Engineers determine top infrastructure concerns

Virginia's top infrastructure concerns are roads and bridges, water infrastructure, and transit, according to the “2001 Report Card for America's Infrastructure” issued earlier this year by the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE). The concerns were determined via a survey of the commonwealth’s civil engineers.

In looking at Virginia’s key infrastructure facts, the report card says that roadway conditions are a factor in an estimated 30 percent of traffic fatalities, 32 percent of the major roads are in poor and mediocre condition, 29 percent of the bridges are structurally deficient or functionally obsolete, and 25 percent of the urban freeways are congested. Virginia motorists pay $1.3 billion—or $275 per motorist—in extra vehicle repairs and operating costs as a result of driving on roads needing repairs.

The ASCE estimates that “Virginia will need to invest $4.3 billion over the next 20 years to repair and replace aging sewage treatment facilities and upgrade water pollution control programs. The largest single investment—$556 million—is needed to prevent the release of raw sewage from broken pipes.” The organization also says that the commonwealth “needs to invest $2.9 billion over the next 20 years to repair or replace aging drinking-water systems.”

To view the report card, visit http://www.asce.org/reportcard.

Three-fourths of Virginians live in one-third of state

Seventy-eight percent of Virginia's citizens live in metropolitan areas that comprise 37 percent of the commonwealth's land, with 31 percent in Northern Virginia, 22 percent in Norfolk, 14 percent in Richmond, and 11 percent in other metropolitan statistical areas, according to an article about the 2000 census in Virginia Town & City.

The census also shows that even though Virginia gained more citizens, its rate of growth declined from about 16 percent in the decade of the 1980s to about 14 percent in the past decade. In addition, the census found Virginia to be the 12th largest state and the 16th fastest growing in the country.

E-books spread word about substance abuse

The federal Center for Substance Abuse Prevention now provides electronic books on its website, http://www.health.org/multimedia/ebooks, making the center one of the first government organizations to use this information technology to reach its constituencies.

“The delivery of publications via e-books promises to improve the government’s ability to deliver up-to-date content to researchers, students, and the general public while lowering the cost of distributing millions of publications worldwide via mail,” center officials said.

The e-books, which include such titles as Alcoholism Tends to Run in Families, Growing Up Drug Free: A Parent's Guide to Prevention, and Moving Forward with Your Life: Leaving Alcohol and Other Drugs Behind, can be accessed on the website free of charge. The site also provides a link to download the free Microsoft® Reader software to read e-book text.

Do you have different suggestions for resolving the issues discussed in this edition of Virginia Issues & Answers? Or comments on the articles? VIA wants to hear from you.

Send your suggestions and comments by mail to Editor, Virginia Issues & Answers, 105-C Media Building (0105), Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA 24061, by e-mail to via@vt.edu, or by fax to 540/231-8032. Please include your name, address, and telephone number.
Loan ceiling increased to help businesses improve environment

Virginia’s Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) has doubled the maximum loan available from the Small Business Environmental Compliance Assistance Fund to $100,000. Businesses must use loans to meet environmental requirements or improve their environmental performance.

According to DEQ, the fund is available to all Virginia businesses to finance the purchase of equipment to comply with the federal Clean Air Act or to implement voluntary pollution prevention measures. It can also be used to finance the purchase of equipment or structures to implement agricultural best management practices.

The interest rate on a loan from the fund is 3 percent, with repayment terms based on the borrower’s ability to repay.

Information on securing a loan from the fund is available by contacting Richard Rasmussen at rgrasmuse@deq.state.va.us or 804/698-4394.

Students not familiar with campus crime legislation

The reporting requirements of the Campus Crime Awareness Act may not have the desired effect on college student behavior, according to a report issued by the Educational Policy Institute (EPI) of Virginia Tech. The purpose of the federal legislation is to allow prospective students and parents access to information about campus safety, which they can factor into college choice decisions, and to make students, employees, and campus visitors aware of potential risks so they can make choices about their personal behavior.

In the study report, The Impact of the Campus Crime Awareness Act on Student Behavior, author Steven M. Janosik surveyed 1,465 students at three institutions of higher education about their knowledge of the act’s existence, changes in behavior as a result of attending crime prevention programs, knowledge of information mandated in their respective institution’s annual report, and how safe they felt on campus and in adjacent areas. A total of 795, or 55.8 percent, of the surveys were completed and returned.

Janosik found large numbers of respondents unaware of the act and the formal reports it requires of institutions. Consequently, “very few of the respondents . . . reported that they received, requested, or read the crime reports required by the act.” Fewer than 4 percent used crime statistics in college choice decisions. However, 52 percent had reported reading flyers, posters, and newspaper articles related to campus crime and prevention, which had led to changes in the way they protected themselves and their property.

For a copy of the report, contact Janosik at sjanosik@vt.edu. Information about other publications issued by EPI is available on the institute’s website at http://filebox.vt.edu/chre/elps/EPI.

Virginia senators support bill to aid wastewater plants

In an effort to improve the water quality of the Chesapeake Bay, Virginia and Maryland senators in Congress are pushing legislation to help wastewater treatment plants upgrade nutrient control technology.

According to the Bay Journal, the legislation would provide $660 million over five years, reimbursing municipal wastewater plants in the Bay watershed “for up to 55 percent of the cost of installing technologies that can remove up to 85 percent of the nitrogen from effluent.” If passed, the legislation would cover the federal share of an estimated $1.2 billion to upgrade the watershed’s 287 major wastewater plants to the best treatment available.

Nutrients in the bay—a estimated 300 million pounds enter it annually—spur algae blooms, which cloud the water and inhibit sunlight from reaching the underwater grass beds that provide food for waterfowl and shelter for fish and crabs.

Virginia divided for academic reporting

The U. S. Department of Education has split Northern Virginia from the rest of the commonwealth and added it to the Northeast region of the country for statistical reporting of public school test scores. The remainder of Virginia falls within the Southeast region.

According to the Washington Post, the department’s National Center for Education Statistics made the change because statisticians found it difficult to separate Northern Virginia from the rest of the Washington metropolitan area.