

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. What is the Bowers Hill Interchange Improvements Study?

The Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) have initiated the Bowers Hill Interchange Improvements Study to evaluate potential improvements to the interchange where I-664, I-264, I-64, U.S. Route 460, U.S. Route 58, U.S. Route 13, and VA Route 191 (Jolliff Road) meet in the City of Chesapeake. The study has been expanded to include approximately seven miles of I-664 between the Bowers Hill Interchange and College Drive in the City of Suffolk. Considerations also include how the study area would interact with the planned and existing Express Lanes in the Hampton Roads region.

2. Was a Bowers Hill Interchange Improvements Study completed already?

In April 2019, FHWA issued the Bowers Hill Interchange Improvements Study Environmental Assessment (EA) which evaluated the potential impacts of a No-Build Alternative and two Build Alternatives. Under Alternative 1, there would be additional lanes and barrier separation of movements between U.S. Route 58, I-664, I-264, and I-64 at existing weave/merge conflict points within the main interchange area. Alternative 1 would retain much of the existing infrastructure and maintain all local access connections. Alternative 2 proposed a full interchange reconstruction. The improvements included braided ramps similar to Alternative 1; however, it would provide additional barrier separation of major movements by realigning NB I-664 within the main interchange area.

Since the publication of the EA, the Hampton Roads Transportation Planning Organization (HRTPO), along with the Hampton Roads Transportation Accountability Commission (HRTAC), VDOT and the FHWA, expanded the study parameters to include approximately seven additional miles of I-664. Given the expanded study area, additional environmental review is required to document analysis of possible social, historic and natural environmental impacts that could result from potential improvements.

The expanded study, to be conducted in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), is assumed to be a major infrastructure project and will require the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The EIS will officially begin with FHWA publishing a Notice of Intent (NOI) in the Federal Register. Currently, VDOT is conducting early planning activities that will allow VDOT and its partner agencies to collect data and agree upon the course for the study.

3. What is the difference between an Environmental Assessment (EA) and an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)?

An EA determines whether or not a federal action has the potential to cause significant environmental effects. Federal agencies prepare an EIS if a proposed major federal action has the potential to significantly affect the quality of the human environment. The regulatory requirements for an EIS are more detailed and rigorous than the requirements for an EA. Due to the expanded study parameters, it is assumed the updated Bowers Hill Interchange Improvements study will be an EIS.

4. Why was the study area expanded?

HRTPO expanded the study area to fully assess the level of improvement needed as part of the larger regional transportation network. This includes expanding the study area to include approximately seven miles along I-664 north as well as consideration for how the study area would interact with planned and existing Express Lanes in the Hampton Roads region.

5. What is the timeline for the Bowers Hill Interchange Improvements Study?

In July 2020, VDOT mailed letters to property owners along the corridor, informing property owners VDOT may need to access their properties in order to collect data. The data, consisting of written/photo documentation related to the surrounding roadways, wetlands, streams, and other resources, will be used to develop a new NEPA document, currently anticipated to be an EIS. Once all data collection is completed, VDOT will develop and present alternatives for potential improvements to the public in Spring 2021.

It is anticipated FHWA will issue Notice of Intent to begin the EIS in Spring 2021. During the development of the EIS, VDOT will refine alternatives, assess impacts, identify the preferred alternative, and establish minimization and mitigation strategies for unavoidable impacts. Throughout the development of the EIS there will be opportunities for the public to provide input on the study. The study would conclude with the FHWA Record of Decision and issuance of water quality permits anticipated in Spring 2023.

6. What is the Purpose and Need?

The Purpose and Need is a statement setting the goals for the study and serves as the primary criteria for comparison of potential alternatives. This statement provides the basis for the NEPA study, including which documents the transportation conditions FHWA and VDOT aim to identify and address. The Purpose and Need is used to determine the range of alternatives considered in an EIS.

7. What are the next steps for the study?

Once early planning activities are completed, it is anticipated the FHWA will publish a NOI in the Federal Register, which will initiate the NEPA study, anticipated to be an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

8. When will the updated study be completed?

The EIS is anticipated to be completed in Spring 2023.

The study will likely be designated under Executive Order 13807, known as One Federal Decision (OFD), which sets timelines for NEPA decisions and federal permits. As part of the study process, VDOT will also move forward with water quality permits from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Virginia Marine Resource Commission, and Virginia Department of Environmental Quality, concurrently with the EIS in order to meet OFD requirements. The FHWA cannot issue a NEPA decision on this study until funding is identified for construction in the Metropolitan Planning Organization's (MPO) Constrained Long Range Plan and the next subsequent (i.e. post-NEPA) phase is funded in the MPO's Transportation Improvement Program. Once FHWA issues a Record of Decision (ROD), the Bowers Hill Interchange Improvements Study will be completed and VDOT may proceed with final design and construction.

9. Who is involved in the study?

The Bowers Hill Interchange Improvements Study is being conducted in accordance with NEPA. The lead agencies, VDOT and FHWA, coordinate with multiple federal and state agencies, stakeholders and the public. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service have been invited to serve as Cooperating and Concurring Agencies to provide input on the study at significant milestones. There are approximately 24 additional participating federal and state agencies also involved in the study. Hampton Roads regional agencies, as well as localities of Chesapeake, Portsmouth and Suffolk, will also provide input into the study.

10. How can the public stay informed on the status of the study?

Study updates will be posted to the study webpage at: www.bowershillinterchange.com. The public can sign up to receive the study email newsletter.

11. How can the public participate in the Bowers Hill Interchange Improvements Study?

The public is encouraged to learn more about the updates to the Bowers Hill Interchange Improvements Study and provide input on the needs for the study area that will inform potential improvements.

Presentation materials will be available online starting September 17, 2020 at www.bowershillinterchange.com. The public can also access the online survey, which will inform the goals and objectives of the expanded study. Comments may also be submitted via email to bowershill@vdot.virginia.gov or via letter mailed to Bowers Hill Interchange Improvements Study, 11827 Canon Blvd, Suite 402, Newport News, VA 23606, to be postmarked by October 16, 2020.