VTrans Webinar: Draft Mid-term Needs Q&A
Transcript
Video Recording file can be found at www.VTrans.org

Slide 1: Chris Wichman: Now I'd like to turn over the presentation to Jitender Ramchandani. Jitender?

Jitender Ramchandani: Thank you, Chris. Good morning, my name is Jitender Ramchandani. I am Transportation Planning Program Manager at OIPI or Office of Intermodal Planning and Investment. I assist the Commonwealth Transportation Board in the development of Commonwealth's Transportation Plan, known as VTrans.

Slide 2: We posted Draft VTrans Mid-term Needs for all construction Districts on October 28 and held a webinar on October 29 to walk everyone through it. It was almost an hour-long introduction to the document. As you may be aware, VTrans Mid-term Needs will be utilized for the next round of SMART SCALE that will start takings applications in spring 2020.

The purpose of this webinar is to address questions that you may have based on your review of the documents and InteractVTrans. I will spend 10 minutes to:

● Go over the resources available to view and utilize the Mid-term Needs.
● Share a few reminders as far as Mid-term Needs are concerned; and
● Share methods to access VTrans Mid-term Needs.

After this brief overview, we will spend the remainder of our time addressing your questions. Please post your questions and comments in the chat pod at any time during the webinar and we will do our best to address them all.

Some of you submitted questions when you registered for the webinar, which are shown here in the gray box on the slide. I am hoping that the opening presentation will help to address some of these questions and, if it does not, we will address them during the question and answer session.

Slide 3: Before we get started, I would like to make everyone aware of several relevant resources that are available to anyone interested in learning more about the VTrans process. In addition to today's webinar, we hosted three webinars earlier this year. Recordings of these webinars are available on our website, vtrans.org and at the links provided on the slide. The recordings for these webinars will be able to provide explanation of VTrans specific terms such as Corridors of Statewide Significance, Regional Networks, Urban Development Areas, and VTrans Activity Centers, among other items. We do not plan on going over that today.

Additionally, our Mid-Term Needs webpage includes background information and useful context.

(LIVE DEMONSTRATION OF MID-TERM NEEDS PAGE)

I will take a quick minute to share that page on screen. You can access that page by going to VTrans.org and selecting the Mid-term Planning tab at the top of the page. Then, on the dropdown you will see the Mid-term needs page. The page includes information related to VTrans travel markets, VTrans goals, performance measures, the outreach and engagement activities and several links outlining the process and work done since then. It also includes the list of all draft documents that have been posted.

In addition to that, we have a page with answers to Frequently Asked Questions. On the VTrans website under the Get Involved tab, this is where you can access the Frequently Asked Questions from the dropdown.

(LIVE DEMONSTRATION OF FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS)

Slide 4: During the next few minutes, I want to mention five noteworthy items to keep in mind as you review the VTrans Mid-term Needs.

The first one is that we are looking at draft results that are likely to be modified based on the feedback received. For example, we have heard from several jurisdictions over the past few weeks about updated or additional Urban Development Area Needs. We also are doing some quality checks to ensure accuracy and completeness.

The final documents which will fund the basis for screening the next round of SMART SCALE applications will be available once the Commonwealth Transportation Board adopts the Mid-term Needs.

Slide 5: The second one, especially for those who work on SMART SCALE applications, is the method of analysis and presentation.

It is important to understand that the mid-term Needs are location specific. They either are related to points—such as roadway intersections, rail stations, Activity Centers, or Industrial and Economic Development Areas—or they are specific to roadway segments.

Similarly, needs are binary in nature. In other words, a Need is either there or not there. There is no interpretation required.

Slide 6: A third point that we want to emphasize is this: While we are specific as to where a Need exists; we do not prescribe where the solution needs to be implemented. The solution to a problem may lie upstream or downstream or even along a parallel corridor.

For example, to address the need for improving rail on-time performance at the Roanoke Amtrak station, the solution may lie in improving Long Bridge which is between Virginia and Washington DC,

close to the origination station for the Amtrak service. Backups at Long Bridge can affect the reliability of service at stations along all the routes north and south of that location.

Slide 7: The fourth noteworthy item to keep in mind is this: A need is not necessarily the same as a solution. A congestion need can be solved by a variety of strategies, such as widening the roadway, running a bus or rail service, or changing policies. In other words, the intent of this Needs assessment is to be specific about where a Need exists without being prescriptive about what the solution might be.

Slide 8: And, finally, the fifth point, which is important to consider when you are developing potential strategies to address Needs. Instead of focusing on one issue at a time, there is exponentially greater value in taking a more comprehensive look at the array of Needs affecting a given area.

So, I often catch myself trying to associate a single Need with an idea for a solution. When developing proposed SMART SCALE projects, I would encourage applicants to consider the confluence of multiple Needs in the area of concern. This will increase the potential to address many issues with one project. For example, an urban roadway segment with a high rate of crashes may also present significant reliability problems, since even a single crash can suddenly cause a miles-long backup on a congested corridor. A holistic solution, in other words, for a segment with these overlapping Needs could help to improve both safety and system performance.

It has taken a lot of time and effort for our team to develop a dataset that allows transportation agencies and stakeholders to look at these overlapping and intersecting Needs. We hope that you will take full advantage of that to develop stronger applications for SMART SCALE.

Slide 9: Now I will spend a few minutes reviewing the ways in which you can access the information about mid-term Needs in your region. We realize that our audience includes a wide array of stakeholders, from technical analysts who are well versed in ArcGIS to policy makers who may prefer high-level briefings that they can read in a few minutes.

You can obtain and review VTrans Mid-term Needs using three methods. The first one is print-ready documents. That's the method that many policy makers may choose, for example. These documents can be downloaded from our website. And the link is included on this slide.

Slide 10: The second method is targeted at users who have access to ArcGIS and prefer reviewing queries and preparing their own jurisdiction-specific maps. You can download a zip file that contains an ArcMap with a point shape file and a polyline shape file. There are also documents that explain fields included in the shape files.

Slide 11: We also want to make the information about VTrans Needs available to the general public and to the many people whose technical expertise lies somewhere between the types of users I mentioned earlier.

A third resource we have developed to provide another way to view and comment on the draft Needs is an online mapping application called InteractVTrans. We will be adding many more functionalities by the end of December. But right now, you can go in and zoom in, zoom out to look at various Needs that may exist in your region. You can also overlay types of needs with other data points such as see safety crashes, rail lines, bus stops and things of that nature.

You can find a presentation and online demonstration of InteractVTrans in the recording of the October 29 webinar. I can also demonstrate the InteractVTrans application during this webinar if it will help to address your questions.

Slide 12: We've gone through our opening presentation fairly quickly so that we can devote the bulk of our time today to addressing your questions. You may ask questions like the ones listed on this slide or any other that you may have. Please continue to add questions to the chat pod as we talk, and we will respond to as many as possible within the reminder of our time here. If we have more questions than we can cover within the hour, we will follow up with those people individually. Chris, do we have some questions in the chat pod with which we can get started?

Participant Question: In your experience, what is the most effective way to support one of your identified "Needs" so that it is embraced and included by the CTB?

Jitender Ramchandani: My suggestion is to get in touch with one of our team members. The contact information is in this slide deck. Send us an email with your comments, we are logging all the comments for review. Our final documentation will include all the comments received and how we addressed them. We encourage

Participant Question: How will VTrans tie in with Arterial Preservation, and is Capacity Preservation a need category? There seems to be some interests around how we are looking at arterial preservation and capacity preservation. Can you go into that a little bit, Jitender?

Jitender Ramchandani: Right now, I'm looking at the executive summary for the 2019 draft Mid-Term needs document for the Richmond Construction District. For those who may not have had a chance to look at the document yet, the question is related to one of the 8 categories of needs that we have proposed as part of the draft documentation. We have relied upon VDOT's arterial preservation network to develop the need, but the slight difference is our capacity preservation needs are limited to the Corridors of Statewide Significance and regional networks, whereas VDOTs arterial preservation network goes beyond that.

For the second question, which was related to capacity preservation, whether that was a need, our thinking behind including this need category was to allow for low cost solutions now before they become more challenging and require more capital-intensive solutions. This is in response to comments we received at one the 13 regional workshops held in July and August of this year. The comment we received was although we are being thorough in identifying problem areas, we need to be more

proactive in identifying minor issues that might become significant problems. In response to that comment, we created the capacity preservation which focuses on simple solutions such as reducing the number of traffic signals and streamlining access. This is in draft form, so we are still accepting comments.

Participant Question: A related question from registration but focusing on where there are needs along corridors of statewide significance and regional networks. One of the questions we had is with help defining regional networks. This seems to be one of the gray areas in Vtrans needs in past applications. Can you give background on how RNS are defined?

Jitender Ramchandani: The term Regional Network refers to one of the three types of geographies included in Vtrans. Right now, I am looking at the executive summary for the 2019 draft Mid-Term needs document for the Richmond Construction District. The same documentation is included for all the construction districts as in the report I am showing here. As you can see, one of the three categories are regional networks, which is defined in the previous iteration of the plan. Vtrans gets updated every four years, per the code of Virginia. The regional network definition is the same as the one used in the last update of the plan, adopted by the board in December 2015 and finalized in January 2018. It includes an MPO area extended to the entire jurisdiction – if an MPO area covers only part of a County, the entire County is included in the regional network. In short, regional networks are defined around urbanized areas. In the document for the Richmond CN, this page provides some context for the purpose of each of the three travel markets, which each serve a unique purpose.

Participant Question: Let's say I was interested in knowing the capacity preservation Needs within a particular regional network, what would be the method I use for accessing those needs? How could I find those?

Jitender Ramchandani: There are three ways to look at capacity preservation needs. One is to go to the document, and then look at the series of Needs maps for each district – in Richmond it is on page 32. The second way, as I mentioned, is to download the data set and review it. The third way is to use Interact VTrans. In the InteractVtrans, we have three key functions: find, layer and comment. If you just want to view the capacity preservation need, you can build a query for Richmond MPO by selecting the geography that you're interested in, select one or more search criteria - in this case I'm entering the segment need and capacity preservation needs for the regional network, Y is Yes – when you click Find, it shows all the capacity preservation needs that exist in the Richmond regional network. You can zoom into a street name. Or click on the "I" button that gives you all the needs that exists along XXX street, capacity preservation and other types of needs that may exist. You can download the results in table format or shape file format for ArcGIS applications.

Participant Question: There is a question from a registrant that has to do with the measures that are used to identify passenger rail on time performance. What measures would address the need identified of improving passenger train on time performance at stations in the commonwealth?

Jitender Ramchandani: I will address the question and point you to the resources that exist. The one-time performance needs are based on observed data. In this case, the data is based on the standards that are set by Amtrak and VRE for each station. Amtrak's has standards for arrivals at each station and VRE sets their thresholds by line segment. In this case, the detailed thresholds have been listed in Appendix A.

Participant Question: How would we use the VTrans needs that are along segments to determine needs for new roads?

Jitender Ramchandani: Sure. In this case, we realize that while we have relied on data, data only exists if a facility or service exists. I would refer you to one of the points that I mentioned earlier – point #3, the location of a need may not necessarily be where the solution may lie. For instance, a new alignment can be screened in for SMART SCALE, if it's addressing one or more of the needs on a parallel facility, such as a congestion or reliability need. Another way to look at it – I had mentioned IEDAs (Industrial and Economic Development Areas) – in that case, the need is connections to the nearest corridor of statewide significance, which could be a roadway or a rail line. So the locality may propose a new alignment connecting an identified IEDA that is above the readiness threshold.

Participant Question: We have a lot of information, a lot of reports and multiple ways to view the data. Let's say though that I am only interested in my particular county. Is there a way for me to expedite my process of seeing those rather than downloading reports and full data sets?

Jitender Ramchandani: The easiest way is to look at the online mapping tool that we have established. I will go back to it now and look at Henrico County as an example. You can search for an individual county or city and do a query to download all the needs for that County in one go, click Find, and then search based on that. The second way, which is the easiest for many, is to play with the different layers that exist. In this case, I might want to focus on just the segments. You can click on any segment and see (for this example) that it is Route 250 East, that it is a principal arterial, that is it on the CoSS, that it is not in a UDA, and that it has needs for capacity preservation, bicycle access, pedestrian access and things like that. Those two would be the easiest way to access county level needs.

Chris Wichman: We have just a few questions left from pre-registrants, please add more questions to the chat pod if you have them.

Participant Question: One question has to do with how to update applications that are already screened in, as it relates to this draft set of needs?

Jitender Ramchandani: This question is related to the SMART SCALE funding program that is under the CTB, where OIPI assists and provides recommendations to them. I will defer to the SMART SCALE program manager Chad Tucker and will provide the contact information from that registrant's question to Mr. Tucker so he can follow up. You can also submit a question about SMART Scale through SmartScale.org to the email address in the portal, which I've highlighted on the screen.

Participant Question: For the policy changes being considered for SMART SCALE. How can stakeholders offer comments on the changes that are under consideration?

Jitender Ramchandani: I will refer you to the SMART SCALE website where you can enter comments and questions and refer you to Mr. Tucker.

Participant Question: There seems to be some interest around bicycle and pedestrian nonmotorized needs. There are multiple places where those are captured. If I am interested in this as a locality, which of the need's categories would I look at for nonmotorized facilities?

Jitender Ramchandani: We have 8 categories, each of which may have multiple modes associated with them. Our needs are trying to address different issues. So, one category is nonmotorized accessibility to activity centers for workers. A second one is within Urban Development Areas; the sponsoring jurisdiction can identify bicycle and pedestrian needs. The third one is within the Transportation Demand Management category. Essentially utilizing walking and biking to reduce the demand for single occupancy vehicles. There is also inclusion of pedestrian safety needs, which might be slightly different, under the safety improvement category. We have for the first time identified corridors that have characteristics that encourage bicycling and walking but also have high-risk profiles. Those pedestrian related needs could therefore also be under safety. They could be in one or all of the four categories we've mentioned here.

Participant Question: How is VTrans capturing technology needs in the region?

Jitender Ramchandani: This is a relatively important and challenging area. The way we are addressing, as I mentioned earlier, is we identifying problems. One of the ways to solve those problems is through technology. We are not viewing technology as a need itself, but we are viewing technology as one of the many means possible to solve a problem. Having said that though, I recognize that needs related to shared mobility and emerging technologies are important and require some flexibility as this technology evolves. Under the TDM category, within regional networks, we have allowed for emerging technologies or shared mobility that can reduce vehicle miles traveled. As long as it can address one of the goals that the CTB has identified, we have identified it as a need.

Participant Question: When we depict the data in the reports and in InteractVtrans, especially InteractVtrans when the data is downloaded. What folks will see for any given need category is a "yes". When you see a "yes" for a need, where can you see the statement that describes what the need is, especially for a "yes"?

Jitender Ramchandani: When someone is on InteractVTrans, they may have questions related to the information, such as the developed detailed information. You can click " i " and link to pages that give you descriptions and definitions of the data. For instance, on this segment of a CoSS with a need, you can see a description of what a CoSS is and other background information about the performance

measures used to identify a need and thresholds used to identify that need. We will also release a detailed methodology technical report that will be available for the CTB's approval as well.

Chris Wichman: We've worked through all the questions received prior to the webinar and in the chat pod. We will continue to allow for more questions, but Jitender do you want to move onto our remaining slides?

Slide 13: We worked with large datasets and while doing that we encountered several challenges. We will continue to focus on accuracy and completeness related items and encourage you to get in touch with us if you see notice anything.

Slide 14: In addition to making VTrans Needs data available through print-ready reports, the ArcGIS dataset, and online at InteractVTrans, we are taking this information out to the public and stakeholders at the Fall Transportation Meetings held in each Construction District.

Our plan is to request CTB action at the December Board Meeting. The updated Needs can then be used in the upcoming round of SMART SCALE funding program which will start application intake in spring 2020.

Slide 15: If you have any additional questions, our team is available to assist you. Katie Schwing and Chris Wichman, members of the VTrans team, have served as points of contact for regions and localities. Katie is going to be away for a few weeks so Chris will be available in her absence.

You can always reach me as well.

Their contact information as well as mine is shown on this slide. Additionally, our website VTrans.org serves as the best resource for accessing information -- particularly the Events and What's Happening sections are routinely updated to keep visitors up to date on project progress and opportunities to attend agency and public meetings.

This webinar is being recorded and will be made available on the VTrans website. You will also find similar recordings on the website.

Jitender: Are there any other questions?

Participant Question: Yes, regarding slide 14, when should folks be working toward a deadline for submitting comments prior to our December 11 date?

Jitender Ramchandani: So, the question is, is there a deadline for providing comments? The deadline for comments from the Fall transportation meetings is November 30. Everything is a draft, until approved by the board. The board can make changes up until the last minute. Our request is that the sooner you provide the comment the better. The more time we have to review, make and incorporate changes. If

you haven't already submitted comments, please do so within the next few days to give us adequate time to review and respond.

Chris Wichman: We just got another question on the chat pod that we haven't talked about as much today, although we discussed them in more detail at the last webinar.

Participant Question: There was discussion of allowing business development areas as entry points to smart scale…. this would be for areas they are not UDA's but are targeted areas for development. Any update on this item?

Jitender Ramchandani: This must be from a participant that was at the regional workshops. At the workshops we introduced this idea of IEDA site and access needs for those sites. We received overwhelming support for including the IEDAs in the needs assessment and have included that in our draft needs.

Our needs are based on the VEDP Business Ready Site program for sites that are Tier 3 or above, meaning that some due diligence and zoning are in place; tier 4 means some infrastructure is ready; and tier 5 means it is shovel ready. At the time of the application, if the site is in Tier 3 or above, at the time of the application, you can apply for connections to a CoSS or facility such as the nearest airport or rail line.

Chris Wichman: I am going to include the link to the October 29 webinar is in the chat pod, if you want to get more details about the IEDAs.

Slide 16: Chris Wichman: I don't see any more questions or people typing in the chat pod, so let's conclude the webinar for today.

Jitender Ramchandani: Thank you very much for your attention and participation. We do remain available for comments and questions – shoot us an email or see us at one of the remaining Fall meetings. That concludes the formal presentation for today. Thank you.