

The I-81 Advisory Committee met virtually on December 11, 2020, and unanimously voted to recommend a proposed budget amendment to the legislature that would allow the committee to only meet twice a year, instead of four times. The committee noted that the bonding for the improvements to I-81 is in place, and the cash flow is in good shape and not really impacted by COVID. VDOT's plan is going well, and since the committee has an oversight role, it would prefer to only have to meet twice a year, with the understanding that more frequent meetings could occur if the need arose.

At its previous virtual meeting on October 23, 2020, the committee was briefed on the status of the I-81 Corridor Improvement Program, including COVID impacts to I-81 traffic, operational improvements and capital project status, multimodal improvements along the I-81 corridor to include transit and rail investment, the Truck Parking Task Force and truck parking demand along the I-81 corridor, the current performance of the I-81 Corridor Improvement Fund, legislative updates to the fund, and the current debt issuance plan. The committee was informed that there are currently 56 projects on the table to improve I-81. Sixteen of them are not scheduled to begin until sometime between 2023 and 2025. Another 32 projects are in the design phase. Eight of the total projects are completed. VDOT also reported to the committee that debt funding with an aggregate principal amount of one billion dollars had been authorized to fund the construction of the I-81 improvements.

The live stream for both of these meetings could be viewed online, and the meetings were open to public comment by calling in. The committee's previous in-person meetings had been heavily attended, and were standing room only.

The I-81 Advisory Committee was established to provide advice and recommendations to the Commonwealth Transportation Board (CTB) regarding the development of the I-81 Corridor Improvement Plan. The committee is scheduled to meet four times each year at rotating planning district locations along the corridor and report to the Governor and General Assembly each December. The committee has 15 voting members: seven Virginia lawmakers, three CTB members representing the Bristol, Salem and Staunton districts, and the five chairs of the planning district commissions. VDOT's commissioner and DRPT's director will serve on the committee ex officio in non-voting capacities. The voting Committee members are:

- Committee Chair: Delegate Gwendolyn Gooditis, District 10
- Committee Vice-Chair: Senator John Edwards, District 21
- Delegate Chris Hurst, District 12
- Delegate Sam Rasoul, District 11
- Delegate Tony Wilt, District 26
- Senator Creigh Deeds, District 25
- Senator Todd Pillion, District 40
- Chair Frank Friedman, Central Shenandoah PDC
- Chair Bradley Grose, Roanoke Valley/Alleghany PDC
- Chair Michael Maslaney, New River Valley PDC
- Chair Dennis Morris, Northern Shenandoah PDC
- Chair Willie Green, Mount Rogers PDC
- Ray Smoot, Jr., Salem District CTB Member
- Bristol District CTB Member (currently vacant)

- Mark Merrill, Staunton District CTB Member

References: <http://www.improve81.org/advisory-committee-and-meetings/advisory-committee/default.asp>

<http://www.improve81.org/>

<https://www.nbc12.com/2020/10/24/i-advisory-committee-discusses-improvement-program-corridor/>