

**REPORT OF THE
VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION'S
RESPONSE TO SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 38**

Feasibility And Desirability Of Establishing Welcome Centers On Non-Interstate Highways in Virginia

**TO THE GOVERNOR AND
THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF VIRGINIA**



Senate Document No. 6

**COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA
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THE FEASIBILITY AND DESIRABILITY OF ESTABLISHING
WELCOME CENTERS ON NON-INTERSTATE HIGHWAYS IN VIRGINIA

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Senate Joint Resolution 38 (SJR38) directs the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) and the Division of Tourism (VDT) to consider the feasibility, desirability, and financial impact of establishing, partially supporting, or otherwise providing for welcome centers at points where multilane arterial highways extend from the borders of and into the Commonwealth and at the junction of the Blue Ridge Parkway, the Skyline Drive and Interstate 64. These centers would be in addition to the ten located on Virginia's interstate highway system and the twenty-six local/regional tourist informational centers statewide that are recognized and supported by VDT. A task force comprised of VDOT and VDT staff was assembled to address this resolution.

Using the criteria specified by the Resolution, the task force identified eleven locations in the Commonwealth as candidates for these proposed arterial welcome centers. In conducting an in-depth analysis of each location, the task force made several assumptions. First, it was assumed that the arterial welcome center would be generally similar in design and configuration to those located on Virginia's interstate system. Second, it was assumed that these proposed centers would be staffed and maintained jointly by VDOT and VDT. Third, it was assumed that these centers would be constructed during the next six years and that the source of funding would be from Primary System Allocations or from sources identified by the General Assembly. Finally, it was assumed that sufficient tracts of land could be located and successfully negotiated for to accommodate the welcome center facilities. The eleven locations chosen for analysis by the task force were as follows:

Site No.	Route No./ Location	Jurisdiction	VDOT District
1	Rt. 29/265 @ NC/VA Border	Pittsylvania Co.	Lynchburg
2	Rt. 220 @ NC/VA Border	Henry Co.	Salem
3	Rt. 23 TN/VA Border	Scott Co.	Bristol
4	Rt. 23 @ KY/VA Border	Wise Co.	Bristol
5	Rt. 460 @ WVA/VA Border	Tazewell Co.	Bristol
6	Rt. 460 @ WVA/VA Border	Giles Co.	Salem
7	Rt. 250 @ I-64 Skyline Dr./ Blue Ridge Pkwy./Afton Mtn.	Nelson Co.	Lynchburg
8	Rt. 301 @ MD/VA Border	King George Co.	Fredericksburg
9	Rt. 522 @ WVA/VA Border	Frederick Co.	Staunton
10	Rt. 168 @ NC/VA Border	City of Chesapeake	Suffolk
11	Rt. 17 @ NC/VA Border	City of Chesapeake	Suffolk

Source: SJR38 Task Force

For each of the eleven sites, the availability and cost of five-acre tracts of land were estimated. While five acres were determined to be the minimum needed for center site development, once site locations are pinpointed, topography could dictate the need for larger tracts. In addition, cost estimates and the feasibility of constructing parking, means of ingress and egress, and obtaining the necessary utilities were calculated; estimates of the staffing and annual maintenance costs of the centers were projected; and the potential impact of the eleven centers on tourist activities in Virginia was assessed. To arrive at the latter, a travel survey of out-of-state motorists traversing routes adjacent to each of the candidate center sites was conducted in August 1988. Finally, information regarding similar welcome center site development in states bordering Virginia was also obtained.

Land

Past practice would suggest that the ten candidate centers at points of entry should be located no more than two miles from the state's border. The study revealed that though varied in per acre cost, land appears to be available at ten sites. Sufficient land appears not to be available at site 7. At this location, the establishment of a welcome center might necessitate either purchasing a site in the Waynesboro area, redesigning and upgrading the existing rest area facility east of Afton Mountain on Interstate 64, or using U.S. Park Service land. Regardless of what is decided about site 7, water, sewage, and electrical services appear to be accessible at all eleven locations.

While land for ten of the sites appears to be available, it is not known whether landowners will be willing to part with it. VDOT may be faced with exercising its power of eminent domain to acquire some portion of this land. However, before this power could be exercised without challenge, a question would have to be resolved as to whether welcome centers are used for transportation information and are thus considered incidental to public highways or whether they are used for economic development. This issue could be clearly resolved by a legislative enactment authorizing VDOT to establish welcome centers as an incident to public highways.

Benefits

There is little question that welcome centers are desirable components of a highway system. The task force sought to determine whether any or all of the candidate centers might prove desirable to the Commonwealth. Since the major purpose of such centers would be to serve the needs of tourists, it was decided that the volume of tourist vehicles traversing the eleven candidate locations had to be

determined. The VDT definition of a tourist vehicle is one that is from out of state and is commuting in excess of fifty miles within the Commonwealth. A survey of vehicles revealed the largest volume of tourist traffic to be at sites 8, 10, and 6, respectively, and the lowest at sites 7, 4, and 3, respectively (Table 6). Of the vehicles traversing these locations and responding to the survey, however, the greatest percentage of tourist traffic was found to occur at sites 7, 8, and 9, and the lowest at sites 3, 11, and 10. Applying statistics from a 1987 study conducted for VDT by The College of William and Mary, the financial contribution that would accrue to the Commonwealth as a result of the construction of each candidate welcome center was determined. This showed that construction of all eleven sites could yield direct tax revenues resulting from increased tourism of \$450,000 annually, and by the year 2010, this figure could increase to \$816,000. Further projections indicate that the greatest potential tax revenue would be generated by sites 3, 5, and 10, and the least by sites 9 and 7.

Cost

It is estimated that the eleven welcome centers will cost about \$31 million to construct--an average of \$2.8 million per site. Construction costs would be greatest at sites 3, 8, and 10. High construction costs at these sites are due chiefly to the cost of land and site development. The least expensive centers to build would be those at sites 9 and 7, although the availability of land at the latter site remains in question. Annual costs for maintaining and staffing the centers are estimated at \$2.4 million, of which, given current funding practices, VDOT and VDT would each bear roughly \$1.2 million.

While options other than state funding should be thoroughly explored, it is useful to determine the impact these centers would have on construction allocations were VDOT to build them. Since construction funds are allocated by district, these allocations would be affected to the extent that proposed centers fall within the boundaries of specific districts. The construction costs for the three centers located in the Bristol District would be nearly \$10 million; the two centers located in the Lynchburg District would cost \$4.5 million; the two in the Suffolk District would cost \$6 million; the two in the Salem District would cost \$4.8 million; and the centers in the Fredericksburg and Staunton Districts would cost \$4 million and \$2 million, respectively. If the funds necessary for the construction of these centers were taken from the Primary Allocation for these six districts, certain programmed projects would likely have to be delayed.

It is also estimated that were the state to adequately staff and maintain these centers, as has traditionally been done, an additional 77 VDOT and 44 VDT employees would be necessary to provide an appropriate level of service. Labor costs for these additional employees are included in the \$218,000 per site annual expenditure for staffing and maintenance. The cost to the Commonwealth for the construction and operation of these centers could be reduced to the extent that localities were required to participate in these expenses. Although the potential for such local participation, as well as joint ventures between VDOT, VDT, and local jurisdictional entities, may exist and should be explored, such activities are thus far unprecedented in the Commonwealth.

In conclusion, it appears that all eleven candidate welcome centers would benefit both the visitor to Virginia and the Commonwealth. Should a need arise to prioritize the candidate sites, the following criteria should be considered. They are listed in no particular order of importance.

1. The cost of construction.
2. The impact of construction cost on district primary allocations.
3. The percentage of tourist traffic traversing the site.
4. The current and projected volume of tourist cars traversing the site (thus, the number of tourists that may stop).
5. The projected revenue to be generated by the site.
6. The current and projected average daily traffic at the site.
7. The proximity of the site to existing welcome centers.
8. The willingness of local governments to participate in the venture.

While this report should enable the General Assembly to assess the viability of constructing the proposed centers, a more sophisticated analysis should be initiated before any final determinations are made. Such an analysis would result in the development of a computer model that could ultimately be used to accurately prioritize candidate sites.

THE FEASIBILITY AND DESIRABILITY OF ESTABLISHING
WELCOME CENTERS ON NON-INTERSTATE HIGHWAYS IN VIRGINIA

INTRODUCTION

On February 12, 1988, the General Assembly passed Senate Joint Resolution No. 38 (SJR38) (Appendix A), which requests the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) and the Division of Tourism (VDT) to consider establishing welcome centers on certain arterial highways. Specifically, the resolution requests the two agencies to consider the feasibility, financial impact, and desirability of establishing, partially supporting, or otherwise providing for additional welcome centers. These welcome centers are proposed at points where multilane arterial highways extend from the borders of and into the Commonwealth and at the junction of the Blue Ridge Parkway, the Skyline Drive, and Interstate 64.

This report, prepared in response to SJR38, presents a discussion of the findings of a task force that was assembled to address the resolution. Members of the task force included R. L. Fink, Assistant Maintenance Division Administrator; C. W. Fulwider, Jr., Right of Way Manager; J. B. Robinson, Engineering Programs Supervisor; Leo H. Rutledge, Environmental Planner; Patricia P. Suarez, Policy Analysis Division Administrator; and A. J. Uzel, Transportation Engineer Senior (all from VDOT); Meriwether German, Welcome Centers Manager at VDT; and Michael Perfater, Research Scientist at the Department's Transportation Research Council.

STUDY RATIONALE AND APPROACH

In requesting the study, the sponsors of SJR38 pointed out that thousands of visitors annually enter and leave Virginia via non-interstate routes, many of which are multilane arterial highways and heavily traveled parkways and drives. This suggests that welcome centers currently located only on interstate routes may not be accessible to a substantial segment of tourists who enter Virginia daily. Since studies have shown that one of the major benefits derived from welcome centers is that they lead to tourists spending time and money in Virginia, providing additional welcome centers to non-interstate tourists may be financially beneficial to the Commonwealth.

In order to address all aspects pertaining to establishing a non-interstate welcome center system in Virginia, the task force identified eleven prospective welcome center locations based upon the parameters provided in SJR38. For each site the following data were assembled:

1. Estimates of fair market value for, and availability of, land and utility service connections,
2. Estimates of the cost to construct buildings and providing other amenities usually found at welcome centers,
3. Estimates of the cost to construct parking and means of ingress and egress to facilities,
4. Estimates of the staffing and funding required to maintain such facilities,
5. A travel survey of out-of-state motorists traversing the routes adjacent to which potential welcome centers might be constructed,
6. The potential economic impact such facilities might have on tourist activities in Virginia.

In developing this information the task force drew heavily upon data concerning the nature, design, serviceability, and cost of the operation of the interstate welcome centers that currently exist in Virginia. Also examined was information about similar activities, either planned or underway, in the states that border Virginia. In addition, in order to ascertain the extent to which certain economic benefits might be derived from tourists stopping at these prospective locations, a travel survey was conducted in August 1988 at each site to determine the percentage of motorists normally traversing the specified routes who were tourists.

HISTORY AND CURRENT STATUS OF VIRGINIA'S WELCOME CENTERS

Using guidelines established during the early 1960's by various federally promulgated highway actions and statutes, VDOT developed a master plan for the inclusion of rest areas in the design and construction of Virginia's interstate highway system. Working with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the Virginia Fine Arts Committee,

VDOT established sites and building designs for these facilities. All of the facilities were designed to contain parking areas as well as amenities such as picnic tables, drinking fountains, trash receptacles, and walkways around brick or stone buildings containing restrooms. At the state borders, these buildings were combined with welcome centers operated by VDT.

Nine of these centers are located on the interstates, and a tenth is located on Route 13 on the Eastern Shore of Virginia (Figure 1). The primary objectives of these centers are to provide hospitality and quick, accurate responses to travel questions and to promote longer visitor stays and, therefore, greater expenditures in Virginia. Welcome center staff are generally encouraged to direct visitors to all regions and attractions within the state and to assist in enhancing the visitor's travel in hopes of encouraging return visits. A variety of free travel brochures and publications is available at each center. A manager and three travel counselors at each facility assist visitors with routing and vacation planning and answer inquiries regarding the state's attractions and accommodations.

Each center, which has as its main feature a brick or stone building, contains restroom facilities; parking for trucks, campers, and automobiles; and other amenities such as picnic tables, grills, water fountains, and walkways designed to add to the comfort of motorists. Welcome centers were constructed by VDOT and are generally maintained jointly by VDT and VDOT.

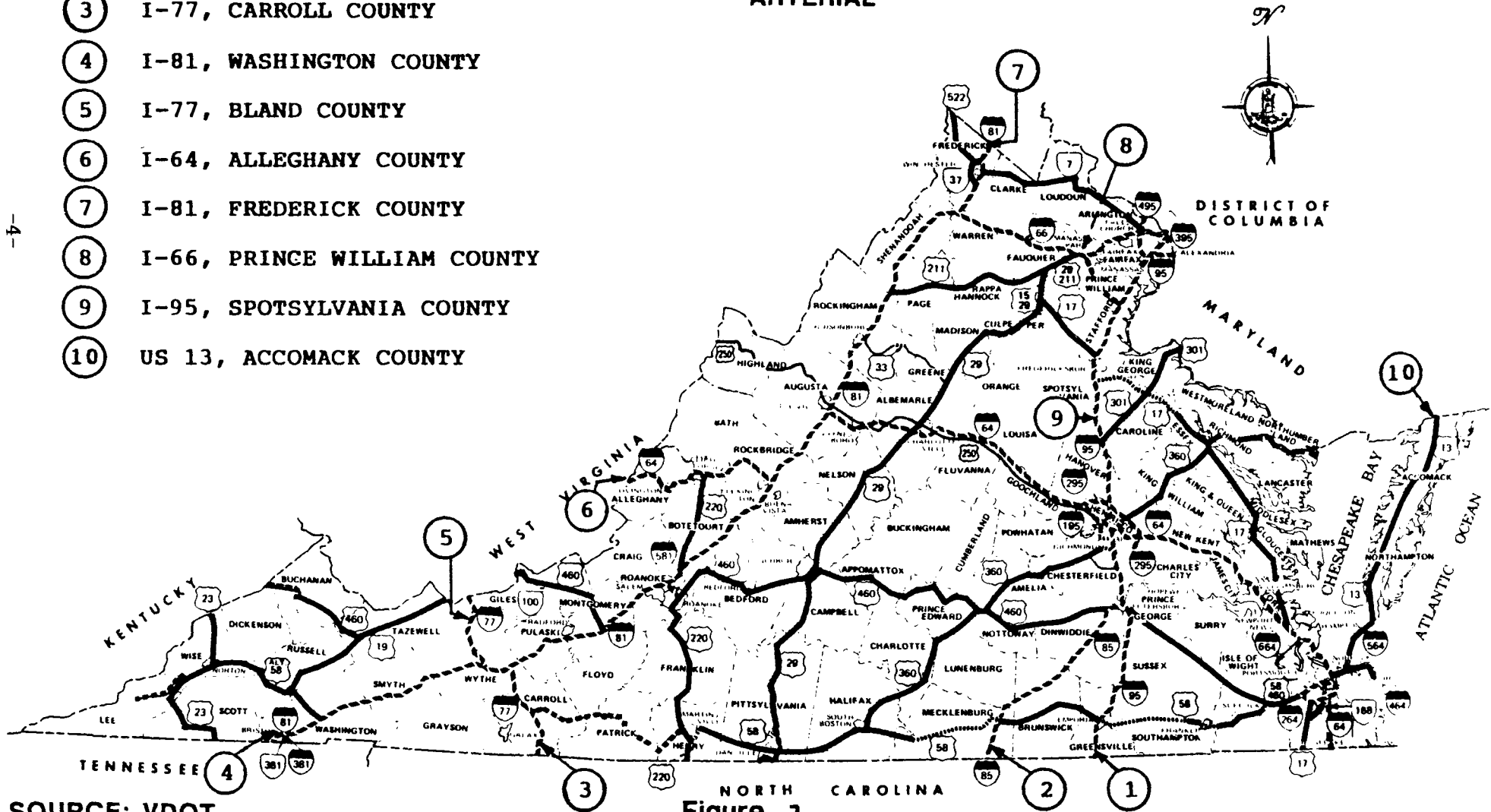
In addition to the ten welcome centers, all of which provide statewide informational services to the tourist, VDT also recognizes and supports 26 local/regional facilities throughout Virginia (Figure 2). Although a substantial portion of informational brochures of a statewide nature are also distributed at these centers, these facilities are oriented toward local and regional attractions. Local/regional centers are operated by nonprofit groups such as local governmental units, chambers of commerce, or a designated tourism promotion organization. VDOT plays only a minimal role in the operation of these centers, that being the fabrication and erection of signs containing information regarding their location. Specific information regarding the criteria for VDT support of local/regional tourist information centers is in Appendix B.

EXISTING VIRGINIA WELCOME CENTERS

- ① I-95, GREENSVILLE COUNTY
- ② I-85, MECKLENBURG COUNTY
- ③ I-77, CARROLL COUNTY
- ④ I-81, WASHINGTON COUNTY
- ⑤ I-77, BLAND COUNTY
- ⑥ I-64, ALLEGHANY COUNTY
- ⑦ I-81, FREDERICK COUNTY
- ⑧ I-66, PRINCE WILLIAM COUNTY
- ⑨ I-95, SPOTSYLVANIA COUNTY
- ⑩ US 13, ACCOMACK COUNTY

LEGEND

- INTERSTATE
- ARTERIAL



SOURCE: VDOT

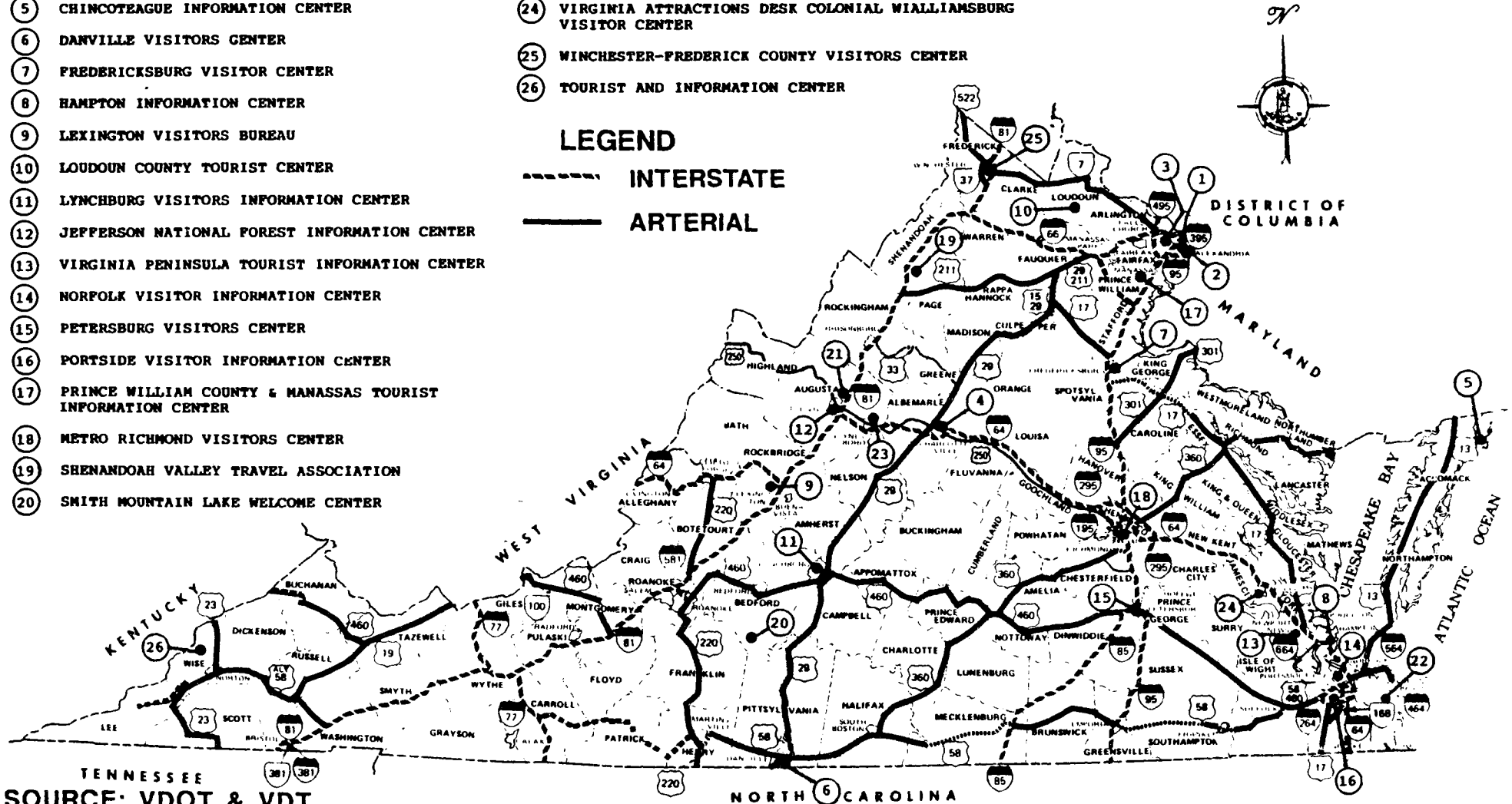
NORTH CAROLINA
Figure 1

LOCAL/REGIONAL TOURIST INFORMATION CENTERS IN VIRGINIA

- | | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ① ALEXANDRIA TOURIST COUNCIL ② THE LYCEUM ③ ARLINGTON COUNTY VISITORS CENTER ④ THOMAS JEFFERSON VISITORS BUREAU ⑤ CHINCOTEAGUE INFORMATION CENTER ⑥ DANVILLE VISITORS CENTER ⑦ FREDERICKSBURG VISITOR CENTER ⑧ HAMPTON INFORMATION CENTER ⑨ LEXINGTON VISITORS BUREAU ⑩ LOUDOUN COUNTY TOURIST CENTER ⑪ LYNCHBURG VISITORS INFORMATION CENTER ⑫ JEFFERSON NATIONAL FOREST INFORMATION CENTER ⑬ VIRGINIA PENINSULA TOURIST INFORMATION CENTER ⑭ NORFOLK VISITOR INFORMATION CENTER ⑮ PETERSBURG VISITORS CENTER ⑯ PORTSIDE VISITOR INFORMATION CENTER ⑰ PRINCE WILLIAM COUNTY & MANASSAS TOURIST INFORMATION CENTER ⑱ METRO RICHMOND VISITORS CENTER ⑲ SHENANDOAH VALLEY TRAVEL ASSOCIATION ⑳ SMITH MOUNTAIN LAKE WELCOME CENTER | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ㉑ STAUNTON-AUGUSTA COUNTY TOURIST INFORMATION CENTER ㉒ VIRGINIA BEACH VISITORS INFORMATION CENTER ㉓ ROCKFISH GAP REGIONAL INFORMATION CENTER ㉔ VIRGINIA ATTRACTIONS DESK COLONIAL WIALLIAMSBURG VISITOR CENTER ㉕ WINCHESTER-FREDERICK COUNTY VISITORS CENTER ㉖ TOURIST AND INFORMATION CENTER |
|--|--|

LEGEND

- INTERSTATE
- ARTERIAL



TENNESSEE
SOURCE: VDOT & VDT

Figure 2

A PROFILE OF PROPOSED ADDITIONAL
WELCOME CENTER SITES

There appears to be eleven locations in Virginia that meet the site description specifications proposed in SJR38. These locations are shown in Figure 3, and Table 1 provides site-specific information regarding the locations. Three of the candidate sites are located in the Bristol District; two each in the Salem, Lynchburg, and Suffolk Districts; and one each in the Fredericksburg and Staunton Districts. Traffic varies at these sites from a high of 27,300 vehicles per day at site 10 to a low of 4,405 vehicles per day at site 9. While highway facilities adjacent to sites 9, 10 and 11 currently have two lanes, they are to be expanded to four lanes in the immediate future. For this reason these sites were included in the analysis.

ANALYSIS

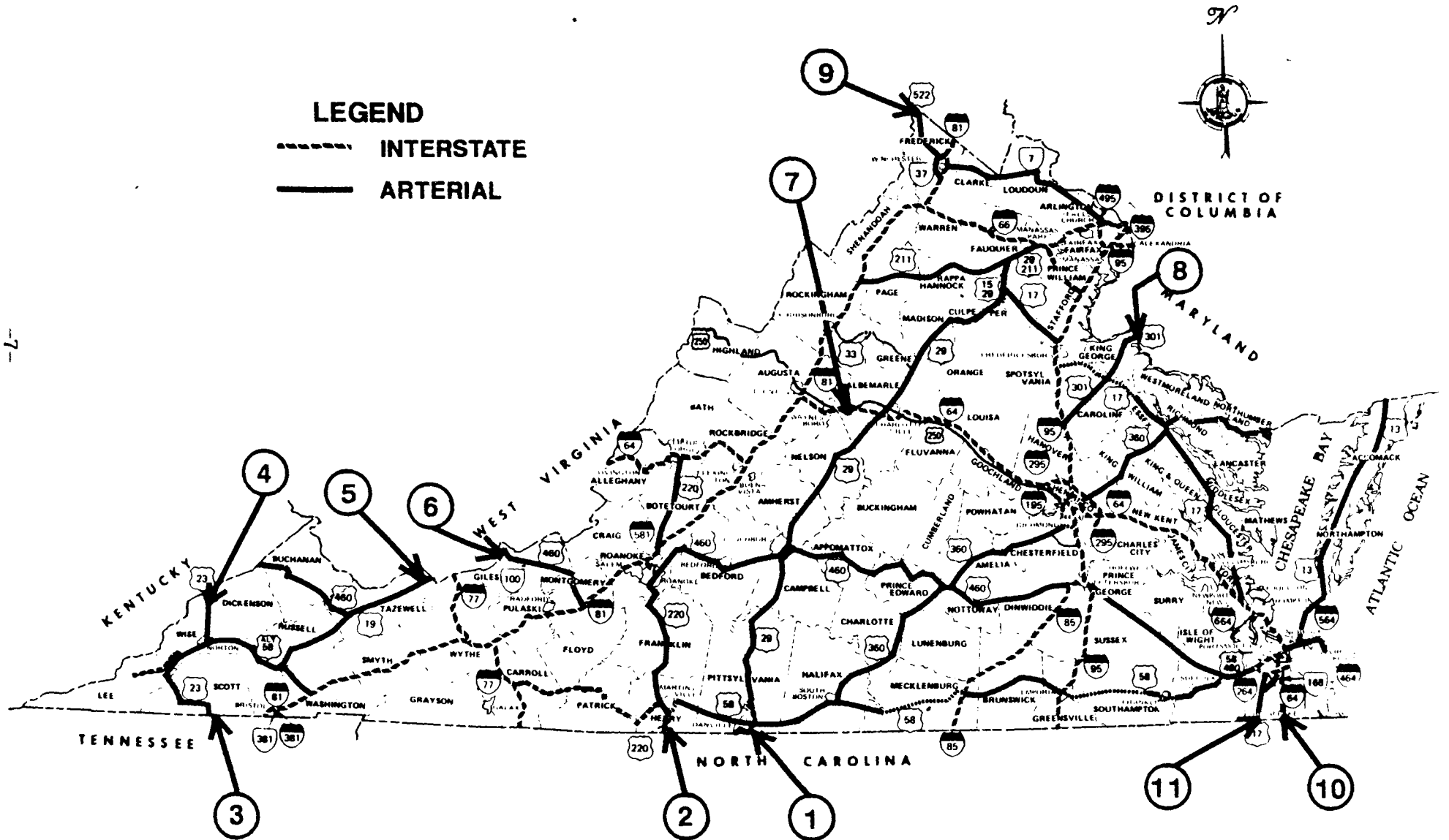
The eleven locations were analyzed from three basic perspectives: feasibility, financial impact, and desirability.

Feasibility

The most important consideration regarding feasibility is the availability of land and utility connections, or the need to develop utility systems, at the specified sites. Historically, welcome centers at the points of entry have usually been located within two miles of the state's border. Based on current and projected traffic counts, centers built at the candidate locations would require five acres. Thus, the analysis herein focused on the availability of five-acre tracts within the two-mile radius.

An examination of the point of entry sites revealed that five-acre tracts of land are likely to be available at all locations except site 7. The unavailability of land at this site might necessitate either purchasing and locating a site in the Waynesboro area, or perhaps redesigning and upgrading the existing rest area facility east of Afton Mountain on Interstate 64. Another alternative would be to explore utilizing some of the land held by the U.S. Park Service. Preliminary communications with this agency indicate that this may be possible; however, additional investigations would need to be conducted to fully determine the acceptability of this land based on size and safety. Site 4 currently has an old drive-in theatre parcel for sale near Weber City, approximately three miles from the state border, which is outside the two-mile radius typically adhered to by

CANDIDATE LOCATIONS FOR NON - INTERSTATE WELCOME CENTERS



SOURCE S.T.R. 38 TASK FORCE

Figure 3

TABLE 1

Proposed Welcome Center Site Characteristics

Site No.	Route No./ Location	Jurisdiction	VDOT District	Existing Roadway Type	1987 ADT
1	Rt. 29/265 @ NC/VA Border	Pittsylvania Co.	Lynchburg	Four-lane arterial	9,730
2	Rt. 220 @ NC/VA Border	Henry Co.	Salem	Four-lane arterial	8,995
3	Rt. 23 TN/VA Border	Scott Co.	Bristol	Four-lane arterial	19,895
4	Rt. 23 @ KY/VA Border	Wise Co.	Bristol	Four-lane arterial	5,070
5	Rt. 460 @ WVA/VA Border	Tazewell Co.	Bristol	Four-lane arterial	14,110
6	Rt. 460 @ WVA/VA Border	Giles Co.	Salem	Four-lane arterial	8,075
7	Rt. 250 @ I-64 Skyline Dr/Blue Ridge Pkwy/ Afton Mtn.	Nelson Co.	Lynchburg	Two-lane arterial	6,825
8	Rt. 301 @ MD/VA Border	King George Co.	Fredericksburg	Four-lane arterial	11,350
9	Rt. 522 @ WVA/VA Border	Frederick Co.	Staunton	Two-lane arterial	4,405
10	Rt. 168 @ NC/VA Border	City of Chesapeake	Suffolk	Two-lane primary	27,300
11	Rt. 17 @ NC/VA Border	City of Chesapeake	Suffolk	Two-lane arterial	12,000

Source: SJR38 Task Force

VDT when establishing a welcome center location. In addition, water, sewage, and electrical services appear to be accessible at all eleven locations.

While five-acre tracts appear to be available at ten of the eleven candidate locations, it is not known whether the owners of these tracts would be willing to sell them. There exists, therefore, the possibility that VDOT might have to exercise its eminent domain power to acquire some or all of the properties that would be required to construct some or all of the candidate centers. Although this power has never been used to acquire a capital outlay project site for Virginia, Section 33.1-89 of the Code of Virginia, as amended, states that "the State Highway and Transportation Commissioner is hereby vested with the power to acquire by . . . the power of eminent domain such lands . . . deemed to be necessary for the construction, reconstruction, alteration, maintenance and repair of the public highways of the State . . . and all purposes incidental thereto. . . ."

In September 1988, the Office of the Attorney General of the Commonwealth of Virginia issued an opinion (Attachment 1) regarding this issue. The opinion states:

The question that arises is whether welcome centers are "incidental" to public highways. To the extent these centers are used for transportation information and rest area functions . . . they will be considered incidental to public highways. To the extent that centers are used for . . . economic development within the State, . . . the centers will be subject to challenge as not incidental to public highways. . . . If the VDOT or the Board decides to condemn land for welcome centers, the transportation purpose for the land should be clearly set out in the decision document. In addition, the eminent domain authority issue will be clearly resolved by a legislative enactment specifically authorizing VDOT to establish welcome centers as an incident to public highways. Such a determination by the legislature would resolve the difficulty of interpretation of Section 33.1-89.

Financial Considerations

In the foregoing discussion, the feasibility of constructing non-interstate welcome centers for each specific site has been pointed out. The development of these sites would require substantial funds for both construction and ongoing maintenance and staffing.

Right of Way Acquisition and Construction Cost

Estimating the total cost of constructing a new welcome center consists of several steps. Once the feasibility of developing a welcome center site has been determined, the next step is to obtain projected traffic in the site area. Based on that projection, a determination can then be made of the number of parking spaces that would be needed at the site. Second, after evaluating the topography of the area, a preliminary design of the site can be formulated, and a determination made regarding the acreage that would be required to accommodate the welcome center facility. During the analysis, consideration is also given to the availability or development of water and sewer systems, as well as to the specific site amenities that are to be made available. The completion of these steps enables a reasonably accurate estimate of the total outlay needed for construction.

For the eleven candidate sites, 1987 average daily traffic (ADT) has been obtained, and traffic volumes for the year 2010 have been projected. These figures are shown in Table 2. The 2010 projections are used to determine the number of parking spaces that would be needed at the proposed sites. The number of required parking spaces and the topography would dictate the amount of needed acreage. As the table shows, traffic is currently heaviest at sites 3, 5, and 10, and lightest at sites 9, 4, and 11. However, by the year 2010, traffic is projected to double at nearly one-half of the sites. Slight traffic increases are expected at site 7 (Route 250, Afton Mountain), followed by site 9 (Route 522, West Virginia/Virginia Border), and site 1 (Route 29 near Danville). By 2010, the heaviest traffic volumes are projected at site 3 (Route 23, Tennessee/Virginia Border), site 10 (Route 168, North Carolina/Virginia Border), and site 5 (Route 460, West Virginia/Virginia Border).

The parking requirements based on the 2010 traffic projections have been calculated and are shown in Table 3 for the eleven sites. This information is used in conjunction with established FHWA guidelines to determine the size and configuration of restroom facilities, the size and capacities of the water and sewer systems, and other site amenities. As Table 3 shows, sites 3, 10, and 5 would have the greatest parking requirements and sites 9 and 7 the least.

Right of way and construction costs have been determined for each of the proposed sites. Right of way estimates for each site were based on current land values in the area, terrain, and land use in the vicinity of the candidate welcome center sites. Based on historical experience, five acres were used as an average for the land to be acquired for the eleven sites. The availability of public utilities is

TABLE 2

Traffic Information
at Proposed Welcome Center Locations

Site No.	Route No.	Location	1987 ADT* Total Veh.	2010 ADT*
1	29/265	NC/VA Border (near Danville)	9,730	13,500
2	220	NC/VA Border	8,995	16,100
3	23	TN/VA Border	19,895	35,700
4	23	KY/VA Border	5,070	11,975
5	460	WVA/VA Border	14,110	27,000
6	460	WVA/VA Border	8,075	12,400
7	250	Afton Mtn./Skyline Dr.	6,825	7,900
8	301	MD/VA Border	11,350	25,830
9	522	WVA/VA Border	4,405	5,800
10	168	NC/VA Border	13,770	27,300
11	17	NC/VA Border	5,560	12,000

* = Average daily traffic

Source: 1987 ADT - VDOT Traffic Engineering Division
2010 ADT - VDOT Transportation Planning Division

also reflected in the estimated site values. To establish site development costs, the developmental history of a typical previously constructed welcome center was used as a model, and current unit prices for grading and paving were applied. Adjustments were made for each of the candidate sites based on their specific parking, water, sewer, and site amenity needs. It was assumed that welcome center building square footage would not vary a great deal.

TABLE 3
Parking Requirements
at Proposed Welcome Center Sites

Site No.	Route No.	Cars	Trucks	Campers
1	29/265	39	10	4
2	220	47	12	4
3	23	104	26	10
4	23	35	8	3
5	460	79	21	8
6	460	36	9	4
7	250	23	5	3
8	301	75	19	7
9	522	17	4	2
10	168	80	20	8
11	17	35	9	4

Source: SJR 38 Task Force

Table 4 reflects the projected right of way, preliminary engineering, site development, structural, water system, sewer system, and site amenity costs for the eleven candidate sites. Based on these projections and 1988 dollars, the total cost for constructing the eleven centers would be \$30,943,400, or an average of \$2,813,036 per site. As the table shows, the projected cost of the seven components of welcome center construction varies by site. For example, land projections vary from \$2,000 per acre at site 9 to \$80,000 per acre at sites 1 and 8. Roadway, parking, and lighting costs would be dependent upon the amount of parking that is needed, cost of materials, and terrain. The variance in the cost of water and sewer systems depends upon the possibility of connection to local jurisdictional systems. Site amenity costs will vary according to the traffic projected to be generated at each site.

TABLE 4

Construction Cost for Proposed Welcome Center Sites

Site No.	Route No.	Land (5 acres)	Prel. Eng.	Roadway, Parking & Lighting	Building	Water System	Sewer System	Site Amenities	Total
1	29/265	\$ 400,000	\$ 190,300	\$ 1,135,000	\$ 350,000	\$ 120,000*	\$ 150,000*	\$ 148,000	\$ 2,493,300
2	220	50,000	237,800	1,510,000	350,000	120,000	250,000	148,000	2,665,800
3	23	125,000	384,700	3,025,000	350,000	20,000*	240,000*	212,000	4,356,700
4	23	75,000	197,300	1,135,000	350,000	120,000	220,000	148,000	2,245,300
5	460	100,000	299,700	2,270,000	350,000	40,000*	125,000*	212,000	3,396,700
6	460	25,000	197,300	1,135,000	350,000	120,000	220,000	148,000	2,195,300
7	250	200,000	159,300	800,000	350,000	120,000	175,000	148,000	1,952,300
8	301	400,000	335,700	2,400,000	350,000	120,000	275,000	212,000	4,092,700
9	522	10,000	129,800	530,000	350,000	120,000	150,000	148,000	1,437,800
10	168	50,000	353,700	2,580,000	350,000	120,000	275,000	212,000	3,940,700
11	17	<u>35,000</u>	<u>193,800</u>	<u>1,100,000</u>	<u>350,000</u>	<u>120,000</u>	<u>220,000</u>	<u>148,000</u>	<u>2,166,800</u>
TOTAL		\$1,470,000	\$2,679,400	\$17,620,000	\$3,850,000	\$1,140,000	\$2,300,000	\$1,884,000	\$30,943,400

*County or City connections possible. Connection fees are not included in the cost figures.

Source: VDOT

Although it is not the only option, the fiscal impact of constructing the centers with VDOT funds needs to be presented. The proposed eleven welcome centers lie within six of VDOT's transportation districts. Three proposed sites, with a total estimated construction cost of \$9,998,700, are located in the Bristol District; two sites with a total estimated construction cost of \$4,445,600 are located in the Lynchburg District; two sites with a total estimated construction cost of \$4,861,100 are located in the Salem District; two sites with a total estimated construction cost of \$6,107,500 are located in the Suffolk District; one site with an estimated construction cost of \$4,092,700 is located in the Fredericksburg District; and one site with a total estimated construction cost of \$1,437,800 is located in the Staunton District.

Were VDOT to bear the cost of constructing these centers, it is assumed that the source would be primary road allocations, since the centers would be located on the arterial system. Table 5 shows how the projected cost of these facilities compares to the primary system allocations for the six districts within VDOT's six-year improvement program. As can be seen, construction costs would range from 1.4 to 6.5 percent of the six-year allocation. Thus, it should be assumed that some programmed projects in these districts would have to be delayed if special funds were not provided for construction of the centers.

Maintenance and Staffing Costs

In addition to construction costs, there are recurrent maintenance and staffing expenses associated with the operation of additional welcome centers. Historically, VDOT and VDT have borne these costs. Presently, VDOT averages \$108,000 annually to maintain each welcome center on the interstate system, and VDT averages \$110,000 annually to staff each of these centers. Thus, the total cost of staffing and maintaining a typical welcome center averages \$218,000 annually. Were the state to bear the total cost of maintaining and staffing eleven new centers, total expenditures of \$2,398,000 would be required annually, of which VDOT will bear \$1,188,000 and VDT \$1,210,000.

The traditional pattern of utilizing VDOT and VDT employees to maintain and provide services at the proposed eleven welcome centers would also necessitate an increase in the allowable maximum employment level (MEL) for each agency. It is estimated that 77 additional VDOT employees and 44 VDT employees would be necessary to provide a level of service equal to that currently provided at the existing interstate welcome centers. Labor costs for these additional employees are included in the staffing cost projections discussed in the preceding paragraph.

TABLE 5

Comparison of Primary Six-Year Allocation
to Candidate Welcome Center Construction Cost

Yearly Allocation for Primary Road Systems
(in \$)

District	'89	'90	'91	'92	'93	'94	Total	Projected Cost of Welcome Center	% of Six-Year Allocation
Bristol	33,863,000	32,098,000	31,432,000	30,323,000	30,614,000	29,534,000	187,864,000	9,998,700	5.3
Salem	24,529,000	23,012,000	22,933,000	22,082,000	22,296,000	21,557,000	136,409,000	4,861,100	3.4
Lynchburg	22,419,000	21,183,000	20,667,000	19,944,000	20,180,000	19,520,000	123,913,000	4,445,000	3.6
Suffolk	16,632,000	15,715,000	15,332,000	14,796,000	15,720,000	15,487,000	93,682,000	6,107,500	6.5
Fredericksburg	19,063,000	18,286,000	18,236,000	17,665,000	17,801,000	17,203,000	108,254,000	4,092,700	3.8
Staunton	18,286,000	17,518,000	17,136,000	16,595,000	16,697,000	16,215,000	102,447,000	1,437,800	1.4

Source: VDOT

It may be possible to reduce some of these costs by doing one or more of the following:

- o Using jurisdictional funds to finance all or a portion of the centers' operations.
- o Using jurisdictional employees to staff or partially staff the centers.
- o Diverting staff and/or funds from existing local/regional centers to the candidate arterial centers. This option may include closing certain regional centers.
- o Establishing joint ventures between VDOT, VDT, and local jurisdictional entities.
- o Allowing commercial sponsorship of the candidate centers.
- o Providing special General Assembly allocations.
- o Contracting from all of VDOT's services provided at the candidate centers.

Heretofore, VDT has not entered into any of these types of ventures. However, demands on available construction and maintenance funding dictate that policy makers seriously consider one or more of the above alternatives.

Desirability

Few would dispute that welcome centers are desirable components of Virginia's interstate system. They afford a safe, convenient, pleasant opportunity for motorists to rest, relax, and obtain information about what there is to see in Virginia. Studies have shown that these centers enhance traveler safety, promote a positive public image, and can even influence visitors to extend their stay in Virginia. The question to be addressed here, however, is not whether welcome centers in and of themselves are desirable or whether those currently in operation on the interstate system are desirable but, rather, to what degree the establishment of additional centers would prove desirable.

To establish the desirability of providing additional welcome centers in the Commonwealth, the task force first determined the number of tourists traveling on the arterial roadways adjacent to the eleven proposed welcome center sites. To obtain this number, an out-of-state vehicle travel survey was conducted at each site. The survey was conducted on one weekday during August between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. Survey data revealed the percentage of out-of-state vehicles that contained tourists (the VDT

definition of tourist is one who commutes in excess of 50 miles within the Commonwealth). The out-of-state vehicle volume counts and tourist vehicle mix at these sites are shown in Table 6.

The daily volume of out-of-state passenger cars at the proposed welcome center locations varies widely, from a low of 310 at site 7 on Afton Mountain to a high of 6,500 at site 10 (Route 168 in the city of Chesapeake at the North Carolina border). The tourist survey revealed that the actual number of vehicles containing tourists ranged from a low of 162 per day at site 4 near the Kentucky border to a high of 2,318 per day at site 8 on Route 301 at the Maryland/Virginia border.

The information presented in Table 6, together with base data produced by a 1987 study conducted by The College of William and Mary, provides a basis for establishing the financial benefits that could accrue to the Commonwealth as a result of increased tourism in Virginia brought about by welcome center visitation. The College of William and Mary study revealed the following:

1. Vehicles stopping at existing welcome centers contain an average of 2.7 persons.
2. Eleven percent of visitors stopping at welcome centers extend their stay an average of 1.5 nights as a result of their visit to the welcome center.
3. Visitors stopping at welcome centers spend an average of \$48.03 per night per person.
4. The 1987 visitation to Virginia's ten interstate welcome centers was 900,727 travel parties. Based on mainline traffic at these ten sites, these travel parties represented 6.4% of the traffic.

The study further reported that these items "imply a total economic contribution to the state of \$19,487,300 and direct tax revenues of \$974,400. This, of course, does not include the multiplier effects that are induced by an external stimulus to the Commonwealth's economy of \$19.5 million."

Based on the information in the William and Mary study and the traffic projections and volumes generated for the eleven proposed sites, the financial impact that could result from tourist visitation at these eleven centers can be projected. If the new welcome center sites were built today, projected visitation would be approximately 422,372 travel parties. This translates to a total annual economic contribution to the Commonwealth of \$8,994,797 and direct tax

TABLE 6

Traffic Characteristics
and Tourist Vehicle Mix
at Proposed Welcome Center Sites

Site No.	Route No.	1987 ADT Total Veh.	1987 ADT Total Cars*	1987 ADT Out-of-State Cars	% of Out-of-State Cars to Total Vehicles	2010 ADT	2010 Out-of-State Cars	% of Out-of-State Tourist Cars**	2010 Tourist Cars
1	29/265	9,730	7,200	2,100	22	13,500	2,970	38	1,129
2	220	8,995	7,100	1,400	16	16,100	2,576	60	1,546
3	23	19,895	18,950	3,050	15	35,700	5,355	17	910
4	23	5,070	4,490	540	11	11,975	1,317	30	395
5	460	14,110	13,150	1,850	13	27,000	3,510	34	1,193
6	460	8,075	6,700	2,900	36	12,400	4,464	41	1,830
7	250	6,825	6,510	310	5	7,900	395	92	363
8	301	11,350	9,500	3,050	27	25,830	6,974	76	5,300
9	522	4,405	3,860	1,750	40	5,800	2,320	66	1,531
10	168	13,770	10,800	6,500	47	27,300	12,831	22	2,823
11	17	5,560	4,550	3,000	54	12,000	6,480	21	1,361

* - includes passenger cars, RVs and campers

** - % based on one-day travel survey conducted in August 1988; year-round % would vary.

Source: VDOT

revenues of \$449,739. In the year 2010, visitation is projected to be 762,480 travel parties, yielding an annual economic contribution to the Commonwealth of \$16,315,052 and direct tax revenues of at least \$815,752.

In order to provide the reader with additional information as to how the aforementioned economic contributions vary by site, Table 7 was constructed. This table allows the reader to compare the potential economic contribution of each site. These comparisons should prove quite useful in the event that a plan to construct additional welcome centers is advanced by the General Assembly.

If one were to rank the candidate sites based upon their projected contribution to the Commonwealth in the form of tax revenues, the greatest revenue would be realized from site 3 (Route 23, Tennessee/Virginia Border), followed closely by sites 5 (Route 460, West Virginia/Virginia Border) and 10 (Route 168, North Carolina/Virginia Border). Sites that would likely generate the lowest long-range tax revenues would be those at Route 522, West Virginia Border (site 9) and at Afton Mountain (site 7). However, it should be remembered that these are estimates that would require further validation.

ACTIVITIES IN BORDER STATES

The study team examined the extent to which activities similar to those proposed in SJR38 were either planned or underway in the states that border Virginia. It was learned that in Maryland, non-interstate welcome centers have been opened at three locations, and three more are in the planning stages at the following locations: (1) Route 301 at the Virginia border, (2) Interstate 83 in Baltimore, and (3) Route 301 near Annapolis. All existing centers are full-service informational centers staffed with personnel from the state's Department of Economic Development with some support from local jurisdictional entities. In North Carolina, four non-interstate welcome centers are planned on the Virginia border at the following locations: (1) Route 17, (2) Route 29, (3) Route 220, and (4) Route 258. Other sites in North Carolina are also planned. At this writing, the task force was unaware of any similar activities in West Virginia, Kentucky, or Tennessee.

TABLE 7

Projected Annual Visitation and Economic Contribution
Generated By Proposed Welcome Centers

Site No.	Location	Travel Parties		Economic Contribution		Tax Revenues	
		1987	2010	1987	2010	1987	2010
1	NC/VA Border (near Danville)	37,955	52,660	\$ 812,126	\$ 1,126,785	\$ 40,606	\$ 56,339
2	NC/VA Border	35,081	62,790	750,630	1,343,540	37,531	67,177
3	TN/VA Border	77,591	139,230	1,660,232	2,979,155	83,011	148,958
4	KY/VA Border	19,773	46,703	423,090	999,310	21,154	49,965
5	WVA/VA Border (near Bluefield)	55,029	105,300	1,177,475	2,253,142	58,874	112,657
6	WVA/VA Border (near Pearisburg)	31,493	48,360	673,857	1,034,777	33,693	51,739
7	Afton Mtn./ Skyline Dr.	26,618	30,810	569,554	659,253	28,477	32,963
8	MD/VA Border	44,265	100,737	947,154	2,155,506	47,358	107,775
9	WVA/VA Border	17,180	22,620	367,596	484,009	18,380	24,200
10	NC/VA Border	53,703	106,470	1,149,103	2,278,178	57,456	113,909
11	NC/VA Border	<u>21,684</u>	<u>46,800</u>	<u>463,980</u>	<u>1,001,397</u>	<u>23,199</u>	<u>50,070</u>
	TOTAL	422,372	762,480	\$8,994,797	\$16,315,052	\$449,739	\$815,752

$(X \text{ TP/yr}) = \frac{A \text{ ADT} (I \text{ TP/yr})}{I \text{ ADT}}$ where: $I \text{ ADT}$ = interstate average daily traffic
 $I \text{ TP/yr}$ = interstate travel parties/yr (900,727)
 $A \text{ ADT}$ = proposed welcome center site average daily traffic
 $X \text{ TP/yr}$ = X travel parties/yr.

Source: The Virginia Highway Welcome Center Visitor
 College of William and Mary
 School of Business Administration

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A
SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 38

APPENDIX A

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 38

Requesting the Department of Transportation and the Department of Tourism to consider establishing certain Welcome Centers.

Agreed to by the Senate, March 4, 1988

Agreed to by the House of Delegates, March 2, 1988

WHEREAS, Welcome Centers are beneficial to the Commonwealth in that they often persuade visitors to stop and spend time and money in Virginia; and

WHEREAS, hitherto Welcome Centers have been established only on interstate highways; and

WHEREAS, thousands of visitors to Virginia every year enter and leave the Commonwealth on noninterstate highways, many of which are multi-lane arterial highways and heavily travelled parkways and drives; and

WHEREAS, logic would suggest that the benefits derived from placement of Welcome Centers along interstate highways would flow from their construction along other major thoroughfares as well; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the Senate, the House of Delegates concurring, That the Department of Transportation and the Department of Tourism are requested to consider the feasibility, desirability, and financial impact of establishing, partially supporting, or otherwise providing for Welcome Centers at points where multi-lane arterial highways extend from the borders of and into the Commonwealth and at the junction of the Blue Ridge Parkway, the Skyline Drive and Interstate Route 64.

APPENDIX B
CRITERIA FOR VDT SUPPORT OF
LOCAL/REGIONAL TOURIST INFORMATION CENTERS



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

Department of Economic Development

DIVISION OF TOURISM

202 North Ninth Street, Suite 500

Richmond, Virginia 23219

(804) 786-2051

CRITERIA FOR VDT SUPPORT OF LOCAL/REGIONAL TOURIST INFORMATION CENTERS

This criteria provides for the recognition and support of the Virginia Division of Tourism to local/regional facilities which provide easily accessible travel information and rest room facilities to travelers in Virginia.

A. Facility Requirements

1. Must be self-contained, free-standing structures with adequate rest rooms to meet "normal" visitor volumes.
2. Must be operated and staffed on a non-profit basis by one or a combination of the following:
 - a. One or more local governmental units
 - b. Chamber of Commerce
 - c. Designated non-profit local/regional tourism promotion organization
3. Must be open and staffed at least eight hours a day, seven days a week, closing only on major holidays.
4. Must maintain, display and provide to the visitor a representative variety of brochures on attractions, localities, events and accommodations on the entire state. A minimum of 50 different brochures must be displayed, including at least one brochure of each locality/region which has a "state designated" local/regional information facility.
5. Must be located in a convenient and accessible location for the ease of the traveler. Trail-blazing signs must lead to the facility, and the facility must have a clearly visible exterior sign identifying it.

6. Adequate staff is required to handle anticipated visitor traffic. This staff must participate in periodic training provided by the State on travel counseling services.
7. Adequate and designated parking areas must be provided directly adjacent to the facility.
8. Must have men's and women's rest rooms, which must be kept clean and well supplied at all times.

B. Virginia Division of Tourism Services

1. Contacts with appropriate organizations and persons instrumental in developing local/regional tourist information facilities now in operation.
2. Administrative information for construction and operation, including square feet of required storage space, size of brochure racks, visual displays, administration of personnel records, monthly reports, and visitor tabulation procedures.
3. Sample tourism brochures on attractions/cities/events, and guidance on developing a brochure ordering system for the continued supply of this material.
4. Staff training program. This program will include orientation to new staff and periodic training on travel counseling services for all staff.
5. Recommendations for various orientation tours for the travel counseling staff.
6. Virginia Division of Tourism Welcome Center Operations Manual reference copy.
7. List of contacts/addresses for statewide tourism brochures, including state highway maps.
8. The Virginia Division of Tourism will provide the following state publications, in limited bulk quantities each calendar year for display/distribution:

<u>Publication</u>	<u>Quantity</u>
Civil War Battlefields	1,000
Golf	1,000
Historic Homes	1,000
Virginia (Quadlingual)	1,000
Virginia Travel Guide	2,000 (each edition)
"Virginia Is For Lovers" bumper stickers (and display stand) will also be provided on an as needed basis.	

* (Fall/Winter & Spring/Summer editions)

9. In cases where the information facility is located in close and convenient proximity of an interstate highway exit, the Virginia Division of Tourism will authorize appropriate highway signage for the exit to the Virginia Department of Transportation.

All facilities will be periodically visited and inspected by state personnel. If the criteria are not being met, the interstate signing and/or state information facility designation will be revoked.

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APPENDIX C
WELCOME CENTER STUDY
TRAVEL SURVEY

APPENDIX C

WELCOME CENTER STUDY TRAVEL SURVEY

ROUTE:
 LOCATION:
 DATE:
 TIME:

TOTAL OUT-OF-STATE VEHICLES:
 TOUR BUSES:
 TOTAL:
 TOTAL VEHICLES INTERVIEWED:

VEHICLES COMMUTING OR
 TRIP LESS THAN 50 MILES: PERCENTAGE:

TOURIST VEHICLES INTERVIEWED:

PURPOSE OF TRIP: BUSINESS: PLEASURE:
 COMBINED: OTHER:

TOTAL NIGHTS AWAY FROM HOME: NONE: 1 TO 3: 4 TO 6:
 7+:

NIGHTS IN VA: NONE: 1 TO 3: 4 TO 6:
 (ONLY IF TOTAL 7+
 MORE THAN 0)

TYPE LODGING IN VA: HOTEL/MOTEL: CAMPGRND: COTTAGE/CABIN:

FRIEND/FAMILY: OTHER:

FIRST VISIT VA: YES: NO:

PRIMARY DESTINATION VIRGINIA: YES: NO:

PRIMARY RESIDENCE: WVA: TN:
 KY: NC:
 MD: DE:
 PA: NJ:
 NY: OH:
 D.C.: FL:
 GA: OTHER:

NUMBER IN PARTY: 1: 2: 3:
 4: 5+:

ATTACHMENT

ATTACHMENT 1
CONDEMNATION FOR WELCOME CENTERS



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

Office of the Attorney General

Mary Sue Terry
Attorney GeneralH. Lane Kneidler
Chief Deputy Attorney GeneralR. Claire Guthrie
Deputy Attorney General
Human & Natural Resources DivisionGail Starling Marshall
Deputy Attorney General
Judicial Affairs DivisionWalter A. McFarlane
Deputy Attorney General
Finance & Transportation DivisionStephen D. Rosenthal
Deputy Attorney General
Criminal Law Enforcement DivisionMEMORANDUM

TO: S. A. Waymack
State Right of Way Engineer

FROM: James F. Hayes *JF Hayes*
Assistant Attorney General

DATE: September 8, 1988

RE: Condemnation for Welcome Centers

RIGHT OF WAY DIVISION RECEIVED SEP 12 1988			
SAW	ADV	NEGO	PTMT
WHS	UTIL	REMO	FILE
	APPR	RELOC	

Pursuant to a Virginia Department of Transportation study being conducted for Senate Joint Resolution Number 38 and House Joint Resolution Number 39, I understand you are interested in the legality of VDOT using its eminent domain power to acquire land for Welcome Centers.

I believe this issue is controlled by § 33.1-89 of the Code of Virginia. The critical language is "the State Highway and Transportation Commissioner is hereby vested with the power to acquire by...power of eminent domain such lands...deemed to be necessary for the construction, reconstruction, alteration, maintenance and repair of the public highways of the State...and all of the purposes incidental thereto...as by the Commissioner may be deemed requisite and suitable...." The question that arises is whether the Welcome Centers are "incidental" to public highways. To the extent these Welcome Centers are used for transportation information and rest area functions, I believe they will be considered incidental to public highways. To the extent that Welcome Centers are used for commercial purposes or economic development within the state, I believe the centers will be subject to challenge as not incidental to public highways. This issue was raised in the City of Richmond case involving a welcome center and the City's condemnation authority. Judge Duling determined that the condemnation was beyond the authority of the city primarily for two reasons. First, public purpose could not be fully determined because the City had not decided

what specifically the condemned land was to be used for. Secondly, one of the purposes for which the City had decided upon was to sell gasoline. Inasmuch as this was a commercial enterprise and not necessary for the public good, the Court decided the City had exceeded its eminent domain powers. That decision is currently on appeal and the decision will probably be of interest on this issue.

If VDOT or the Board decides to condemn land for Welcome Centers, the transportation purpose for the land should be clearly set out in the decision document. In addition, the eminent domain authority issue could be clearly resolved by a legislative enactment specifically authorizing VDOT to establish Welcome Centers as an incident to public highways. Such a determination by the legislature would resolve the difficulty of interpretation of § 33.1-89.

If I can be of further assistance on this issue, please let me know.

526/157

