

Proposed Access Management Regulations and Standards

Preserving and Improving the Efficient Operation of State Highways

The Published Regulations and Standards

The Commissioner approved and published on the Virginia Department of Transportation web site the "Access Management Regulations" and the "Access Management Design Standards for Entrances and Intersections (Appendix C of the Road Design Manual)" in accordance with legislation from the 2007 General Assembly session.

Implementation of the regulations and the entrance/intersection spacing standards in the Design Standards will be phased by highway functional classification beginning July 1, 2008, with full implementation by July 1, 2009. They will not be retroactive and only apply to new entrances on highways maintained by VDOT. The regulations and spacing standards will:

- Only apply to principal arterials on July 1, 2008;
- Be extended to minor arterials on January 1, 2009; and,
- Be extended to collectors on July 1, 2009.

All parcels of land abutting a state highway will be granted at least one entrance to a state highway, except for limited access highways.

The access management regulations and standards will:

- Preserve public investment in new and existing highways;
- Enhance public safety by reducing conflicting traffic movements;
- Reduce the need for new or wider highways by preserving the performance of existing highways;
- Support economic development by promoting the efficient movement of goods and people; and,
- Respect vested property rights.

The legislative goals for access management will be accomplished through:

- Spacing standards for entrances and intersections based on the type of entrance and highway functional classification;
- Signal spacing to maximize the progression of traffic on highways;
- Locating entrances a safe distance from intersection turning movements;
- Requirements for inter-parcel access between properties such as circulator or frontage roads and access easements; and,
- Consolidation and sharing of highway entrances.

The regulations contain provisions to allow VDOT to work with individual localities on access management corridor plans.

The spacing standards established by the regulation and standards generally do not apply:

- On older, business corridors of urban highways;
- To the streets internal to new urbanism and traditional neighborhood developments; or,
- On highway corridors with local access management plans.

Procedures are included for appealing or requesting exceptions to the regulations and spacing standards with deadlines for VDOT decisions.

Background

The 2007 General Assembly unanimously approved legislation proposed by Gov. Timothy M. Kaine - HB 2228 and SB 1312 - to direct the commissioner of the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) to develop and implement access management regulations and standards with the goals of:

- Reducing traffic congestion
- Enhancing public safety by decreasing traffic crash rates
- Supporting economic development by promoting the efficient movement of people and goods
- Reducing the need for new highways and road widening by maximizing the performance of the existing state highways
- Preserving the public investment in new highways

The legislation establishes that the commissioner shall solicit and consider public comment in the development of the regulations and standards (which are exempt from the Administrative Process Act) and publish them by December 31, 2007.

A discussion on access management – what it is, basic techniques, and several resources for more information – is presented below.

Process for Developing and Soliciting Input on the Regulations and Standards

A VDOT technical committee, representing a broad range of disciplines from Central Office divisions, the regions, districts, residencies, and the Virginia Transportation Research Council, prepared the first draft of the proposed Access Management Regulations and Access Management Design Standards for Entrances and Intersections.

To assure a wide variety of viewpoints were considered, a multi-step process was developed for gaining public input on the proposed regulations and standards:

- **First**, the documents were reviewed and refined in August and September, 2007, by a policy advisory committee.

The committee was composed of external stakeholders, including representatives from local government, development, environmental and transportation engineering organizations, as well as internal stakeholders from VDOT and the Office of the Secretary of Transportation.

The representatives solicited input from their organizations to assist in this process.

- **Second**, a public comment period was provided from October 3 to October 29. The proposed regulations and standards were published on this Web site for public review. An email form was included on the Web site for the public to send their comments to VDOT on the proposed documents.
- **Third**, a public hearing was held Oct. 22 in Richmond.

During September and October notices about these public input opportunities were advertised twice in 13 newspapers and distributed to 50 media outlets including radio and television stations to assure statewide coverage. A General Notice of the comment period and public hearing was posted on the Virginia Regulatory Town Hall and published in the Oct. 15. "Virginia Register".

Results of Public Comment Period and Public Hearing

VDOT received over 250 comments from nine local governments (urban, suburban, and rural), 4 business organizations, an environmental organization, the Hampton Roads Planning District Commission, and the general public.

The policy advisory committee and the VDOT technical committee evaluated the comments during November and used them to make many changes to the regulations and standards. The policy advisory committee submitted their recommendations on the final draft access management regulations and standards to the commissioner at the end of November.

What Is Access Management?

Roads are a critical public resource and constitute a major investment of the public's money. The importance of providing safe and efficient state highways has resulted in a renewed focus on access management.

Access management seeks to improve the performance of the existing road network and enhance safety while maintaining the right of private property to have reasonable access to state highways.

To accomplish this, highways are classified according to their function, moving traffic versus providing access to property.

Regulations and standards based on a highway's functional classification are used to manage the location, number, spacing and design of entrances, median openings, traffic signals, turn lanes, street intersections, and interchanges.

In other states, access management has led to:

- Reductions in crashes, injuries, and fatalities
- Greater mobility that enhances the economic vitality of an area
- A reduction in the need for additional road capacity
- Increased traffic carrying capacity of existing roads

For example, studies have demonstrated that a four-lane highway with good access management can carry as much traffic as a six-lane highway with poor access management.

Illustration comparing a four-lane highway with access management to a six-lane highway without it.

