This study was initiated as a cooperative project with two counties that were interested in further analyzing devolution options available to counties. The study provides all counties with a framework that identifies necessary information and analyzes available options to assist them in making the decision of whether to assume responsibilities for the secondary system of state highways. The study also provides guidance on implementation if such responsibilities are assumed by a county.

This study identifies the resources needed and the financial, organizational, and logistical implications associated with a county taking over the functional activities for roads included in the secondary system of state highways. The study also presents and evaluates various scenarios that counties may contemplate in the assumption of responsibility for the secondary system which include 1) maintenance only, 2) construction only (including preconstruction), 3) maintenance and construction, or 4) maintenance, construction and operations (equivalent to withdrawal from the state system).

Key elements and focus areas of the study include the following:

● Issues that need to be considered and addressed in order for a county to assume secondary road responsibility;
● Equipment and/or facilities a county will need to acquire to assume selected secondary system responsibilities;
● Staffing levels and skills (including administrative, engineering and financial) a county will require to takeover different sets of responsibilities associated with the secondary system of state highways;
● Methodology to estimate county start-up costs, including capital asset acquisition;
● Methodology to estimate annual program costs for individual counties for each of the four devolution options, including delivering varying levels of service for maintenance and operations.
● Potential sources of revenues to support and or enhance county assumption of secondary system of state highway programs;
● “Devolution road map” to guide counties in implementing a plan for takeover of the secondary system of state highways within their jurisdictions.

The results of the study are summarized in a report entitled Guide to County Assumption of Secondary Roads (Devolution Guidebook). Another important aspect of the study is a user-friendly computer model that counties can use to determine the financial and institutional implications of different devolution scenarios based on a wide range of assumptions and inputs (e.g., different inflation rates and performance levels). The model should be a useful tool for any county considering devolution; however, it is not predictive of payments that a county would receive from VDOT.