

Getting Roads Built

FAQs

How can I get a road built or improved in my area? The first step is to show a need for the road and then get the project included in VDOT's six-year-improvement program. That program, which is updated yearly, shows the tentative plans for construction and improvement of major roads statewide. Public hearings are held every spring around the state, and citizens are encouraged to attend and express their views on which projects to include in the program. For secondary roads, VDOT works with the local boards of supervisors to set priorities.

Individuals interested in a particular road improvement should solicit the support of their local government officials and board of supervisors. The more support a project has, the more likely it is to be included in the plans, provided it meets other criteria related to needs. Sometimes, funds are included only for initial engineering work, but not construction. Even after it reaches this point, the project might be delayed for numerous reasons including changes in local government priorities and needs, funding availability, escalating land costs and environmental concerns.

How does VDOT decide what type of road is going to be built and where to build it? Location is determined by a number of factors, including geography, environment, physical features of the area, the cost of acquiring land, relocating utilities, safety, preferences of area residents and the safety standards for different types of roads. Traffic volumes and desired speeds determine or require specified widths, sight distances, grades and other requirements to enhance safety. Designers wrestle with questions such as whether to take a house or put in a curve that might raise the road's cost and make it less safe. Often, it is a process of elimination: some proposed paths are too expensive, harm the environment too much or cross through protected historic sites.

How long does it take to build a road, and why does it take so long? It can take years to build a road because of the enormous amount of work that is involved. It usually takes at least two or three years, and sometimes 10 or more. Before construction begins, years of homework must be done. The environmental, social and economic impact of a road must be studied. Permits must be secured; homes, businesses and utilities in the path of the road must be relocated. Often, it's a matter of waiting for funds to be available. During construction, there are thousands of details that require attention, and unexpected circumstances can cause delays. The weather is a major factor. A day of rain can cause a three-day delay while the ground dries out. It can take nearly a month for concrete to harden to its maximum strength. Sometimes materials are not delivered on schedule; other times workers may find underground streams that must be protected or rock hidden below the surface that must be moved.

What if I have more questions? Contact your district office if you have more questions about getting a road built or improved.
