Board of Supervisors Transportation Committee
Meeting Minutes

April 8, 2025, at 11:00 a.m.
Conference Room 11, Government Center

Board of Supervisors Members Present:
James N. Bierman, Jr., Dranesville District (Committee Chairman)
Walter L. Alcorn, Hunter Mill District (Committee Vice Chairman)
Kathy L. Smith, Sully District (Vice-Chairman)
James R. Walkinshaw, Braddock District
Rodney L. Lusk, Franconia District
Andres F. Jimenez, Mason District
Daniel G. Storck, Mount Vernon District
Dalia A. Palchik, Providence District

Board Members Absent:
Jeffrey C. McKay, At-Large (Chairman)
Patrick S. Herrity, Springfield District

County Leadership:
Bryan J. Hill, County Executive
Jennifer Miller, Deputy County Executive
Beth Teare, County Attorney

Link to agenda and presentation materials:
https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/boardofsupervisors/board-supervisors-transportation-committee-meeting-april-8-2025

Committee Chair Bierman called the meeting to order at 11:04 a.m.

1. Opening Remarks
Committee Chair Bierman announced that Chairman McKay was absent due to testifying at the General Assembly's Committee on federal workforce cuts.

2. Approval of Minutes
The Committee had no changes to the minutes from the February 25, 2025, meeting.

3. Snow After Action
Three Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) officials, Bill Cuttler, P.E., District Engineer; Monica Bhatia, Deputy District Administrator; and Ellen Kamilakis, Assistant District

Administrator for Communications, briefed the Committee on the preparation, execution, and lessons learned during the snowstorms in January and February 2025.

VDOT presented topics on

- Northern Virginia (NOVA) District information: number of lane miles and subdivision streets
- Priorities and process: public safety, priority order, regional mobility, and mitigating economic disruption
- Planning and execution: pre-storm activities, mobilization, pretreatment, and operational responses
- Responses to the January 6 snowstorms
- The public expectations and perceptions of VDOT performance
- The plan moving forward

The NOVA District oversees four counties: Arlington, Fairfax, Loudoun, and Prince William. The presenters outlined the snow removal process and expected service levels in order of priorities for interstates (I-66, I-95, I-395, and I-495) and primary roads (such as Routes 1, 7, 50, and 286). VDOT's strategy is to make the roadway passable, then provide additional treatments until bare pavement is achieved. Subdivision roads should be passable but not to the level of bare pavement, and they generally will not receive chemical treatment. Additional priorities: especially on high volume roads, shoulders are important to be cleared for incident clearance purposes. Park and ride lots and access to Metro Stations and transit centers are also additional priorities. VDOT defines "passable" as "crews sand hills, curves, and intersections to help with traction. In neighborhoods, an 8'-to-10' path for emergency vehicle access is provided; and the road is drivable with extreme caution, but is snow-packed and not curb-to-curb or to bare pavement."

The January 6 snowstorm brought 6.1 to 10 inches of snow and below-freezing temperatures. The storm brought the 2nd highest amount of snow for the year, and the deep freeze combined for one of the worst weather events in the last 25 years. VDOT mobilized its highest storm response level with over 3,000 pieces of equipment, and it "achieved first pass" for interstates within 2 hours, primary roads within 1 hour, and high-volume secondary roads within 1 hour. For treatment of subdivisions within counties, Loudoun was within 24 hours, Prince William was within 30 hours, and Fairfax was within 36 hours. In VDOT's after-action review, there were zero complaints of impassable subdivision roads after 36 hours. VDOT defines a passable road as accessible to emergency vehicles and drivable with caution.

The February 11 snowstorm produced 5.8 to 8.5 inches of snow and above-freezing temperatures. Citizen complaints were far less than those for VDOT's response to the January 6 snowstorm.

VDOT plans to continue coordinating with the school systems, elected officials, and stakeholders, sharing accurate information via social media platforms, updating the statewide plow tracker app, and other activities.

Committee Chair Bierman was highly critical of VDOT's presentation and responses to the January 6 snowstorm. He interrupted the presentation and disagreed with the VDOT statement that all neighborhood streets had received at least one pass from a snowplow truck within 36 hours. He stated that he walked around his neighborhood streets after the snowstorm and could attest that the statement "was not accurate." Chair Bierman asked VDOT to develop a better system of monitoring contractors and a way to verify their reporting. He noted that the Supervisors in the room agreed with his statement. Conversely, he praised VDOT's responses to the February storm, as well as their communication to stakeholders about what "passable" means in the context of snow removal. But his concern is that this meeting was meant to tackle the holes in the process from the January 6 storm and how to prevent holes in future storms.

County Executive Bryan Hill agreed that VDOT did not meet its goal of providing at least one pass through every street within 36 hours. He stated that VDOT did a good job on the February snowstorm and expressed hope that VDOT can meet its goal in the future and asked to shift the perspective to what needs to be done moving forward.

There was a concern from VDOT regarding inaccurate information on the County website regarding messaging related to VDOT and snow. Committee Chair Bierman asked Mr. Gregg Steverson, Fairfax County Department of Transportation (FCDOT) Director, to perform a communication audit of VDOT information on the Fairfax County website.

Supervisor Smith asked if VDOT had categorized the citizen inquiries to the NOVA Customer Service Center. Ms. Kamilakis replied that VDOT categorized the information and would funnel it to the appropriate headquarters or maintenance groups. Supervisor Smith observed that VDOT did not achieve the "first pass." She said the County residents could not travel out of their streets because plow trucks that visited their neighborhood could not enter. Supervisor Smith continued by saying the County residents did not expect their roads to be cleared immediately after the snowstorm. However, nothing was done within 36 hours. She suggested that VDOT recognize its shortcomings and let the Committee know how it plans to improve next time. She expected VDOT to review their phone calls, determine if they had a contractor issue, and develop a solution.

Supervisor Jimenez asked if VDOT needed a map of Fairfax County showing where the Mason District is. He said the photo of a passable road and its definition were laughable because nothing like that was done in his District. People were trapped in their homes for one week, and VDOT had no plan for the snowstorm. He thought VDOT had no plan for the future and would fail next time.

Mr. Cuttler responded that there are 18 area headquarters in the NOVA District. They responded to all Districts in the County, including the Mason District. He said that VDOT was successful and kept the economy open throughout the storm. By Friday of the same week, the school system determined that all roads were passable for the school buses. He stated that VDOT has a plan and was able to provide passable roads for the community within the week.

Supervisor Alcorn raised concerns about the quality control procedure of the contractor, the plow maps, and the reality of whether a plow truck had visited a neighborhood within 36 hours. Ms. Kamilakis said the statewide plow map was an issue she cared about. She stated that VDOT could provide a map showing the locations and traveled paths of the trucks to the citizens. Mr. Cuttler indicated that staff from the VDOT office went to the streets to monitor the trucks. However, when another wave of snow came, it could cover the roads again, making it appear that VDOT was not there, and nothing was done to clear the streets. He said he went to 50 different streets throughout the region (not on the first day) and received multiple phone calls about a street that had not been touched. He stated that the streets he visited were touched at some point. VDOT had done quality control and monitored the contractors. VDOT responded to emergency calls and directed resources to clear the roads. Supervisor Alcorn said he was looking forward to the improved plow map and recommended that VDOT review its quality control procedures.

Supervisor Walkinshaw recommended that VDOT review the January event's definition of "passable" roads. VDOT declared the roads snow-packed and passable; however, during the January 6 snowstorm, roads were often ice-packed and not passable even though they had been treated once or twice. He wondered if the school system and VDOT could have done something different to open the school sooner. Mr. Cuttler indicated they had a good conversation with the school system so VDOT could better understand the schools' needs and receive information on the bus routes. He could not promise that VDOT would change its priorities but that bus routes were something new they could consider in the future. Ms. Kamilakis appreciated Supervisor Walkinshaw's recommendation for the ice-packed roads. She welcomed collaboration with the County's public information media team.

Supervisor Lusk agreed with the review of the passable definition for an ice-packed road. He asked VDOT to work with FCDOT to find a solution to have a clear path from the bus shelter to a high-volume bus stop. He suggested that VDOT should coordinate better with the homeowners associations (HOA) about the timing of the VDOT snowplow trucks and the issue of snowbanks blocking the entrances to HOAs. HOAs could bring in their private contractors to clear the snowbank created by VDOT trucks passing by. He inquired if there is a use of new and innovative technology from other communities in the country that can better deal with snow and significant events like January 6.

Supervisor Palchik read an email from a nurse manager from Inova Fairfax Hospital about the ramps and roads leading to the hospital, which were not cleared. This resulted in incidents and

created significant risks for everyone traveling to the hospital. She recommended that VDOT do a debriefing on improving the operation process and better coordinating with the County departments, continue to improve, resolve the issues, and be a better partner with the County.

Supervisor Storck asked VDOT about its quality control process, the outcome of the quality control review, and the list of issues (operations and contractors). Ms. Kamilakis responded that she did not have the information. Supervisor Storck inquired if VDOT had found issues with the contractor not doing their work. Mr. Cuttler responded that VDOT had not seen any problems with the contractors. However, he said VDOT could review the vehicle locator reports that can indicate where the vehicle's history is tracked. Mr. Cuttler acknowledged that people were not satisfied with VDOT's responses. He promised to review the processes and staffing issues and work to change the culture within the organization. He was proud of how VDOT worked with the school system to open the schools sooner than other parts of the Commonwealth. Supervisor Storck asked how County Supervisors can report and work with VDOT regarding issues they observed in their communities. He wondered if that would help to speed up the responses from VDOT. Ms. Kamilakis responded that she welcomed the feedback from elected officials and their staff and will continue to incorporate it.

Committee Chair Bierman summarized the discussion by saying there were problems with the VDOT responses. Some of the roads got plowed, and some were not. There was not a single call from the Great Falls neighborhood in McLean. It did not mean that the contractors in Great Falls did a good job because they did not. He said the answer could not be that there was a deep freeze and expressed hopes that VDOT would find a solution to fix the problem next time. It could be a better-quality control process, a new plow map, a better passable definition, and communication with elected officials and their staff. He invited VDOT to return to the Committee later this year to present their findings and recommendations.

4. Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacons (RRFBs)

Two VDOT officials, Jessica Paris, P.E., District Traffic Operations Engineer, and Amir Shahpar, P.E., District Deputy Traffic Operations Engineer, updated the Committee on the application and maintenance process of RRFBs. The RRFB is a warning device installed at a marked crosswalk to increase driver awareness and enhance pedestrian visibility. Approximately 30 RRFB devices are installed in the NOVA region, and responsibility for their maintenance is shared between Fairfax County and VDOT. Fairfax County is responsible for preventive maintenance and minor maintenance. VDOT is responsible for emergency response, major replacement, and reimbursement by the County for costs. In terms of approval for RRFBs, the County will collect and analyze the data and submit recommendations to VDOT for review, as they make the final decision regarding implementation of RRFBs. VDOT discussed details on how RRFBs fit within the guidance in Virginia regarding potential safety-based countermeasures, including situations where RRFBs may be best utilized to influence driver

behavior to yield or stop for pedestrians. Two case studies were discussed where even though there were similar situations, an RRFB was recommended in one instance and not in another.

Committee Chair Bierman disagreed with VDOT's assessment of RRFBs being overused in the NOVA region, as he pointed out the population differences between the region and the rest of the Commonwealth. He believed that having over 30 RRFB locations installed in the region is not a sign of overuse. He inquired if the RRFBs' capital and maintenance costs are less than those of roadway reconfiguration or the refuge islands. Ms. Paris and Mr. Shahpar stated that the costs depend on each project's location and characteristics. Committee Chair Bierman queried about the specific updates and timeline on the new federal Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD) and Virginia MUTCD regarding the design and operation of RRFBs. Ms. Paris answered that the draft version of the MUTCD was available for public comment. The guidance contains information on the RRFB devices, such as the configuration and flashing rate. VDOT and FCDOT will continue to work together on the locations and how to increase the use of the devices. Committee Chair Bierman asked if a support letter from the Board would help advocate for a wider usage of RRFBs. Mr. Shahpar replied that a Board support letter for the Virginia MUTCD may be preferred. VDOT was working to update the guidance to remove confusion on the requirements and recommendations of the device based on the volume of the road.

Supervisor Jimenez inquired about the location of the RRFBs that were knocked down; VDOT officials will provide him with the information.

Supervisor Palchik questioned if there were any specific recommendations on the process. Ms. Paris responded that VDOT will continue to partner with FCDOT to better understand the County's needs. VDOT will try to make the process more transparent and defined; however, it might make qualifying for the RRFBs tougher. She mentioned that VDOT was in the second round of systematic updates of safety countermeasures on two-lane rural roads. In future rounds, County staff can help shape the countermeasures across the state.

5. Comprehensive Roadside Management Program (CRMP)
Due to the lack of time, the CRMP presentation was deferred.

Committee Chair Bierman thanked VDOT officials for coming to the meeting, answering the questions, and being willing to continue the conversation in the future. The meeting was adjourned at 12:39 p.m. The next Board Transportation Committee meeting is scheduled for June 3, 2025.