

**TRANSPORTATION SPOTLIGHT**



**VIRGINIA J. EPPERLY P.E.**

**COMPANY:**  
Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT)

**TITLE:**  
Complex Structures Engineer

**TRAINING ORGANIZATION OR COLLEGE/UNIVERSITY:**  
University of Virginia

**CERTIFICATION/DEGREE:**  
B.S. in Civil Engineering, (Structural)

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**Q: How did you select your certification program or college major?**

**A:** I have always been fascinated by bridges; on every family cross-country road trip, I was pressed to the glass, mesmerized by the bridges and tunnels. How they had been constructed, especially those older bridges which were constructed without some of our more modern conveniences. Then, the summer that I graduated from high school, I thought that I would be selecting electrical engineering as a major (this would have been my father's influence here). However, I took a summer job at the local VDOT Structure and Bridge District Office. The work I did was very low-level, but I loved every minute of it. Everything clicked for me and I knew this was the path I needed to pursue.

**Q: What was the biggest influence in your selection of career pathway?**

**A:** My father was a mathematician and worked in the engineering field for many years. I remember him teaching me various trigonometry, physics, and mathematical principles when I was as young as four. His observation had been that young women tend to be "scared" of math, and he didn't want that for his daughter.

**Q: What attracted you to the transportation industry?**

**A:** Once I had decided on structural engineering, my love of bridges brought me to transportation; I love the timeline of designing and constructing bridges. The process of designing a bridge out and then seeing it constructed is immensely gratifying to me. This process can take a year or two for smaller projects; when I was younger, I loved that my project list was growing so rapidly.

**Q: What is your favorite aspect of your job?**

**A:** I have a small voice in influencing policies, procedures, and practices in our industry. I love being involved in some of the research that goes into the implementation of new or revised policies and procedures.

**Q: How do you/your company make a positive impact on society/our community?**

**A:** "VDOT keeps Virginia moving." A healthy, safe transportation system is vital for the community and the economy; the citizens can get to work, school, and other critical destinations safely and on time. Business can thrive and more may choose to locate in the vicinity. I also help to safeguard the Commonwealth's resources through the selection of site locations that avoid natural and historic resources, bridges designs that are both safe and economical, and keep life cycle costs in mind when discussing overall project costs.

**Q: What's the most interesting thing you have been able to do in your professional career?**

**A:** I was involved with founding a local chapter of WTS (Women's Transportation Seminar), serving several offices, including President, and currently serving on the WTS International and WTS Central Virginia Advisory Boards. Through this organization, I was able to be involved in mentoring young women to be involved in STEM programs, WTS Central Virginia Scholarship program was created, and I have met women from every state and working in every aspect of transportation (highway, rail, air, port, aeronautic, etc). I even got to witness a re-supply launch for the Space Station from NASA Wallops Island.

**Q: What makes you get up each morning excited about your profession?**

**A:** In my position right now, every day is different. I can plan my calendar, but part of my job is helping other engineers solve problems with complex bridges, and sometimes complex problems with ordinary bridges, procurement issues, and issues that arise during construction.



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**Southeast Transportation Workforce Center**

**Q: If you could go back to high school and select any elective course to take that would have better prepared you for college, what would it be?**

**A:** I was never comfortable with Public Speaking until very recently, when I started performing IMPROV – yes, improvisational comedy has made me a better public speaker. If I could go back in time, I would have taken opportunities to try-out for plays, taken public speaking, or Improv. My time performing improv has had more positive influences with my professional life than I ever could have imagined.

**Q: What advice would you share with students or anyone considering your profession?**

**A:** Talk to professionals in various careers. Explore—even things you think you won't like and seek out professions of which you have not heard. Get involved with mentoring organizations. Also, don't put limits on yourself. If you are interested in a field of study, don't throw roadblocks in your own way (other people will do that for you). If your dream is to be an astronaut, find a way to be an astronaut.

***"If we did all the things we are capable of, we would literally astound ourselves."***

**- THOMAS A. EDISON**

***"The only way to discover the limits of the possible is to go beyond them into the impossible."***

**- ARTHUR C. CLARKE**

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