



TPB Technical Committee

Item #8

July 1, 2005

*District of Columbia**Bowie**College Park**Frederick County**Gaithersburg**Greenbelt**Montgomery County**Prince George's County**Rockville**Takoma Park**Alexandria**Arlington County**Fairfax**Fairfax County**Falls Church**Loudoun County**Manassas**Manassas Park**Prince William County*

Ms. Jo Anne Sorenson
Assistant District Engineering for Planning and Development
Virginia Department of Transportation
14685 Avion Parkway
Chantilly, VA
20151

Re: Improvement of the TIP/CLRP Process and Documents

Dear Ms. Sorenson:

Thank you for your letter of May 4, 2005 presenting a comprehensive set of concerns and suggestions developed by VDOT and Northern Virginia jurisdiction staff for improving the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) and the Constrained Long Range Plan (CLRP) process and documents. My staff has reviewed the concerns, proposed resolutions and benefits outlined in your letter, and has prepared responses to them.

As you will see in our responses, most of the changes can be implemented for the FY 2006-2011 TIP currently under development. I suggest that all of these proposed changes to the TIP/CLRP process and documents be reviewed at the July 8 TPB Technical Committee meeting. Following this review, we can proceed to implement the changes.

Our response to the proposed resolutions for each concern is presented below.

1. **Concern - The beginning of the TIP development process is too compressed.** In January, the final TPB TIP solicitation document is approved and the eTIP software for the forthcoming fiscal year is available. Input of regionally significant projects is due to the TPB Steering Committee on the first Friday in February. Meeting this deadline does not give jurisdiction and agency staffs sufficient time to verify the accuracy of their inputs and to properly coordinate project inputs internally or externally with sister agencies and jurisdictions in the region. As a result, the submissions may not be complete and accurate.

Proposed Resolution - Begin the TIP process earlier. Seek TPB approval of the draft and final TIP solicitation documents in November and December, respectively, and make the eTIP for the forthcoming fiscal year available in

late November or early December. Leave the remainder of the schedule the same.

Benefit - Beginning the process earlier will give VDOT and jurisdiction/agency staff more time to review and coordinate input and to ensure the accuracy and completeness of the data prior to its submission to the Steering Committee.

Response: Staff will implement the proposed resolution for the FY 2007-2012 TIP cycle.

2. Concern - The current eTIP software (Access) does not readily output data into the CLRP and TIP spreadsheets (Excel). Data within the eTIP must be hand transcribed to the CLRP and TIP spreadsheets. **Hand transcription can result in errors** of omission or commission, and requires jurisdiction and agency staffs to compare the transcribed data to the data that they originally input into the eTIP.

Proposed Resolution - Develop a way to move data electronically between the eTIP and the CLRP and TIP spreadsheets.

Benefit - A single entry approach will reduce the possibility of errors. It will also reduce, if not eliminate, the need for jurisdiction and agency staff to review the CLRP and TIP spreadsheets to assure that the data that they entered into the eTIP has survived the hand transcription over the CLRP and TIP spreadsheets.

Response: Staff will implement the proposed resolution for the FY 2007-2012 TIP cycle.

3. Concern - **Projects are not readily identifiable via unique project numbers** and some project titles are confusing; e.g., Backlick South or Backlick North Park and Ride Lots, multiple widening projects on VA 123.

Proposed Resolution – Include VDOT’s universal project code (UPC) numbers in the TIP and CLRP documents. In Virginia, each project is assigned a unique UPC that is used for programming, funding, and schedule tracking.

If Maryland and the District of Columbia have unique project identifiers equivalent to VDOT’s UPC numbers, they may want to include their project identifiers in the eTIP. If they are interested, then we should work toward a means of accommodating all jurisdictions’ project identifiers. If either Maryland and/or the District of Columbia are not interested in including their identifiers in the eTIP, then Virginia should not be precluded from having their project UPC’s in the eTIP.

Benefit – Including UPC’s will make it easier to check the draft TIP against VDOT’s Six Year Program documents. Some Virginia jurisdictions will also be using the UPC numbers in their own databases. Addition of the UPC number to the TIP and CLRP documents will reduce confusion and result in fewer misattributions and quicker searches.

Response: *Staff will implement the proposed resolution for the FY 2006-2011 TIP cycle. The current eTIP software includes a field for agency project identification codes on the data input forms. Staff will revise the CLRP and TIP documents to display that field on data reports.*

4. Concern - In the CLRP, the column labeled “Under Construction or R/W Acquired?” is creating confusion among project managers and analysts. A project proposed to occur within existing right of way would have a “Yes” in this column, even if the proposed improvement were in the year 2030. As currently labeled, the information in this column is not helpful. For the past eight years, VDOT’s Northern Virginia District has used this column exclusively to identify which stage of construction, or implementation, projects are under: “No” - not under construction/implementation yet to begin, “Yes” - under construction/implementation underway, and “Complete” - open to traffic/in use.

Proposed Resolution - Change the column in the CLRP currently labeled “Under Construction or R/W Acquired?” to “Under Construction”.

Benefit - This would reduce confusion and facilitate the provision of meaningful information.

Response: *Staff will implement the proposed resolution for the FY 2006-2011 TIP cycle.*

5. Concern - The column in the TIP labeled “Carryover” is creating confusion among project managers and analysts. This column was originally added to the TIP to distinguish between “old” and “new” money in the TIP. It continues to do that somewhat satisfactorily; however, since the TIP is an obligation document, project phases that have been authorized drop out of the TIP. Consequently, beyond the previous fiscal year column, there is **little financial history provided in the TIP**; it is primarily a document of future obligations.

Proposed Resolution - Change the column title labeled “Carryover” to “Previously Authorized”. (This change will require a corresponding change in the data entered within this column.)

Benefit - The “Previously Authorized” column will still allow the reader to distinguish between “old” and “new” money, and it will provide a financial history for each project.

Response: If all of the TPB implementing agencies are agreeable, staff will implement the proposed resolution for the FY 2006-2011 TIP cycle.

6. **Concern** - The TIP's current project phase codes – “a” for “Preliminary Engineering”, “b” for “Right of Way Acquisition”, and “c” for “Construction” are not representative of the activities that are associated with a significant number of projects. ITS projects, recurrent traffic engineering functions, acquisition of new buses, provision of new transit services, the annual leasing of park and ride lots, and implementation of TERM projects are typical examples.

Proposed Resolution - Identify new project codes for “acquisition”, “implementation”, “provision”, etc., or expand the definition of “a”, “b”, and “c” to include these new purposes.

Benefit - This would allow for the provision of more meaningful information.

Response: If all of TPB implementing agencies are agreeable, staff will revise the definitions of the current project phase codes (“a,” “b,” and “c”) to include these “non-construction” types of activities, beginning with the FY 2007-2012 TIP cycle.

7. **Concern** - The inability to describe projects/activities as “ongoing” and forcing project managers to identify a numerical year of completion within the CLRP and eTIP causes ongoing projects and activities to be misrepresented within these documents. By ongoing, we mean projects/activities that continue from one year to the next and generally receive funds annually. For example, we would identify TERMS, the regional effort to provide “Free Bus Fares on Forecasted Code Red Ozone Alert Days”, interstate signs and signals, commuter assistance programs, bus acquisitions, etc., as “ongoing”.

Proposed Resolution - Allow identification of a project or activity as “ongoing”.

Benefit - This change would provide more meaningful information.

Response: Staff will revise the input and output forms to include a check box that would indicate a project is ongoing, beginning with the FY 2007-2012 TIP cycle.

8. **Concern** - Not all projects entered in the eTIP are included in the Air Quality (AQ) Conformity Input Table. This causes much concern for the project managers who can't find their projects in the Conformity Input Table. Apparently, only regionally significant projects and some exempt projects are included in the AQ Input Table. The reasons given for this are that it would increase (double) the size of the AQ Input Table and would require much

hand transcription since there is no direct conversion of data in the eTIP to the AQ Conformity Input Table.

Proposed Resolution - Include all of NOVA's eTIP entries in the AQ Conformity Input Table. Identify the projects as to whether they are included in the AQ model, accounted for off line, are exempt, etc. This could be accomplished by having an AQ column with "Y", "N", or "E" (exempt) entries.

Benefit - This change would provide more meaningful information and reduce the concern expressed by project managers that have projects that fall below the grain of the AQ model.

Response: The information in the Air Quality Conformity Input Table includes only projects that are coded in the networks for analysis (or "study" not coded projects), These projects must be reviewed and approved by the TPB for input to the conformity analysis several months before the other projects in the eTIP. Consequently, it is necessary to keep the entries in this table limited to those that are subject to this early TPB review and approval. If all of TPB implementing agencies are agreeable, staff proposes that an additional table including all of the eTIP entries that are not coded in the networks for analysis be prepared for inclusion in the final conformity report.

9. Concern - Document organization. **Bike/ped or ITS projects are not grouped within the same sections of the TIP/CLRP documents.** We believe that the current practice of organizing bike/ped and ITS projects by jurisdiction within the TIP and CLRP documents does not provide an overview of the bike/ped or ITS "universes".

Proposed Resolution - Place all of the bike/ped projects in one location in the listings (there would be no bike/ped projects or bike/ped subsections within the jurisdictional sections). Within the new bike/ped section, projects should be sorted in alpha order by jurisdiction (regional projects should precede non-regional) and then by "facility" in alpha order. Likewise, all ITS projects would be included within the ITS section and sorted similarly.

Benefit - Placing all of the bike/ped projects in one location and all of the ITS projects in another location will allow those interested in all things bike/ped, or in all things ITS, to attain a greater sense of what is proposed.

Response: Staff will work with the TPB implementing agencies to organize projects as per the proposed resolution, beginning with the FY 2006-2011 TIP cycle.

10. Concern - New planning staff at the state and local levels need **training in entering data into the eTIP**. Existing staff could benefit from refresher training.

Proposed Resolution - Develop an eTIP training program and hold an eTIP training session at least once a year at the start of the new TIP season.

Benefit - This effort would allow planners to keep up with changes and new users to learn the system directly.

Response: Staff has been responding to training requests on an as-needed basis. Beginning with the 2006 CLRP and FY 2007-2012 TIP solicitation process, the eTIP application will transition to a web-based format. In the next two months, staff will invite state, local and transit agency personnel involved with the TIP process to a workshop to help a consultant team determine the best approach to implementing this application. The proposed system would allow users from multiple local jurisdictions to input and edit data into one centrally located database, eliminating the need to transfer data via email or other means. Following the design of the application, staff will organize a series of training sessions prior to the start of the solicitation process. Staff will continue to offer training sessions each fall, and as needed.

11. Concern - VDOT has recently begun funding **maintenance projects using federal dollars** that necessitates entering these projects **in the TIP**. VDOT has reached an agreement with the FHWA that the TIP entries for maintenance projects can be grouped by funding source and refer back to the corresponding funding entry in the STIP.

Proposed Resolution - Add a "Maintenance" category to NOVA's eTIP. [Based on recent staff level discussions, we understand that a "Maintenance" category will be added to the FY-06 eTIP. Please carry through with that proposal.]

Benefit - Adding a separate "Maintenance" category to NOVA's eTIP will allow us to refer to the funding entries more easily and will separate these "generic" entries from the typical project/funding flow specific entries in the remainder of the eTIP.

Response: This proposed resolution has already been implemented. Projects have been amended into the FY 2004-2009 and FY 2005-2010 TIP under a new "Maintenance" project category. A "Maintenance" category has been added to the eTIP.

12. Concern - In Block 6 of the TIP Description Sheet, the projects are sorted by fiscal year and then by phase in alpha order. The latter results in the phases

sorted in the following order: #1 - Carryover, #2 - Construction, #3 - PE, #4 - R/W. This **order does not follow the typical phasing order in six-year plans**, resulting in confusion.

Proposed Resolution - Develop a subroutine in the eTIP that sorts phasing in the following order: #1- PE, #2 - R/W, #3 - Construction, #4 - Carryover.

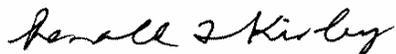
Benefit - The proposed revised phasing is consistent with the fiscal programming documents making it easier to enter fiscal data into the eTIP. Additionally, it is consistent with the linear progression of project development to which transportation professional have become accustomed.

Response: Staff will examine ways to re-organize the sorting for financial data on this form as suggested in the proposed resolution.

We look forward to working with you and you staff to address the concerns identified and to implement the proposed changes to the TIP/CLRP process and documents.

Please contact Mr. Gerald Miller at (202) 962-3319 if you have any questions or if you would like to meet to discuss any of the proposed changes included in this letter.

Sincerely,



Ronald F. Kirby
Director, Department of
Transportation Planning

cc: Mr. Tom Biesiadny, Chair, NVTA Interim Technical Committee
Ms. Marsha Kaiser, MDOT
Ms. Michelle Pourciau, DDOT