

Draft 2024 Albemarle County Transportation Priorities Report

Background

The Albemarle County Transportation Priorities is a list of all major transportation projects recommended through any planning process in which the county has participated. These planning processes include the Comprehensive Plan, Master Plans, Small Area Plans, Corridor Studies, Transportation Plans (including bicycle and pedestrian or greenway plans) or any Transportation Impact Analysis. These planning documents have been developed by the County or a consultant on behalf of the County or on behalf of a Development Project, by the Thomas Jefferson Planning District Commission, the Charlottesville-Albemarle Metropolitan Planning Organization (C-A MPO), or by state agencies such as the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) or the Department of Rail and Public Transit (DRPT) among others.

Purpose

The Albemarle County Transportation Priorities List is intended to help focus staffing resources and funding to the projects that would provide the highest benefits to the County. Prioritizing all County projects by specific and consistent factors allows staff, officials, and the public the opportunity to understand the process and needs of the county in a holistic manner. The State and Federal Grant Programs follow two-year cycles, and the prioritized list helps identify projects that can and should be applied for under each of the grant programs based on the benefits and types of projects. This process especially helps identify which projects might score well under SMART Scale because the assessments are similar under each. Furthermore, the County Capital Improvement Program may be utilized to help provide matches for grants or to fund projects outright. Because this funding is extremely limited, focusing those funds on projects with the highest benefit insures good stewardship of County resources.

Following is a brief description of the various funding mechanisms for which the projects listed in the Albemarle County Transportation Priorities may be eligible and which could be utilized to construct.

SMART Scale

Smart Scale is the primary funding mechanism for transportation projects in the Commonwealth. The applications for projects are submitted by localities and regional entities on a bi-annual schedule. Projects are then scored based on six identified factors: Land Use, Economic Development, Safety, Congestion, Accessibility, and Environmental. The total funding available is split between High Priority Projects, which is a statewide pool, and the District Grant Program where projects only compete against other projects within each VDOT District. The highest scoring projects are awarded funding and the program tends to be highly competitive. Application deadlines are in the Fall of even-numbered years.

Revenue Sharing

In the Revenue Sharing Program, the County and State share revenues to fund projects applied for by the locality. This requires a 50-50 match between local and state funds with \$5 million available in state funding per locality each year. Revenue Sharing is on a two-year application cycle with applications due in

Fall of odd-numbered years. The program is less competitive than SMART Scale. However, certain criteria such as projects that previously have been awarded Revenue Sharing Funds and address a need identified in the State Transportation Plan, VTRANS, or those that are included in the local Capital Improvement Plan are more likely to receive funding.

Transportation Alternatives

The Transportation Alternatives Program funds projects that expand non-motorized travel choices and enhance the transportation experience. This program is on biannual application cycle with applications due in Fall of odd-numbered years. The program is highly competitive with approximately \$1 million available per VDOT District annually which is generally split among several projects. A 20% local match is required, however, matches over 20% improve the project scores.

Highway Safety Improvement Program

The Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP) awards funding for highway or bicycle and pedestrian improvements related to specific safety issues. Projects are awarded funding through a data driven approach focusing on strategies with expected performance outcomes. No match is required for submission and the application cycle is open in the Fall of each year. The program is generally highly competitive.

Capital Improvement Program

Through the Albemarle County Capital Improvement Program (CIP) the County may fully fund capital projects or use county CIP funds to provide the local match to projects as needed for grant applications. The County currently includes a Transportation Leveraging fund line item in the CIP and has been contributing \$1 to \$2 million per year used to leverage local funds for state and federal grants to complete recommended transportation projects. Capital needs applications have been submitted to fund specific projects through the CIP as well.

Methodology

Staff has developed a process utilizing similar factors as those used in the Commonwealth of Virginia's SMART Scale Program for scoring and funding transportation projects. The SMART Scale process, developed through extensive evaluation and research, identifies six comprehensive factors by which varied types of transportation projects can be evaluated based on shared goals for a well-functioning transportation system. Each of these six factors is scored based on multiple criteria that are relatively easily collected and measurable. The six Factors in SMART Scale are Land Use, Economic Development, Safety, Congestion, Accessibility, and Environmental.

The transportation project prioritization process for Albemarle County evaluates each of the factors through similar criteria as those in the SMART Scale process. We use the term Equitable Accessibility instead of just Accessibility to highlight the intent with that factor. The data Albemarle County uses consists of what is available and reflective of the factors we are measuring. The intent of these measures is to align with the goals and objectives of the County and to allow for a streamlined scoring process, based on quantitative data.

Staff have collected relevant data for each of the six factors in a Geographic Information System application. A series of questions related to each of the Factors was developed to assess how the project will address that factor. A score of 0-10 is assigned to each project for each of the six factors assessed.

The scores for each project are totaled for a maximum of 60 and the projects are ranked based on that score.

All identified projects went through an initial scoring process. Based on the initial scores, the top 50 projects, and ties, were placed in the First Tier List. Staff then reevaluated all scores of First Tier projects to ensure consistency in scoring. The scores of all projects initially placed in the Second Tier List which had previously been ranked in the top 50 in 2019 were also reevaluated for scoring consistency. Following these reevaluations all projects were again ranked and broken up into the First and Second Tiers. It should be noted that the Second Tier List is not in a rank order to acknowledge that many of those projects underwent only an initial evaluation and further evaluation may be necessary to accurately rank all projects.

First Tier projects are those that will be actively pursued for funding and advancement through grant applications, CIP fund requests, or planning studies to better define the project or develop conceptual designs and costs. Second Tier projects will be pursued by the County as opportunities are presented, through private development, and/or when unscheduled public funding is made available and will be reevaluated in future prioritization activities. These may also be opportunistically advanced through private development or by outside agencies. Following is a listing of the six factors and the criteria by which each transportation project was evaluated for that factor.

Land Use

- Are there proposed/under construction residential developments near the project and what is the size of those developments? (Score is scaled based on the size/amount of the development) If so, do those residential developments near the project further the goals outlined in planning documents in the county?
- Does this project enhance multi-modal opportunities? If so, do those multi-modal facilities provide a connection to other resources identified in this Factor?
- Does this project serve an Activity Center and how close is it to that Activity Center?
- Is this project located in the Development Area?
- Is this project located near community resources like schools, libraries, parks, and community centers? The closer the project is to these community resources the higher the score assigned.

Economic Development

- Are there proposed/under construction non-residential developments near the project and what is the size of those developments? (Score is scaled based on the size/amount of the development) If so, do those non-residential developments near the project further the goals outlined Project Enable? Are they part of a public-private partnership with the County?
- Is this transportation project located in an economic development zone?
- Would this project improve travel times/efficiency for freight vehicles travelling to and through the county primarily by access to Primary arterials?
- Is this project located near an area where there is a significant number of jobs, and will it improve access to that area? (Score is scaled based on the number of jobs and how close the project is to those jobs.)

Safety

- Does this project address a location where serious crashes are occurring? (Score is scaled based on the number and severity of crashes.)
- Is the location of this project on the VDOT Top 100 Potential Safety Improvement (PSI) list? (Score is scaled based on the rank in the Top 100 list.)
- Are there pedestrian/bike crashes happening at this project site? (Score is scaled based on the number and severity of crashes.)
- Does this project address a location with a high frequency of crashes? (Score is scaled based on the number and severity of crashes.)

Congestion

- Has a Traffic Impact Analysis or other study determined operational issues at this location such as failing Level of Service (LOS)? (Score is scaled based on the severity of any operational issues.)
- Is this project located on a high-volume corridor/intersection? (Score is scaled based on the traffic volume of the roadway.)
- If this project is primarily enhancing transit, bike, or pedestrian facilities, would this improvement provide opportunities to divert trips from single occupancy vehicles to alternative means? (Score is scaled based on the opportunities to connect to daily needs.)

Accessibility/Equity

- Does this project improve access to employment areas for underserved populations? (Score is scaled based on level of underserved properties and ability to connect to employment areas.)
- Is this project improving transit access or pedestrian/bike infrastructure? (Score is scaled based on level of improvement expected.)
- Is this project located in an area identified as underserved by the county? (Score is scaled based on level of underserved properties.)

Environment

- Does this project reduce Vehicle Miles Travelled (VMT) by providing multimodal transportation options? (Score is scaled based on the connectivity to Residential and Economic Development.)
- Does this project avoid floodplains and critical slopes?
- Does this project reduce emissions by preventing unnecessary idling at intersections and improve the effectiveness of the transportation network?
- Does this project avoid sensitive environmental areas including known Threatened and Endangered Species Habitat or other resources identified in the Biodiversity Action Plan?
- Does this project avoid impacts to identified historic properties, Districts, or sites?

Transportation Project Priorities

The results of the scoring can be found in the attached documents.

Attachments

Attachment B – Draft 2024 Albemarle County Transportation Priorities List

Attachment C – Draft 2024 Albemarle County Transportation Priorities Mapping