



Charlottesville-Albemarle Metropolitan Planning Organization

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November 15, 2011

James S. Utterback, PMP
Culpeper District Administrator
Department of Transportation
1601 Orange Road
Culpeper, Virginia 22701

Dear Jim:

I am in receipt of your letter of November 14 and am concerned that it represents a serious misunderstanding on your part of the situation as it exists related to travel demand modeling for the Charlottesville-Albemarle MPO. To begin, you state that VDOT has requested electronic copies of all activities covered under 1st Quarter Progress report, Task 2E. I have received no such request from you. I did receive a request from you that the district planner, Chuck Proctor be included in meetings related to the improvement process we are undertaking for the regional travel demand model. We have complied with that request. This is the first request I have received from you for the products that were produced in the 1st Quarter under Task 2E. We will be happy to provide those items and will work with Chuck to do so.

What your correspondence fails to acknowledge are the legitimate concerns we have related to travel demand modeling practice on the part of VDOT and its consultants. As we have previously discussed with VDOT Central Office staff, we have identified serious issues in the 2007 Model previously provided to the Charlottesville-Albemarle MPO by VDOT. These issues included errors in the geographic location of base year 2007 socioeconomic input data, errors in coding of network links, failure of the model to include turn prohibitions that correctly represent actual traffic operations, and the failure of the model to include the University Transit System. Due to these problems our analysis shows that the 2007 Model does not meet the standards and guidelines established in the [Virginia Transportation Modeling Policies and Procedures Manual](#), and in our view should not be used for any travel demand modeling purpose by the local governments, MPO or VDOT. Given the problems that existed with the 2007 model, we have serious questions about the processes being used by VDOT for traffic forecasting. We believe that VDOT's reliance on consultants for travel demand modeling and lack of oversight of those consultants is the ultimate source of the problems that existed in the 2007 model. Given the numerous mistakes made by VDOT and their consultants in past modeling processes, we do not believe that it is in the best interests of the MPO for us to simply accept at face value the results of any use of the model by either VDOT or their consultants. We believe that it is necessary for the MPO staff to review all travel demand modeling prior to publication to ensure that errors by VDOT or its consultants are not skewing the results. To accomplish that review we want complete access to all the input and output files for the model runs.

We believe that a federally mandated role for the MPO is to provide a forum for review of all transportation planning products being produced by any of the partners, including VDOT, the local governments, University of Virginia and the transit systems. We believe it is impossible for the MPO to play that role as a forum for collaborative transportation planning process for the Charlottesville-Albemarle region as long as VDOT refuses to provide full disclosure to the MPO staff of all model input and output files. Without such access and review, it is impossible for us to advise the public, the local governments and the MPO Policy Board about the adequacy of the travel demand modeling and the reasonableness of any conclusions reached on the basis of that modeling.

I do not believe that the position of the Virginia Department of Transportation is consistent with the federally mandated role of either the MPO or the Department of Transportation. I intend to submit this letter to the MPO Technical Committee at their meeting of November 15 and to the MPO Policy Board at their meeting of November 16 for their review.

I believe that an agreement specifying mutual review of travel demand model output is the best solution to the issues that currently exist and I call on you as the District Administrator and a member of the MPO Policy Board to help us reach such an agreement.

Sincerely,



Stephen Williams,
Executive Director

Cc: Charlottesville-Albemarle MPO Policy Board
Gregory Whirley, Commissioner of Highways
Ed Sundra, FHWA Virginia Division
Ivan Ricker, FHWA Virginia Division
Reta Busher, VDOT Chief of Planning and Programming
Marsha Fiol, VDOT Transportation and Mobility Planning Director