I-81 Corridor Description

- Long-haul corridor
- Mostly rural; rolling and mountainous terrain
- Designed for 15% trucks; carries 30-40%
Truck-Toll Proposal

• Public-Private Transportation Act of 1995
  – Law allows solicited and unsolicited proposals
  – Early 2002: private consortium, STAR Solutions, proposed building separate truck lanes and partially financing them with electronically-collected tolls on trucks
  – Toll revenues would support revenue bonds
Was the Proposal Feasible?

Several questions needed answers:

• How many lanes will I-81 need in the future?
• Does truck separation work for the entire corridor?
• Are rail improvements the answer?
• Is tolling feasible as a funding source?
  – Virginia law allows tolls on I-81 only on trucks
Two Federal Processes Required

• March 2003 – applied to FHWA for tolling I-81
  – Possible funding option; no decisions have been made

• January 2004 – launched I-81 Corridor Improvement Study under National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)
  – NEPA process helps determine what to build, not private proposal
Key Findings of I-81 Corridor Study

• Traffic volume will nearly double by 2035, with truck volume growing fastest.
  – In 2035, 37% needs one more lane in each direction; the rest needs more.

• Building two separate lanes for trucks for the entire corridor doesn’t work because it provides too much capacity for trucks and not enough for other vehicles.

• Rail alone does not meet future needs.
  – With Virginia-only rail improvements, it may be possible to divert 3-6% trucks to rail.

• The rate of trucks diverting to other routes is low, even with high tolls on trucks.
What Happened?

• Virginia’s transportation policy-making body, the Commonwealth Transportation Board, in October 2006 directed VDOT to implement a program of safety improvements, including truck climbing lanes and interchange ramp extensions.
Lessons Learned

• Consider required federal processes, including compliance with NEPA.

• NEPA helps determine what can be built.

• Start public involvement early.
  – Coordination with MPOs and PDCs
  – Presentations to hundreds of groups
  – Public hearings held in April 2006
  – About 3 in 4 responders were strongly opposed to using tolls on I-81 as a funding source