



MEDIA RELEASE

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U.S. CENSUS CONFIRMS TRANSIT USE IS UP IN NORTHERN VIRGINIA

Northern Virginia leads the region in public transportation ridership

Arlington, VA -- The Northern Virginia Transportation Commission (NVTC) reported today that the 2000 U.S. Census confirms transit use for trips to work is actually growing in Northern Virginia. Compared to the 1990 census, the number of persons using transit is up 5.5 percent.

NVTC's Chairman Chris Zimmerman of the Arlington County Board stated, "The census provides yet another illustration of what we experience every day in our congested region. Transit works. Our regional rail systems are bursting at the seams with riders. For example, our Virginia Railway Express just broke through the 13,000 daily rider mark, showing one of the fastest growth rates in the country. Metro's ridership is also at an all time high. Metrorail ridership in May 2002 alone recorded nearly 16 million trips."

NVTC, which compiles ridership totals for Northern Virginia transit systems, reported **220,000 boardings on those systems in 1990 and 275,000 for 2000 and increase of almost 25 percent.** Mr. Zimmerman went on to say, "The increase in transit ridership in Northern Virginia reflects the wisdom of earlier investment decisions. The census shows transit ridership is up in Northern Virginia despite obstacles that have limited transit ridership growth elsewhere, including dispersed jobs, lower density land use and financial constraints."

The 2000 census shows transit's share of trips to work is substantial and growing in Northern Virginia. The highest market penetration is in areas with the greatest transit coverage and most transit supportive land use, such as a 23 percent share of work trips in Arlington and 16 percent in both Alexandria and Falls Church. But even in the newly developing areas, which face the most challenges to providing transit, the growth of transit is impressive. From 1990 to 2000, Loudoun County witnessed a 92 percent increase, and Prince William County realized a whopping 131 percent increase.

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William D. Bogard of Loudoun County's Board of Supervisors and an NVTC Board member agrees, " The growth we have experienced over the last ten years has been nothing less than phenomenal. The growth translates directly into potential users of transit -- if we make it available and convenient." Mr. Bogard went on to say, "Our recent transportation study confirms the statistics and recommends the creation of new routes which will move commuters from their homes to their workplace. Our next challenge will be to find adequate funding for this important project. "

Mr. Bogard is upbeat about the census statistics. "If you look at the actual numbers, I'm very encouraged by the statistics for Loudoun County. Our transit system is in its infancy, but it's growing in popularity and is providing a vital service for our residents." Chairman Chris Zimmerman agrees with Mr. Bogard's assessment, "The growth figures in outlying areas of Northern Virginia are strong indicators of the benefits of extending transit investments to reach the new job centers. As we have seen time after time, if you build transit, riders will come. Imagine what our highways and streets would look like with almost 90,000 additional automobiles (representing the 2000 census Northern Virginia transit riders) driving during each morning and evening rush hour. Each freeway lane can accommodate only about 1,500 automobiles each hour. You do the math."

At its monthly business meeting held on June 6th, members of the commission discussed several aspects of the recently released census information and the subsequent series of newspaper articles interpreting those numbers. Commissioners relayed their concern that the articles paint a misleading picture of the actual census results, especially for Northern Virginia. (Transit investment decisions are made by each region individually, and transit systems within Northern Virginia are designed to provide an integrated network; so it would be appropriate to report ridership trends separately for Northern Virginia).

Reviewing the census information, the commission noted several other factors to bear in mind regarding the census statistics, as well as reasons for optimism:

- **Use of transit has increased steadily in the past five years – in all modes and in all jurisdictions.**
- **Use of Metrochek by transit riders is growing rapidly;** and its increase to \$100 monthly in tax free benefits did not occur until ***after*** the 2000 census. This can further explain transit's growing popularity.
- **There was a restructuring of bus fare and transfer policies in 1998.** A regional mobility panel developed an agreement to reform transfer policies for bus and rail systems region-wide.
- **The SmarTrip card just reached a milestone – there are now 250,000 active card SmarTrip card accounts.** The SmarTrip system is currently expanding into the Northern Virginia bus systems. In the near future, residents will be able to go from Fredericksburg, VA to Baltimore, MD using a variety of transportation options and only one form of fare media – the SmarTrip card.

- In many of those jurisdictions with the lowest growth in transit use for trips to work, travel time increased significantly, which provides an incentive to use transit more often in the future.

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NVTC is a regional agency with the mission of managing traffic congestion, restoring clean air, boosting the economy and improving the quality of life for all of Northern Virginia's citizens through effective public transit and ridesharing networks. Its board of directors consists of 19 local and state-elected officials from its six member jurisdictions of Arlington, Fairfax and Loudoun counties and the cities of Alexandria, Fairfax and Falls Church.

NVTC is the leading source of information about public transportation issues in Northern Virginia. For more information contact the commission at 703/ 524-3322 or visit our website at www.thinkoutsidethecar.org.

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