



SVN Briefing Paper: I-81 Tolls vs. Rail Freight

There is now a clear choice regarding the future of I-81. Norfolk Southern has announced the \$2 billion, multi-state I-81 Crescent Corridor plan to upgrade rail over the next seven years, which could divert one million trucks, including 750,000 trucks in Virginia, by 2012.

Yet, VDOT plans for Virginians to pay more than \$11 billion to widen I-81, expanding 69 percent of the corridor to eight lanes. Such a costly, unnecessary and unpopular expansion depends on tolls on both cars and trucks, at the expense of businesses and residents along the entire corridor.

VDOT Retains Authority to Toll I-81:

1. VDOT's application for tolls on cars and trucks on I-81 is pending before the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and is reportedly the only state application to seek tolls on an existing free interstate highway.
2. In 2007, the General Assembly approved HB2314 (Del. Lingamfelter), which authorizes tolls on any interstate in Virginia, subject to federal approval. While this bill contained a prohibition on tolls for PPTA projects, there is an exception for federal toll pilot projects, such as VDOT's application before the FHWA.
3. The 2006 state legislative budget amendment that prohibited the tolling of cars and light trucks on I-81 contained a similar exemption, allowing tolling if I-81 were approved for a federal toll pilot project.
4. VDOT's I-81 Final Environmental Impact Study (FEIS), approved by the FHWA in June 2007, and a 2006 CTB Resolution on I-81 instruct VDOT to pursue a federal toll pilot project for the highway.
5. VDOT's use of "Segments of Independent Utility" in the FEIS plan appears to facilitate tolling segment by segment on I-81. Segments include: Maryland border to I-66; I-66 to Route 33 in Harrisonburg; Route 33 to I-64. All are natural toll plaza sites.

The Rail Option Avoids Tolls, Is Less Expensive & More Effective

1. The \$2 billion cost of the multi-state Crescent Corridor rail upgrade amounts to \$833,333 per mile shared across many states, a stark contrast with the \$11 billion estimate to widen I-81 in Virginia, at a cost of \$33 million per mile.
2. Norfolk Southern estimates that the upgraded corridor will divert one million trucks a year from highways to rail, including 750,000 trucks diverted from Virginia's highways by 2012.
3. Energy and environmental savings are significant. A train can haul one ton of freight up to five times further than a truck on the same amount of fuel and emits one third as much carbon dioxide.

4. Norfolk Southern has begun work on a \$52 million upgrade in Virginia to increase capacity between Manassas and Front Royal. The state provided \$40 million, with a thirty percent match, or \$12 million, from the railroad.

VDOT Foreclosing on Rail, Forcing Tolls on I-81:

1. VDOT says it will “consider” rail later in the I-81 EIS process, but the Tier I FEIS Record of Decision by the FHWA shuts out rail as an alternative. In the next stage of planning, rail cannot be considered a legal alternative to tolling.
2. As stated in the FEIS, "FHWA does not propose to advance rail concepts in Tier 2 of this NEPA study," (pages ES-xvi). VDOT and FHWA "determined that it was not reasonable for this Tier 1 EIS to evaluate multi-state rail improvements" (page ES-xvi).
3. By proposing to study only Segments of Independent Utility in the Tier 2 EIS, VDOT shuts out rail freight because rail is not effective at shorter distances. Yet half of all trucks on I-81 are long-distance, through-traffic, according to the FEIS.
4. VDOT secured FHWA approval for its I-81 plans before a rail freight diversion study, mandated by the legislature, was complete. Norfolk Southern is coordinating the study with state officials. It is due in mid-October, 2007.
5. VDOT has been unwilling to reopen the Final Environmental Impact Statement, to reconsider the rail freight option in light of Norfolk Southern's plans for the Crescent Corridor rail upgrade on I-81.
6. VDOT is still negotiating with the STAR consortium to widen the highway. While federal earmarks (\$140 million) will pay for spot widening, the FEIS calls for much more expensive widening that is unlikely to occur without tolls.

Legislative Recommendations:

1. Pass new state legislation to ban tolls on I-81.
2. Pass a new state budget resolution to ban tolls on I-81 and limit spending to specific highway safety and congestion improvements, not corridor widening.
3. Call on the Speaker, Senate Majority Leader, Governor and Commonwealth Transportation Board to require VDOT to reopen the I-81 FEIS to re-examine the rail option, based on the state study and Norfolk Southern projections.

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