

Locality workshop – May 13, 2008 Charlottesville

Summary notes

VDOT's recently issued Local Programs Policy emphasizes the importance to strive to provide local governments with the maximum flexibility in how they administer their own transportation programs, while meeting all federal and state stewardship and oversight obligations. This effort includes accepting locality processes and methods as long as the end results are achieved and requirements are met. It further directs VDOT to partner with localities to promote effective project delivery, including consideration of the impact to locally administered projects when developing new requirements and systems and when exploring and implementing innovative training opportunities.

The purpose of this meeting was to hear recommendations for locally administered projects as well as the locality perspective as to where potential streamlining opportunities exist. The meeting is an example of partnership efforts between localities and VDOT. The meeting was a round-table discussion / forum with some of our most experienced localities - those currently administering projects and those that have done so in the recent past.

Introductions – Each locality shared their experience with locally administered projects. The experience ranged from just starting to consider local administration to over 20 years of project delivery.

Discussions – A number of questions pertaining to local administration of projects were asked to stimulate discussion. These questions ranged from what are your goals in administering projects to what specific actions would they like VDOT to take in the next year to demonstrate the implementation of the local programs policy. A brief, unfiltered, synopsis of the questions and responses follow:

What is your goal for managing projects? The most often noted reason for managing projects was to have more control of the project in order to deliver the project as expected by the citizens of the locality. Other goals included expediting the project, adding value to the project and implementing context sensitive solutions.

What is working well? The construction side of project delivery is working well, during preliminary engineering, the project coordinators really try to help. Some districts hold monthly meetings that are helpful. The Local assistance staff provides a single point of contact whose role is to help the locality. There was much discussion as to the importance of this single point of contact and the monthly coordination meetings that are being held. The Hampton Roads District Urban section was highlighted several times as a great example of partnering and communicating with localities.

What is not working well? The design piece is inefficient and confusing; rules seem to change with each submission and some rules seem to be different for VDOT-administered projects. Reviews take too long. There are not guidelines for how long a review should take; there seems to be no sense of urgency on the VDOT side. Need differentiation between requirements and advisory comments. Too many VDOT staff assigned to small projects and who attend meetings, etc. – largely outnumbering the number of local staff/consultants who are responsible for the delivery of the project. Transparency regarding what VDOT is doing is needed.

What does a successful partnering relationship with you look like? Create well established goals and clear processes and have VDOT and the locality sign a partnership agreement. If we are truly partnering, the locality should be involved in decisions, not just told what to do. VDOT needs to trust that the localities are going to do the right thing and should be available for guidance. Trust on both sides is the key to a successful partnership.

How can VDOT better convey requirements versus good business practices? In review letters, VDOT should clearly note which comments are requirements and which ones are advisory – the locality doesn't know. Some problems are with not being able to meet requirements – needs to be clear-cut how to get waivers and exemptions; what do we do if we can't meet requirements. Interpretations of requirements – ADA for example; seems to result in scope creep for the project. Localities want to be able to phase improvements with money available – if can't meet standards but can do something.

What are small changes VDOT can make or influence that would go a long way towards your success? Small changes that VDOT can implement – a single person with a checklist that coordinates all the issues; there should be a VDOT “Champion” for the project and they must be empowered to make decisions. Keep as many decisions at District as possible; Using consistent guides and definitions. Suggest follow-up auditing rather than reviewing along the way. Create pre-qualifications and certifications for localities. Materials Testing and Acceptance– looking at different requirements based on size or complexity or risk.

Six months/one year from now, what changes would you see that reflects VDOT's commitment to a strengthened partnership?

- Distinguishing between small and large projects – same processes aren't necessary for all jobs – example; focus on implementing safety (HSIP) projects more quickly;
- Getting Regional Design Standards approved for Hampton Roads
- Standard templates that are used and don't need to be re-reviewed each time there is a new submittal; (may have submitted bid document one

- month previous and though exact template is used have to submit each time for same review)
- Stream-line the Waiver/Exception process
 - Direction moved to approving town processes for federal projects
 - Move toward locality certification
 - Continued emphasis on training – Project Management “Boot camps”
Also for inspectors – DBE, materials testing, Title VI;
 - Create design course similar to TCMI at Tech (2 wk intensive)
 - Plan review time-frames, requirements vs. best management practices, and some sort of review checklist – who’s reviewed it has everyone reviewed it? Example-months after comments received notified drainage had never reviewed-sent plans but did not respond so had to address late in the process.
 - Develop and promote a program that will allow local construction inspectors to “shadow” VDOT inspectors – on the job training.

How can we continue partnering with you? Engage more on Guide update – local governments want this. Provide this same group with an update (get back together in 4 – 6 months) to let them know where we are going with our Policy Implementation.

The group was briefed on the update to the Guide for local administration of VDOT projects. VDOT committed to keep the localities involved in the update.