

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE REPORT

**AN ASSESSMENT OF THE VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT
OF TRANSPORTATION'S PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PROCESSES:
PHASE I RESULTS**

Amy A. O'Leary, Ph.D.
Senior Research Scientist

E.D. Arnold, Jr.
Senior Research Scientist

Cherie A. Kyte
Research Scientist

Michael A. Perfater
Research Manager

(The opinions, findings, and conclusions expressed in this
report are those of the authors and not necessarily
those of the sponsoring agencies.)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Citizens have higher expectations for meaningful involvement in transportation decision making than ever before. Interest in an assessment of the Virginia Department of Transportation's (VDOT's) public involvement practices has originated from several sources. First, VDOT's top leadership is interested in a "tool kit," or an inventory, of current "best practices" in public involvement. Second, the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission's 1998 report on the highway location process in Virginia made a number of observations and suggestions about VDOT's public involvement practices. Most recently, the passage of Senate Bill 1198 (SB 1198) called attention to the open forum format VDOT uses most often for its location and design public hearings.

To address these information needs, the Virginia Transportation Research Council (VTRC) developed a plan for a two-phase study of VDOT's public involvement practices. Phase I, summarized in this report, focused primarily on hearing formats and related issues. Phase II will take a much broader, more comprehensive look at all of VDOT's public involvement practices, beginning with the earliest planning stages. The results of the Phase II analysis will be summarized in one or more future reports. A 10-member project task group, with broad representation from VDOT divisions and districts and the Federal Highway Administration, will guide the VTRC's efforts during the study.

The Phase I study of hearing formats and related issues reported here included a comprehensive review of the literature, a written survey for public involvement professionals in the 50 states, and a written survey for citizens attending three VDOT public hearings in 1999 (the Meadowcreek Parkway design hearing, the Capital Beltway citizen information workshops, and the Indian River Road location hearings). Two of the three projects (Meadowcreek and Capital Beltway) are controversial. Results of a previous citizen "exit survey" conducted at VDOT public hearings in 1995 and 1996 by VDOT's Location & Design Division's Public Involvement Section were also reviewed, as were several years' worth of attendance data and comments from VDOT location and design public hearings.

What the Literature Tells Us

The literature on public hearing formats distinguishes three major formats: the open forum, the traditional format, and the dual or combined format. The *open forum* involves one-on-one interaction between citizens and agency staff in a room with plan exhibits. Comments for the record may be submitted in writing at the hearing or for a 10-day period following the hearing, or verbal comments may be made privately to a court reporter in an area of the hearing room. There is typically no formal presentation, although videotapes or continuous slide shows about the project may be used. This format has been widely used by state departments of transportation (DOTs) since the late 1980s.

The *traditional format* ("town meeting") is the format used by many local governments and formerly used by most DOTs prior to the Federal Highway Administration's approval of the open forum in the 1980s. A formal presentation is made at the beginning of the hearing, and

then individual citizens may make comments for the record into a microphone, typically with a 3- or 5-minute time limit. Every comment is heard by everyone in the hearing room. One-on-one interaction (at the hearing itself) is typically limited to any time remaining after all the speakers have made their comments. Citizens' questions are not generally answered in hearings done in this format—it is not a dialogue between an agency and the public. In the past, when VDOT used the traditional hearing format extensively, a “pre-hearing review” was typically held before the formal hearing. This pre-hearing provided several hours for the public to examine plan displays closely.

Finally, the *dual or combined format* has elements of both the open forum and the traditional format. There is generally a formal presentation first, followed by a highly structured formal hearing, with a hearing officer presiding. Citizens can make comments for the record into a microphone; there is no discussion except to clarify procedural matters. An informal information meeting with exhibits and opportunities for one-on-one discussion takes place in another room while the formal hearing is ongoing. There are some variations on this format among the states—some conduct the informal part of the meeting first and then conduct the formal part. All comments for the record are made publicly, as in a traditional format hearing.

Regardless of the format used, VDOT's practice has been to make a transcript of citizens' comments for the record available for public review. These transcripts include both written and oral comments from citizens.

Advantages of the Open Forum Hearing Format

The literature on hearing formats points to a number of advantages for the open forum format. *For citizens attending a hearing*, the major advantages include:

1. highly accessible plans and exhibits
2. the opportunity for unlimited, one-on-one questions and answers with technical staff responsible for the project
3. the flexibility for citizens to come and go at any time between particular hours
4. the opportunity for citizens to make a comment privately, if one is anxious about speaking in public.

For DOTs and other agencies, the literature emphasizes the following major advantages for the open forum format compared to the traditional format:

1. much better two-way communication with citizens
2. a hearing environment that encourages many citizens to offer comments
3. a substantially better chance of eliciting the full range of opinions on the project

4. procedures that make it relatively easy for busy people to attend and make a comment for the record.

The Special Studies Unit of the Illinois DOT (1990) also concluded that the open forum was superior for controversial projects, observing that the traditional format “encourages grandstanding and confrontation.” The unit said that the open forum was “the only rational approach to use” for hearings with very large turnouts.

Disadvantages of the Open Forum

The chief disadvantage of the open forum format noted in the literature is that citizens do not hear the comments of others, including elected officials, first hand. The phrase “I want to hear what my neighbor is saying” is frequently used to describe this problem. Obviously, a traditional format hearing affords the chance to hear all comments (although “neighbors” who are anxious about public speaking may not express their views). Another disadvantage of the open forum approach is that some citizens and elected officials want to hear a formal presentation on a project by agency officials rather than read about it, ask questions, watch a video, etc.

What Virginia’s Citizens Say About Hearing Formats

The 690 citizens who participated in the exit survey conducted by VDOT’s Public Involvement Section in 1995-96 expressed a strong preference for the open forum format (85% said they preferred it to the town meeting format). An identical percentage of respondents said their questions had been answered satisfactorily at the hearing they attended. This survey included one third of the 92 public hearings conducted from May 1995 to February 1996 (31 hearings in all).

Analysis of attendance and comment data for 31 recent (January 1997 to February 1999) open forum public hearings revealed that VDOT is generally receiving large numbers of comments for the record relative to the numbers of citizens attending hearings. In the past, when VDOT held traditional format hearings, comments were received from 15% of those attending, on average. Typically, only 1% of the comments made in traditional format meetings were made in favor of the project.

One-page citizen surveys were completed by **235 individuals** attending the open forum Meadowcreek Parkway hearing (100 respondents), combined format Capital Beltway citizen information workshops (66 respondents), and open forum Indian River Road location hearing (69 respondents). Although the sample of projects for the citizen surveys was limited, and weighted toward more controversial projects, citizens’ opinions were very informative. VTRC hopes to distribute additional citizen surveys to attendees at several major location/design hearings scheduled for 2000. One of these (I-73) will be done in a traditional format on five successive nights.

Between 76% (Indian River) and 61% (Meadowcreek) of the citizen survey respondents indicated they liked the format of the hearing they had attended or liked it very much. No more than 17% (Meadowcreek) of the respondents in any group said they disliked the format of the hearing they had attended.

Overall, the results of our citizen surveys indicate that if citizens were to choose between a formal presentation and one-on-one interaction as a source of information about a project, more would choose one-on-one interaction. More citizens at all three survey sites would choose a flexible schedule that permits comments at any time between particular hours versus only after a formal presentation. With the exception of the Capital Beltway attendees, more citizen survey respondents would choose to comment privately than publicly. At all three sites, however, more citizens would prefer for *their neighbors* to make comments publicly than privately.

Our results also suggest, however, that some citizens want to come away from a hearing with more information than they get from their own one-on-one interactions, from reading handouts, or from watching a video. For some, it may be as simple as wanting to hear the questions other people are likely to ask and the answers to them. Some of these information needs may be best addressed *before* citizens attend a location or design hearing. In Phase II of the research, VTRC staff plan to do additional research on how other states have addressed the “I want to hear what my neighbor is saying” sentiment. Additional citizen surveys in 2000 could enable VTRC staff to ask the public *how* they would like to find out what their neighbors are saying (if they do).

A content analysis of citizens’ write-in responses to the question “What can VDOT do to make its public meetings better?” revealed major themes, one of which was hearing formats. More positive than negative comments were made about hearing formats, particularly for the (combined format) Capital Beltway workshops. Although several comments suggested some kind of combined hearing format, very few suggested adopting a traditional format as such.

What Public Involvement Professionals in Other States Say

The survey of public involvement professionals in other states had a response rate of 44%. VDOT consultants involved in public hearings were included in the sample, but not VDOT staff. Respondents represented 43 states and 41 DOTs; two thirds of the respondents were DOT employees.

The open forum format was always or often used by 71% of the respondents’ DOTs or consulting firms. Fifty-two percent said the traditional format was seldom or never used by their organization for location/design hearings. The combined format was always or often used by 37%. Only 2% of the respondents indicated that their organizations “always” used the traditional format for location/design hearings, as proposed in SB 1198.

In response to a series of questions asking them to rate the traditional, open forum, and combined formats on a variety of dimensions, respondents gave the open forum format the highest ratings for the following:

- facilitating two-way communication
- explaining technical project information
- obtaining many public comments
- obtaining the full range of public opinion
- attracting individual citizen high turnout
- making exhibits accessible
- providing what individuals want in a hearing format.

The only dimension on which the combined and traditional formats were rated more highly than the open forum was providing what *interest groups* want in a public hearing format.

Relatively large percentages of our respondents gave the traditional format poor ratings on two dimensions in particular: facilitating two-way communication (48%) and obtaining the full range of opinions (46%).

A content analysis of answers to the question “What public involvement techniques or approaches has your organization used most effectively for controversial projects?” revealed major themes. The largest number of comments (74) mentioned a variety of *public awareness or public information techniques*—hotlines, newsletters, web sites, news releases, etc. The second largest number of comments (38) described a variety of types of *meetings with stakeholders and interest groups*, typically short term and occurring early in the public involvement process. The third largest category of comments (34) described the use of *citizen advisory groups or project technical groups*. There were also relatively many comments about the use of particular hearing formats (primarily the open forum) for controversial projects. Two additional write-in questions about ways to counter citizen perceptions that “everything has already been decided” and techniques used to sustain broad public involvement from the first project development milestone to the last will be analyzed for the Phase II report(s).

We had strong expressions of interest in our research from a number of responding DOTs and consultants; they will provide a network of contacts for the Phase II portion of the study. Several states also provided documentation or procedures manuals describing their public involvement processes (e.g., Minnesota’s *Hear Every Voice*). We have also been asked by the Transportation Research Board’s Committee on Public Involvement in Transportation to collaborate with them on additional survey research in the near future. In the course of reviewing the literature on hearing formats, we found a number of case studies of best practices, some of which focus on the development of long-range transportation plans. In short, public involvement is a very dynamic area at present, with considerable information on best practices being exchanged.

Conclusion

Adoption of the traditional format for *all* location hearings, as specified in SB 1198, might address some citizens' desires for more information about their neighbors' opinions (and/or some citizens' desires to influence their neighbors' opinions). But such a move would create many more problems than it would solve, given the preferences of the 235 citizens we surveyed:

- Only 28% prefer formal presentations alone as a source of project information at a hearing.
- Only 33% prefer commenting for the record only after a formal presentation has ended.
- Only 45% want commenting in public to be their only option.

Some Virginia citizens, and even some elected officials, may not be aware that hearings in formats other than the open forum can be requested. VDOT may need to make them more aware that they have this choice. It would be far better to continue to allow Virginia's citizens and their elected officials to choose the traditional format for specific projects rather than mandate it for every location hearing. Based on all of the information we reviewed for this report, it is highly likely that VDOT will lose substantial citizen input if the traditional format is adopted for all location hearings. Concerns about the possible consequences of requiring the traditional format for all highway location hearings also stem from the results of our national survey of public involvement professionals:

- Eight-four percent gave the open forum high ratings for "obtaining the full range of opinions"; only 21% did so for the traditional format.
- Eighty-nine percent gave the open forum high ratings for "obtaining many public comments"; only 33% did so for the traditional format.

The remainder of this report outlines the original research questions proposed for continuing Phase II of the study effort. VTRC needs to prioritize those research questions (which are numerous), with input from the Executive Leadership Group and the project task group. From there, we can develop a schedule and plan for the deliverables.

Appendices to the report include the citizen and state surveys and verbatim responses to the questions about how VDOT can make its public hearings better (sorted by location) and the approaches other states have effectively used for controversial projects.

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BACKGROUND

Public involvement professionals in transportation are aware that citizens have higher expectations for meaningful involvement in decision making than ever before. Gone are the days when the public might be presented with the results of detailed engineering analyses and an already-identified set of potential solutions. Instead, they frequently expect to have a genuine role in defining what the problems are and identifying a broad set of potential solutions (Federal Highway Administration, 1997).

Interest in an assessment of the Virginia Department of Transportation's (VDOT's) public involvement processes has multiple origins. First, in 1998, the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission (JLARC) published a report on the highway location process in Virginia, offering a number of observations and recommendations about VDOT's public involvement processes.

Second, Senate Bill 1198 (SB 1198) (Appendix A), reflecting one of the recommendations of the JLARC report, was enacted by the 1999 Session of the Virginia General Assembly (Virginia General Assembly, 1999). SB 1198 would make it mandatory for VDOT to use a traditional ("town meeting") format for highway location hearings, rather than the open forum format that has been consistently used since the early 1990s. The traditional format for hearings is characterized by a formal presentation at a specified time, followed by comments from attendees, one at a time, into a microphone. Thus, comments are heard by everyone in the hearing room. City councils and county boards of supervisors frequently use the traditional format for their hearings. The open forum approach, in contrast, involves informal one-on-one interaction between the public and VDOT staff (or consultants) beside plan displays or maps.

Generally, there is no formal presentation (although videos are sometimes specially produced for larger projects). Comments may be submitted in writing or spoken to a court reporter in a corner of the hearing room. Under SB 1198, VDOT could conduct supplementary location hearings in the open forum format, but these could not be held in lieu of a traditional hearing. SB 1198 will not become effective unless re-enacted by the 2000 Session.

Third, the Virginia Transportation Research Council (VTRC) was asked by VDOT's top leadership to assess the department's public involvement practices from the earliest planning stages, with a goal of identifying a "tool kit" of "best practices" proven to be effective in different situations. Some of VDOT's public involvement professionals in the field have also suggested a number of research questions for consideration in recent years.

Because of the wide range of research questions that have been proposed, VTRC staff developed a plan for conducting public involvement research in two phases. Phase I would focus on the issue of hearing formats, in particular, and particular related questions about project-specific public involvement processes. Phase II would take a much broader, comprehensive look at VDOT's public involvement practices, going back to the development of the long-range transportation plan and examining the various points of contact between VDOT and the public until the design of a project is finalized.

This report summarizes the Phase I study approach and results; a subsequent effort will focus on the research questions of Phase II.

APPROACH

We performed the following tasks to address the Phase I questions that VDOT's leadership and public involvement professionals presented:

1. a review of literature on other states' public hearing practices, and a limited review of best practices in public involvement more generally
2. written surveys of citizens attending five VDOT public meetings
 - the Meadowcreek Parkway design hearing in Charlottesville
 - the three Capital Beltway citizen information workshops held in Annandale, Falls Church, and McLean
 - the Indian River Road-Elbow Road location hearing in Virginia Beach.
3. a review of previously compiled VDOT data on public hearing attendance, numbers of comments received, and citizen satisfaction with public hearings
4. a written survey of 193 public involvement professionals in the 50 states.

Citizen Surveys

We created a one-page survey for distribution to citizens attending VDOT public hearings and workshops (Appendix B). Surveys used for the Meadowcreek Parkway, Capital Beltway, and Indian River Road projects were virtually identical, except for minor changes in wording to reflect the particular hearing. The survey included a series of questions about whether people preferred to make comments in public or private, whether they preferred for others to make comments in public or private, and similar items. It also had an open-ended, write-in item “What could VDOT do to improve its public hearings?” We intentionally avoided asking any questions about whether the individual was in favor of the proposed highway project or opposed to it. The surveys were anonymous, and time constraints ruled out any follow-up mailings to increase response rates.

We selected these particular hearing locations for surveys for several reasons. We were able to attend all of the hearings and see what occurred first hand. In the case of the Meadowcreek and Capital Beltway hearings, we anticipated strong public interest and attendance. To a degree, we also wanted to go where critics of VDOT’s public involvement processes were likely to be so that we could identify and understand their criticisms.

We used two approaches to distribute the surveys. For the Meadowcreek Parkway and Indian River Road hearings, surveys were sent to citizens by mail shortly after the hearing. The survey form was designed as a self-mailer, with return postage provided. This approach worked fairly well (46% of the Meadowcreek and 42% of the Indian River Road attendees returned surveys). For the Capital Beltway information meetings, we placed the surveys in the meeting room for citizens to pick up, with the option of either completing it on-site or mailing it back to us later. This approach had worked well in earlier VTRC studies of the public involvement process. It did not work well for the Capital Beltway hearings, however, yielding a much lower rate of return (6%) than the mail approach. This may have happened for a variety of reasons—many pieces of paper were being distributed to citizens, and there were many things to see and do for anyone attending the Capital Beltway workshops.

Although we targeted several secondary road location and design hearings for survey distribution, low attendance and/or low rates of completion yielded a very small number of completed surveys (fewer than 15). Those surveys are not included in the results because the numbers were so small.

When the hearing attendance list included a pair of names (typically married couples), surveys were mailed to each individual. We did not assume that a couple would necessarily have the same views about public hearings.

Review of Previously Compiled VDOT Data

We also reviewed several years’ worth of VDOT Location & Design Division statistics on numbers of citizens attending location and design public hearings and numbers of comments received. Unfortunately, it was not possible to distinguish comments received at the public

hearing and comments mailed in after the hearing, so these data are suggestive rather than definitive.

VDOT's Public Involvement Section (Location & Design Division) also provided us with the results of a *Public Involvement Process Survey* it conducted in 1995 and 1996 (Virginia Department of Transportation, 1996). Brief face-to-face "exit interviews" were conducted with 690 individuals attending 31 hearings in that time period (the 31 hearings represented 34% of the 92 public hearings conducted in the time period). Individuals were asked if their questions were answered adequately and whether they preferred the (open forum) style of the meeting they were attending or the "town hall" (traditional) format.

Survey of Other States

We also developed a survey of public involvement professionals in other states (Appendix C) specifically for this study. We asked respondents to rank the traditional, open forum, and combined hearing formats on a number of dimensions. The survey also included several open-ended questions (e.g., which public involvement techniques had respondents used most effectively for controversial projects). The survey of other states also included items relevant to Phase II of this study.

The 193-name respondent pool for the survey included the following:

- state DOT location and design directors from a current American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) directory
- state DOT public affairs directors from a list provided by VDOT's Public Affairs Office
- VDOT public hearing consultants from a list provided by VDOT's Location & Design Division
- members and friends of the Transportation Research Board's (TRB's) Committee on Public Involvement in Transportation (A1D04).

In some instances, this sampling approach yielded more than one respondent from a state (in a few cases, there were multiple respondents from the same DOT). In every such case, however, respondents either worked for different organizations in the same state or worked in different functional units of the same DOT.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Literature Review

What Other States Do

Two states in particular—Georgia and Illinois—have documented their experience with different hearing formats. A recent VTRC study (Arnold, Weichmann, & Capizzano, 1999) focusing on the transportation planning practices of other state DOTs, including public involvement, also provides a look at what other states do.

Georgia

Georgia pioneered the open forum format in the early 1980s and needed the approval of multiple levels of Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) officials before it was cleared to adopt the alternative format formally. They developed the open forum technique from the approach they were using for public information meetings at the time.

Georgia reported that it developed the open forum approach because they were not getting sufficient comments from citizens to make decisions when they used a traditional format (Lively, 1992). This problem was attributed to several factors:

- citizens' fear of speaking in public
- mostly one-sided comments being made, so that people with minority opinions were reluctant to comment
- lack of complete public understanding of the project for the following reasons:
 - displays were hard to see from where the audience was seated
 - technical terminology was used
 - opportunities for one-on-one conversation were very limited
 - a small number of speakers tended to attempt to control the meeting.

Georgia evaluated the open forum approach by conducting both traditional and open forum hearings for a single controversial project. Fifty comments were received at the traditional hearing compared to more than 700 comments at four open forum neighborhood meetings (Lively, 1992).

Illinois

The Illinois DOT's Special Studies Unit was commended by FHWA for adapting the open forum approach to large-scale hearings more successfully than any other state. The Special Studies Unit (Illinois DOT, 1990) observed that:

- The open forum approach had broad public acceptance in Illinois. More than 85% of citizens surveyed preferred it over the traditional "town meeting" format.
- For hearings with a very large turnout, Illinois concluded that the open forum was "the only rational approach to use." A hearing for a major project (FAP 413) attracted 900 people. The Special Studies Unit concluded that "there was no way this crowd could have been accommodated using the older format."
- For controversial projects, Illinois said, "the open house format does the best job of managing the controversy. The older [traditional] format encourages grandstanding and confrontation." They also recommended consideration of supplementary public involvement approaches (e.g., citizen advisory committees) for highly controversial projects. The FAP 413 project, for example, involved four working groups and an advisory committee.

VTRC Study

In the VTRC study (Arnold, Weichmann, & Capizzano, 1999), a survey developed specifically for the study included items asking respondents to identify the most effective and least effective aspects of their public involvement process for transportation planning. A number of the 38 responding DOTs identified the informal meeting format as the most effective aspect of their public involvement process. Several noted that open forum meetings, open houses, roundtable discussions, transportation fairs, and informational meetings were more effective for eliciting public comments than formal hearings. Respondents said that informal meeting formats allow citizens to speak from the audience, surrounded by friends and neighbors. Eliminating the requirement that comments be made into a microphone in the front of the meeting room made the atmosphere less threatening and intimidating, they said.

Responding DOTs also mentioned that formal hearings and presentations that do not allow for questions and interaction result in minimal public input for a transportation plan. Survey respondents also mentioned two additional points that will be addressed in Phase II of this research: the importance of reaching out to citizens on "their turf" (e.g., shopping centers, fairs, schools, public libraries), and the importance of proactively seeking the participation of stakeholder groups in the earliest stages of the planning process. Such stakeholder groups might range from neighborhood associations to environmental groups.

Advantages and Disadvantages of the Open Forum Format Identified in the Literature

Advantages

The literature from a number of states and federal agencies identified the following advantages for the open forum format, in addition to those outlined previously (Berman, 1999; Federal Highway Administration, 1997; Georgia Department of Transportation, 1985; Howard/Stein-Hudson Associates, 1996; Illinois Department of Transportation, 1990; Lively, 1992; National Highway Institute, 1996):

1. The public can attend at their convenience over several hours, compared to the typical 7 P.M. starting time for traditional hearings. This can increase attendance. The short time required for participation attracts people who do not want to sit through long meetings.
2. Citizens have direct interaction with project staff who might not otherwise be available.
 - This can allow designers, environmental specialists, or others to solve individuals' problems.
 - People can get immediate responses to their questions.
 - Misinformation about a project can be reduced
3. The informal atmosphere encourages more open participation by the public.
4. Intimidation of speakers and emotion are reduced.
 - Georgia reports receiving comments from *5 times as many hearing attendees* when the open forum was used rather than the traditional format (62% versus 12%).
 - The open forum format focuses on issues rather than positions.
 - The quality of comments can be enhanced as a result.
5. The open forum format allows plenty of time for citizens to see displays and documents close up. People have a chance to clarify their comments by reviewing materials before putting their comments "on the record."
6. Citizens have many opportunities for questions and detailed answers, and question periods have no strict time limits. When the traditional format is used, speakers are typically limited to 3 minutes each, or in some instances, 5 minutes. As Bill Bailey of the Fairfax County Federation of Citizens Associations (Berman, 1999) noted, citizens

making comments in a traditional format hearing frequently get cut off before they finish their statements.

7. Open forum hearings are effective for disseminating information to the public. Citizens get informational materials on the project to take home and review; they do not have to rely on their memory of a presentation.

Disadvantages

The literature also notes disadvantages of the open forum approach:

1. People do not hear the views of others first hand or the basis for others' views at the hearing. They have to seek this information from other sources (newspapers, meetings of civic associations, etc.).
2. People do not hear their elected officials' views.
3. Effective displays and exhibits can be expensive to produce. Complex issues can also be difficult to present in handouts (videos or repeating slide shows are used by a number of DOTs, however).
4. It may be impossible to gauge the opinions of citizens attending the hearing until citizens' comments for the record are transcribed. This may be frustrating for the press (although they can conduct interviews without waiting for the hearing to end).

Some DOTs have addressed these criticisms of the open forum approach by using what is called a combined (or dual) hearing format. It involves a highly structured, formal hearing that is either preceded or accompanied by an informal, ongoing informational meeting. Citizen testimony is received by a hearing officer in the formal portion of the hearing, without cross examination, and this is usually preceded by a formal presentation on the project. There is no discussion in the formal portion of the hearing except to clarify procedural questions; questions raised in the formal hearing are answered in writing or at the simultaneous information meeting (NHI, 1996). Although the combined format might seem to offer "something for everyone," people who are reluctant to speak in public must either submit their comments in writing or face the prospect of making their comment for the record in front of an audience. And if the public involvement program preceding the combined hearing was not comprehensive in scope, the manner in which comments for the record are received in the combined format hearing can seem unresponsive and disinterested (National Highway Institute, 1996).

A variation on the combined format was used in the VDOT Capital Beltway Citizen Workshops we attended. There was one-on-one interaction in a room with plan exhibits from 5 to 7 P.M., followed by a 20-minute formal presentation in another room, and then public comments made by citizens into a microphone.

Advantages and Disadvantages of the Traditional Format Hearing Identified in the Literature

Many of the advantages and disadvantages the literature identifies for the traditional hearing format are the converse of those identified for the open forum format. The traditional format for highway hearings “was developed at a time when hearings usually afforded the sole opportunity for public involvement . . . it was quite common for the ‘interaction’ to break down into heated, unproductive debate” (National Highway Institute, 1996).

Advantages

Advantages of the traditional format hearing that are identified in the literature (National Highway Institute, 1996) include:

1. It can be useful for disseminating substantial amounts of information to large and diverse audiences.
2. It can bring together a variety of interest groups that may not be aware of each others’ needs or concerns; it can give impetus to the resolution of problem issues (if groups’ positions are not crystallized).

Disadvantages

Disadvantages of the traditional format identified in the literature (in addition to those noted by the Georgia DOT) include:

1. The public does not have the opportunity to discuss the project on a one-on-one basis with project staff at the hearing.
2. The public does not have the opportunity to have its questions answered at the hearing.
3. The public does not have the opportunity to inspect displays or plans at the hearing.
4. The formality can be intimidating to people and a barrier to the free expression of views.
5. The physical and psychological separation of agency officials and the public reinforces an “us versus them” atmosphere that can “add fuel to the fire of vocal minorities.”

The Most Important Point

The most cogent point the literature on hearing formats makes is this: “Today, many transportation agencies realize that the hearing is only as worthwhile as the public involvement program that has preceded it” (National Highway Institute, 1996). The shortcomings of each hearing format are well known, and the exchange of information that takes place in a public hearing can be supplemented in a variety of ways, depending on time and resources.

Previously Compiled Data on VDOT Public Hearings

The face-to-face “exit survey” conducted by VDOT’s Public Involvement Section in 1995 and 1996 (VDOT, 1996) reveals some interesting results, which are summarized in Table 1. Sixty-one percent of those interviewed were attending a VDOT meeting for the first time; the remainder had attended one or more VDOT meetings previously. *Most relevant to this research is the finding that 86% of the 690 citizens interviewed said they preferred the open forum format, whereas 13% expressed a preference for the (traditional) town hall format.* Public Involvement Section staff noted: “Many of those providing comments noted that this (open forum) method of hearing gave them the opportunity to get answers to specific questions, that it was more convenient to their schedule, and that they did not have to wait their turn to speak” (VDOT, 1996). A substantial majority—85 percent—also said that the questions they asked had been satisfactorily answered at the meeting.

Table 1. Results of Public Involvement Procedures Survey, 1995-1996

Question	Response		
Is this your first VDOT meeting?	Yes (420)	No (270)	
How did you hear of the meeting today?	Direct mail (327)	Newspaper (301)	Other (62)
Do you prefer this style meeting or a town hall style meeting?	Open forum (591)	Town hall (87)	No preference (12)
If a video was shown, did it provide you helpful information?	Yes (288)	No (25)	
Were the questions you asked answered adequately?	Yes (587)	No (73)	NA (30)
Are there any changes we can do to improve the hearing process?	Yes (75)	No (486)	NA (129)

Public Involvement Section staff noted that there was an incorrect perception among some citizens that VDOT only had one hearing format (open forum). They observed that when traditional or combined hearing formats had been used in response to the “I need to hear what my neighbor said” concern, citizen attendance and participation were lower than with the open forum format.

Public Involvement Section staff reported that before VDOT adopted the open forum format, comments were received from 15% of those attending traditional format VDOT hearings, on average. Typically, less than 1% would make a comment in favor of the project. By 1995-96, open forum hearings were eliciting comments from 35% of those attending, on average

(VDOT, 1996). Based on their experience, Public Involvement Section staff concluded: “The primary goal when the [open forum] process was value engineered was to find a method to increase citizen input at the public hearings, to assist the Department in the decision making process. To this end, the new process is working and is supported in our survey data.”

More recently, the Location & Design Division furnished VTRC with data on attendance and the number of comments received at 41 location and design public hearings, primarily those held from January 1997 through February 1999 (a few were earlier). These data are shown in Table 2. One caveat is in order: the “comments received” figure for each hearing includes *all* comments received, whether they were received at the public hearing or mailed in during the 10-day comment period following the hearing. It is not possible to distinguish the numbers of comments made only at the hearings.

The data for the open forum hearings (i.e., all hearings in the table except the first two) show high numbers of comments received relative to the number of people attending a given hearing. Many comments were also received at the Route 460 and Blacksburg/Roanoke Connector hearings in Montgomery County, both of which were held in the traditional format. The evidence from these two controversial projects is not sufficient for drawing conclusions about the traditional format, however. Unfortunately, no information pre-dating VDOT’s use of the open forum format was available for this study; we had only the evidence from Georgia and VDOT’s public involvement staff to draw upon.

Results of the Citizen Surveys

This section of the report summarizes the findings from the **235 surveys** completed by attendees at the Meadowcreek Parkway design hearing, Indian River Road location hearing, and Capital Beltway citizen workshops. Results tables show entries for all three sites side by side to make comparisons easier for the reader. Since there were distinct differences in the kinds of issues involved, percentages are not aggregated across hearings, however.

Background of the Three Highway Projects

Capital Beltway

The Capital Beltway (I-95/495) Citizen Workshops were held on three successive nights—June 8, 9, and 10, 1999—in Annandale, Falls Church, and McLean. The combined attendance at the workshops was approximately 1,200. A combined format was used for the workshops: 2 hours of one-on-one interaction beside plans and displays, with opportunities to provide written comments or verbatim comments to a court reporter. At 7 P.M., there was a 20-minute formal presentation, followed by questions and comments from citizens made into a microphone. We attended the first of the workshops in Annandale.

At this point, at least six options are under consideration for the estimated \$1 billion plus Capital Beltway improvements: combinations of 10 lanes or 12 lanes with express/local lanes

Table 2. Attendance at Recent VDOT Location & Design Hearings and Numbers of Citizen Comments Received for the Record

Route	County/City	Hearing Date	Attendance	Comments Received
Blacksburg/Roanoke Connector*	Montgomery Co.	September 26, 1991	217	192
Route 460*	Montgomery Co.	October 18, 1995	274	324
Shirley Ave.	Fauquier Co.	February 15, 1996	51	46
Route 614	Gloucester Co.	April 11, 1996	50	246
Route 58	Carroll, Patrick, and Floyd Counties	September 10 & 11, 1996	397	93
Main Street Route 29	City of Danville	January 30, 1997	24	9
Southwest Suffolk Bypass	City of Suffolk	February 18, 1997	146	94
George Washington Highway	City of Chesapeake	March 19, 1997	226	224
Routes 15/19/17	Fauquier Co.	March 19, 1997	Not Available	Not Available
Route 83	Buchanan Co.	March 20, 1997	34	25
Route 58 Big Stone Gap	Wise Co.	April 22, 1997	88	28
Route 460	Town of Farmville	April 22, 1997	14	1
Route 58 Jonesville Bypass	Town of Jonesville	April 29, 1997	94	19
Spotsylvania Courthouse Bypass	Spotsylvania Co.	May 29, 1997	90	81
95/395/495	Fairfax Co.	June 6, 1997	722	445
Route 895	Henrico & Chesterfield Counties	June 17 & 18, 1997	151	99
Route 208	Louisa Co.	June 24, 1997	29	26
Route 633	Orange Co.	June 26, 1997	17	7
I-95	Stafford Co.	July 15, 1997	346	104
Route 168	City of Chesapeake	July 30, 1997	Not Available	Not Available
Route 29	Amherst Co.	August 19, 1997	77	16
Route 211/Lee Highway	Rappahannock Co.	September 25, 1997	34	17
Route 360	Halifax Co. and Town of South Boston	October 10, 1997	59	151
Route 28: Independence Bypass	Grayson Co.	October 21, 1997	127	65
Outer Connector	Stafford and Spotsylvania Counties	November 17 & 18, 1997	872	1029
Armistead Avenue	City of Hampton	November 18, 1997	Not Available	Not Available
Route 722	Caroline Co.	January 7, 1998	8	3
Deep Hole Road	Town of Chincoteague	January 13, 1998	25	15
Route 86	City of Danville	January 22, 1998	68	79
Main Street	City of Danville	January 27, 1998	15	4
Route 669	Carroll Co.	April 14, 1998	425	19

Route 210 Connector	Amherst Co.	April 21, 1998	133	155
Route 165	City of Va. Beach	April 23, 1998	Not Available	Not Available
Horse Mountain View Road	Alleghany Co.	June 1, 1998	40	8
Route 58	Patrick Co.	June 9, 1998	121	103
Bailey Bridge Road	Chesterfield Co.	July 14, 1998	63	19
Route 123	Prince William Co.	July 16, 1998	79	27
Route 28	Prince William Co.	August 17, 1998	160	55
Route 288	Powhatan Co.	August 26, 1998	95	42
Route 120	Arlington Co.	September 16, 1998	14	9
I-64/288	Goochland Co.	October 14, 1998	42	62
Jefferson Avenue	City of Newport News	November 17, 1998	24	12
Route 1	Henrico Co.	December 8, 1998	21	17
Route 15	Fauquier Co.	February 23, 1999	38	41
Route 3	Culpeper Co.	February 25, 1999	62	38
I-95	Stafford Co.	February 25, 1999	Not Available	Not Available

*Indicates hearing done in the traditional format; all other hearings were open forum.

and/or HOV lanes (VDOT, 1999b). DeLeuw Cather (Parsons Transportation Group) is a major contractor and maintains a Capital Beltway web site. Numerous consultants were working the exhibits at the Annandale workshop we attended.

The Sierra Club had a “citizen sign-in room” across the hall from the VDOT/DeLeuw Cather exhibits at the Annandale workshop. Although consultants and VDOT staff referred to an earlier Major Investment Study (MIS) that concluded that *both* transit and highway improvements were needed in the region, some citizens commenting at the Annandale workshop wanted to propose that the \$1 billion be spent solely on transit, rather than highway improvements. We also witnessed frustration on the part of some citizens in response to panel members’ statements that studies were still being conducted and that the rail studies and highway studies were on different timetables.

Meadowcreek Parkway

The Meadowcreek Parkway in the City of Charlottesville and Albemarle County is a controversial \$22.7-million, 2-mile extension of McIntire Road that has been debated for 30+ years in the community. Charlottesville City Councilor David Toscano said that in his 9 years on the council, he has gotten more comments from citizens about the Meadowcreek Parkway than any other single issue (Dukceovich, 1999d). The VDOT design presented at the public hearing was a four-lane, limited access, divided facility with a speed limit of 70 km/h (43 mph). The City of Charlottesville, however, commissioned local landscape architect William Rieley to come up with alternatives to the VDOT design. Rieley’s two- and four-lane alternatives had lower design speeds (37 mph) than the VDOT design and would take fewer acres of land from McIntire Park (Koomen, 1999). Computer simulations and extensive descriptions of the Rieley

and VDOT alternatives were featured on the city's web page prior to the VDOT location hearing (City of Charlottesville, 1999).

The weeks before the Meadowcreek hearing were characterized by extensive press coverage of the activities of both the anti-parkway group Sensible Transportation Alternatives to the Meadowcreek Parkway (STAMP) and the pro-parkway group (Local Action 4 the Meadowcreek Parkway, or LAMP). STAMP, formed in 1997, objected to the environmental impacts of the VDOT design and argued that the four-lane design would lead to heavier traffic and promote growth. LAMP, on the other hand, said the parkway was a vital link for downtown businesses and Park Street residents contending with heavy traffic volumes.

The design hearing on May 27 was attended by 217 people. STAMP, LAMP, and the MPO's parkway design advisory committee all had tables set up along the way into the hearing room. A few weeks after the VDOT design hearing, VDOT Resident Engineer Angela Tucker said that the 1,000 comments received for the record were at least **4 to 1 in favor of the facility** (Dukceovich, 1999c). When the City of Charlottesville held its own, 4-hour, traditional style hearing on June 21, 1999, city officials reported that half of the speakers spoke for the parkway and half spoke against it (i.e., the ratio of comments in favor to comments opposed was **1 to 1** when the traditional format was used). Ultimately, the Charlottesville City Council endorsed a two-lane parkway, in a split vote. The Albemarle County Board of Supervisors subsequently endorsed a four-lane parkway, in a unanimous vote (Savodnik, 1999).

Indian River Road-Elbow Road

The Indian River-Elbow Road improvement project originated with a request to VDOT from the city of Virginia Beach in May 1995. Two 4.7-mile-long alignments for the project were under consideration at the time of the location hearing on July 14, 1999. One alignment (Alignment 1) would widen the existing alignments of the two roads with short realignments and intersection improvements. It would take 49 homes, 2 businesses, 1 church (Mount Bethel Baptist), 1 community spiritual center, 2.2 acres of forest land, and 1 acre of wetlands. Alignment 2 would be largely on a new location, taking many fewer homes (4 versus 49), 0 businesses, 6.3 acres of forest land, and 2 acres of wetlands (VDOT, 1999c). Future levels of service on the two roads are projected to be F** if the no-build option is chosen.

At the hearing, which was attended by 164 people, we observed only one individual publicly advocating the no-build option. A number of the members of the Mount Bethel Baptist Church (in the path of Alignment 1) were in attendance, and there was much activity around the table where VDOT right-of-way staff were seated. There was also much activity around the table with VDOT environmental specialists. We were told by VDOT staff that residents along the potential new alignment were very interested in noise walls.

Citizen Survey Responses

Response Rate

Survey completion rates for the hearings are shown in Table 3. They reflect the methodological observation made earlier—that distributing surveys at hearings (e.g., Capital Beltway) did not work nearly so well as mailing them to citizens after hearings (Meadowcreek and Indian River). Although time did not permit follow-up mailings, we probably could have achieved even higher rates of completion for Meadowcreek and Indian River. The return rates of 46% and 42% for those two hearings, respectively, are good for a mail survey of this type (probably attributable in part to high levels of interest in the projects).

Table 3. Response Rates for Citizen Surveys

Item	Capital Beltway	Meadowcreek	Indian River
Number attending	1,200 (estimated)	217	164
Surveys completed	66	100	69
Response rate	5.5%	46.1%	42.0%

These were *not random samples* of hearing attendees, but in the case of the Meadowcreek and Indian River hearings, they may well be *fairly representative samples* of people attending the hearing (given the response rates). It is unlikely that *any* group of people who attend a public hearing resembles a true random sample of the population. Even in the case of the Capital Beltway respondents, however, we have information from people who were interested enough to attend the workshops and interested enough to complete a survey. Their thoughts on the process are worthy of consideration for that reason alone.

Key Questions Asked

The key questions asked on the survey were:

- whether citizens liked or disliked the format of the hearing they had attended (combined format for Capital Beltway, open forum for Meadowcreek and Indian River Road)
- whether citizens preferred a formal presentation or one-on-one interactions as a source of information about a project
- whether citizens preferred to make their own comments for the record privately or publicly
- whether citizens preferred for *other people* to make their comments for the record privately or publicly

- whether citizens preferred a hearing schedule that allows attendance and comments for the record at any time between particular hours or a schedule that allows comments only *after* a formal presentation
- citizens’ suggestions for ways that VDOT could make its public hearings better (a write-in item).

A few of the questions included on the survey (e.g., Question 1 on how individuals were notified about the hearing, and Question 4, a write-in question about individuals’ reasons for attending the hearing) will be summarized in the Phase II study report, which will explore factors influencing hearing attendance in more depth.

Previous Hearings Attended

Table 4 shows how many previous VDOT hearings survey respondents had attended. (Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number, so totals may differ slightly from 100.) Relatively many survey respondents from each of the three sites reported being first-timers at a VDOT hearing. Roughly one in four of the respondents from each site had attended three or more previous VDOT hearings.

Table 4. Number of Previous VDOT Hearings Attended

Number of Hearings	Capital Beltway	Meadowcreek	Indian River
None	50%	38%	46%
1 or 2	27	34	32
3 or 4	9	14	10
5 or more	14	15	12
(Number of cases)	(66)	(100)	(69)

Non-Highway Government Meetings Attended in Past Year

Table 5 shows how many non-highway government meetings the respondents had attended in the past year (e.g., city council, school board). Especially in the case of the Meadowcreek Parkway respondents, citizens attending the VDOT hearing tended to have been involved in other local government activities as well. But 30% to 40% of the respondents in each group do not appear to be regular attendees at other kinds of local government meetings (judging from the past year).

Table 5. Number of Local Government Meetings Attended in Past Year

Number of Meetings	Capital Beltway	Meadowcreek	Indian River
None	42%	29%	46%
1 or 2	38	28	33
3 or 4	11	16	13
5 or more	9	27	7
(Number of cases)	(66)	(100)	(69)

Overall Satisfaction with Format of Hearing

Table 6 shows citizens’ overall satisfaction with the format of the hearing they attended. Seventy-six percent of the Indian River Road respondents and 61% of the Meadowcreek respondents indicated they either liked the open forum hearing format or liked it very much. For the Capital Beltway workshops, 72% said they either liked the combined format that was used or liked it very much. *Only small percentages ranging from 10% (Indian River) to 17% (Meadowcreek) of the survey respondents indicated they disliked the format of the hearing they attended.* Some of the sources of dissatisfaction are identified later in the discussion of the last question on the survey (suggested ways VDOT could make its public hearings better).

Table 6. Satisfaction with Hearing Format

Response	Capital Beltway (Combined Format)	Meadowcreek (Open Forum)	Indian River (Open Forum)
Liked it very much	23%	26%	25%
Liked it	49	35	51
Neither liked nor disliked it	16	22	13
Disliked it	11	6	4
Disliked it very much	0	11	6
(Number of cases)	(61)	(100)	(68)

Number Making Comments at Hearing

Table 7 shows how many individuals at each hearing location chose to make comments for the record. A large percentage of the Meadowcreek respondents (75%) made comments; slightly more than one-half of the Indian River respondents reported doing so. Fewer (40%) of the respondents attending the combined format Capital Beltway workshops reported having made a comment. The last finding is interesting because interest in the Beltway improvements appears to be quite high, and people had the option of making their comments privately (as well as publicly) at the workshops.

Table 7. Attendees Making Oral or Written Comments for Official Record

Response	Capital Beltway (Combined Format)	Meadowcreek (Open Forum)	Indian River (Open Forum)
Made comment	40%	74%	56%
Did not make comment	60	26	44
(Number of cases)	(63)	(100)	(68)

Preference for Formal Presentation vs. One-on-One Interactions

Table 8 shows responses to Question 7, which asked how individuals preferred to get information about highway projects. As structured, the question was intended to tap a respondent’s preference for a traditional format hearing (with a formal presentation) **or** for an open format hearing (with one-on-one interaction). The question was structured that way

because of SB 1198’s use of the traditional versus open format dichotomy (i.e., it does not mention combined formats). Preliminary checks on the data revealed that a number of respondents in each of the three groups had checked **both** answers when presented with a choice of this type. The data analysis approach was modified so that all combinations of responses could be counted.

In each group, 30 percent or fewer of the respondents indicated that they wanted only a formal presentation as a source of project information at the hearing (Table 8). Fifty percent or more of those attending the two open forum hearings (Meadowcreek and Indian River) said they wanted only one-on-one interaction as a source of information. The percentage who indicated they preferred both a formal presentation and one-on-one interaction for project information ranged from 6% (Indian River) to 26% (Capital Beltway).

Table 8. Citizens’ Preferences for Formal Presentations versus One-on-One Interactions

Response	Capital Beltway (Combined Format)	Meadowcreek (Open Forum)	Indian River (Open Forum)
Prefer formal presentation only	30%	24%	26%
Prefer one-on-one only	35	52	68
Prefer both formal presentation and one-on-one	26	19	6
No answer	9	5	0
(Number of cases)	(66)	(100)	(69)

Public vs. Private Comments

Tables 9 and 10 show responses to survey questions asking whether the respondents preferred to make their own comments for the record privately or publicly (Question 8) and whether they preferred for other people to make their comments privately or publicly (Question 9). A number of respondents checked both answers for each question (as shown in the tables).

Making one’s own comments **only** in public was favored most by the Capital Beltway respondents (39%) and favored least by the Indian River Road respondents (29%). About half of the Meadowcreek (45%) and Indian River (51%) respondents endorsed making their own comments **only** in private. About 1 in 7 respondents in each of the three groups endorsed both options—making their own comments in private **and** making their own comments in public. Those citizens may be comfortable either way, or perhaps they want to have a choice, depending on the situation.

Table 9. Citizens’ Preferences for Making Own Comments in Private or in Public

Response	Capital Beltway (Combined Format)	Meadowcreek (Open Forum)	Indian River (Open Forum)
Prefer in private only	30%	45%	51%
Prefer in public only	39	36	29
Prefer both in private and in public	14	14	14
No answer	17	5	6
(Number of cases)	(66)	(100)	(69)

The data in Table 10 suggest that a number of respondents would make different choices for their “neighbors” who have comments than they would make for themselves. The Capital Beltway and Indian River respondents are much more inclined to want their neighbors to comment publicly than themselves. Meadowcreek respondents also endorse their neighbors commenting in public more than themselves, but the difference is smaller. In all three groups, more (sometimes many more) respondents want *their neighbors* to make public comments rather than private comments. This may represent the “I want to hear what my neighbor is saying” sentiment. It may be more prevalent among the Capital Beltway and Indian River Road groups because those projects are at an earlier stage of development.

Table 10. Citizens’ Preferences for Others Making Comments in Private or in Public

Response	Capital Beltway (Combined Format)	Meadowcreek (Open Forum)	Indian River (Open Forum)
Prefer in private only	17%	33%	25%
Prefer in public only	65	45	58
Prefer both in private and in public	8	15	13
No answer	11	7	4
(Number of cases)	(66)	(100)	(69)

Hearing Scheduling

Table 11 shows respondents’ preferences for a flexible hearing schedule (i.e., attend at any time to make a comment) versus the fixed schedule of a traditional hearing (comments after a formal presentation). *All three respondent groups endorsed the attend-at-any-time option more than any other option.* This preference was strongest among attendees of the Meadowcreek and Indian River open forum hearings, who also preferred one-on-one interaction as a source of information about projects. More Capital Beltway respondents than Meadowcreek or Indian River Road respondents endorsed comments after a presentation or both options. This is consistent with the Capital Beltway respondents’ greater preference for formal presentations as a source of information.

Table 11. Citizens’ Preferences for Traditional Hearing Scheduling vs. Open Forum Scheduling

Response	Capital Beltway (Combined Format)	Meadowcreek (Open Forum)	Indian River (Open Forum)
Prefer comments following formal presentation	33%	29%	33%
Prefer comments at any time between certain hours	44	56	61
Prefer both (following a presentation and at any time)	17	11	4
No answer	6	4	1
(Number of cases)	(66)	(100)	(69)

Citizens' Suggestions for Improving Hearings

Table 12 shows the number of respondents who wrote in an answer to the last question (Question 12) on the survey: “How can VDOT make its public hearings better?” Table 13 shows the results of a content analysis of the responses.

The responses from each of the three groups are provided in Appendices D, E, and F. Some of the “suggestions” were really statements in support of or opposition to the particular project. Comments written in response to other questions on the survey are also shown in brackets in the appendices. Unedited comments are provided for illustrative purposes only. Although there are differences in the frequency of particular kinds of comments by location,

Table 12. Number of Citizens Suggesting Improvements for Public Meetings

Response	Capital Beltway (Combined Format)	Meadowcreek (Open Forum)	Indian River (Open Forum)
Made suggestion	58%	73%	55%
Did not make suggestion	44	27	45
(Number of cases)	(66)	(100)	(69)

Table 13. Categorization of Citizens' Suggestions for Improving VDOT's Public Hearings

Category of Comment	Capital Beltway	Meadowcreek	Indian River
Hearing format	15	35	18
Hearing exhibits	9	25	1
Hearing personnel	8	3	4
Notification about hearing	2	0	12
Follow up after the hearing	2	6	2
Hearing time or location	2	3	2
More information on decision making	3	9	2
Projects discussed at hearing	0	0	2
Miscellaneous	6	4	2

there were more comments about hearing format than any other subject. Two of the comments endorsed the traditional hearing format:

- “Be public! Written and private comments are not what I consider a public hearing” (Meadowcreek).
- “Have the type of hearing at which comments are made openly, so that others can hear them and make their comments in return” (Meadowcreek).

More positive than negative comments were made about hearing formats. All 15 comments about the combined format of the Capital Beltway workshops were positive:

- “It was very helpful to have the various experts and consultants available for one-on-one discussion. I don’t like public hearings because I don’t enjoy people venting their feelings in public” (Capital Beltway).
- “The way this meeting was done with both types was very good—you could look at the exhibits or attend the meeting” (Capital Beltway).
- “Your format stops the loud mouth minority from dominating the hearing. This allows for true democracy” (Meadowcreek).
- “Present method good for providing factual information in whatever detail desired by the recipient. Old method, with public statement, etc., good for firing up a fight” (Meadowcreek).
- “I would only make a comment in private because I cannot speak in front of people” (Indian River).
- “I particularly liked the one-on-one format” (Indian River).

A number of comments suggested a combined hearing format:

- “One format I think would be useful would be a statement/response structure in which citizens and officials could comment on or ask questions of the statements made by others. That would allow the overall discussion to rest on the knowledge base of all the people rather than adversarial groups shouting at officials” (Meadowcreek).
- “Start the hearing by a formal presentation and then spread out for one-on-one discussions” (Meadowcreek).

Exhibits (e.g., plans) were the subject of many comments by Meadowcreek attendees, in particular. A number of these comments were negative:

- “Provide graphics that show the entire project—segmented graphics make it difficult to visualize the project in its entirety” (Meadowcreek).
- “Offer ‘guided tours’ of the plan beginning every 15 minutes. As lay people, we don’t understand the maps, legends, etc.”
- “Use computer generated 3-D graphics” (Meadowcreek).
- “VDOT’s engineering drawings are difficult to read” (Meadowcreek).

Most of the comments about exhibits from the Capital Beltway respondents were in the form of suggestions:

- “Provide current photographs with overlay sheets of current road, proposed alternatives, and required right-of-way” (Capital Beltway).
- “Use videos for each section/category of data” (Capital Beltway).
- “Provide more written and detailed materials” (Capital Beltway).

Hearing notification was the subject of many comments by the Indian River respondents. Most of these comments suggested that information about hearings should be sent directly to citizens who might be affected by the project:

- “VDOT should mail to the homeowners affected any information in the form of brochures, newsletters, and maps, if available” (Indian River).
- “VDOT should send everyone along the proposed route a better ‘map’ of the proposed routes, along with advantages and disadvantages, costs, and timetables a few weeks before the hearing” (Indian River).
- “Have a better way to reach the community affected by direct mail or flyers” (Indian River).

Finally, the Meadowcreek respondents, in particular, made a number of comments indicating their interest in knowing more about “how it all works.” Some Meadowcreek respondents also expressed an interest in seeing a tabulation or summary of the comments received for the record.

- “[Would like some] indication of whether or not opinions will count on the final outcome of the roadway. Education on process as a whole” (Meadowcreek).
- “Let people know how/why decisions were made” (Indian River).
- “VDOT should tabulate and summarize written/private comments and have results published in the news media in the region/area affected by the proposed project” (Meadowcreek).

Further Analysis and Refinement of Surveys

Some of the citizens’ suggestions could apply to other kinds of VDOT public hearings or meetings (e.g., transportation planning public meetings). In Phase II of the study, we plan to do further analysis of these comments and suggestions, with input from the project task group. Information on other states’ public involvement practices will also help us and the task group identify which of the citizens’ suggestions may have been implemented elsewhere.

As noted earlier in the Methodology section, at least two of the projects included in the citizen surveys (Meadowcreek and Capital Beltway) are controversial. We surveyed attendees at them nonetheless, believing that there was useful information to be gained. We hope to have the opportunity to refine the citizen survey and mail it to attendees at more location/design hearings in 2000. There are three major location hearings scheduled for 2000—the Capital Beltway project, the Coalfields Expressway, and I-73. The I-73 hearings, in particular, are scheduled to be held in a traditional format over 5 nights. They would afford an excellent opportunity to assess how citizens (and possibly local officials) feel about the traditional format, now that some of them have experience with the open forum. In addition, the vast majority of VDOT’s location/design hearings are conducted for secondary road projects. We would like to survey a good-sized sample of citizens attending those hearings as well.

Survey of Other States

Response Rate

The response rate for the survey of other states was **43.5%** (84 responses to 193 surveys sent). In some cases, the multiple surveys sent to a state DOT (i.e., to the directors of both location & design and public affairs divisions) may have been routed to a single person for completion. The respondents represented **43 states and 41 DOTs** (Appendix G), or roughly 85% of the 50 states. Time constraints did not permit repeat mailings to nonrespondents.

Two thirds (64%) of the survey respondents were employed by state DOTs; the second largest group (25%) worked for consulting firms. The remainder worked for federal agencies, MPOs, and other organizations. All of the 13 Virginia respondents except 1 worked for consulting firms (1 Virginia respondent is employed by FHWA).

Among the DOT employees, 56% worked in preconstruction divisions, 15% worked in public affairs, 14% worked in planning, and 19% worked in other divisions such as environmental (total percentages slightly exceed 100 because two individuals checked multiple divisions).

Location/Design Hearing Practices in Other States

Number of Hearings and Staff

Three fourths (78%) of the respondents (both DOT employees and others) indicated that they conducted or attended highway location/design hearings as part of their job. Responses to the question “How many location and design hearings does your organization typically conduct in one year?” were extremely variable, ranging from 1 to 300. The median number was 10 (this is the least biased average, given the large range).

Preconstruction staff conduct location/design hearings in 79% of the respondents’ states; public affairs staff conduct them in 25% (some respondents checked multiple answers);

consultants conduct them in 43%; and others (none of the aforementioned groups) conduct them in 32%.

Not surprisingly, there is also much variation in the answers to the question about the percentage of location/design hearings held in urban areas with populations of 50,000 or more. Answers ranged from 2% to 100%, averaging 50%.

Methods Used to Notify Public

Table 14 shows the methods used by respondents’ organizations to notify the public about upcoming location/design hearings. Not surprisingly, newspaper ads and direct mail are used by very high percentages of DOTs and consulting firms. Television ads are used by relatively few, and web pages are used by about half (54%). We plan to analyze the data on other notification methods used (a write-in item) in Phase II of this research, along with the write-in questions capturing respondents’ judgments about the most and least effective notification methods. Direct mail received high marks as an effective notification method, followed by newspaper items *other than* legal notices (which were rated least effective by a number of respondents).

Table 14. Methods Used to Notify Public About Location/Design Hearings

Notification Method	% Who Use
Newspapers	98
Mailings	90
Radio ads	36
TV ads	18
Web page	54
Other methods	43
(n)	(63)

Formats Used for Hearings

Table 15 shows the frequency with which respondents’ organizations use the traditional, open forum, and combined formats for location/design public hearings. The traditional format is used least often—only **2% of respondents** reported their organizations “always” use it. *Hence, SB 1198’s proposal for VDOT to always use the traditional format for location hearings would make Virginia extremely unusual compared to the 43 other states represented in our survey.* Fifty-two percent of respondents reported that their organizations seldom or never use the traditional format.

The open forum approach is “always” or “often used” by 71% of the respondents’ DOTs or firms. Only 13% reported seldom or never using the open forum. *The open forum appears to be the format of choice for the vast majority of responding states and consulting firms.* Although the combined format offers elements of both of the other formats, only about half as many respondents (37% versus 71% for open forum) reported using the combined format “always” or “often” for location and design hearings. Twice as many respondents reported “seldom” or “never” using the combined format compared to the open forum.

Table 15. Formats Used for Location/Design Public Hearings

How Often Used?	Traditional	Open Forum	Combined
Always	2%	30%	8%
Often	19	41	29
Sometimes	19	14	30
Seldom	36	5	21
Never	16	8	6
(n)	(63)	(63)	(63)

Respondents’ Ratings of Hearing Formats

A major portion of the survey of other states was devoted to ratings of the traditional, open forum, and combined formats on a number of different dimensions. Respondents were asked to rate the formats for **all** types of transportation public hearings, not just location or design hearings.

Facilitating Two-Way Communication

Table 16 shows respondents’ ratings of the formats for facilitating two-way communication. *The open forum got very high marks for two-way communication, with 86% of the respondents rating it “good” or better (a majority rated it “very good”). The traditional format was rated “poor” for two-way communication by nearly 50% of the respondents.* Ratings for the combined format on two-way communication were generally positive, though it got notably fewer “very good” ratings than the open forum format (38% versus 62%).

Table 16. Ratings of Hearing Formats for Facilitating Two-Way Communication

Rating	Traditional	Open Forum	Combined
Very good	3%	62%	38%
Good	11	24	39
Fair	35	4	15
Poor	48	0	0
Haven’t used the format	3	2	8
(n)	(79)	(80)	(79)

Explaining Technical Information

Table 17 shows respondents' ratings of the different hearing formats for explaining technical project information to citizens. *The traditional format received much poorer ratings on this dimension than either the open forum or the combined format.* Only one third of the respondents gave the traditional format a “good” or “very good” rating for explaining technical project information, compared to 85% for the open forum and 79% for the combined format. The traditional format was the only format to receive a significant number of “poor” ratings on this dimension (31%).

Table 17. Ratings of Hearing Formats for Explaining Technical Project Information

Rating	Traditional	Open Forum	Combined
Very good	10%	50%	45%
Good	23	35	34
Fair	33	11	12
Poor	31	1	1
Haven't used the format	2	2	8
(n)	(78)	(80)	(78)

Obtaining Many Comments

Table 18 shows the respondents' ratings of the hearing formats for obtaining many public comments. Recall that this was one of the “selling points” for the open forum format when the Georgia DOT developed it. *Eighty-nine percent of the respondents rated the open forum “good” or “very good” for obtaining many public comments,* and the combined format was rated that way by 79% of the respondents. *Only 33% gave the traditional format a rating of “good” or better on this dimension.* The traditional format was the only format to get an appreciable (25%) number of “poor” ratings on this dimension.

Table 18. Ratings of Hearing Formats for Obtaining Many Public Comments

Rating	Traditional	Open Forum	Combined
Very good	5%	54%	33%
Good	28	35	46
Fair	39	9	13
Poor	25	0	1
Haven't used the format	2	2	6
(n)	(79)	(80)	(78)

Eliciting the Full Range of Opinions

From a public involvement standpoint, it is insufficient for a hearing format merely to elicit a large number of comments. It also should elicit the full range of opinions that citizens have about the project if decision makers are to be truly informed. Table 19 shows ratings of the hearing formats for their ability to elicit the full range of opinions. The open forum (84% “good” ratings or better) and the combined format (72% “good” or better) were positively rated on this dimension. Many fewer respondents (21%) gave the traditional format a rating of “good” or better on this dimension. *The traditional format received many more negative ratings on this dimension than some other dimensions, with 46% rating it “poor” for its ability to obtain the full range of opinions.*

Table 19. Ratings of Hearing Formats for Obtaining Full Range of Opinions

Rating	Traditional	Open Forum	Combined
Very good	2%	51%	38%
Good	19	33	34
Fair	29	13	18
Poor	46	1	4
Haven’t used the format	2	2	6
(n)	(78)	(79)	(77)

Attracting High Turnout

One of the research questions that VDOT public involvement staff proposed to the VTRC is the identification of ways to enhance citizen attendance at hearings. This seems to be an issue with which many DOTs are grappling. The open forum format (71% ratings of “good” or better) and the combined format (64% ratings of “good” or better) were rated substantially better than the traditional format on this dimension (Table 20). Thirty-eight percent rated the traditional format “good” or better for attracting high turnout. The traditional format received fewer “poor” ratings on this dimension than some others.

Table 20. Ratings of Hearing Formats for Attracting High Turnout

Rating	Traditional	Open Forum	Combined
Very good	5%	24%	16%
Good	33	47	48
Fair	51	23	26
Poor	8	3	3
Haven’t used the format	3	3	7
(n)	(73)	(74)	(73)

Making Exhibits Accessible

Accessibility of exhibits was another factor the Georgia DOT cited as a key advantage of the open forum format, and this is confirmed by our survey respondents' ratings (Table 21). *The open forum received ratings of "good" or better (mostly "very good") from 96% of the respondents for accessibility of exhibits.* This is one of the real strengths of the open forum format, judging from the ratings. One-third of the respondents gave the traditional format good ratings on accessibility of exhibits, and almost as many (30%) gave it poor ratings on this dimension. The combined format's ratings were not as positive as those for the open forum, with notably fewer "very good" ratings. But the combined format was rated much more positively than the traditional format for making exhibits accessible.

Table 21. Ratings of Hearing Formats for Making Exhibits Accessible

Rating	Traditional	Open Forum	Combined
Very good	5%	71%	44%
Good	28	25	39
Fair	34	1	6
Poor	30	0	2
Haven't used the format	2	0	8
(n)	(79)	(80)	(79)

Providing What Individuals Want

The last two questions about hearing formats asked respondents to rate them for their ability to provide what individual citizens seem to want and what interest groups seem to want in a hearing format. "Neighborhood groups" and "environmental groups" were given as examples of "interest groups" in the question stem. Responses to those questions are presented in Tables 22 and 23.

Table 22. Ratings of Hearing Formats for Providing What Individuals Want

Rating	Traditional	Open Forum	Combined
Very good	4%	36%	38%
Good	32	54	38
Fair	44	6	16
Poor	18	1	0
Haven't used the format	2	2	8
(n)	(78)	(80)	(79)

Providing What Interest Groups Want

The general pattern of the survey results was different on this dimension: the combined format rated highest, with 70% of the respondents rating it “good” or better (Table 23). The traditional format was rated second highest, with 64% ratings of “good” or better, and the open forum was slightly lower, with 55% ratings of “good” or better. Although the open forum format was not rated as highly as the other two formats on this dimension, it did not get a large percentage of “poor” ratings (11%) on this dimension.

Table 23. Ratings of Hearing Formats for Providing What Interest Groups Want

Rating	Traditional	Open Forum	Combined
Very good	32%	20%	23%
Good	32	35	47
Fair	28	30	20
Poor	5	11	1
Haven’t used the format	2	2	8
(n)	(78)	(79)	(78)

Summary of Respondents’ Ratings of Hearing Formats

The open forum format was rated more highly than the two other formats on *every dimension except “providing what interest groups seem to want.”* Although the combined format received good ratings on some dimensions, its ratings were never as high as those of the open forum except on this dimension. *The traditional format received high percentages of “poor” ratings for two dimensions in particular: facilitating two-way communication (48%) and obtaining the full range of opinions (46%).* The open forum and combined formats received very few “poor” ratings on any dimension; the same cannot be said for the traditional format. Table 24 summarizes the percentage of respondents who rated each format “good” or “very good” on each dimension.

Table 24. Summary of “Good” or “Very Good” Ratings for Each Hearing Format (All Dimensions)

Dimension	Traditional	Open Forum	Combined
Facilitating two-way communication	14%	84%	77%
Explaining technical project information	33	85	79
Obtaining many public comments	33	89	79
Obtaining the full range of opinions	21	84	72
Attracting high turnout	38	71	64
Making exhibits accessible	33	96	83
Providing what individuals want	36	90	76
Providing what interest groups want	64	55	70

Note: The number of cases varies by dimension and hearing format rated; minimum n is 73, maximum n is 80.

Other States' Use of Innovative Public Involvement Techniques

We asked respondents whether their DOTs or organizations had used any of an array of innovative public involvement techniques. Table 25 shows the percentages of respondents indicating that their organizations had used a particular technique. (“Interactive” was defined as allowing users to select which information they view and/or allowing them to send electronic comments back to the source.)

As Table 25 shows, many of the techniques listed have been used by roughly 50% or more of the DOTs and firms. The survey did not ask *how often* these techniques had been used, which might be valuable information for Phase II of this study. We are not sure whether the respondents understood “collaborative decision making” to mean a structured decision process involving stakeholders. The percentage for the item was higher than expected.

Table 25. Survey Respondents' Use of Innovative Public Involvement Techniques

Technique	% Who Have Used
Computer simulations	68
Interactive slide shows	24
Interactive web site	46
Interactive video	15
Information kiosks	40
TV/radio call-in programs	32
Public opinion surveys	54
Focus groups	65
Mediation	21
Collaborative decision making	60

Other States' Approaches for Controversial Projects

The information on whether other organizations have *ever* used particular techniques may be less telling than respondents' answers to a write-in question that asked: “What public involvement techniques or approaches has your organization used most effectively for controversial projects?” Table 26 categorizes responses to that question. For readers who may be interested in the full text of the responses, they can be found in Appendix H.

Table 26. Approaches Used for Controversial Projects

Approach	Number of Comments
Public awareness techniques	74
Stakeholder meetings	38
Citizen advisory groups	34
Using open forum format	22
Using combined format	9
Using traditional format	4
Small group techniques	17
Exhibits	11
Scheduling/timing of meetings	10
Agency staff involvement	5
Other approaches	11

Public Awareness Techniques

The largest number of comments (74) mentioned public awareness or public information techniques used by respondents' DOTs or firms—newsletters, hotlines, web sites, news releases, etc. Thus, the respondents indicated that one approach for dealing with controversial projects is to ensure that extensive information about the project is disseminated:

- “24 hour toll-free hotline with live person during business hours and next day returned call.”
- “Direct and frequent communication—letters in response to comments/questions; newsletters; periodic meetings for the project.”
- “Multifaceted approach including newsletters, guest speakers at citizen association meetings, flyers, news releases, kiosks at malls.”

Stakeholder and Interest Group Meetings

The second largest category of responses described meetings with stakeholders and interest groups of various sorts, ranging from local officials to property owners. These meetings were typically described as short term and occurring early in the public involvement process.

- “Meetings with stakeholders with specific problems to help focus controversy into workable categories which can be addressed individually.”
- “. . . informal meetings with neighborhoods, businesses, citizen groups, etc., can be effective in supplementing the required information meeting/public hearing process. The key is for any technique to effectively keep the public involved without losing control of the process.”
- “Multiple small group meetings to resolve issues early during the process.”

Use of Citizen Advisory Groups or Project Technical Groups

The third largest category of comments was about the use of citizen advisory groups or project technical groups for controversial projects. These kinds of groups were generally described as being longer term than approaches included in the stakeholder meeting group (conceptual overlap is unavoidable, as a citizen advisory group without stakeholders is difficult to imagine).

- “We set up a citizens’ advisory task force made up of citizens who are representative of [the] town or city’s interest groups. These people are selected by the town or city.”

- “Advisory committees consisting of elected officials, town officials, commercial and civic leaders to help scope improvements and assist in the dissemination of information to the public.”

Particular Hearing Formats

Some survey respondents mentioned the use of particular hearing formats as a way of effectively handling controversial projects. In some cases, the survey’s content (i.e., the number items devoted to hearing formats) may have encouraged responses related to hearing formats. As Table 26 shows, there were many more responses citing the advantages of the open forum format than the combined format or the traditional format.

- “Open Forum (‘Early and Often’). Use this early in the planning-environmental and design phases, and do it numerous times so participants feel they are part of the project development process—emphasize that issues raised at earlier meetings have been included in the next project meeting, if appropriate.”
- “An open house format. Plenty of people/personnel to staff the meeting so that everyone has a chance to get information or comment. Making sure leaders, legislators, etc., have been invited helps. People are more open to a project, even if they are against it, if they feel you are doing a good job informing them and not trying to ‘sneak’ something past them.”

Small Group Techniques

Seventeen comments identified various small group techniques (workshops, focus groups, charrettes, and speakers’ bureaus) as effective for controversial projects.

- “Focus groups: following a Power Point presentation, the audience [was] broken into small working groups to seek consensus on alternatives. The groups then reassembled to hear results. This was followed by an open house session with displays and discussion (very successful).”

The public involvement literature also includes a number of case studies of best practices that document the effective use of small groups in the development of long-range transportation plans (see Lebeaux, 1996, or FHWA, 1997, for example). In Phase II of this study, we will be looking at this literature on the use of small group techniques more closely.

Other Approaches

The remainder of the comments categorized in Table 25 stressed several key points: the importance of early public awareness and public involvement activities; the importance of meeting times and locations that are convenient for the public; the need for high-quality graphics and videos; and the importance of gaining the public’s trust in a long-term relationship.

Further Analysis of Responses

Analysis of the other two write-in questions on the survey (“If your organization finds that citizens are saying ‘everything has already been decided, our opinions don’t matter,’ what does it do to respond to these comments?” and “What techniques, if any, does your organization use to sustain broad public involvement from first project development milestone to the last?”) will be included in the Phase II report(s). Also, TRB’s Committee on Public Involvement in Transportation has asked a member of the research team (Dr. O’Leary) to develop and analyze the results of another survey of public involvement professionals for them in the near future (topics to be defined). This will provide an opportunity to ask additional questions in any areas of interest to VDOT’s leadership or Virginia’s legislators.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Advantages and Disadvantages of the Open Forum Format

The literature on hearing formats points to a number of advantages of the open forum format that are confirmed by the survey of other states conducted in this study.

For citizens attending a hearing, the major advantages of the open forum include:

1. highly accessible plans and exhibits
2. the opportunity for unlimited, one-on-one questions and answers with technical staff responsible for the project
3. the flexibility for citizens to come and go at any time between particular hours
4. the opportunity for citizens to make a comment privately, if one is anxious about speaking in public.

For DOTs and other agencies, the literature and survey results point to the following major advantages for the open forum format:

1. *much better two-way communication with citizens*
2. *a hearing environment that encourages many citizens to offer comments*
3. *a substantially better chance of eliciting the full range of opinions on the project*
4. *procedures that make it relatively easy for busy people to attend and make a comment for the record.*

The Location & Design Division data from several years' worth of hearings make it clear that with the open forum format, VDOT is getting many comments upon which to base its decisions, and JLARC (1998) recognized this as well.

A weakness of the open forum format is that citizens who want to hear the comments made by fellow citizens cannot hear them.

Advantages and Disadvantages of the Traditional Format

One advantage of the traditional format is that citizens who want to hear the comments made by fellow citizens can hear them. The traditional format also appears to have an edge over the open forum in providing what *interest groups* want in a hearing format, based on the survey of other states. But the open forum was judged superior for providing what *individual citizens* want.

The opportunity to hear what one's neighbors are saying in a traditional format hearing comes at a price:

- People who are anxious about speaking in public may remain silent.
- Others may be intimidated by the forcefulness of their neighbors' comments.
- Questions may go unanswered because of limited time for one-on-one interaction.
- People who cannot attend a meeting that could last until late in the evening may not attend at all.

These well-known disadvantages of the traditional format likely underlie the fact that *only 2% of respondents to the survey of other states reported that the traditional format was always used for location/design hearings in their state and half said their states seldom or never used it.*

What Virginia's Citizens Say About Hearing Formats

The results of the citizen surveys indicate that if citizens had to choose between a formal presentation and an informal, one-on-one interaction as a source of information about a project, more would choose the one-on-one interaction. More citizens at all three survey sites would choose a flexible schedule that permits comments for the record at any time between particular hours versus being able to comment only after a formal presentation. With the exception of the Capital Beltway attendees, more citizen survey respondents would choose to comment in private than to comment in public. At all three sites, however, more citizens would prefer for *their neighbors* to make comments publicly than privately.

Our citizen surveys were limited in their coverage of hearings and weighted toward more controversial projects (two of three). The earlier exit survey conducted by VDOT's Public

Involvement Section sampled many more hearings, and preferences for the open format were stronger among their larger sample. Nevertheless, the results of the survey in this study suggest that some citizens want to come away from a hearing with more information than they get from their own one-on-one interactions, from hearing handouts, and even from viewing a specially produced video. For some of these citizens, it may be as simple as wanting to hear the questions other people ask and the answers given. Some of these information needs may be best addressed *before* citizens attend a location or design hearing. VTRC staff plan to do additional research on how other states have addressed the “I want to hear what my neighbor is saying” sentiment in Phase II of the research. Additional information gathering from citizens themselves could be very valuable, and the major location/design hearings scheduled for 2000 would provide an excellent opportunity.

Issues About Adopting the Traditional Format for All Location Hearings

Adoption of the traditional format for *all* location hearings, as specified in SB 1198, might address some citizens’ desires for more information (and/or some citizens’ desires to influence others’ opinions). But such a move would create many more problems than it would solve, given citizens’ preferences for one-on-one interaction, commenting in private, etc., and the negative assessments of the traditional format by a nationwide sample of public involvement professionals. Some Virginia citizens, and even some elected officials, may not be aware that hearings in formats other than the open forum can be requested. VDOT may need to make them more aware that they have this choice. It would be far better to continue to allow Virginia’s citizens and their elected officials to choose the traditional format for specific projects rather than mandate it for every hearing. Based on all of the information we reviewed for this report, it is highly likely that VDOT will lose substantial citizen input if the traditional format is adopted for all location hearings.

OVERVIEW OF PHASE II STUDY

When we originally scoped the plan for this research, the following prospective topics for Phase II were identified:

- What are the practices of other state and local government agencies whose public involvement programs are widely regarded as exemplary? Are there also non-governmental organizations with highly regarded public involvement programs?
- What are some ways VDOT might achieve more public involvement at a number of points in the planning process?
- What document, if any, does VDOT have that outlines its public involvement procedures for citizens? If there is none at present, what should the content of such a document be?

- How can we enhance citizens' understanding of VDOT's overall public involvement process?
- What public involvement approaches have been used most effectively for corridor studies and major investment studies?
- When is it appropriate and effective to use citizen advisory groups, community consensus building techniques, and dispute resolution techniques?
- What innovative public involvement approaches have been used by VDOT consultants?
- What are some approaches that others have used maintain the public's interest throughout the planning and project development processes?
- Apart from public hearings, what are some ways of effectively measuring public opinion (e.g., focus groups)?
- What public involvement approaches have been demonstrated to be effective for controversial projects?
- How can VDOT best "tie it all together" into a continuous program of public involvement, without lapses (from the citizens' point of view)?
- How can VDOT's public involvement process be made more proactive?
- What can VDOT do to effectively counter citizen perceptions that "everything has already been decided"?

The information gathering done for Phase I partly addressed some of these research topics; the survey of other states, for example, included questions on public involvement approaches for controversial projects and ways to counter citizens' perceptions that "everything has already been decided." Our collaboration with TRB's Committee on Public Involvement will be valuable in the additional information gathering we will do, as it moves away from a focus on legally required public hearings to a broader focus on VDOT's overall public involvement program.

We plan to seek additional input from members of the project task group and the Executive Leadership Group in order to identify other topics that should be included and the priorities they would assign to such topics or topic areas (since some items on the list are related). With that information, we can better develop a schedule and plan for the Phase II work.

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APPENDIX A: SENATE BILL 1198

CHAPTER 500

An Act to amend and reenact § 33.1-18 of the Code of Virginia, relating to location of routes by the Commonwealth Transportation Board.

[S 1198]

Approved March 27, 1999

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:

1. That §33.1-18 of the Code of Virginia is amended and reenacted as follows:

§33.1-18. Location of routes.

The Commonwealth Transportation Board shall not locate and establish any route under subdivision (1) of §33.1-12 until: the Department of Transportation has (i) published in a newspaper published or having a general circulation in the county, city, or town in which the route is to be located and established a notice of its willingness to hold a public hearing on the matter, (ii) notified the governing body of the county, city, or town in which the route is to be located of its willingness to hold a public hearing on the matter, and (iii) held a public hearing, if one has been requested.

If a public hearing is requested, written notice of the time and place of the hearing shall be given, not less than thirty days prior to the hearing, to the governing body of the county, city, or town in which the route is to be located and established. Not less than thirty days prior to the hearing, a notice of the time and place of the hearing shall also be published by the Department of Transportation at least once in a newspaper published or having a general circulation in the county, city, or town in which the route is to be located and established.

All public hearings on the location or possible location of a route shall afford citizens an opportunity to present their comments to representatives of the Department directly, one speaker at a time, in a public forum following a traditional hearing format. As supplements to these hearings, the Department may hold less structured open forums to afford citizens additional opportunities to obtain route location information and present their views. These open forums, however, shall be held only in addition to hearings conducted according to a traditional format, and shall not be substituted for such hearings.

Following the public hearing, if one is held as provided in this section, the Department of Transportation shall notify the local governing body of the affected county, city, or town of the Commonwealth Transportation Board's decision regarding the location and establishment of the route.

2. That the provisions of this act shall not become effective unless reenacted by the 2000 Session of the General Assembly.

APPENDIX B: CITIZEN SURVEY

VDOT PUBLIC HEARING SURVEY

Purpose: The Virginia Transportation Research Council, part of the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) is doing a study of the highway public hearing process. Over the summer, we will be contacting citizens who have recently attended VDOT hearings and meetings for their feedback. We would value your opinions.

Please take a minute to fill out the enclosed survey. All responses are confidential. If you have questions about the study, Dr. Amy O'Leary, its lead researcher, can be reached at the Research Council in Charlottesville at (804) 293-1995. Thank you!

1. How did you find out about this highway location hearing? (check all that apply)

- Newspaper TV Radio Friend or neighbor Internet
 Other

2. How many VDOT highway public hearings had you ever attended before the Indian River Road hearing on July 14, 1999?

- None 1 or 2 3 or 4 5 or more

3. How often have you attended other, *non-highway related* government meetings in the community in the past year? (for example: City Council, School Board, Board of Supervisors, Planning Commission, etc.)

- Never 1 or 2 times 3 or 4 times 5 or more times

4. People attend highway public hearings for many reasons. What were the main reasons you attended the VDOT Indian River Road public hearing? (please write in)

5. Overall, how did you like the format of the Indian River Road hearing? (the exhibits, one-on-one discussion with VDOT staff, citizen comments for the official hearing record made in private)

- Liked it very much
 Liked it
 Neither liked nor disliked it
 Disliked it

Disliked it very much

6. Did you choose to make either written or oral comments for the official hearing record? Yes No

7. Would you prefer to get information about a highway project by
 Hearing VDOT staff make formal presentations to a seated audience, or
 By talking one-on-one with VDOT staff beside road plan exhibits?

8. If *you* want to make a comment about a highway project for the official record, would you prefer to
 make that comment into a microphone for others to hear, or
 to make that comment privately, not heard by others?

9. If *other people* want to make a comment about a highway project for the official record, would you prefer that they
 make their comments into a microphone for you and others to hear, or
 that they make their comments privately, not heard by others?

10. Do you prefer a hearing format in which
 a formal presentation is made at a specific time and citizens take turns making oral comments after the presentation, or
 citizens can come and go at any time between certain hours to get information or make a comment?

11. What, if anything, would you like VDOT to do to make its public hearings better? (please write in)

⇒ PLEASE FOLD SURVEY ON THE DOTTED LINES ON THE BACK OF THIS PAGE, FASTEN IT, AND PUT IT IN THE MAIL

THANK YOU VERY MUCH

APPENDIX C: SURVEY OF OTHER STATES

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PROCEDURES SURVEY

Purpose: The Research Council of the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) is conducting a study of other organizations' procedures for conducting public hearings, particularly highway location and design hearings. We are very interested in others' use of different public hearing formats and their assessments of them.

This survey is being sent to both engineering and public affairs managers in AASHTO member states, VDOT consultants, and members and friends of the Transportation Research Board's Committee on Public Involvement. All responses are confidential. We would be pleased to send you a copy of the results, if desired.

Instructions: Please check or write in your answers as appropriate, and return the survey in the enclosed, postage paid envelope by **August 20, 1999**. Thank you!

Section I: Background Information

1. Your state: _____ (for information on sample completeness only)
2. Your work organization:
 - State DOT
 - Consulting firm
 - FHWA
 - Other (write in) _____
3. *State DOT employees only:* what is your organizational unit?
 - Preconstruction or Location & Design
 - Public Affairs
 - Planning
 - Other (please write in) _____
4. Do you conduct or attend *highway location/design hearings* as part of your job?
 - Yes No

↓

If NO to Question 4, please skip to Question 12

5. In your state, who conducts highway location and design public hearings? (check all that apply)
 - DOT Preconstruction staff DOT Public Affairs staff Consultants
 - Others (write in): _____

6. How many highway location and design hearings does your organization typically conduct in one year? _____ hearings

7. Approximately what percent of your organization’s highway location/design hearings are conducted in areas with populations of 50,000 or more? _____ %

8. What methods does your organization use to notify the public about upcoming highway location and design hearings? (check all that apply)

- Newspaper ads Mailings Radio ads TV ads
- Web page
- Other methods (write in) _____

9. In your experience, what is the *most effective* way to notify the public about upcoming location/design hearings? (write in) _____

...the *least effective* way to notify the public? _____

10. Overall, how would you describe attendance at highway location/design public hearings which your organization conducts?

- Typically high Typically moderate Typically low Don’t know

Comments: _____

11. What formats does your organization use for highway location/design public hearings? (please make 3 ✓, one for each hearing format listed; formats are defined below)

	<i>Always used</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Seldom</i>	<i>Never used</i>
Traditional format	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Open forum format	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Combined format	<input type="checkbox"/>				

- ◆ *Traditional format* means that the hearing consists of a formal agency presentation to a seated audience, followed by questions or comments from individual citizens that are heard by everyone present.
- ◆ *Open forum* means that agency staff engages in one-on-one discussions with citizens next to project displays set up around a room. Citizens make written or spoken comments privately, not heard by others.
- ◆ *Combined (dual) format* means that in one room, a formal agency presentation is made to a seated audience, followed by comments from citizens; in another room, plan displays are set up and agency staff and citizens have one-on-one discussions.

ALL SURVEY RESPONDENTS ↓

(Note: Questions 12-18 apply to *all* types of transportation public hearings.)

12. If you have not done so already, please read the descriptions of 3 different public hearing formats in Question 11. Then, rate each public hearing format your organization has used on the dimensions listed below. Please make 3 ✓ per table, one for each hearing format.

a. *For facilitating two-way communication between organization staff and the public*

	<i>Very good</i>	<i>Good</i>	<i>Fair</i>	<i>Poor</i>	<i>Haven't used the format</i>
Traditional format	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Open forum format	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Combined format	<input type="checkbox"/>				

b. *For explaining technical project information to citizens*

	<i>Very good</i>	<i>Good</i>	<i>Fair</i>	<i>Poor</i>	<i>Haven't used the format</i>
Traditional format	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Open forum format	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Combined format	<input type="checkbox"/>				

c. *For obtaining many public comments on the project*

	<i>Very good</i>	<i>Good</i>	<i>Fair</i>	<i>Poor</i>	<i>Haven't used the format</i>
Traditional format	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Open forum format	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Combined format	<input type="checkbox"/>				

d. *For obtaining the full range of citizen opinions*

	<i>Very good</i>	<i>Good</i>	<i>Fair</i>	<i>Poor</i>	<i>Haven't used the format</i>
Traditional format	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Open forum format	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Combined format	<input type="checkbox"/>				

e. *For attracting high citizen turnout at hearings and meetings*

	<i>Very good</i>	<i>Good</i>	<i>Fair</i>	<i>Poor</i>	<i>Haven't used the format</i>
Traditional format	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Open forum format	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Combined format	<input type="checkbox"/>				

f. *For making plans, maps, etc., accessible for viewing by people attending the hearing*

	<i>Very good</i>	<i>Good</i>	<i>Fair</i>	<i>Poor</i>	<i>Haven't used the format</i>
Traditional format	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Open forum format	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Combined format	<input type="checkbox"/>				

g. *For providing what individual citizens seem to want in a public hearing format*

	<i>Very good</i>	<i>Good</i>	<i>Fair</i>	<i>Poor</i>	<i>Haven't used the format</i>
Traditional format	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Open forum format	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Combined format	<input type="checkbox"/>				

h. *For providing what interest groups (e.g., neighborhood groups or environmental groups) seem to want in a hearing format*

	<i>Very good</i>	<i>Good</i>	<i>Fair</i>	<i>Poor</i>	<i>Haven't used the format</i>
Traditional format	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Open forum format	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Combined format	<input type="checkbox"/>				

13. *(If your organization conducts hearings in traditional or combined formats)*

Are there time limits for individual speakers? Yes No

(If yes) What is the time limit per individual? _____ minutes

14. *(If your organization conducts hearings in an open forum format)* What procedures are used for taking comments for the record? (check all that apply)

- Written comment forms
- Court reporter for spoken comments
- Other procedure (write in) _____

15. Please check any of the following public involvement techniques that your organization has used. (Note: *interactive* means users can select which information they view and/or send electronic comments back to the source).

- Computer simulations
- Interactive slide shows
- Interactive Web site
- Interactive video
- Information kiosks
- TV or radio call-in programs
- Public opinion surveys
- Focus groups
- Mediation
- Collaborative decision-making processes

16. What public involvement techniques or approaches has your organization used most effectively for controversial projects?

17. If your organization finds that citizens are saying “everything has already been decided, our opinions don’t matter,” what does it do to respond to these attitudes?

18. What techniques, if any, does your organization use to sustain broad public involvement from the first project development milestone to the last?

If you would like a results summary from this survey, please provide either an e-mail address for an electronic copy, or your name and mailing address for a printed copy.

E-mail address: _____

Name/U.S. Mail Address: _____

Thank you very much for your help!

APPENDIX D:

**CAPITAL BELTWAY INFORMATION MEETING CITIZEN SURVEYS
Citizen Responses to Question 12: How Can VDOT Make Its Public Hearings Better?**

ID #	COMMENT
1	I would like to see VDOT present not only their project ideas regarding the widening and duplication of highways, but also serious and feasible studies regarding how to maximize public transportation, i.e., trains, subways, buses, affordable parking lots, etc. Tokyo is bigger than our area with millions using public transportation.
2	[Respondent wants both options to Questions 8,9,10.] [Should have both, for both kinds of people.]
4	I think an update (newspapers, mailing to homes) before the next meeting could be helpful. It would save time.
	Also, put the number of feet (or levels) on the maps. A lot of people have no clue what “level 1 or level 2” mean.
5	At this particular meeting (6/8 – POE MS) the sign-in station was removed from exhibit area, so exhibit layout wasn’t immediately clear. Consider requesting commenters to observe a 3 minute time limit. [Respondent wants both options 8,11.] [Both have independent utility.]
8	Very well planned – good exhibits. VDOT staff knowledgeable and helpful.
9	Use a telephone survey to accurately determine the public support. These meetings only bring out those who are opposed to road projects.
10	[Integration of bus, vans, rail, and signage are “saviors”.]
12	[Respondent prefers both answers to Questions 8,9,10,11.] Continue to invite community groups including homeowner associations, environmental groups, citizens.
13	Show that it listens to the public.
14	Be more prepared for the difficult questions! [Only one (road) alternative was presented, 5.] [Respondent prefers both answers to Questions 8,9,10,11.]
15	While informal meetings better, summary or all public comment should be published or made available (say public library).
17	[Respondent likes both, Question 11.] [The way this meeting was done with both types was very good – you could look at the exhibits and/or attend the

	meeting.]
	[Respondent prefers others commenting into microphone, 10.] [As long as they want to make their comments public.]
18	Hold more meetings on Saturdays. Difficult to attend weekday evening meetings due to work conflicts and traffic congestion.
20	Refreshments!
21	More formal presentation of related major issues such as condemnation proceedings, studies on impacts to secondary roads.
23	[Either answer is fine, Questions 8,9,10,11.]
24	Looks like a good format.
25	In general, format concept good however, “hell is in the details”. No citizen who wants to speak after signing up should be threatened with “we’re out of time” – format needs to allow ample Q&A time, answers from VDOT personnel should not be smug and dismissive or duck the questions.
	Weekend time, open-end weekday. Weekend allows people with kids/jobs which finish late to attend without ruining the next workday. Have all decision persons present (FHWA, governor’s office, congressional offices) so buck stops passing on questions.

25	Show us current photos with overlay sheets of current road, proposed/preferred [by] VDOT, each alternative so they can be directly compared with planners from study group.
	The very next important change would be to ask for real citizen and local input in affected neighborhoods at the MIS or earlier stage e.g. “we are looking at changes to X road, how do you perceive problems/solutions/alternatives.” Stop coming to us after the fact with slick dog and pony shows and stop piecemeal/stopgap planning.
	[Respondent likes both options to Questions 8,9.]
	Both. Q&A session also allows me to hear other ideas and ask questions via other audience queries instead of dozens of my own.]
	[Does not matter but I want answer available for all to learn from with public accountability for VDOT and politicians.]
26	Need to have copies of the plans for those of us directly impacted by this – so can see if the roads are on top of my home or 5-10 feet away from it.
27	Provide better and clearer information on the “exhibits”. They were useless to someone like me unfamiliar with the content.
	There should be more organization to comments so that everyone can be heard

28	It was very helpful to have the various experts and consultants available for one on one discussion. I don't like public hearings because I don't enjoy people venting their feelings in public.
29	Charts were not simple enough.
31	I would like some time to review plans and ask questions after the formal meeting. Provide more written and detailed materials on your analyses with specific assumptions and data.
32	Be more open, honest and responsive. Obey laws and budget. Show us where added traffic on added lanes would go when it is time to get off. Where are the honest detailed plans for public transit?
32	VDOT and CTB are neither open to or honest with the public. As evidence, look at the "bait and switch" tactics so often used.
34	More alternatives, more specialists.
35	It's good, just don't beat around the bush as much in public comments – the short answer is better for public meetings and they can comment extensively in private. [Respondent likes both formats Questions 8,9,10] [Though extensive comments should be monitored – by both parties – the government officials can go on too!]
36	Videos for each section/category of data. There was – I think – little or no information as to right of way acquisition, or fund availability. [The] subject of satellite communities should be explored. [Data information requires more time and explanation to appreciate.] [Respondent thinks both options are needed, Question 8.]
38	Have some questions submitted in advance so that data and info can be brought to the meeting to respond publicly. [Respondent prefers both answers to Question 11.]
40	[Respondent prefers both options to Question 8.]
41	[The staff were enthusiastic and helpful.]
44	It was well done.
45	VDOT's public meetings were good for me.
46	[Respondent prefers either option, 9,10, and both options, 11.]

ID #	COMMENT
47	Handouts like that provided for the Springfield Interchange rebuild. So you could take your time to puzzle through all the alternatives.
49	[Respondent prefers both, Question 8.]
50	[Respondent prefers both, Question 8.]
53	[Respondent prefers both options, Question 8.] A written overview of what the presentation is intended to accomplish.
54	[Respondent prefers having both options, Questions 8,11.] Show changes that are made from meeting to meeting. [Did not illustrate what if anything had been changed since the last meeting on the Beltway] Put people by the exhibits who can answer questions, rather than say –“Oh VDOT needs to answer that.” Then put VDOT out by the exhibits
55	[Respondent prefers having both options, Questions 8.9.]
56	Respondent prefers both, “doesn’t matter”, 9,10,11.] Very well done. Provide food and drinks.
57	[Respondent likes both, Question 8.] Connect with rail, etc – explain, ensure interconnection.
58	I could not stay for the formal presentation – the exhibits were helpful. I like being able to come early and look at exhibits.

60	[Respondent likes both answers, Question 8.] Hold them [hearings] earlier in the planning process. Hold them more frequently VDOT officials act as though they have made up their minds about the strategic considerations, i.e. Beltway expansion and they seem concerned only with details. VDOT officials appear arrogant. Also, they are in love with concrete and asphalt.
61	Provide maps showing existing system plus proposed improvements as well as new ROW required. I found many “official” responses bureaucratic and with spin. [Wants both open forum and traditional meeting elements, as was done with Beltway citizen info meetings. Wants formal presentation and one-on-one] [Question 9: said whether own comment should be public or private “depends on comment to be made]

ID#	COMMENTS
62	Needed more explanation of the benefits/pros cons of the different options. Such as tradeoffs with safety, cost, vehicle volume efficiency. Also what the deficiencies of the current Beltway are
	. . . comparisons of the options to the solutions experiences in other states highways/beltways for the “best solution.” In other words, what are the benefits/tradeoffs of the proposed options.
63	Mailings specific to a given area with specific data on property impacts
64	Give a chart of dates or estimated dates for when each stage of this lengthy proposed widening approval process is expected.
65	Might be televised on local cable channel
	[Identified himself on survey as Delegate James Dillard]
66	Talk with, not down to the citizens

APPENDIX E: MEADOWCREEK PARKWAY DESIGN HEARING CITIZEN SURVEY
Citizen Responses to Question 12: How Can VDOT Make Its Public Hearings Better?

ID #	COMMENT
2	[Provide] fancy computer graphics like Will Rieley
	Also, build the road you said you would; i.e., Rio Road s-curves is getting much more work than I was led to believe
	Your format stops the loud mouth minority from dominating the hearing. This allows for true democracy
3	Have the type of hearing at which comments are made openly, so that others can hear them and make their comments in return.
4	[Respondent said either public or private comments by self and others were ok]
5	I think they do a very good job, no suggestion at this time.
7	[Loves both traditional format and open forum format]
8	I liked the format, the one-on-one for questions, etc.
9	[Wants one-on-one information session followed by a formal presentation with comments]
	The graphic materials need to be designed to convey information. The Meadowcreek Parkway presentation was designed to obscure information. For an example of a good presentation, see Will Reiley’s study of the Parkway for the city of Charlottesville. VDOT’s engineering drawings are difficult to read, even for people versed in construction drawings.
10	[Wants self and others to make comment privately, but wants anonymous comments made available to interested parties and the public]
	I would like a VDOT representative available to offer a short introduction and description at the video area and at the plan exhibit area.

10	I would also like the plan exhibit area maintained free and clear of large gatherings of viewers standing idly by and conversing.
	Overall, I believe the public hearing was a great success.
11	Offer “guided tours” of the plan beginning every 15 minutes. As lay people we don’t understand the maps, legends, etc.
	a VDOT rep could explain along the way thus better informing participants and eliciting informed comments
12	I see no reason why there can’t be a compromise [between] a public hearing & a “silent” hearing.
	Public hearings are a form of public dialogue allowing citizens to hear and possibly learn from the views of others

	Many people feel intimidated by this format so the ability to comment orally or by writing directly to VDOT officials would also be useful
	Question 9: Whatever encouraged them to participate
	One format I think would be useful would be a statement response structure in which citizens and officials could comment on or ask questions of the statements made by others. That would allow the overall discussion to rest on the knowledge base of all the people rather than adversarial groups shouting at officials.
	Was displeased with the comment form available for written format. Upon requesting blank paper from a VDOT official, he told me this had not even occurred to him to have on hand.
	The freer, less guide the opportunity for comment is the more like it will reflect the actual view of attendees
13	Call them public information sessions if they are not true public hearings.
14	I feel that the current presentations are quite adequate.
15	Question 10: No preference
16	The hearings I have attended all suffer from a format that breaks down the project in to specific segments with knowledgeable staffers answering questions next to maps it is often difficult therefore to visualize the project in its entirety

16	The descriptions and materials too often degenerate into jargon that the layman cannot easily understand
17	[Answer to Question 1: Dunlora Newsletter]
18	Question 7: Both
20	Questions 8 & 9: No preference. Any comments are ultimately public either way Present method good for providing factual information in whatever detail desired by the recipient Old method, with public statement, etc. good for firing up a fight!
21	Question 8: Both answers ok Question 9: Either answer Questions 8 & 9: Both options should be available at some point.
	Thing I would like most is for VDOT and CTB to be responsive to public input and desires They have been extremely prejudiced and non-responsive to the public's desires on the Alt. 10 proposed bypass. Public hearings were a farce. CTB pulled a double-cross in Feb 95 by reversing CTB 1990 & 1991 resolutions. VDOT/CTB cannot be trusted.
22	Question 7: Both answers Explain how a proposal fits into the larger transportation picture, i.e., State interests and Federal funding

23	Question 9: comment privately more thoughtful
24	I was very satisfied by VDOT's handling of this particular public hearing I am also convinced that the general public can never be satisfied on any issue involving as many private and public understandings as this.

24	Public input is fine but decisions by committee cannot be expected to please everyone. The divine right of Kings and governments is not always pleasing to everyone either but I'm happy and will wait to see how it all works out in the end.
25	People speak poorly of VDOT. VDOT has to get a better image in order to convince people to accept change. VDOT should be truthful honest and humble. Should listen to the public and have the integrity to put forth a well thought out package and stand by it.
27	Angela Tucker was wonderful!
28	Question 6: Intended to but missed postal deadline Start the "hearing" by a "formal" presentation and then spread out for one-on-one discussions.
29	Question 1: Other notification method: Mail (Postcard from VDOT) The hearing was held as if there was no controversy over the parkway, with no consideration given to other options that have been discussed. The drawings were too technical for lay interpretation. Too large scale to allow for meaningful understanding of the whole plan. There was no information given regarding the project's impact on traffic continuing down McIntire Rd. But rather the presentation focused only on the project site itself. There was a sense of futility among those with whom I spoke. As if there were no room for discussion at this point anyway.
31	Question 5: There was no opportunity for hearing community views as a group
32	Not have as long a way to for persons who are handicapped
33	I think a lot of trouble is taken I appreciated [it]

34	Question 7: 1-on-1 or in small groups
	Question 8: Doesn't matter
	Question 9: Doesn't matter
	Have VDOT personnel more recognizable. At this "meeting," there were a lot of folks there with name badges on but I wasn't sure who was who.
	I did notice some VDOT personnel getting very defensive – not good PR

	Overall a nice forum perfect time frame 5:30-8:00 p.m.
	The video gave a good introduction.
35	Question 7: neither answer, see #11
	Make a short presentation and then open discussion with those in the audience or small group discussions
	Have it at 7:30 p.m. not 5-8 p.m.
	Have it on Adelphia Cable for those at home. Use it as an education process for everyone – including those at home.
36	The present format sees to work very well
37	Allow opposing parties to offer alternative solutions to traffic problems
38	Question 5: [Liked it]
	It was difficult to locate particular buildings, roads, and neighborhoods on the maps provided.
	Questions 6-10: Informal presentations fragment public opinion. VDOT Bureaucrats need to face more public forums
38	The perception keeps growing that VDOT conducts “public hearings” after the fact and that actually public input has little to do with decisions that are ultimately made
	The perception is that VDOT is becoming increasingly politicized (i.e. Carter Myers’ role on the CTB and his putting the squelch on the interchanges on Rt. 29).

38	It looks like the folks in Lynchburg would love a truck route through Charlottesville. Where is the statewide vision?
39	More often
40	Questions 8 & 9: Should be able to do either or both
42	Question 7: [Formal] so we can respond to all of them.
	Members of VDOT should keep an open mind and hear the real reason the public is for or against a project. For instance, the Rt. 10 Western Bypass proposal is crazy. It would endanger our already bad facilities at the reservoir, also ruin neighborhoods with fumes and noise. It is not a bypass it’s a pass-thru. Build the by pass 7 to 10 miles East of Charlottesville.
43	Try to get majority opinion. Now a few have held up this project for years.
44	I would like for the charts and diagrams to be more user friendly.
	VDOT personnel need to engage the public more at these meetings. At no time when I was at the Meadowcreek Parkway meeting did any VDOT official go out of his/her way to discuss this project with me.
47	Question 1: Other – Your card in mail
	Larger print on displays

48	The maps are confusing – one large map should be made then detailed blow ups of certain sections
	A stream relocation is a big deal – this seems to be buried so no one would notice
48	Charts or some explanation should be given to traffic counts and studies. Be honest about the drawbacks of counts & why no origin & destination studies are being done.

49	I believe they are doing it well.
50	Have exhibits available for viewing before public hearing. Hold a public hearing with hearing officer – in many cases this should be several members of the CTB Citizens learn from public hearings when they can listen to the entire presentation and then hear comments from other interested parties. Question 10: I really think it would be preferable to have both – opportunity to ask questions and hear specific presentation and citizen comments
51	You should present all alternatives that have been proposed including 2 lanes and no lanes.
52	Have an open presentation and a Q&A/Statement period
55	3D representations, drawings, simulations, models, etc.
56	Question 1: Other – Mailing Question 7: These should both occur Question 8: Doesn't matter, although written comments are easier and more suited to my schedule Question 9: Doesn't really matter so long as I can read their comments later Be realistic in the drawbacks the project – especially environmental issues VDOT should make it abundantly clear that other alternatives may exist to solve the same problem even if they haven't yet been explored. I'd also like to know how I can get/review others' written comments.
57	Offer both types of hearings – take into consideration the personal impact on the citizen of the project being discussed and give less weight to opinions of those less impacted.

58	I think local officials need to be more educated about VDOT developments and plans of planned highways.
60	I would like better more substantial presentations that address key issues (either legal or statutory requirements and citizen/community concerns) The drawings were not informative. A presentation of alternatives presented in a 3D format (drawing and video) would be more helpful I really felt the presentation was a poor use of time and money.

61	Question 7: Doesn't matter much, video helpful in not a formal presentation
62	Have computerized drawings, elevations of the whole project plus as compared to the plans already in existence of why VDOT's plan is/would be better. Rieley's plan looks great – VDOT's plan looks terrible.
63	Include a formal presentation with the informal style forum that Meadowcreek Parkway had. A formal presentation made on tape would have been nice to watch in addition to the mediocre overview tape that was shown
64	I thought your past presentations have been very good – why don't you stop surveying the public and go ahead and build it – Action!
65	Question 1: Other – From VDOT and MPO Question 7: Both answers It is possible that you could make better use of the video. It could give more background information as to why a project is needed and how the particular project meets those needs.
67	Very incomplete visual materials No 3-dimensional drawings, computer graphics or models. Why not, what are you hiding?

68	Question 8: Doesn't matter, either fine Present more options than just what they are inclined to think is "best."
69	Build the road and don't spend so much time studying it!
71	Question 5: 1) Drawings were devoid of context. I am a design professional with over 20 years experience, so I'd hate to think how little the lay people go out of this. 2) Non-educational – discussion is healthy. What are you afraid of? Question 7: Both answers Start proposing better ideas. That'll greatly improve meetings. Does anyone on your staff have a clue how inept VDOT looks compared to other states? You're still living in world of mid-20 th century ideas – that destroyed cities and ecosystems through urban renewal Prepare better contextual maps – aerial photographs w/new plans collaged in would have been very easy to do with computers and very clearly depicted the impact of the project Show alternatives like with Rieley's schemes Why does everyone say VDOT cannot be stopped? Who gives you such authority over localities? These are comments I hear weekly – there is lots of resentment & anger.
72	Question 7, 8 & 9: Both answers Leave closed minds at home – be open to real change – dream dreams – have a vision of community.
74	Question 7: Depends on stage of project For this project, private comments are ok

	Projects at other stages may be better with a presentation and comments
	I answered the above thinking about this project at this time – I am against the Parkway
	It might have been helpful to know how people feel about the project

76	I would like a formal presentation at a set time, followed by an opportunity to look at the drawings and talk to VDOT staff informally. That way everyone who attends the presentation get a basic overview to use when talking to staff and examining the exhibits.
77	Question 8: Either one
	Question 10: No preference
78	Nothing
80	Make brief formal presentation followed by one-on-one discussion with VDOT staff
	VDOT should tabulate and summarize written/private comments and have results published in the news media in the region/area affected by the proposed project.
81	Both forums are useful public speaking to hear others views written to express opinions of those that prefer not to speak in public.
82	I have a degree in architecture and still found the map exhibits confusing. Computer generated before and after aerial photographs – would be much easier to understand.
83	Provide feedback on comments
85	Make those who represent groups identify themselves and reveal their reasons, i.e., live in path of new roads; make local representatives accountable (put them on the “stand”)
86	After the come and go citizen time for information and comments I would like a formal presentation of questions asked. This would give anonymity and more succinct presentation without personal feelings.
87	This was not a public hearing

88	Question 5: Liked some disliked some
	Question 7: Both
88	Question 8: Microphone – For general positional comments 1-on-1 for certain type comments which maybe sensitive
	Question 9: Need to know what others think
	Question 10: This question is similar to #7 why?
	Inadequate overview, maps/posters from proper orientation. Posters at last meeting (Charlottesville High School) too detailed and complex for introduction. Others had inadequate data (e.g. traffic volumes in certain areas) Be better informed, e.g., [when I] asked if there was

	additional land to replace lost golf holes, I was told to ask the city. Certainly with all the studies done over the years, one would think this answer would be available. VDOT official claimed this answer was not the state's responsibility (Cop-out answer)
	I submitted detailed comments in writing to VDOT Culpeper office also asked to simply acknowledge that the comments were read. Have not to this date (6/18/99) received a response. Waste of time sending comments when they are not read.
89	Give feedback to the public on comments that have been made
90	Start meetings earlier then the seated audience time people that want to look at the road exhibits and turn in written comments for VDOT to read later have their views recorded on the Meadowcreek Parkway
	Have meetings on the Meadowcreek Parkway televised on local channel 10 We deserve the same rights as City Council
	Start buying right of ways for Meadowcreek Parkway that in the county then the Parkway will get through the Park
91	Question 6: Written
	We saw 3-D artist's renderings of the four different proposals. I got a much better "feeling" for the project from those than I did from the VDOT drawings, even though they were beautifully presented. Incidentally, I have been working with single dimension drawings since 1938, so I have no problem reading them but the artist drawings made the overall project much clearer.
92	Be public! Written and private comments are not what I consider a public hearing.

94	Question 7: Both
	Question 8: N/A
	Question 10: Both
	Provide both informal and formal periods for presentations and public comment
95	Question 3: A couple were road related (i.e. traffic calming in neighborhood expansion of preschool its impact on traffic but not specific to Meadowcreek.
	Question 7: I think there is room for both
	Question 8: As a fundamentally shy person I feel pretty strongly about this. Wouldn't mind having my comments read.
	Question 9: Would be happy to listen or read
95	Question 10: We've had so many of these that are needed at some point but tend to shed as much heat as light. Also understand students were assigned to attend.
	Thought this one was thoughtfully done. Informative – staff knowledgeable and helpful
96	
97	Question 7: This is a bad question.
	I liked their format – Just great!!
	Question 8 & 9: No preference

	I thought they did a fantastic job!!!
98	Indication of whether or not opinions will count on the final outcome of the roadway
	Education on process as a whole
99	Start off with placing diagrams, maps showing north at the top
	Very poor showing at Meadowcreek Parkway display

APPENDIX F: INDIAN RIVER ROAD LOCATION HEARING CITIZEN SURVEY
Citizen Responses to Question 12: How Can VDOT Make Its Public Hearings Better?

ID #	COMMENT
1	To be better informed. Really the info I received about the hearing was a sign placed near my home on Indian River. While it was up I often ignored it. Luckily I called the phone numbers shown & had days before to attend. Frankly more advertising (at least radio and newspaper) would have been more helpful or use TV ad space on local gov't cable channels.
3	Good displays and knowledgeable staff at meeting ensured success Meeting advertisements need to include direct mailing (as routine) of notice to affected property owners and civic associations.
5	Question 5: Need more choices For one thing, present all proposed road projects in a given area. In this case: Indian River Rd. expansion, Elbow Rd. expansion, Salem Rd. Expansion, Southeast Expressway
6	Make you contact every person whose homes, property & business will be affected. Don't try to do things undercover and be fair to everyone.
7	Mail notice of hearing to people who sign-up for wanting to be mailed this information Have a list of city and VDOT officials and titles available with telephone numbers to follow up after meetings.
8	Everyone that I living in the area of concern should be contacted about any hearing regarding the movement out of the newly constructed area. Let them speak their opinion. Listen to them carefully. Take everything they say into consideration Make your decision as easy as possible and less expensive but still getting the same effects that's needed
9	I would like for the officials to be more informed about the roads. The official I spoke to couldn't even find my home on the map nor could he answer my questions.
11	Hold meetings closer to the area involved
14	Question 7: I'd prefer a combination of these.

	Questions 9 & 10: I'd prefer having the choice
	I'd prefer a format that will allow formal presentations, open dialog and exhibits with professionals who can answer questions
	The Indian River Road format was not designed for the public but rather the best interests of organizers.
15	Questions 8 & 9: Doesn't matter
	I have no problem with them now
16	Please question the people who will be affected the most by new change and provide direct information how this change would impact the whole community at large.
17	Bring the real information to the hearing
	Take time to talk to the people that will be affected by this action
18	Question 9: No preference
19	Send written information to those effected by the road expansion prior to any meetings
	Keep the public informed on all progress of the road expansion.
20	Question 8: Doesn't matter
	Follow up info to those who sign in--i.e. results of the alignment decision.
21	Call all for one and one for all, majority wins.
22	Precise, clear and come all together who are concerned and affected by the projects.

25	Question 8: In writing
	Question 9: Opened
29	I found meeting very informative
31	Make sure that a representative is present throughout the entire hearing so that the "I don't know" comment is kept to a minimum
32	Question 6: Written
	Question 8: Either way – would depend on reasons for concern
	Satisfied as they are
33	No suggestions
36	I really like the format of the Indian River Road public hearing

	I think the hearings need more advertisement of time and date of event. I would suggest putting a sign up on affected roadways and impacted neighborhoods 10 days before public hearing and leaving up until the meeting. Many concerned citizens weren't even aware of the public hearing.
40	More VDOT personnel to answer questions on project
41	No change. I particularly liked the one-on-one format
44	When you start surveying for projects, information should be given to people that are affected. The cost to do so should not be much.
45	Change as indicated in question 10
46	Would like a formal presentation or a video explaining the project as you come in and then have one-on-one talk

46	I only would make a comment in private because I cannot speak in front of people.
47	Send everybody along the proposed route a better "map" of the proposals for routes with advantages and disadvantages, costs & timetables for each route a few weeks before the hearing.
48	I was not impressed by VDOT personnel, supposedly engineers. The consultants did well. The maps were very good
51	I thought you did an excellent job! One of the handouts was inaccurate about the alignment of Elbow Rd through Hillcrest Farms. Many people did not attend because they thought the road would not be going through Hillcrest Farms. This was deceptive.
52	Offer a forum opportunity in addition to the current format
53	Let people know "how"/"why" decisions were made Often we feel final decisions were made long before the public hearing was held
54	Have a better way to reach the community affected by direct mail or flyers
55	Question 10: A combination. I like being able to come as you please because of people's schedules but we need to know other people's concurrence in the community.

56	I would prefer the final hearing to be a formal presentation
57	Update their addresses. The letter sent announcing the hearing was addressed to the previous owners I have lived here for 2 years.
58	I would like for hearing to closer from date to date and close to the areas involved.

59	We are interested in what is happening at Elbow, Indian River Rd. and Elbow Rd./Extended Parkway
61	Question 9: This answer really depends on the role that person plays in the project or community!! Average citizen could make it private – Elected public official should be made into a microphone for all citizens to hear.
63	I would like VDOT [to] mail to the homeowners affected any information in the form of brochures, newsletters, and maps if available
65	No need to have them – the State is going to do what it wants anyway
67	I would like to see VDOT make a formal presentation with the public asking questions which could be answered by a panel
68	Questions 8 & 9: Either
69	I think it could have been organized better I would like to hear [a] presentation and if people had comments
70	Conduct more than one public hearing to allow all concerned to voice their opinions The exhibit method smelled of “divide and conquer.” I felt that it diluted the effect of the process by removing the ability to persuade the majority opinion to one side or the other.

**APPENDIX H:
WRITE-IN RESPONSES TO QUESTION 16: “WHAT PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT
APPROACHES HAS YOUR ORGANIZATION USED MOST EFFECTIVELY
FOR CONTROVERSIAL PROJECTS?”**

ID#	RESPONSE
001	Open Forum (“Early and Often”). Use this early in the planning-environmental and design phases and do it numerous times so participants feel they are part of the project development process – emphasize that issues raised at earlier meetings have been included in the next project meeting, if appropriate.
002	See enclosed information on Advisory Committee (#8) set up for FAP 413 Freeway Project. Also see FAP 413 Newsletters (#14) and script for slide presentation (#7). We use the Open House type format for informational meetings and a public hearing. See enclosed copy of Ill DOT’s Chapter 19 “Public Involvement Guidelines”.
003	Powerpoint presentation using computer aided design (CADD) graphics. Conduct early information meetings at the project scoping stage. Meet with local officials, concerned groups, individual citizens, and property owners. Provide space for concerned groups to display info and present their views at meetings and public hearings. Focus groups: following a Powerpoint presentation, the audience [was] broken into small working groups to seek consensus on alternatives; the groups then reassembled to hear results. This was followed by an open house session with displays and discussion (very successful).
004	Combined meeting format. Video, possible website. Face to face presentations.
005	Informal meetings where citizens are in small groups. Extended hours of meetings. Multiple sites. Quality graphics.

006	Disseminate information early in the process. Work closely with (public) local officials. Gain consensus from MPOs. Partner with MPO’s. Hold public information meetings as meaningful information on project is available.
007	Open house format. The format discourages one person from “grandstanding” –

	it allows all people to express their views to SDDOT personnel.
009	Citizen work groups, carefully organized public open houses
010	Combined format Newsletters, newspaper articles Technical Advisory Committees, Public Advisory Committees
011	Forming partnering groups to bring together various positions/viewpoints to address issues and needs. Begin public involvement early. Conduct neighborhood meetings and involve neighborhood groups in discussion of highway needs, possible alternatives and issues.
012	Focus groups, citizen advisory committees Websites Outreach meetings
013	RIDOT uses a 2-tiered approach to public involvement. We start with an “Initial Public Hearing” using aerial mapping with constraints shown and we ask the public for thoughts and their ideas. The second “Public Hearing” presents alternatives based on the public input.
014	Advisory Committees. Encourage presence of local agency head.

015	Early involvement for stakeholders. Citizens Committee
016	Open house hearings
017	Combined format hearings and public meetings. CAC’s – Community Advisory Committee Public Officials Work Groups (POWG’s) Focus Groups
018	Formation of Citizen Advisory Committees where concerned citizens are brought together with PennDOT, FHWA, and political representatives to discuss project issues.
019	Neighborhood meetings that include interest groups and affected stakeholders.
020	Many techniques such as task forces; informal meetings with neighborhoods/businesses, etc; citizen groups, etc. can be effective in supplementing the required information meeting/public hearing process. The key is for any technique to effectively keep the public involved without losing control

	of the process.
021	Recording points of agreement and consensus Agency technical staff coaching (how to interact with citizens)
022	Collaborative decision-making process. Open house and traditional format hearings.
023	Multi-party decision making models

035	Public meetings prior to public hearing. Direct mail in the form of a newsletter about the proposed project.
036	We've tried a lot of things but using other community groups and businesses to support our position helps; also one-on-one meetings with community leaders who oppose.
037	Frequent neighborhood meetings. Community Advisory Committees.
038	GA developed the "Open Format" Public Hearing and it took 2 years for the FHWA and their attorneys to approve the open format. GA has used the open format ever since and is convinced it is the best way for the public to understand a project and to make comments.
039	NA
040	Using combined format hearings; having plenty of informational meetings, newsletters.
041	Open forum
042	The traditional format seems to keep people in order better than the other types. You must also have a good, firm, but impartial moderator.
043	Open forum with videos, newsletters.
044	Focus groups and a series of meetings throughout the project to get people. This seems to work better than just presenting conclusions or findings at the end of a project.

045	Combined format and small work groups – want to be heard. 24 hour toll free hotline with live person during business hours and next day returned call.
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	Technical materials and maps in location accessible to public.
046	hotline
	newsletters
	speakers bureaus
	field trips to points of controversy (canoe trip on scenic river with river advocates)
047	television specials on transportation issues and projects
	establish long term relationship with public so that DOT official's word is trusted
048	Our most effective approach began using the traditional format to make sure everyone was on the same page. Following presentations, we then stop the meeting and begin one-on-one discussions.
049	We use a technique pioneered by Hans and Annemarie Bleiker at the Institute for Participatory Management. It is called Systematic Development of Informed Consent.
050	Multiple open houses
	Citizen advisory groups
	Policy and Technical Committees
051	Meetings with interested groups prior to the Public Hearing.
	News releases at start of design.
	Early contact with affected citizens, businesses and property owners.

051	Advisory committees consisting of elected officials, town officials, commercial and civic leaders to help scope improvements and assist in the dissemination of information to the public.
052	Videos
053	In some instances I have seen the use of a website strictly for a particular project/study and other times a task force is set up. The media has been used to update the public on the projects (newspapers, television, etc.).
054	Early public involvement
	Focus groups
055	Elected Officials Coordinated Committee
	All-Inclusive Advisory Panels
	Open Houses
	Fact sheets/mass mailings
057	Open house format for preliminary design phase and meetings with individual

	landowners before the final design phase.
058	Customer involvement throughout using many mediums – and project galas or community days to open the project to traffic.
059	Open forum with public meeting throughout the process prior to the formal hearing.
060	Combinations; flexibility; variety
	Direct and frequent communication – letters in response to comments/questions; newsletters; periodic meetings for the project.

APPENDIX G: STATES RESPONDING TO THE PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT SURVEY

STATE	DOT RESPONDED?	NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS
Alaska	Yes	2
Alabama	Yes	1
Arizona	Yes	2
California	Yes	5
Colorado	Yes	2
Connecticut	Yes	1
Delaware	No	0
District of Columbia	N/A	1
Florida	Yes	1
Georgia	Yes	1
Hawaii	Yes	1
Iowa	Yes	1
Idaho	Yes	1
Illinois	Yes	1
Indiana	No	0
Kansas	Yes	2
Kentucky	Yes	1
Louisiana	No	0
Massachusetts	Yes	1
Maryland	No	1
Maine	Yes	1
Michigan	Yes	2
Minnesota	Yes	2
Missouri	Yes	3
Mississippi	Yes	1
Montana	Yes	1
North Carolina	Yes	2
North Dakota	No	0
Nebraska	Yes	1
New Hampshire	Yes	1
New Jersey	Yes	1
New Mexico	Yes	1
Nevada	Yes	1
New York	Yes	2
Ohio	Yes	2
Oklahoma	Yes	1
Oregon	Yes	1
Pennsylvania	Yes	4
Rhode Island	Yes	1
South Carolina	Yes	2
South Dakota	Yes	2

Tennessee	No	0
Texas	Yes	2
Utah	Yes	2
Virginia	No	13
Vermont	Yes	1
Washington	No	0
West Virginia	No	0
Wisconsin	Yes	1
Wyoming	Yes	1
Nationwide Firms	N/A	2
Total		81