



September 24, 2021

Mr. Scott Alexander  
Project Manager, Virginia Department of Transportation,  
811 Commerce Road,  
Staunton, VA 24401-9029  
VIA Email [Scott.Alexander@VDOT.Virginia.gov](mailto:Scott.Alexander@VDOT.Virginia.gov)

Dear Scott,

I am writing with Alliance for the Shenandoah Valley's comment on the proposed Interstate 81 improvements in Harrisonburg. The Alliance is a regional nonprofit, working to conserve the natural resources, cultural heritage and rural character of our region.

As you know, this Harrisonburg segment is very busy, particularly with traffic entering and exiting. It has been identified as one of the most troublesome for safety, and we recognize that significant improvements are needed. And while we generally advocate for alternatives to highway widening, we appreciate that this proposed project would occur in the existing right of way.

When the project is complete, we encourage VDOT to take proactive steps to prevent increased speeds through this segment. Often increased widths or new lanes lead drivers to go faster. This would be counterproductive to the safety goals of this project. The speed limit should remain at 60 mph, and we encourage enforcement and other operational measures to reduce speeding and increase safety.

In addition to the interstate widening and associated improvements, this project includes a proposed roundabout at the Pleasant Valley bridge. We support this roundabout as a welcome addition. As with any new traffic pattern, there will be a learning curve, but the slower speeds as well as the continuous movement allowed by a roundabout will serve as an important demarcation between fast moving interstate traffic and the elementary school, retail, and industry uses along the Pleasant Valley corridor. Roundabouts require less cost and maintenance to operate than a traffic light, making this a good option.

Also included in this Harrisonburg segment are significant changes at the Route 33 interchange that have been the subject of public comments previously. The Alliance has supported these changes because they will improve traffic on both I-81 and Route 33 as well as provide

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pedestrian access along Route 33 where none currently exists. Any opportunity to reduce traffic conflict points reduces the likelihood of crashes which impede the flow of traffic – the most common cause of traffic back-ups along I-81.

Finally, I would like to reiterate the following points that Kate Wofford made in our Alliance comment letter on the Staunton widening this month.

We encourage VDOT to increase its focus on operational improvements to help alleviate safety issues. Improvements which accelerate the clearing of accidents are important. Long clearance times not only cause problems for motorists on the interstate, they are disruptive for communities and neighborhoods on local roads where traffic is diverted.

We highlight the fact that the Shenandoah Valley is characterized by its beauty, its rich history, and its farming culture. Leading economic sectors, including agriculture, tourism, and outdoor recreation, rely on the protection of these resources. Projects on I-81 have significant consequences for the Valley, and we urge you to take a context sensitive approach on this and future projects. And we encourage you to prioritize public engagement, accessibly and transparency. We believe that sincere incorporation of public input results in better projects that more effectively and efficiently meet transportation needs.

Thank you for your consideration of our comments.

Sincerely,

Kim Sandum  
Rockingham County Coordinator