



- Much discussion has centered on the possible expansion of Interstate 81 in Virginia. Because the interstate system is federally funded, changes to the highway must comply with federal laws, including the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).
- Under NEPA, the Federal Highway Administration and the Virginia Department of Transportation launched an I-81 Corridor Improvement Study in January 2004. This study evaluated existing and future traffic and identified deficiencies, or problems, along the interstate. The study also outlined potential solutions to the problems. Data and findings of the study were documented in a report called the Tier 1 Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS), which was released for public review Nov. 29, 2005. Six public hearings on the document were held in April 2006, and public comments were taken through late May of 2006.
- According to the Tier 1 DEIS, existing and future deficiencies on I-81 include capacity and safety issues. A total of 211 combinations of highway and rail improvement concepts were considered as potential solutions. Concepts included adding lanes and/or making rail improvements, as well as the possibility of separating heavy trucks and other vehicles. The study also evaluated the effects of tolling on traffic.
- Information from the study and all the public comments were presented to the Commonwealth Transportation Board (CTB) in September 2006. Appointed by the governor, the 17-member CTB sets policy for Virginia's transportation system and allocates funding for all transportation modes. In October 2006, the CTB directed VDOT to complete the I-81 Tier 1 EIS with a widening concept that would add a varying number of lanes only where needed to meet future traffic.
- VDOT completed the study, and it was sent to the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) for review. The Tier 1 Final Environmental Impact Statement is available for public review at www.I-81.org.
- The next step in the study process is for FHWA to issue a Record of Decision (ROD) on the Tier 1 FEIS. The ROD gives federal approval of the study and allows VDOT to go forward with planning improvements to I-81. That decision could come in spring 2007.