

November 14, 2023

W. Sheppard Miller III  
Virginia Secretary of Transportation  
P.O. Box 1745  
Richmond, VA 23218

Subject: Protect SMART SCALE's successful features

Dear Secretary Miller and members of the Commonwealth Transportation Board:

SMART SCALE is a nationally recognized program that saves taxpayer money by prioritizing Virginia transportation project spending using objective criteria. In 2014, then Republican Speaker of the House, William (Bill) Howell (R), initiated the bill that would become SMART SCALE, noting he was tired of being handed the transportation bill for bad land use by local governments. He and his team partnered with Governor McCauliffe (D) and his administration on the legislation which passed on a bipartisan basis, and was then implemented by VDOT and the CTB.

SMART SCALE's criteria reflect the broad needs of Virginia communities, not just a simple congestion ranking. As a result, the Commonwealth has seen more cost-effective projects prioritized, regardless of transportation mode and size of project, and that include creative and less expensive alternatives to costly interchanges, reduced demand on our roadways, and more environmentally beneficial results.

Therefore, we caution against substantial changes to SMART SCALE and emphasize that the criteria should continue to allow for transportation investments tied to more efficient land use including transit and local street networks, and should permit many smaller-scale cost-effective projects that provide alternatives to driving on congested highways.

Therefore, the Coalition for Smarter Growth urges OIPI and the CTB to support:

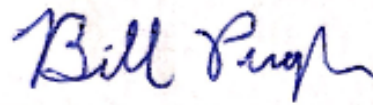
1. Retaining the Land Use factor OR at a minimum, making the Accessibility factor an important and heavily weighted criterion. Accessibility is improved by proximity and includes distance from jobs and equitable access.
2. Keeping the Congestion Reduction factor no higher than 35%. Overemphasizing this factor can lead to failed attempts at highway expansion. New and wider highways in economically successful states can fill up in as little as five years, leaving us back at square one. Overemphasizing this factor also leads to failing to fund the transit and local street/bike/walk accessibility investments that provide people with options to avoid inevitable congestion on the highways.

3. Ensuring Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) and Light Rail Transit projects qualify as high-capacity transit, and that an appropriate definition of BRT is included, based on how these projects are typically designed.
4. Not reducing the number of projects that can be submitted, and ensuring "high priority projects" do not exclude the important bike, pedestrian, and transit projects that move more people through a corridor.

Thank you,



Stewart Schwartz  
Executive Director



Bill Pugh, AICP CTP  
Senior Policy Fellow