



NVTC NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

November 1, 2005

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:

Kala Quintana (703) 524-3322 x104

Transit Ridership Soars to Over 128 Million Annual Passenger Trips in Northern Virginia for FY2005

Seven local transit systems responsible for over 20 million of those trips. All transit systems need a stronger funding commitment from state and federal partners.

Arlington, VA – Transit is becoming a victim of its own success. The Northern Virginia Transportation Commission (NVTC) has compiled a comprehensive listing of average weekday and annual public transportation trips for FY 2005 in Northern Virginia. And the numbers look good, REALLY good.

In FY2005, passenger trips on eight public transit systems in Northern Virginia increased by nearly 3.3 million trips compared to FY2004, or an increase of approximately 2.5 percent. Since FY 2005 concluded on June 30, 2005 this does not include the extra transit trips resulting from recent spikes in gas prices.

Throughout FY2005, Metrorail broke one record after another carrying an ever increasing load of passengers. The Virginia Railway Express (VRE), which has more than doubled its ridership since FY 1998, is virtually at capacity carrying nearly 16,000 passengers daily.

Local transit systems carrying more riders than ever

Traffic gridlock and high motor fuel prices are forcing area residents to reassess their transportation choices. As a result, all Northern Virginia transit systems continue to show solid gains.

LC Transit (Loudoun County) leads the region in gains with an increase in passenger trips of 31 percent. Due in part to the tremendous growth in Loudoun County and the high cost of fuel, Loudoun County residents are flocking to the system which is functioning at near capacity. Many routes are over crowded and passengers sometimes stand for the entire length of the 45 minute ride into Rosslyn, VA. LC Transit alone exceeded 500,000 passenger trips in FY 2005.

Fairfax Connector (Fairfax County) increased ridership by nearly 500,000 passenger trips -- a six percent increase. The Connector celebrated its 20th birthday in late September, 2005 having grown from 10 routes and 33 buses to 57 routes and 107 buses and 8.5 million passenger trips.

Arlington County's ART bus system saw an increase of nearly 116,000 passenger trips -- a 17 percent increase.

For FY2005, the transit systems serving Northern Virginia carried nearly 129 million passengers. Most of these trips occur in the most heavily congested commuting corridors during peak commuting hours, which is why transit makes such significant contributions to air quality, energy conservation and traffic relief while creating economic value around key station locations.

On a typical weekday in FY2005, transit systems were responsible for over 438,000 passenger trips in Northern Virginia -- up 2.5 percent from nearly 429,000 in FY 2004.

Nationwide, the **American Public Transportation Association** reports that transit ridership was up around the country in FY 2005, growing by 1.3% -- but overall the growth in ridership does not match the gains realized in Northern Virginia.

Northern Virginians are willing to pay for transportation improvements

The **Northern Virginia Transportation Authority (NVTA)** sponsored a survey of 1,263 area residents earlier this year. Survey results indicated that nearly two-thirds of Northern Virginians are frustrated with their commutes -- with nine out of ten citing "traffic" as the reason.

Eighty-five percent of survey respondents indicated that are willing to pay for transportation improvements. This included the expansion of public transportation to reduce crowding on Metro and VRE. When asked how to pay for such improvements respondents preferred an increase in the sales tax.

Dedicated funding for transit still an issue

Despite the increasing popularity of transit and the benefits to citizens in Northern Virginia, the Northern Virginia Transportation Commission and its jurisdictions must struggle to obtain sufficient funding from its state and federal partners.

State and federal governments are counting on transit to reduce toxic emissions (such as Nitrous Oxide (NOx) which affects air quality) by getting more cars off the road and more passengers onto transit. However, they are not providing enough funding to keep up with demand and compete successfully against single-occupant automobiles.

This is a critical time for Northern Virginia's transit systems. The commonwealth has failed to meet its statutory objectives to help fund transit -- falling \$98 million short in payments to NVTC in FY2005 alone. The General Assembly has convened House and Senate committees to study the transportation funding issue carefully and should consider various tax restructuring and budget proposals.

At the federal level, WMATA has alerted Congress that it needs federal funds to rebuild existing facilities and acquire more railcars and buses. Rep. Tom Davis has introduced a bill (H.R. 3496) that would provide \$1.5 billion in federal funding over 10 years --- provided that Northern Virginia, Maryland and DC can come up with the necessary dedicated funding match.

For more information about how to contact the General Assembly and Congress to urge more funding for public transit, to review NVTC's transit ridership report in more detail, or for a link to the NVTA Survey results, go to www.thinkoutsidethecar.org.

For more information on the data used for this press release go to: <http://www.thinkoutsidethecar.org/transit.asp> and click on the link titled "Coordination of Local Transit Systems in Northern Virginia's Public Transit Network."

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.

NVTC