

## **6. COMMENTS AND COORDINATION**

Substantive edits that have been made to this Final SEIS since the publication of the Draft SEIS are indicated with underlined text.

In cooperation with FHWA, VDOT has coordinated with local, state, regional, and federal agencies throughout the duration of the study. At the initiation of the study, a Coordination Plan was developed, in accordance with FHWA's SAFETEA-LU *Environmental Review Process Final Guidance*. The purpose of the plan was to facilitate and document the structured interaction with the public and agencies during the study process to ensure adequate opportunities for participation in the development of the Purpose and Need, identification of the range of alternatives, and identification of significant environmental issues. The agency coordination and public involvement that has occurred as part of the study is summarized in the subsequent sections.

### **6.1 AGENCY COORDINATION**

#### **6.1.1 Scoping**

Pursuant to 40 CFR 1501.7, FHWA published a Notice of Intent to prepare a SEIS in the Federal Register on June 23, 2015. On July 21, 2015, VDOT hosted an Agency Scoping Meeting which provided Cooperating/Participating Agencies and others the opportunity to respond to questions originally asked in VDOT's June 19, 2015 scoping letters, suggest input to be considered in the study, and ask additional questions of VDOT and FHWA regarding the study. The intent of the meeting was to introduce the HRCS SEIS to federal, state, and local agencies; discuss the HRCS SEIS study process/approach, schedule, and agency involvement; and identify key constraints or issues that should be considered. Since that time, there have been monthly meetings held with the Cooperating Agencies and regular meetings with the Participating Agencies to keep these agencies and groups informed and to seek appropriate input and concurrence to inform the development of the study.

#### **6.1.2 Cooperating Agencies**

According to CEQ regulation (40 CFR 1508.5), a Cooperating Agency is defined as any Federal agency, other than a lead agency, that has jurisdiction by law or special expertise with respect to any environmental impact involved in the proposed project or project alternative.

CEQ regulations (40 CFR Section 1501.6) permit a Cooperating Agency to assume on request of the Lead Agency responsibility for developing information and preparing environmental analyses including portions of the environmental impact statement concerning which the Cooperating Agency has special expertise. An additional distinction is that, pursuant to 40 CFR 1506.3, "a cooperating agency may adopt without recirculation of the environmental impact statement of a lead agency when, after an independent review of the statement, the cooperating agency concludes that its comments and suggestions have been satisfied." This provision is particularly important to permitting agencies, such as the US Army Corps of Engineers, who, as cooperating agencies, routinely adopt USDOT environmental documents. Agencies that have been invited to serve and accepted the role of Cooperating Agency for the HRCS SEIS include:

- US Army Corps of Engineers
- US Coast Guard

- US Environmental Protection Agency
- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
- US Naval Station Norfolk
- US Department of Transportation
- City of Hampton
- City of Newport News
- City of Norfolk
- City of Virginia Beach
- City of Portsmouth

A complete list of agencies invited to be Cooperating Agencies for the study are included in the Coordination Plan (**Appendix C**).

#### Coordination after Publication of the Draft SEIS – US Army Corps of Engineers

On September 27, 2016, VDOT recommended Alternative B to the USACE as the Preferred Alternative. This recommendation was informed by comments from the USACE on September 19, 2016 which stated “If Alternatives A and B also meet the project purpose and need, have less adverse impacts [than Alternative C or D] on the aquatic ecosystem, and do not significantly impact other natural ecosystems, then USACE may determine that it can only permit one of these less damaging options as the LEDPA.” From among Alternative A and Alternative B, VDOT considered Alternative B the least impactful alternative that fully addressed the purpose statement in the Draft SEIS.

In a letter on October 13, 2016, USACE requested additional information to better document how Alternative A does not sufficiently meet the project purpose and need. In addition, HRTPO and HRTAC unanimously endorsed Alternative A as their preferred alternative on October 20, 2016. VDOT subsequently updated their recommendation of a Preferred Alternative to Alternative A on November 14, 2016, and requested USACE’s concurrence that Alternative A can be considered the preliminary LEDPA. USACE concurred on VDOT’s recommendation for Alternative A as the Preferred Alternative on December 2, 2016. USACE based their concurrence on information in the Draft SEIS which demonstrated that Alternative A sufficiently meets the HRCS Purpose and Need and would have less environmental impacts than the other build alternatives in the Draft SEIS, including Alternative B. USACE also found no reason to disagree that Alternative A may be considered the preliminarily LEDPA.

#### **6.1.3 Participating Agencies**

Pursuant to 23 CFR 771.111(d) local, state, regional, and federal agencies expected to have an interest in the study were invited to serve as Participating Agencies. Participating Agencies provide advice over the course of the study regarding purpose and need, potential alternatives, environmental issues, and study methodologies. They also review and comment on environmental documentation to reflect the views and concerns of their respective agencies. A complete list of the Participating Agencies is included in the Coordination Plan (**Appendix C**).

#### **6.1.4 Section 106 Consulting Parties**

Pursuant to Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act as implemented through 36 CFR 800.3(f), VDOT, in cooperation with FHWA, initiated invitations to consulting parties to participate in the

identification of historic properties and evaluation of effects on such properties. The consulting parties include:

- African American Historical Society of Portsmouth
- American Battlefield Protection Program
- Buckroe Historical Society
- City of Suffolk
- City of Newport News
- Citizens for a Fort Monroe National Park
- National Park Service Chesapeake Bay Office, Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail
- Norfolk Historical Society
- Norfolk Preservation Alliance
- Mr. J. Brewer Moore
- Partnership for a New Phoebus, Inc.
- US Army Corps of Engineers
- US Coast Guard Base, Portsmouth
- Virginia Department of Historic Resources

Consulting parties have reviewed and commented on study documents including the *Phase I Architectural Survey Management Summary*, the *Phase II Architectural Intensive Level Survey*, and the *Archaeological Assessment*. These documents included the identification of historic properties. VDOT's assessments of the Preferred Alternative's effects on architectural historic properties were provided to the SHPO and other consulting parties on November 22, 2016 (Appendix D). Consulting parties will be involved in the preparation of a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) or Programmatic Agreement (PA), should one be prepared at the conclusion of the Section 106 process.

## **6.2 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT**

### **6.2.1 Citizen Information Meeting #1**

The first series of Citizen Information Meetings were held on July 21 and July 22, 2015 in Norfolk and Hampton, respectively. The meetings were advertised in the *Tidewater Hispanic News*, the *Virginian-Pilot*, the *Daily Press*, and *New Journal and Guide*. VDOT distributed a press release and posted meeting notification on the study website.

Sixty-five people attended the open house meetings (30 on July 21 in Norfolk and 35 on July 22 in Hampton). Team members were on hand to answer questions and discuss the study with attendees. Several large display boards were used to convey an overview of the study and potential issues to be addressed. A narrated PowerPoint video was available for viewing. Each attendee received a brochure and a comment sheet. Comments could be provided orally with a stenographer, written at the meeting, or written and mailed in during the 30-day comment period. A total of 36 comments were received in the form of letters, emails, oral comments, and the comment form.

Respondents were asked where the most favorable location for improvements in the study area would be. Approximately 44 percent of respondents indicated that the I-64/Hampton Roads Bridge Tunnel as the most favorable location; 19 percent indicated that the I-664/Monitor-Merrimac Memorial

Bridge-Tunnel as the most favorable location; 26 percent indicated Patriot’s Crossing as the most favorable, with the remaining 11 percent indicating “other” locations as most favorable.

The following issues were identified as additional environmental, social, and transportation issues that need to be evaluated:

- Congestion
- Pedestrian and bike access
- Environmental impacts: dredging, marine habitat, water quality
- Needed transit
- Noise and air quality (congestion) mitigation
- Improvements needed now/quicker schedule
- Access to Fort Wool
- Minimize private property impacts
- Cost for drivers/commuters
- Floods

### **6.2.2 Stated Preference Survey**

In addition to the comment sheet that was disseminated at the Citizen Information Meetings in July, a robust online stated preference survey was administered between July 21 and September 9, 2015. Over 1,300 completed surveys were received. Travelers were recruited to participate in the stated preference survey using four methods:

- In-person intercepts at sites along or around the study corridors.
- E-mail distribution to members of an online research panel residing in the Hampton Roads area.
- Public outreach through businesses, websites, and other targeted e-mail lists in the region.
- Hampton Roads Crossing Citizen Information Meetings and through the Hampton Roads Crossing web site.

The survey included over 50 unique questions that were designed to solicit information from the public on the potential HRCS improvements. Specifically, the questions asked which crossing facilities were used, when (time of day, day of week), for what purpose, how long did the trip take, were there delays, and were tolls collected, etc. The results of the survey have been used to inform this study.

### **6.2.3 Citizen Information Meeting #2**

A second round of Citizen Information Meetings were held in December 2015. The meetings provided an opportunity for citizens and organizations to give VDOT comments on the study. Specifically, VDOT sought input from the public on purpose and need, alternatives and Operationally Independent Sections that could be retained for analysis in the SEIS. The meetings were held on December 9 and December 10, in Norfolk and Hampton, respectively.

Notification of the meeting was advertised in the *Tidewater Hispanic News*, the *Virginian-Pilot*, the *Daily Press*, and *New Journal and Guide*. VDOT administered a press release and posted meeting notification on the study website.

The open house meetings were attended by 138 people (85 on December 9 in Norfolk and 53 on December 10 in Hampton). Team members answered questions and discussed the study with attendees. Several large boards displayed information on the Purpose and Need, each of the four alternatives, and the Operationally Independent Sections. A narrated PowerPoint video was available for viewing.

A total of 215 comments were submitted via emails, letters, orally with a stenographer, and comment forms. The following topics were identified as issues that need to be evaluated:

- High levels of traffic
- Expand HRBT
- Timeline to construction
- Dedicated funding
- Potential negative impacts: to private property, Fort Monroe, Willoughby neighborhood, Portsmouth, and visual impacts of bridge over Elizabeth River
- Light rail transit right-of-way and more public transit options
- Projected traffic and estimated cost information to make a reasoned decision
- Oversized transport trucks
- Positions against tolls and for increased (gas) taxes
- High cost to implement. Select most cost effective
- More HRBT tunnel lanes
- More bridge options
- Outreach extended to VA Beach, Chesapeake, and other places in VA
- Increased affordability for residents near naval base
- Coordination with naval station on number of carriers during peak traffic seasons

#### **6.2.4 Location Public Hearings**

Location Public Hearings were held to present the findings of the Draft SEIS, to provide a discussion forum between the public and the study team, and to obtain input and comments from the community. Two hearings were held on September 6 and 7, 2016 after the release of the Draft SEIS.

In accordance with state code, which requires that all property owners within the study area corridor(s) for a Location Study be notified of a Location Public Hearing at least 30 days prior to the meeting, postcards were mailed to over 140,000 address 30 days before the hearing. Given the significance of the HRCS, this mailing exceeded state code requirements by notifying all properties within each zip code that intersects the study area corridors. In addition to the mailings, an email blast was sent to the project mailing list; a notification of the meeting was posted to VDOT's website and included in other social media outreach; and the meeting was advertised in local newspapers 30 days and 15 days prior to the hearing, per VDOT public involvement policies. Further, the overall document release schedule has been publicly available and shared through email blasts, community meetings, HRTPO briefings, and through the study website since the study began in 2015.

The public comment period extended from August 5, 2016 to September 19, 2016. During that time 677 comments were received from the public, agencies, elected officials, and localities (226 letters and emails, 438 comment forms, and 9 oral testimony). All comments received during the Location Public

Hearings and the public comment period will be considered, and all substantive comments are addressed in this Final SEIS. Response to comments are provided in **Appendix H**.

### **6.3 STAKEHOLDER COORDINATION**

In addition to ongoing agency coordination and public involvement summarized in **Sections 6.1 and 6.2**, VDOT communicated with and briefed key stakeholders on the status of the study. These efforts included the following:

- Citizen Information Meetings
  - July 2015
  - December 2015
- Location Public Hearings
  - September 2016
- Commonwealth Transportation Board
  - September 2016
  - October 2016
  - December 2016
- Cooperating Agency Meetings
  - Monthly meetings beginning in August 2015 and continuing through the publication of the Draft SEIS
  - Concurrence on the Purpose and Need in October 2015
  - Concurrence on the alternatives retained for analysis in January 2016
  - Concurrence on the recommended preferred alternative in November 2016
  - Met with individual agencies/localities, as needed, to answer questions and address regulatory purviews
- Cooperating/Participating Agency Meetings
  - July 2015
  - December 2015
  - February 2016
  - May 2016 (2)
  - August 2016
- HRTPO/HRTAC Briefings
  - July 2015
  - November 2015
  - March 2016
  - April 2016
  - June 2016
  - July 2016
  - October 2016

- Local City Councils/Boards
  - City of Chesapeake Council – September 2016
  - City of Hampton Council – December 2015, August 2016
  - James City County Board of Supervisors – May 2016
  - City of Newport News Council – April 2016
  - City of Portsmouth Council – September 2016
  - City of Suffolk Council – September 2016
  - City of Virginia Beach Council – August 2016