Chester.Coalfields Expressway public hearing in late April The Virginia Transportation Research Council is helping VDOT evaluate its techniques for involving the public in its transportation decision-making. We are sending you the enclosed questionnaire so that you can express your views. Please take a few minutes and fill out this questionnaire as carefully and completely as possible. We will use the information you provide to identify what changes, if any, should be made in VDOT's public involvement process.

Directions: Please check (✓) your answers to the questions, or write in an answer as indicated. Please follow the instructions at the end of questionnaire on how to return it to us (postage is provided). We greatly appreciate your cooperation and assistance. All answers are confidential; no names will be used in any summary of the results.

Questions about the survey? Contact Gene Arnold or Amy O'Leary at the Virginia Transportation Research Council, (804) 293-1900 or garnold@vdot.state.va.us

---

(1) How did you find out about the Coalfields Expressway hearingmeeting? (*check all that apply*)

❑ Newspaper ❑ TV ❑ Radio ❑ Friend or neighbor ❑ Web site ❑ Mailing

Other (*please write in)*

_____

(2) About how long have you been following developments in the Coalfields Expressway project? _____ months *OR* _____ years

(3) In your opinion, what is the *best* way(s) for VDOT to inform citizens about upcomingfuture hearingsmeetings? (*check more than one if you wish*)

❑ Postcard or letter from VDOT   ❑ Sign posted on proposed highway route
❑ Newspaper announcement   ❑ TV announcement
❑ Radio announcement   ❑ Web site

❑ Other ways (*write in*):
_____

(4) How many VDOT highway public hearings meetings had you ever attended before the Coalfields Expressway hearingRichmond District's financial planning meeting?

❑ None   ❑ 1 or 2   ❑ 3 or 4   ❑ 5 or more

(5) What could VDOT do to make it easier or more appealing for citizens to attend public hearingsmeetings? (please write in)

_____
_____
_____

(6) People attend highway public hearings meetings for many reasons. Why did you attend the Coalfields Expressway hearingRichmond District's financial planning meeting? (*please check all that apply*)

❑ To see maps showing the 5 alternative Coalfields routes
❑ To see how Coalfields routes might impact a specific property (your home, your business, etc.)
❑ To ask VDOT staff questions one-on-one about the Coalfields project
❑ To express my views (positive or negative) about the Coalfieldsarea projects for the official hearing record
❑ To suggest additional projects for VDOT funding
❑ General interest in community affairs
❑ To get information about possible environmental effects of the projects
❑ To get information about the possible economic /community impacts of the projects

❑ Other reason for attending (write in):_____

[7] Do you think the steps in VDOT's highway project development process (from planning to construction) are:

❑ Unclear to most people
❑ Somewhat clear to most people, or
❑ Quite clear to most people?

Comments (optional): _____

_____

(8) Do you think VDOT's **public involvement procedures** for highway projects are:

❑ Unclear to most people
❑ Somewhat clear to most people, or
❑ Quite clear to most people?

Comments (optional):

_____

_____

(9) Please check (✓) how well each element of the Coalfields Expressway hearing informed you or answered your questions.

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Can't say
Written handouts					
Video (if one shown)					
Road plans or poster displays					
One-on-one discussions with VDOT staff					
One-on-one discussions with consultant staff					
Other part of hearing (write in)					

(10) Other than the items listed in Question 9, what else could have been done *during the hearing* to better inform you about the Coalfields Expressway project? (*write in*)

_____

_____

_____

(11) What would be the best way(s) for VDOT to communicate with interested citizens about the results of the Coalfields Expressway hearing, Richmond District's financial planning meeting, and the development of the Six Year Improvement Program and future news about the project? (check all that apply)

❑ Newsletter mailed to all who attended the hearing
❑ Written document listing citizens' and public officials' comments for the official record (available for review in local VDOT or county office)
❑ News features on TV
❑ News features on radio
❑ News releases or articles in the newspaper
❑ Toll-free telephone hotline
❑ Information kiosk (display) in a shopping center
❑ Project web site
❑ Project Internet "chat room"
❑ VDOT speakers at meetings of community groups

❑ Other way (write in) _____

_____

(12) How often would you like VDOT to give you a "status report" on the Coalfields Expressway project using the approach(es) you checked in Question 11?

❑ Every month   ❑ Every 3 months   ❑ Every 6 months ❑ Once per year

❑ Never

Other (*write in*)_____

(13)   In your opinion, what could VDOT do to make its public hearings meetings better??

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

THANK YOU FOR YOUR VIEWS!

⊠ To return survey: (1) fold on dotted lines on back of this page so return address shows, and (2) fasten closed with tape or staple. Postage is provided. ⊠

APPENDIX D

SURVEY FOR VIRGINIA'S METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATIONS
(MPOs)

MPO PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT SURVEY

The Virginia Transportation Research Council is conducting a study to identify a "tool box" of public participation techniques from the earliest planning stages through project construction. We know that the MPOs are active partners with VDOT in public awareness and participation activities in the planning stages of project development. Accordingly, we would very much appreciate receiving your opinions on the effectiveness of these activities and on possible improvements to the public involvement process. Thank you very much in advance, and please don't hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or would like to discuss any of these questions personally. Responses will be kept confidential.

Gene Arnold 434/293-1931, FAX 293-1990, (garnold@vdot.state.va.us). Please return your survey by July 18, 2001.

Your name and telephone number (Optional)

_____

(1) What are the **most effective ways** to **notify** citizens about upcoming VDOT hearings or meetings?

   (*Check as many as you wish*)

___Postcard in mail from VDOT	___Newsletter in mail from VDOT
___Newspaper advertisement	___Newspaper feature story
___TV announcement	___Radio announcement
___Sign posted on proposed highway	___VDOT web site
___Kiosk (displays located in mall)	___Roadway billboards

   ___White tag fastening plastic bag for newspaper ("flexi-tag")

   ___Stick-on label on front page of newspaper ("headliner")

   ___Any other ways (*write in)*

_____

(2) What are the least effective ways of notifying the public about upcoming VDOT meetings or hearings?

___Postcard in mail from VDOT	___Newsletter in mail from VDOT
___Newspaper advertisement	___Newspaper feature story
___TV announcement	___Radio announcement
___Sign posted on proposed highway	___VDOT web site
___Kiosk (displays located in mall)	___Roadway billboards

   ___White tag fastening plastic bag for newspaper ("flexi-tag")

   ___Stick-on label on front page of newspaper ("headliner")

   ___Any other ways (*write in)*

_____

(3) VDOT needs to redesign the look of its paid newspaper notices for upcoming public hearings.

___Strongly disagree ___Disagree ___Agree ___Strongly agree

(4) The public understands the engineering descriptions used in VDOT's paid newspaper notices for upcoming hearings.

___Strongly disagree ___Disagree ___Agree ___Strongly agree

(5) Do you think the steps in VDOT's transportation planning process (from transportation plan development to approval of the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program) are:

___Unclear to most citizens ___Somewhat clear to most citizens, or

___Quite clear to most citizens?

Comments (optional):

_____

_____

(6) Do you think VDOT's **public involvement procedures** during the **transportation planning process** are:

___Unclear to most citizens ___Somewhat clear to most citizens, or

___Quite clear to most citizens?

Comments (optional):_____

_____

(7) Do you think the steps in VDOT's **highway project development process** (from preliminary engineering to construction) are:

___Unclear to most citizens ___Somewhat clear to most citizens, or

___Quite clear to most citizens?

Comments (optional):_____

_____

(8) Do you think VDOT's **public involvement procedures** during the **highway project development process** are:

___Unclear to most citizens ___Somewhat clear to most citizens, or

___Quite clear to most citizens?

Comments (optional):_____

_____

(9) Please check (✓) how well you think each part of a typical VDOT meeting or hearing informs citizens and/or answers their questions:

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Can't say
Written handouts					
Video					
Road plans or poster displays					
One-on-one discussions with VDOT staff					
Public question and answer session					
Public comment session					
Other part of hearing (please write in)					

(10) Other than the items listed in Question 9, what else, if anything, could be done **during the meeting or hearing** to better inform citizens about the project or plan? (*please write in*)

_____

_____

_____

(11) What are the **most effective ways to provide feedback** about the results of meetings or project updates to interested citizens? (*check as many as you wish*)

___Newsletter mailed to everyone who attended the hearing
___Written document listing citizens' comments for the official record
   (available in local VDOT or county office)
___News features on TV   ___ Project web site
___ News releases or articles in the newspaper   ___Toll-free telephone hotline
___Information kiosk (display) in a shopping center   ___ Project Internet "chat room"
___VDOT speakers at meetings of community groups   ___ News features on radio
Any other ways (write in)

_____

_____

(12) What are the least effective ways of providing feedback about the results of meetings or project updates to interested citizens? (*check as many as you wish*).

___Newsletter mailed to everyone who attended the hearing
___Written document listing citizens' comments for the official record
(available in local VDOT or county office)
___News features on TV   ___Project web site
___News releases or articles in the newspaper   ___Toll-free telephone hotline
___Information kiosk (display) in a shopping center   ___ Project Internet "chat room"
___VDOT speakers at meetings of community groups ___ News features on radio
Any other ways (write in)

_____

_____

(13) How often do you think VDOT should provide a "status report" to citizens on a **transportation planning activity** using the approaches you checked in Question 11?
___Every month   ___Every 3 months   ___Every 6 months___Once per year ___Never

(14) How often do you think VDOT should provide a "status report" to citizens on a highway project using the approach(es) you checked in Question 11?

___Every month ___Every 3 months ___Every 6 months ___Once per year ___Never

(15) What else could VDOT and the MPO do to make its public outreach/public involvement better or more appealing for citizens (Attach additional sheets as needed).

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

THANK YOUR FOR YOUR VIEWS!

Please return by July 18, 2001 to:

Gene Arnold
Virginia Transportation Research Council
530 Edgemont Rd.
Charlottesville, VA 22903
FAX 434/293-1990
garnold@vdot.state.va.us

APPENDIX E

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT TOOLKIT

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT TOOLKIT

This toolkit was created from several "inventory" documents that provide information on numerous public involvement techniques, including:

- *Public Involvement Techniques for Transportation Decision-making* (Howard/Stein-Hudson Associates, 1996) (online at http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/reports/pittd/cover.htm)

- the *Public Participation Toolbox* of the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) (www.iap2.org/boardlink/toolbox.pdf)

- *Hear Every Voice: A Guide to Public Involvement* (Minnesota DOT, 1999)

- *Project Development Methodologies for Reconstruction of Urban Freeways and Expressways* (Saag, 1996)

- *Public Outreach Handbook for Departments of Transportation* (Wilson, 1994)

- *Guidebook for Transportation Corridor Studies: A Process for Effective Decision-Making* (Smith, 1999).

The toolkit is divided into techniques for dealing specifically with small groups and for dealing with large groups. (The techniques are not, however, necessarily mutually exclusive.) The section presents a description of each tool, its pluses and minuses, when it is particularly useful, tips for its use, and whether it is used primarily to inform the public (frequently one-way communication) or involve the public (two-way communication). Where possible, further reading or case studies are referenced. Copies of these resources may be available from the Virginia Transportation Research Council Library, the researchers, or from the websites of organizations and state DOTs. The tools are presented in alphabetical order for ease of reference.

At the time of this report's publication, the FHWA was nearing release of an interactive (i.e., electronic) public involvement planning tool. It allows transportation professionals to answer a series of questions about the stage and characteristics of a project or transportation plan and the community in which the outreach will occur. The will then provide a list of potential public involvement techniques and information on them. The tool will be available as a web-based tool and probably also as a CD-ROM, according to David Kuehn, AICP, of FHWA Headquarters in Washington D.C., who has overseen its development. Mr. Kuehn may be contacted at 202-366-6072 or e-mail David.Kuehn@fhwa.dot.gov. The researchers had the opportunity to test a version of the interactive tool during its development by FHWA and think that VDOT staff could find it very useful.

Table E-1 lists the techniques included in the toolkit, their purpose (inform and/or involve), whether the technique is most suited for small or large groups, and the transportation activities (planning, design, maintenance) for which the technique can be suitable. Tables E-2,

Table E-1. **Summary Table of Public Involvement Techniques and Their Uses**

TECHNIQUE	SMALL OR LARGE GROUPS?	INFORM OR INVOLVE?
Brainstorming	Small	Involve
Breakout Groups	Small	Involve
Briefings	Small	Inform
Charities	Small	Involve
Citizens on Policy Bodies	Small	Involve
Citizen (or Civic) Advisory Committee	Small	Involve
Coffee Klatches	Small	Inform
Collaborative Decision Making	Small	Involve
Collaborative Task Force	Small	Involve
Citizen (or Community) Juries	Small	Involve
Conflict Utilization Opinion Aires	Small	Involve
Decision Science	Small	Involve
Deliberative Polling	Small	Involve
Delphi Technique	Small	Involve
Dialogue Facilitation	Small	Involve
Expert Panels	Small	Inform
Facilitation	Small or Large	Involve
Focus Groups	Small	Involve
Key Person Interviews	Small	Involve
Negotiation and Mediation	Small	Involve
Nominal Group Process (NGT)	Small	Involve
Ombudsman	Small	Inform
Open Space Technology	Small	Involve
Retreats	Small	Involve
Role Playing	Small	Inform
Roundtables	Small	Involve
Samoan Circle	Small or Large	Involve
Seminars	Small	Inform
Site Visits (Field Trips)	Small	Inform
Small Format Meetings	Small	Inform or Involve
Speakers' Bureau	Small or Large	Inform
Structured Dialogue	Small	Inform
Study Circles	Small	Inform
Strengths/Weaknesses/ Opportunities/Threats (SWOT) Analysis	Small	Inform or Involve
Synaptic	Small	Inform or Involve
Transportation Action Model	Small	Involve
Value Analysis	Small	Inform or Involve
Workshops	Small	Involve
Briefings	Large	Inform
Central Information Contact	Large	Inform
Conferences	Large	Inform or Involve
Drop-in Centers (Field Offices, Information Centers)	Large	Inform

Table E-1. **Summary Table of Public Involvement Techniques and Their Uses, cont.**

TECHNIQUE	SMALL OR LARGE GROUPS?	INFORM OR INVOLVE?
Electronic Techniques	Large	Inform or Involve
Employer Outreach	Large	Inform
Future Search Conference	Large	Involve
Games and Contests	Large	Inform
Highway Advisory Radio	Large	Inform
Information Repositories	Large	Inform
Interactive Displays and Kiosks	Large	Inform
Mailing Lists	Large	Inform or Involve
Media Strategies	Large	Inform
Public Information Materials	Large	Inform
Public Meetings or Hearings	Large	Inform and/or Involve
Public Opinion Surveys	Large	Inform
Systematic Development of Informed Consent (SDIC)	Large	Inform
Technical Assistance	Large	Inform
Technical Reports	Large	Inform
Transportation Fairs	Large	Inform
Visioning	Large	Involve
Websites or Online Services	Large	Inform or Involve

E-3, and E-4 provide more detail on the detailed planning and project development activities for which techniques may be useful and the time, resource, and staff requirements of the techniques. The latter three tables are reprinted from the Minnesota DOT's (Minot's) publication Hear Every Voice (1999), with that agency's permission.

Table E-2: Minnesota DOT Rankings of Public Involvement Techniques in the Planning Process

● **Always Appropriate**   ◗ **Sometimes Appropriate**   ○ **Not Very Appropriate**

Tool/Technique	Total Planning Process	Developing Values, Goals & Objectives	Choosing Alternatives	Plan Implementation	Feedback-Modification
Civic Advisory Committee (Advise)		●	●	○	○
Citizens on Policy & Decision Bodies (Recommend)		○	○	●	○
Collaborative Task Force (Problem Solve)	●	●	●	●	●
Mailing Lists	●	●	●	●	●
Public Information Materials	●	●	●	●	●
Key Person Interviews	●	●	●	●	●
Briefings	●	●	●	●	●
Video Techniques		◗	●	◗	○
Telephone Techniques		◗		◗	◗
Media Strategies	●	●	●	●	●
Speakers Bureau and P.I. Volunteers		●		◗	○
Public Meetings/Hearings (Formal)		○	●	○	○
Open Forum/ Open Houses		◗	●	○	◗
Conferences, Workshops, & Retreats	●	●	●	●	●
Brainstorming		●		○	○
Charities	●	●	●	●	●
Visioning		●	●	○	○
Small Group Techniques	●	●	●	●	●
On-line Services		●		◗	◗
Hotlines		◗	●	◗	●
Drop-in Centers		◗	●	○	○
Focus Groups	●	●	●	●	●
Public Opinion Surveys		●	●	○	●
Facilitation		○	●	○	○
Negotiation & Mediation		○	○	●	○
Transportation Fairs		◗	●	○	○
Games & Contests		○	●	○	○
Improving Meeting Attendance	●	●	●	●	●
Role Playing		○		○	○
Site Visits		◗	●	●	○
Non-Traditional Meeting Places & Events	●	●	●	●	●
Interactive Television		◗	●	○	○
Interactive Video Displays and Kiosks		◗	●	○	◗
Computer Presentations & Simulations		◗	●	●	○
Teleconferencing		○	◗	○	◗

[1]Reprinted with the permission of the Minnesota Department of Transportation from their report *Hear Every Voice: A Guide to Public Involvement at Mn/DOT* (1999).

The authors also gratefully acknowledge the work of Mn/DOT's Public Involvement Task Force and the FHWA Publication *Public Involvement Techniques for Transportation Decision-making* (Howard/Stein-Hudson Associates, Inc. and Parsons Brinckerhoff Quade and Douglas, 1996), which the Mn/DOT Task Force used to develop the table.

Table E-3: Minnesota DOT Rankings of Public Involvement Techniques in the Project Development Process[1]

● **Always Appropriate**   ◗ **Sometimes Appropriate**   ○ **Not Very Appropriate**

Tool/Technique	Planning	Scoping	Pre-design & Env. Study	Detail Design & R/W Acq.	Construction & Operation
Civic Advisory Committee (Advise)			◗	●	
Citizens on Policy & Decision Bodies (Recommend)			◗		
Collaborative Task Force (Problem Solve)			◗		
Mailing Lists	●	●	◗		●
Public Information Materials		●	●	●	●
Key Person Interviews		●			
Briefings			●	●	●
Video Techniques		●	◗		
Telephone Techniques			○		
Media Strategies	●	●	●	●	●
Speakers Bureau and P.I. Volunteers	●	●	◗		
Public Meetings/Hearings (Formal)		●	◗		
Open Forum/ Open Houses		●	●		
Conferences, Workshops, & Retreats	●		◗		
Brainstorming	●	●			
Charrettes			◗	●	
Visioning	●		◗		
Small Group Techniques			◗		
On-line Services			◗		
Hotlines			◗		
Drop-in Centers			◗		
Focus Groups	●		○		
Public Opinion Surveys	●		◗		
Facilitation	●	●	◗		
Negotiation & Mediation			◗	●	
Transportation Fairs	●		◗		
Games & Contests	●	●			
Role Playing		◗	◗		
Site Visits	●	●	◗	●	
Interactive Television			◗		
Interactive Video Displays and Kiosks			◗		
Computer Presentations & Simulations	●	●	◗	●	
Teleconferencing	●	●	●	◗	

Table E-3: Minnesota DOT Rankings of Public Involvement Techniques in the Project Development Process, cont. [1]

● **Always Appropriate** ◗ **Sometimes Appropriate** ○ **Not Very Appropriate**

Tool/Technique	Requires Facility	Requires Ext. Expert
Civic Advisory Committee (Advise)	◗	
Citizens on Policy & Decision Bodies (Recommend)	◗	
Collaborative Task Force (Problem Solve)	◗	
Mailing Lists		
Public Information Materials		◗
Key Person Interviews		
Briefings		
Video Techniques		◗
Telephone Techniques	◗	
Media Strategies		
Speakers Bureau and P.I. Volunteers		
Public Meetings/Hearings (Formal)		
Open Forum/ Open Houses	●	
Conferences, Workshops, & Retreats	●	
Brainstorming		
Charrettes		
Visioning		
Small Group Techniques		
On-line Services		
Hotlines	◗	
Drop-in Centers	◗	
Focus Groups	◗	◗
Public Opinion Surveys		
Facilitation		
Negotiation & Mediation		●
Transportation Fairs	●	
Games & Contests	◗	
Role Playing		
Site Visits		
Non-Traditional Meeting Places & Events		
Interactive Television	●	◗
Interactive Video Displays and Kiosks	●	◗
Computer Presentations & Simulations	●	◗
Teleconferencing	●	

Table E-4: Minnesota DOT Rankings of Public Involvement Techniques and Resource Use[1]

● **Very Intensive**   ◗ **Moderately Intensive**   ○ **Less Intensive**

Tool/Technique	Use of Time Resources	Use of Money Resources	Use of Staff Resources
Civic Advisory Committee (Advise)	○	●	●
Citizens on Policy & Decision Bodies (Recommend)	◗	○	◗
Collaborative Task Force (Problem Solve)	◗		◗
Mailing Lists	○	◗	◗
Public Information Materials	○	○	○
Key Person Interviews	○		●
Briefings	○		●
Video Techniques	◗	●	
Telephone Techniques	○		●
Media Strategies	◗		◗
Speakers Bureau and P.I. Volunteers	◗		◗
Public Meetings/Hearings (Formal)	○	○	○
Open Forum/ Open Houses	○	○	◗
Conferences, Workshops, & Retreats	○	○	◗
Brainstorming	○	◗	◗
Charrettes	○	◗	◗
Visioning	○	◗	◗
Small Group Techniques			◗
On-line Services	○	○	◗
Hotlines	○	○	◗
Drop-in Centers	○	◗	◗
Focus Groups	◗	◗	◗
Public Opinion Surveys	◗	◗	●
Facilitation	◗	○	◗
Negotiation & Mediation	●	●	◗
Transportation Fairs	◗	◗	◗
Games & Contests	○	◗	○
Improving Meeting Attendance	○	○	○
Role Playing	○	○	○
Site Visits	○	○	○
Non-Traditional Meeting Places & Events	○	○	○
Interactive Television	○	●	◗
Interactive Video Displays and Kiosks	◗	●	◗
Computer Presentations & Simulations	◗	●	◗
Teleconferencing	○	○	○

SMALL GROUP TECHNIQUES

Brainstorming *(Involve)*

Description: A process to get as many ideas as possible on paper without judgment or criticism. Is a part of a larger process: a large meeting may be broken into brainstorming groups. The purpose is to prioritize ideas and reach consensus.

When Used: Appropriate for some planning activities but can be used at any point.

Tips: Use a facilitator. Keep the group small, under 10 people.

Plus: Encourages new approaches to a problem, and problems tend to be defined better as the process goes on. May help limit conflict, and all participants have an equal opportunity to contribute. Can show agency's willingness to hear new approaches and ideas. Inexpensive, and material needs are minimal.

Minus: Success depends on the skill of the facilitator.

For more information: *A System that Serves Everyone: Attracting Nontraditional Participants into the Regional Transportation Planning Process* (Lebeaux, 1996).

Breakout Groups *(Involve)*

Description: Subsets of larger meetings that break out to discuss issues and report back to larger group. All in the breakout group can contribute. Use different techniques to address an issue (brainstorming, for example).

When Used: Can be helpful at any point in process.

Plus: Helps a large meeting be more productive.

Minus: Some may see the breakout as a "divide and conquer" strategy.

Briefings *(Inform)*

Description: Meetings with community groups or leaders to provide information. Can be one-on-one. Get on agenda of regular social and civic clubs (e.g., Rotary Club, League of Women Voters).

When Used: Appropriate for planning process and project development, particularly design, especially before a big decision. Useful for many stages of a project: at the beginning or during the planning phase. Can be used to keep public informed at regular intervals.

Tips: Keep presentations short and simple. Bring high-quality visual aids. Staff at briefings should be very comfortable making presentations and answering questions (those who do well "thinking on their feet." Can use same presentations for more than one group

Plus: Can be means of reaching variety of people who may not be interested in other techniques. Can pinpoint focus on a particular neighborhood or aspect of a project so that people who attend are interested in that phase. Can repair the view by the public of a misunderstood or misrepresented agency and can demonstrate agency initiative. Briefings tend to be inexpensive, especially if presentation materials are used more than once.

Minus: May not reach some groups of stakeholders. Topic or presentations may be too technical, so keep them easy to understand. If agency relies on briefings too much, can have the appearance of making "backroom deals."

For more information: *Hear Every Voice: A Guide to Public Involvement at MnDOT* (Minnesota Department of Transportation, 1999).

Charrettes *(Involve)*

Description: Goal is to resolve a problem or deal with an issue during the time of the meeting. Agency sets specific goals and makes them known before the meeting.

When Used: Appropriate for planning process and design. Also can be used to resolve difficult issues or impasses.

Tips: Clearly state how ideas will be used. Have a facilitator experienced with charrettes.

Plus: The compressed time frame encourages participants to attack the problem rapidly and openly. Shows agency's openness to suggestions and consensus.

Minus: Public may not see participants as representative. May not have lasting impact if used as only technique. Requires significant resources: materials, staffing, and facilitator. Requires a great deal of advance work. Since it is a one-time event, lots of thought must be given to the timing of the event and its participants.

For more information: *South Dallas/Fair Park LRT Station Charrette Summary Report* (Carter Burgess and Wallace Consultants and Wallace, Roberts, and Todd Consultants, 1999).

Also: Verona Road–West Beltline Needs Assessment (Fox, 1999).

Citizens on Policy Decision Bodies *(Involve)*

Description: People from the community, appointed in several ways, participate in decision-making boards or policy boards.

When Used: Especially useful for complicated projects.

Tips: Balanced representation is very important.

Plus: Community reps bring new ideas and creativity to the process. Can give more legitimacy to any decisions made by board.

Minus: Criticism of the selection process may occur.

Civic Advisory Committee (a.k.a. Citizen Advisory Committee) (*Involve)*

Description: Committee serves in advisory capacity. Is made up of a representative group of public stakeholders who provide input and meet regularly. Is a forum for hearing and recording people's ideas. Consensus is sought but does not have to be reached. Helps community develop understanding of transportation decisions

When Useful: Planning and project development, especially in design. Most useful on a project or regional level.

Tips: Keep group size manageable. Be sure to define member roles and responsibilities. Use neutral party facilitation. Encourage members to communicate with their constituencies. Diversity of viewpoints is a bonus for full discussion.

Plus: Can show agency's commitment to getting people involved. Project issues can be explored in detail. Can help the agency keep a finger on the community's pulse.

Minus: Requires large time commitment. Needs high and consistent attendance and work from support staff. Committee recommendations may not be received well by public. Can require large amounts of time and staff requirements.

For more information: *A Citizen-Led Process for Deciding Community Transportation Priorities* (O'Dowd, 1996).

Also: *Woodrow Wilson Bridge Project: Lessons Continuing* (Walker, 2000).

Also: *Executive Summary: Visioning Document, Clearfield and Centre Counties, Pennsylvania.* (Orth-Rodgers and Associates, 2001).

Also: *The Interaction Between Traffic Analysis and Public Involvement in a Small Community: The M-52 Bypass Study in the Village of Chelsea, Michigan* (Aldighieri et al., 2001).
Also: *Boise's Bench-to-Valley Transportation Study: How the Political Process Interprets Public Input and Technical Recommendations* (Butzier and Szplett, 1999).

Coffee Klatches *(Inform)*

Description: Small, informal meetings, usually in someone's home.

Tips: Be sure staff is appreciative and polite.

Plus: Informal setting can help foster dialogue.

Minus: Can be labor-intensive to reach many people.

For more information: *Public Participation Toolbox* (http://www.iap2.org).

Collaborative Decision Making *(Involve)*

Description: A method to involve stakeholders in a process to solve controversial transportation problems. A nine-step process for identifying and selecting stakeholders and issues through developing evaluation criteria and ranking alternative solutions.

Plus: Relatively inexpensive.

For more information: *Collaborative Decision-Making: Use of Multiattribute Utility Analysis in Resolving Controversial Transportation Issues* (Schwartz and Eichorn, 1997).

Collaborative Task Force (*Involve)*

Description: Group tasked with a particular job, such as making a policy recommendation. Group exists only for a specific period of time. Group solves a problem by working hard to reach consensus and speaking in a unified voice; their decision is subject to approval by agency decision makers.

When Used: Appropriate for planning process. Good for high-profile issues and is often used when an impasse has been reached.

Tips: Members should represent diverse perspectives and have credibility with the public. Assign agency staff with technical expertise to the task force. Use a facilitator to ensure all members have chances to participate and guide the process in terms of when the discussion is going well and/or when an impasse is impending. Select a neutral site for the meetings.

Plus: Can foster input of community and help settle disputes through a process that promotes participation. Since the group typically represents a wide range of interests, its decisions can be expected to have wide support in the community.

Minus: Group may not reach consensus. Requires large time and staff commitment. Needs extensive meetings to understand issues fully, and an experienced professional facilitator can be expensive.

For more information: *Public Involvement: Paving the Way to Success* (Kaufman and Cain, 2000).

Also: *Collaboration to Enhance the Effectiveness of Public involvement on the Maumee River Crossing Project* (Nims et al., 2001).

Also: *Citizen Participation: Tackling the Thorns* (Chiat et al., 1999).

Also: *Collaboration: A Guide for Environmental Advocates* (Dukes and Firehock, 2001).

Community or Citizen Juries *(Involve)*

Description: 18-20 people are selected from community. Participants are impaneled to hear testimony on a plan presented by experts. Decision is non-binding

When Used: Appropriate for planning.

Tips: Balanced representation on the jury is key. Skilled moderator needed. Agency that holds jury must explain why recommendations were not followed, if turns out to be the case.

Minus: Requires significant resources from the agency and a significant time commitment from participants.

Plus: Gets input that is thoughtful and well informed. Can alert agency to flaws in plan.

For more information: See *The Citizens' Jury Process* (www.jefferson-center.org). The site also includes descriptions of Citizen Jury projects to date.

Conflict Utilization Opinionaire *(Involve)*

Description: A problem solving strategy for a small group (8-10). Explores how people deal with conflict by employing questionnaires and survey techniques. Participants express their views of conflict and how leaders should deal with the conflict and the best path to reach consensus.

Tips: Use a facilitator.

Plus: Can be more a comfortable method of getting to the issue in question.

Decision Science *(Involve)*

Description: A procedure for reaching consensus. The small group starts off by agreeing to things that are not in dispute until they reach those items that are in dispute.

Tips: Use a facilitator.

Plus: Allows discussion to center on unresolved issues.

Deliberative Polling *(Inform)*

Description: A method to measure opinion on a project or issue once a segment of the public is educated about the issue in question.

When Used: Appropriate for some planning.

Tips: Use a facilitator who knows the technique.

Plus: The polling can indicate to the agency what the public would think if they had more information and time.

Minus: Resource intensive, often a multiday meeting.

Delphi *(Involve)*

Description: Technique for building consensus. Achieves consensus by asking experts for advice; advice is then sent to participants at public meetings or committee meetings. Iterative process goes on until basic concepts are identified by a majority of participants and a ranking procedure identifies priorities.

When Used: Appropriate for planning.

Tips: Give enough time to reach consensus and define the level (how *much* do all members have to agree) of agreement sought.

Minus: Not the choice for groups who do not want to compromise.

Dialogue Facilitation *(Involve)*

Description: Goal is to open channels of communication first, then get to issue discussion later. Can open channels over a meal or relaxed setting; conversation is about matters other than the central issue. This method is not expected to have the group reach consensus, rather it is a way to encourage discussion and then move to the issue in question.

When Used: Appropriate for planning

Plus: Relaxed setting fosters discussion.

Expert Panels *(Inform)*

Description: Media panel interviews project experts.

Tips: Impartial moderator needed. Let public ask questions after media finished. Set ground rules before meeting starts.

Plus: Helps educate the media and gives chance for balanced discussion.

Minus: Needs lots of preparation and staff time. May increase public concerns by raising the profile of issues.

Facilitation *(Involve)*

Description: Guidance of a group in problem solving. Leads toward consensus. Usually facilitator is neutral on issues under discussion.

When Used: Appropriate for planning. Often can be used to supplement other techniques.

Plus: Is a flexible technique and can demonstrate a commitment to action lacking in an un-facilitated meeting.

Minus: Requires sufficient time: a short meeting may curtail full discussion. May be expensive if professional facilitator is needed over long time period.

For more information: *We Can't Hear You! San Diego's Techniques for Getting Balanced Community Input in Major Investment Studies* (Bates and Wahl, 1997).

Focus Groups *(Involve)*

Description: Small group that has an interactive discussion, usually led by a moderator or facilitator. Used for gathering input and insights and not shaping them. Used in addition to other techniques.

When Used: Useful at beginning of project and in later phases, especially when designing public information plan. Especially appropriate for planning.

Tips: Hold multiple sessions. Provide refreshments or other incentive. Use trained facilitator/moderator.

Plus: Relaxed setting encourages active discussion and an opportunity to explore participants' attitudes. Can help solicit community input from specific people who may otherwise be un-represented.

Minus: Can be expensive, but not as expensive as full-fledged opinion survey. However, focus groups are not a means of gathering public consensus because the members tend not to be statistically representative of all of the public.

Key Person Interviews *(Involve)*

Description: Individual one-on-one meetings with community leaders or those who work with others: elected officials, community volunteers, business people. Goal is to obtain information and notify community. Can be a way of selecting committee representatives for other committees/task forces and a way of identifying issues. Can also be used to fine-tune public involvement plans.

When Useful: At beginning of public information process and before decision making. Also can help in the evaluation of proposals, projects, or the process. Can be especially useful when a project affects a group of businesses or a neighborhood.

Tips: Send invitations by mail, and follow-up with phone calls. Conduct interviews in person. Ask for opinions on how the community would like to participate. Choose interviewers who can establish rapport and trust with the interviewees. Document the interview in writing, and maintain anonymity of interviewee. Make follow-up contacts. Include project opponents in interviews. Early contact would be welcome.

Plus: Shows agency is interested in community thoughts. Can lead to lists of contacts and key players in community.

Minus: Can take a lot of time to conduct multiple interviews. May not represent the entire community. May alienate people who are not interviewed.

Negotiation and Mediation *(Involve)*

Description: Negotiation (bargaining) can take place during mediation. Mediation relies on trained neutral person to help reach consensus. Negotiation is usually employed earlier in the process: mediation is usually employed once an impasse has been reached.

When Used: Appropriate for design phase in particular and whenever feelings/emotions are high.

Tips: Include all stakeholders. Stakeholders can be selected from a wider group to keep meetings to a reasonable size.

Plus: Can help resolve an impasse and resolve sticky issues by taking a problem-solving approach. These processes can help avoid costly and time-consuming alternatives (litigation, major redrafts of plans, etc).

Minus: Employing a trained mediator/negotiator can be expensive. Consensus may fall apart over the course of the process. May be time-consuming.

Nominal Group Process *(Involve)*

Description: Includes several methods for helping groups identify issues and priorities. Identifies, organizes, and ranks issues in various ways (voting, tallying cards, etc).

When Used: Often used with brainstorming.

Tips: Allow all members to speak.

Ombudsman *(Inform)*

Description: Official from government who investigates complaints by public relating from construction or some other aspect of the project. Works with community organizations.

Tips: Use a ombudsman with experience dealing with public and who is comfortable doing so.

Open Space Technology *(Involve)*

Description: Way to assign leadership to a small group, such as a breakout group. Members write topics and their names on cards/post-it notes, etc., and display them. Others "vote" for the topics, and the topics with the most votes are discussed. The person who suggested the topic leads discussion.

When Used: Appropriate for planning. Often used with breakout groups.

Tips: Have an interesting theme to encourage topics. Carefully explain ground rules.

Plus: Method of assessing which issues are more important to the group.

Minus: Accurate recording of results can be difficult.

Retreats *(Involve)*

Description: Workshops in informal setting with few distractions. Usually task oriented, and if issue is complicated, may require one full day or longer. Work on conflict resolution and communication.

When Used: Appropriate for planning but can be used anywhere in the process.

Tips: Use a skilled, impartial moderator. Define what the agency will do with results. Hold in convenient location.

Plus: Participants can speak freely without the need to have comments put on the record. Can be used to develop specifics for a transportation program. Can include specific groups.

Role Playing *(Inform)*

Description: Participants act out characters in a given situation. Usually followed by some assessment of the characters' interactions.

When Used: Used with other techniques such as a retreat.

Tips: Make sure all positions are represented. Use a trained leader. May work better with informed participants. Encouragement may be necessary.

Plus: Can help break down barriers or ease tension among participants. Participants can have the chance to see other perspectives. Can be used as conflict resolution tool.

Minus: Requires significant preparation time in developing situations. Some participants may find the process uncomfortable.

Roundtables *(Involve)*

Description: Stakeholder group usually organized around a table. The focus is a very detailed discussion with all participating.

When Used: Often a way of organizing breakout groups, workshops. Appropriate for planning.

Samoan Circle *(Involve)*

Description: A technique for small group discussion of controversial issues without a facilitator, chair, or moderator. Two concentric circles of seats are arranged (an inner circle with a table and four chairs, and an outer circle). Those most interested in the discussion and those wishing to speak are in the circle; others stay in the outside circle. All participants can move in or out of the inner circle as the discussion proceeds.

When Used: Appropriate for planning. Can be especially useful and effective for discussions of controversial issues.

Tips: Have several people recording the discussion.

Plus: Useful for anywhere from 10 to 500 people. Can help identify stakeholders.

Minus: Dialogue can sometimes be taken over by individuals.

For more information: *Public Involvement Techniques for Transportation Decision-Making* (Howard/Stein-Hudson Associates and Parsons Brinckerhoff Quade and Douglas, 1996).

Seminars *(Inform)*

Description: The group's agenda usually centers on a single topic. Participants usually are very interested in the topic or issue.

When Used: Appropriate for planning.

Plus: Enables participants to learn about issue.

Site Visits (a.k.a. Field Trips) *(Inform)*

Description: Organized, guided trips taken by residents, officials to site.

When Used: Appropriate for planning and design in particular.

Tips: Provide refreshments, and make sure site is safe. Demonstrations at site can be very effective. Staff must be able to answer wide range of potential questions.

Plus: Can improve media understanding. Can help visitors understand an unfamiliar technology or concept.

Minus: May be a magnet for protestors. Site visits may need to be held over and over for big projects and to reach broad audience.

For more information: www.wilsonbridge.com, see Citizen Tours.

Small Format Meetings *(Inform/Involve)*

Description: Meetings during other group meetings or along with other event.

When Used: Especially useful during planning phase. But also appropriate for controversial projects.

Tips: Be sure to have one-on-one meetings with participants.

Plus: Can get lots of information exchange in a setting comfortable for participants.

Minus: Can leave out some important groups if focus on only one.

For more information: *The North Shore Connector: Incorporating Community Values into the Project Development Process* (Wohlwill and Veights, 2000).

Speakers' Bureaus and Public Involvement Volunteers *(Inform)*

Description: Bureau consists of trained representatives to speak about a project to different groups in the community. Public involvement volunteers are community people who assist the agency in designing the public involvement program and putting it in place. The two can be used together or separately.

When Used: Appropriate for some planning activities. Especially effective when approaching a project milestone.

Tips: Customize presentations to the audience's needs and requests. Can explain agency's work at different public involvement events.

Plus: Can help the agency staff understand the concerns of the community and help the community understand the agency. Relatively inexpensive, and volunteers can stretch a limited budget.

Minus: The use of volunteers does not take the place of staff involvement. Volunteers may lose respect in community if process does not work.

Structured Dialogue *(Inform)*

Description: Method of getting input from stakeholders. Examines an issue in detail. Identifies areas of common ground and misunderstanding.

When Used: Can be helpful with controversial projects.

Study Circles *(Inform)*

Description: More than one meeting designed to talk about critical issues. Members assigned learning tasks between meetings.

When Used: Appropriate for planning.

SWOT *(Inform/Involve)*

Description: Strengths, weakness, opportunities, threats analysis of an issue. Critical approach that uses these criteria to evaluate a plan's or concept's chances for success. Voting and consensus building can help set priorities.

When Used: Appropriate for planning. Could be used with a variety of small group techniques.

Synetics *(Inform/Involve)*

Description: Group discusses an unrelated issue and analyzes that discussion. That analysis can help with relationships in the critical issue discussion.

When Used: Appropriate for planning.

Transportation Action Model *(Involve)*

Description: Appropriate for communities of 5,000 to 10,000 in population. Involves citizens at grassroots level in highly structured process. Process consists of "creating public dialogue, identifying transportation issues, and developing solutions." It is a 21-week process.

For more information: *Hear Every Voice: A Guide to Public Involvement at Mn/DOT* (Minnesota Department of Transportation, 1999). Contains detailed description and a case study.

Value Analysis *(Inform/Involve)*

Description: Used to judge the attractiveness of each alternative based on a set of values held by the community (perhaps clean air). Participants assess the attractiveness of each alternative and assign points to that value as a means of ranking alternatives.

When Used: Appropriate for planning.

Workshops *(Involve)*

Description: Relatively short, task-oriented meeting with a narrowly defined topic usually led by agency staff person or community volunteer to keep group on track. May have presentations and interactive working groups.

When Used: Can be smaller part of a larger meeting or conference. Especially appropriate for smaller groups. Appropriate for planning. Particularly helpful for discussions regarding alternatives or criteria analysis.

Tips: Have a plan to use public input. Have facilitator training before workshop. Have resource people attend to answer questions that may arise. Can target specific groups of people.

Plus: Smaller groups allow for more opportunities for interaction and participation. Can build credibility and can foster significant feedback from attendees. Less expensive than conferences, fees are usually not suggested.

Minus: Needs a number of small group facilitators. Some may not like the small group division concept.

For more information: *Light-Rail Station Workshop Summary Results* (Seattle Planning Commission and University Community Urban Center Neighborhood Planning Committee, 1996).

Also: *The North Shore Connector: Incorporating Community Values into the Project Development Process* (Wohlwill and Veights, 2000).

Also: Agenda for West Beltline and Verona Road *Ideas for the Future* Community Workshop, June 10, 1999 (Wisconsin Department of Transportation, 2000).

LARGE GROUP TECHNIQUES

Briefings *(Inform)*

Description: Meetings with community groups or leaders to provide information. Can be one-on-one. Get on agenda of regular social and civic clubs (Rotary Club, League of Women Voters).

When Used: Appropriate for planning process and project development, particularly design, especially before a big decision. Useful for many stages of a project: at beginning, during planning phase or to keep public informed at regular intervals

Tips: Keep presentations short and simple. Bring high quality visual aids. Staff at briefings should be very comfortable making presentations and answering questions (those who do well "thinking on their feet"). Can use same presentations for more than one group

Plus: Can be means of reaching variety of people who may not be interested in other techniques. Can pinpoint focus on a particular neighborhood or aspect of a project so that people who attend are interested in that phase. Can repair the view by the public of a misunderstood or misrepresented agency and can demonstrate agency initiative. Briefings tend to be inexpensive especially if presentation materials are used more than once.

Minus: May not reach some groups of stakeholders this way. Topic or presentations may be too technical so keep them easy to understand. If agency relies on briefings too much can have the appearance of making "back room deals."

For more information: *Hear Every Voice: A Guide to Public Involvement at MnDOT* (Minnesota Department of Transportation, 1999).

Central Information Contact *(Inform)*

Description: Trained agency contact as liaison.

Tips: Person should be selected for excellent communication skills. Keep any recorded messages current. Contact person must be prepared to answer questions accurately and quickly.

Plus: Demonstrates accessibility of the agency.

Minus: Callers may not get answers to the toughest questions.

Conferences *(Inform/Involve)*

Description: Structured agenda including presentations and discussion. Length of conference can vary from one-half day to several days. May be a forum to talk about regulations and law or used to celebrate the completion of a process. Conferences are usually open to the public, but some may be by invitation only.

When Used: Appropriate for planning but can be used at any phase of the process.

Tips: Have knowledgeable people at the conference, i.e., technical experts. Hold it at a location that is convenient for participants. The costs of a conference may be offset by fees to cover refreshments and printing costs (fees should be as low as possible).

Minus: Special organization and extensive publicity is required for a conference so can be challenging for agency staff. Conferences are expensive and can be viewed as exclusionary.

Drop-In Centers (a.k.a. Field Office, Site Office, Information Centers, Clearing House) *(Inform)*

Description: Location for information exchange within community. Is staffed by knowledgeable people so questions can be addressed on site.

When Used: Appropriate for some planning and construction activities.

Tips: Choose an accessible and convenient location. Provide Internet access.

Plus: Can be good way to educate schoolchildren in particular. Can generate positive media coverage at significant project events.

Minus: Can be expensive. Unless the facility is mobile, it may be limited to those living or working close by.

For more information: www.springfieldinterchange.com (Springfield Interchange Improvement Project, 2003).

Electronic Techniques *(Inform/Involve through Feedback)*

Description: For two-way communication with the public. Examples of such techniques are information bureau, email, helpline, electronic town meeting, interactive cable TV, teleconferencing. For further discussion of Internet techniques, see *on-line services*.

Tips: Offer up-to-date recordings and access to trained staff. Be sure to follow up questions with responses, and use toll-free number for helplines. Present information in lively, interesting manner. Make arrangements for the hearing impaired. Must be used with other techniques.

Plus: Have advantage of delivering consistent message but can become dated, particularly videos. Shows agency is accessible. Techniques reach a broad spectrum of people.

Minus: Not everyone in all communities has access to a telephone or email. People may not hear the opinions of others in this case. Some techniques can be expensive, and it may be hard to judge audience response. Although cable access TV is cheaper than paid network advertising, it reaches only a limited audience. Although public access TV programming is less expensive than commercial network programming, it typically has lower viewership.

Employer Outreach *(Inform)*

Description: Can tap into existing employer information channels, such as newsletters and email lists, to inform people.

When Used: Can engage contacts within the organizations to help locate stakeholders.

Facilitation *(Involve)*

Description: Guidance of a group in problem solving. Leads toward consensus. Usually, facilitator is neutral on issues under discussion.

When Used: Appropriate for planning. Often can be used to supplement other techniques.

Plus: Is a flexible technique and can demonstrate a commitment to action lacking in an un-facilitated meeting.

Minus: Requires sufficient time: a short meeting may curtail full discussion. May be expensive if professional facilitator is needed over long time period.

For more information: We Can't Hear You! San Diego's Techniques for Getting Balanced Community Input in Major Investment Studies (Bates and Wahl, 1997)

Future Search Conference *(Involve)*

Description: Focuses on future of agency, community.

When Used: Planning process.

Tips: Have a facilitator trained in this technique.

Plus: Has potential to lead to significant changes in agency. Can involve a large number of people in eventual decisions.

Minus: Time commitment by participants is significant (2-3 days). Can be difficult to plan and arrange.

Games and Contests *(Inform)*

Description: Ways to involve new people and can get them thinking about alternatives, alignments, and other issues.

When Used: Appropriate for planning.

Tips: Test the game and specify how the results will be used.

Plus: These tools can grab people's attention and help generate publicity. Can form base mailing list.

Minus: Needs lots of preparation time and can be expensive depending on sophistication of game. A poorly designed game fails and can obscure its original purpose.

For more information: *Planning Games and Public Involvement* (Beever and Wagner, 2001).

Highway Advisory Radio *(Inform)*

Description: Real-time information about patterns near project or alternate routes.

Tips: Message must not be out of date, and signal must be clear. Announcer should possess good speaking ability. Tips: Need publicity to alert travelers to its existence (signage, other).

Plus: Can reach a large portion of those in range.

For more information: *An Investigation of Operational Procedures for Highway Advisory Radio* (Smith et al., 1995).

Information Repositories *(Inform)*

Description: Use public facilities to store materials (libraries, schools).

Tips: Use a sign-in sheet to keep track of use. Train personnel to be familiar with where the information is kept.

Plus: Keeps copy and mailing costs down by having material in one visible location

Minus: May not be well used by public.

Interactive Displays and Kiosks *(Inform)*

Description: Kiosks can provide info to the user in a convenient location (mall). Can be used to conduct online surveys.

Tips: Can be multilingual. Keep technical language to minimum.

Plus: May reach broader audience than other techniques if well situated. Interactive displays can take the place of a site visit, particularly helpful if the site is far away.

Minus: Developing an interactive display can be expensive. Some may be uncomfortable with the level of technology.

Mailing Lists *(Inform/Involve through feedback)*

Description: List of people interested in or affected by a transportation decision. Can include addresses, email addresses, phone numbers, etc. Basic foundation for a good public involvement program.

When Used: Useful for all phases of project.

Tips: Keep lists current. Cannot replace other techniques, so do not rely on lists to the exclusion of others.

Plus: Demonstrates outreach and notification efforts. Can allow updated information to be sent in timely fashion. Can target a specific group: those living in project corridor, for example. Can be used as pool of potential committee members and base population for surveys and to help set up other techniques.

Minus: The building and maintenance of an updated list can be labor-intensive but can save staff time if computerized. Bulk printing and mailing costs can be significant, but often there are economies of scale. May exclude portions of the population, but these may be reached through special efforts. Not statistically valid for surveys.

For more information: *Public Involvement at the Planning Level: A Case Study of the University of Maryland Eastern Shore Access Road* (Rahman, 1993).

Media Strategies *(Inform)*

Description: Goal is to inform and educate the public. Examples: newspapers, radio, TV/videos, billboard, posters, VMS, mass mailings, public service announcements, news conferences.

When Used: Appropriate for planning and development, particularly design. Can be especially useful for bigger, milestone events since people tend to be more interested in these.

Tips: Agency can monitor the public's opinions about the information they receive. Speakers should be trained to deal well with media. A variety of strategies should be used to get information out to broad section of public.

Plus: Agency gets to frame the message. Gets the same message out to the public and can help generate interest in a project.

Minus: Can be expensive, so the message should be carefully crafted. A good media strategy requires a significant time commitment from start to finish.

For more information: *Virginia Department of Transportation External Communications Assessment: Final Report* (Siddall, Matus, and Coughter Consultants, 2002b).

Public Information Materials *(Inform/Involve through Feedback)*

Description: Documents, videos, other items that give details on project. Some may be legally required. Idea is to communicate quickly and provide basic project information. Examples: ads, billboards, newsletters, articles, bill stuffers, news inserts, flexi-tags, headliners, postcards, key chains, children's activity books, magnets.

When Used: Appropriate for planning and project development phases, but useful throughout.

Tips: Make them eye-catching. May reach more people if language concerns are taken into consideration: distribute in language of choice. Watch out for use of technical engineering jargon unfamiliar to public. Have contact phone numbers, email addresses, fax numbers on communications. Keep agency look consistent (logos), i.e., "branding" of agency materials. Keep them brief and to the point. FAQ format. Include a stamped return postcard/email address for comments. Staff experienced with writing and communicating with the public should lead

this process. Can distribute materials in variety of ways: through mail, in public places, at public events.

Plus: Can reach a large group of people. Shows agency cares about communicating with public. Can improve awareness of the agency planning process. Informs the public about agency activities.

Minuses: Are only one-way communication devices. The items may not all be read, but a variety may get attention. Only limited information can be conveyed. May not work if information is too technical.

For more information: See *Virginia Department of Transportation External Communications Assessment: Final Report* (Siddall, Matus, and Coughter Consultants, 2002b).

Also: *South Sacramento Transit Alternative Project: Public Involvement Ethnic Outreach 1993* (Montoya Bilingual Communications, 1993).

Also: *Public Involvement: Low Budget Can Mean High Effectiveness (*Bell, 1998).

Also: *Incorporating Public Outreach Activities on Transportation-related Archaeological Projects* (Landers and Resnick, 2001).

Also: *Involving Kids in a Transportation Planning Process: A Collaborative Project Between Akira Toki Middle School, WisDot, City of Madison and UW-Madison Graduate Students* (Wisconsin Department of Transportation, 2001).

Also: *Public Involvement: Paving the Way to Success* (Kaufman and Cain, 2000).

Public Meetings and Hearings (a.k.a. Citizen Advisory Meetings) *(Inform/Involve)*

Description: Can be open forum, open house, or traditional format. A method of two-way communication between agency and public. Public meetings provide information to the public and are generally held during the planning process. Public hearings tend to be more formal, usually legally required, and usually held before a major decision point. Both are forums for gathering comments and input from the community. Visualization technologies can enhance the public's understanding of the project.

When Used: Appropriate for parts of the planning process and some project development activities.

Tips: Hold meetings at various sites. Provide childcare. Choose a neutral, accessible site. Avoid formal meetings if possible. If open house, be prepared for waves of people.

Plus: Open format means participants can spend more time on their issues. Gathers recorded comments. Open format allows citizens to attend at convenient time. Open forum may be preferable for those uncomfortable with public speaking.

Minus: Open house usually requires more resources than meeting, requires more people to answer questions in various technical areas. Formal presentations and microphones can be intimidating if traditional format meeting. In open house style, it is difficult to talk with all attendees and everyone does not hear all comments. "I want to hear what my neighbors are saying." Requires significant effort and staff. If traditional format, many people are not comfortable speaking in public. Tends not to foster dialogues and can be a magnet for protestors. A hearing alone is generally an insufficient level of public involvement when held at the end of the process: best preceded by other involvement opportunities. Only a small portion of the public generally attends meetings and hearings.

For more information: *An Assessment of the Virginia Department of Transportation's Public Involvement Processes: Phase I Results* (O'Leary et al., 1999). Online at http://www.virginiadot.org/vtrc/main/online_reports/00tar3.pdf

Also: *Cutting Edge Visualization Tools: Graphic Simulations That Stimulate Project Understanding and Decision Making* (Keister and Moreno, 2002).

Also: *Hear Every Voice: A Guide to Public Involvement at MnDOT* (Minnesota Department of Transportation, 1999).

Also: *Public Involvement at the Oregon Department of Transportation* (Federal Highway Administration, 1997b.

Also: *Public Involvement at the Planning Level: A Case Study of the University of Maryland Eastern Shore Access Road* (Rahman, 1993).

Public Opinion Surveys *(Inform Decision Makers)*

Description: Sets of questions designed to elicit opinion on issues. Can be effective method of finding out general public attitudes and to educate the public.

Tips: Use neutral, unbiased questions. Materials must be in a form public can understand easily.

Plus: Can enhance participation by gathering details from public, and an informed public can enhance the involvement process. Can be accomplished through many means: online, phone (usually higher response rate from phone than mailed surveys), mass mailings, computer-based participation and electronic democracy: good response rate but high expense.

Minus: Be careful relying on online polls because they are not usually statistically valid. Any surveys can be labor-intensive. Results can be skewed by nonresponse or other factors.

For more information see: www.wilsonbridge.com.

Also*: In the Possibilities Are the Solutions: Assessment and Implications of the Public Involvement Process During the Environmental Impact Study of the Woodrow Wilson Bridge* (Keever et al., 1999).

Samoan Circle *(Involve)*

Description: Works with larger groups by dividing the group into an inner circle of discussion and an outer circle. Participants move from circle to circle as the discussion proceeds, according to level of interest.

When Used: Appropriate for planning. Can be especially useful and effective for controversial issues.

Tips: Need to have several people recording the discussion.

Plus: Useful for anywhere from 10 to 500 people. Can help identify stakeholders.

Minus: Dialogue can sometimes be taken over by individuals.

For more information: *Public Involvement Techniques for Transportation Decision-Making* (Howard/Stein-Hudson and Parsons Brinckerhoff Quade and Douglas, 1996).

Speakers' Bureaus and Public Involvement Volunteers *(Inform)*

Description: Bureau consists of trained representatives to speak about a project to different groups in the community. Public involvement volunteers are community people who assist the agency in designing the public involvement program and putting it in place. The two can be used together or separately.

When Used: Appropriate for some planning activities. Especially effective when approaching a project milestone.

Tips: Customize presentations to the audience's needs and requests. Can explain agency's work at different public involvement events.

Plus: Can help the agency staff understand the concerns of the community and help the community understand the agency. Relatively inexpensive and volunteers can stretch a limited budget.

Minus: The use of volunteers does not take the place of staff involvement. Volunteers may lose respect in community if process does not work.

Systematic Development of Informed Consent *(Inform)*

Description: Developed by Hans and Marie Bleiker of the Institute for Participatory Management and Planning (Minnesota Department of Transportation, 1999; Institute for Participatory Management and Training, 2003). Aim is to problem solve and by doing so, establish the agency's legitimate role. Communicates the seriousness of problem to public. Defines informed consent as not complete consensus, but seeks to get everyone's agreement that they can "live with" the result. Process identifies objectives and divides these into responsibility, responsiveness, and effectiveness objectives.

For more information: *Hear Every Voice: A Guide to Public Involvement at Mn/DOT* (Minnesota Department of Transportation, 1999).

See also: Institute for Participatory Management and Training, http://www.ipmp-bleiker.com/whoweare.htm.

Technical Assistance *(Inform)*

Description: Public given access to technical expertise.

When Used: Planning.

Tips: The expert must be seen as credible. Work with technical experts to ensure they know how to work well with public.

Plus: Can work well to resolve conflict when facts are in dispute. Can build credibility and address public's equity concerns.

Minus: Staff may not be comfortable dealing with public.

Technical Reports *(Inform)*

Description: Documents that provide explanation of project decisions.

When Used: Planning.

Tips: May be viewed as more objective if done by outside group.

Minuses: May not be reader-friendly.

Transportation Fairs *(Inform)*

Description: Highly promoted event to interest community in transportation.

When Used: Appropriate for planning.

Tips: Ensure adequate staff and other resources. Does not replace other techniques.

Plus: Good for generating media coverage and may interest public who would not otherwise be interested.

Minus: Fairs are expensive to do well. Can harm relations if not done well. Does not result in public consensus.

Visioning *(Involve)*

Description: Focus is long range, and outcome is a statement of goals. Can be a set of meetings.

When Used: Appropriate for some planning activities and long-range planning in particular. Most useful at beginning of development of policies or plans. Used along with other techniques.

Plus: Is integrated approach to policy plans.

Minus: Requires lots of advance work by staff. May require participants to attend several meetings.

For more information: *Metroplan (Little Rock, Arkansas): Pouring Water on Dry Ground* (Federal Highway Administration, 1997a).

Also: Sustainable Community Planning: Kansas City's Empowerment Project (Jackson, 1997).

Websites or Online Services *(Inform/Involve through Feedback)*

Description: Agency or project websites, chat rooms. Public can submit opinions and provide feedback.

When Used: Throughout process.

Tips: Keep the website easy to navigate. Keep the site current. Register site with major search engines. Make it load quickly and look professional, compatible with multiple browsers. Have interactive participation and links to other helpful sites.

Plus: Can reach large numbers of people; content can be revised or updated readily.

Minus: Not everyone has Internet access.

For more information on websites: *Giving Something Back: Public Outreach in Archaeology as an Important Part of Transportation Planning* (Hinks et al., 2001).

Also see: The following project websites:

www.wilsonbridge.com   Woodrow Wilson Bridge Project website, accessed February 27, 2003.

www.hooverdambypass.org   Hoover Dam/US 93 Project website, accessed February 27, 2003.

www.oahutrans2k.com   Honolulu, City and County of. Website for Oahu Trans 2K Transportation Plan.

www.pbid.com/us24   Parsons Brinckerhoff. Ohio US 24 Project Website. Accessed February 27, 2003.

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