

MINUTES
NVTC COMMISSION MEETING – MAY 4, 2006
NVTC CONFERENCE ROOM – ARLINGTON, VIRGINIA

The meeting of the Northern Virginia Transportation Commission was called to order by Chairman Connolly at 8:08 P.M.

Members Present

David Albo
Sharon Bulova
Gerald Connolly
Adam Ebbin
William D. Euille
Paul Ferguson
Jay Fisette
Tanya Husick (DRPT)
Scott Silverthorne
Paul Smedberg (Alternate, City of Alexandria)
David F. Snyder
Mary Margaret Whipple
Christopher Zimmerman

Members Absent

Eugene Delgaudio
Jeannemarie Devolites Davis
Ludwig Gaines
Catherine M. Hudgins
Dana Kauffman
Elaine McConnell

Staff Present

Rhonda Gilchrest
Scott Kalkwarf
Jana Lynott
Adam McGavock
Kala Quintana
Elizabeth Rodgers
Mark Roeber (VRE)
Jennifer Straub (VRE)
Richard K. Taube

Minutes of NVTC Meeting of April 6, 2006

On a motion by Mr. Ferguson and a second by Mrs. Bulova, the commission unanimously approved the minutes. The vote in favor was cast by commissioners Bulova, Connolly, Ebbin, Ferguson, Husick, Silverthorne, Smedberg and Zimmerman.

Presentation by WMATA's General Manager

Chairman Connolly introduced WMATA's Interim General Manager Dan Tangherlini, who was invited to present his vision for the success of Metro. Mr. Tangherlini observed that NVTC, as a regional leader, has supported Metro through good and bad times. Metro riders are more and more recognizing the value of Metro and the service it provides, as well as the cost competitiveness compared to commuting by automobile. A WMATA Board Committee has approved a replacement program to purchase a certain number of buses each year so that the fleet never gets too old. Metro also needs a consistent program for railcars.

Delegate Albo arrived at 8:12 P.M.

Mr. Tangherlini stated that the Dulles Metrorail project is exciting because it will fulfill the promise to Northern Virginia that Metro made 30 years ago for equal levels of service between Maryland, the District of Columbia and Virginia.

Mr. Fisette arrived at 8:15 P.M.

Mr. Tangherlini also reported that Metro is working to improve its customer experience, which includes looking at putting retail outlets in the stations. Metro has received positive feedback on the tunnel advertisements, which have generated substantial revenues. Mr. Zimmerman explained that the retail project will be a pilot project within selected stations in West Falls Church, Rosslyn, King Street and Vienna in Virginia.

Delegate Ebbin asked if WMATA has made any reforms or improvements as a result of the negative publicity it received from a series of Washington Post articles. Mr. Tangherlini responded that the WMATA Board's response was broad. Although Metro is still working on the issue of openness of the agency, it is moving away from a defensive posture. One of the biggest initiatives the WMATA Board has implemented to make it clear that it is open to scrutiny at every level, is to create an Inspector General. Also, there is a lot of work being done on railcar precision stopping, the 5000 series railcars, and other improvements. Mr. Zimmerman stated that although the 5000 series railcars had well publicized problems initially, they are now Metro's most reliable railcars. Mr. Tangherlini stated that these railcars are on average running 70,000 miles between failures. Mr. Tangherlini stated that even though Metro was portrayed badly by the press, in actuality Metro ridership is at all time highs. In fact,

recently Metro set three of the top ten highest ridership days during one week in April, 2006.

Mr. Euille arrived at 8:24 P.M.

In response to a question from Mr. Fiset, Mr. Tangherlini stated that WMATA has one of the best joint development processes in the nation. Currently, of the 86 Metro stations, more than half still have development potential around them. Mr. Fiset stated jurisdictions should be looking at development around the Metro stations, including issues such as minimum density thresholds. Mr. Euille stated that the WMATA Board discussed this issue about Metro being a collaborative partner with the jurisdictions concerning their economic development plans. If projects are planned properly, they will meet and address transportation needs. Chairman Connolly stated that it would be useful for WMATA to keep a compendium of what development is allowed at stations and potential land available around the rail stations for regional planners to use in their planning processes.

Senator Whipple arrived at 8:31 P.M.

In response to a question from Mr. Smedberg about the future of Metrobus, Mr. Tangherlini stated the way to address Metro's capacity issues is to reinvest in the bus system and expand it. Any expansion of Metrorail will take a minimum of five to ten years. In contrast, bus expansion is the quickest way to provide capacity for a constrained transit system. Mr. Zimmerman observed that bus is the least expensive way to move lots of people.

Mr. Snyder arrived at 8:40 P.M.

Chairman Connolly stated that it is important that the federal government reexamine its role in public transportation. If there is concern about the price of gasoline and its production, it is important to be aggressive at looking at alternative modes of transportation in urban areas.

Mr. Snyder stated that there is an urgent need to overlay a network of light rail throughout the region. In reality, even though bus service is economical and practical, bus does not capture the public's imagination. For example, the Route 7 corridor from the Potomac River to Tysons Corner should be recognized as an urban street and should be treated as such. He challenged WMATA to do visionary thinking as it pertains to light rail throughout the region. He also noted the significant role the public transportation system has during emergencies. There is a close linkage between transportation improvements and the region's ability to respond to emergencies. He also stated that it is important that the issue of WMATA management constantly needs to be addressed to counter critics.

Chairman Connolly stated that it is his understanding that the WMATA Board has not taken a position on the issue of dedicated funding for Metro. Mr.

Zimmerman stated that the Governor of Maryland is against it. Chairman Connolly stated that it is critical for Maryland, the District of Columbia and Virginia to maintain a regional perspective. Fairfax County covers 400 square miles with 1 million residents, making it the largest jurisdiction in the region. It is essential that Fairfax County be integrated into the Metro system in a way that it is not currently. Arlington and Alexandria are very well served by Metro, but Fairfax County is not. Rail to Dulles and rail to Centreville and beyond are essential to the future of the region. Since 2004, Fairfax County has more part-time and full-time jobs than the District of Columbia and it is important that the county's many business centers be served by Metro.

VRE Items

Report from the VRE Operations Board and VRE Chief Executive Officer.

Mrs. Bulova stated that Mr. Zehner is on vacation, but Jennifer Straub, VRE's Deputy CEO, is present to answer any questions.

VRE Fare Increase. Mrs. Bulova reported that the VRE Operations Board recommends approval of Resolution #2021, which would authorize VRE's Chief Executive Officer to increase VRE base and zone fares by six percent beginning July 3, 2006. This increase was proposed in VRE's approved budget for FY 2007 along with a local subsidy increase and public comments were requested between February 22 and March 24, 2006. More than 150 comments were received. An additional \$1.4 million is expected from the fare increase in FY 2007.

Mrs. Bulova moved, with a second by Mr. Silverthorne, to approve Resolution #2021.

In response to a question from Delegate Albo, Ms. Straub stated that increased costs of fuel, liability insurance and Amtrak services are the reasons for the fare increase. Chairman Connolly asked if the stalemate in the General Assembly would affect the VRE budget. Ms. Straub replied that it would impact the railcar purchase because \$50 million for railcars is included in the proposed budget. Chairman Connolly observed that VRE is bumping up against capacity. Ms. Straub stated that VRE reconfigured its trains to provide more seating, so currently there are no standees, but that is just a temporary solution.

The commission then voted on the motion and it passed. The vote in favor was cast by commissioners Albo, Bulova, Connolly, Ebbin, Euille, Ferguson, Fisette, Husick, Silverthorne, Smedberg, Snyder, Whipple and Zimmerman. (A copy of the resolution is attached.)

Mechanical Engineering Contract Award. Mrs. Bulova stated that the VRE Operations Board recommends approval of Resolution #2022. This resolution would authorize VRE's Chief Executive Officer to contract with STV, Inc. to provide mechanical engineering services over the next five years at a cost not to

exceed \$5 million using individual task orders. Task orders over \$30,000 must be approved by the VRE Operations Board. The current contract will reach its authorization limit by June, 2006. Funds have been budgeted to cover the new contract. The proposed consultant was selected with a competitive procurement.

On a motion by Mrs. Bulova and a second by Mr. Silverthorne, the commission unanimously approved the resolution (copy attached). The vote in favor was cast by commissioners Albo, Bulova, Connolly, Ebbin, Euille, Ferguson, Fisette, Husick, Silverthorne, Smedberg, Snyder, Whipple and Zimmerman.

Legislative Items

Mr. Taube reported that at this time the General Assembly remains deadlocked. A draft policy paper has been prepared for commission discussion that makes the case for dedicated Metro funding as a tax relief measure. A two-page flier condenses this material for widespread distribution. Also a draft press release has been prepared.

Mr. Euille stated that that it is important to educate the public on what happens to the gas tax revenues and how they are used. If they understand the process, they can apply pressure on the General Assembly.

Mr. Taube gave a PowerPoint presentation on the policy paper making the case for dedicated Metro funding. Mr. Connolly stated that it would be interesting to know how far the price of gasoline can increase before people change their commuting habits and move from automobile to transit. Senator Whipple stated that bus ridership in Danville, Virginia increased by 17 percent when gasoline prices hit \$3.00 a gallon.

Mr. Taube stated that increasing traffic congestion and accelerating gas prices are equivalent to substantial tax hikes. Those "taxes" yield no corresponding revenues to solve the problems. In sharp contrast, proposals for dedicated funding for Metro such as the proposed quarter-cent sales tax in NVTC's five Metro jurisdictions (Arlington and Fairfax counties and the cities of Alexandria, Fairfax and Falls Church) would provide over \$50 million annually to sustain and improve Metro. Dedicated funding would leverage \$150 million of new federal dollars annually for 10 years to purchase 340 new Metrorail cars, 275 new buses and provide many other improvements.

Mr. Taube stated that the Texas Transportation Institute ranks the Metropolitan Washington area third worst in congestion costs, at \$2.5 billion annually or \$577 per commuter. Investments in public transit here save \$1 billion in congestion costs annually or \$3 per Metro trip. This amounts to \$330 million annually in Northern Virginia or \$200 per capita in congestion taxes avoided. Transit offers relief from accelerating motor fuel prices and dedicated Metro funding is a sound investment.

In summary, Mr. Taube stated that congestion costs \$577 per commuter and higher priced gas costs at least \$250 more per capita, but dedicated Metro funding using a small sales tax would cost \$38 per capita in five jurisdictions. It is a wise investment of \$38 per person to save almost \$1,000 per person (congestion, gas, jobs and air quality).

In response to a question from Delegate Albo, Chairman Connolly stated that Fairfax County's transportation budget (not including bonds) is about \$60-80 million a year. Delegate Albo asked if Fairfax County did not have to pay for roads because the General Assembly came up with enough money to fund NVRTA's transportation needs, could the property tax be reduced accordingly? Chairman Connolly responded yes and stated that anything the commonwealth does to help alleviate the burden is a direct benefit to property owners.

Mr. Smedberg expressed concern that the title of the press release "Get on Board Transit for Virginia Tax Relief" could be confusing. Delegate Ebbin stated that people associate tax relief with lower taxes. Senator Whipple suggested putting the words "tax relief" in quotes. Delegate Ebbin suggested the following title: "There's More Than One Kind of Tax Relief." Chairman Connolly suggested following it with "Get On Board Transit." Commissioners agreed that this would be an intriguing title.

In response to a question from Chairman Connolly, Mr. Taube explained that it is proposed that the material be mailed to General Assembly members and the Governor. The flier also could be distributed to the public and there is a proposed press release.

Mr. Euille moved, with a second by Ms. Bulova, to authorize the policy paper and the press release to be distributed to members of the General Assembly and the media. The vote in favor was cast by commissioners Albo, Bulova, Connolly, Ebbin, Euille, Ferguson, Fiset, Husick, Silverthorne, Smedberg, Snyder, Whipple and Zimmerman.

Delegate Albo suggested that he personally send the information to the Republican House caucus members. There were no objections.

Mr. Euille stated that constituents do not understand that there are no more road maintenance funds available. It's a quality of life issue. Ms. Bulova stated that her office receives many comments and questions about road maintenance. Many people believe that it is the county that pays for maintenance, but in actuality it is the state's responsibility.

Mr. Ferguson stated that going to Metro stations or parking lots outside Metro jurisdictions to hand out fliers is a good idea. NVTC could make it a press event.

Mr. Fisette stated that he is skeptical that General Assembly members will read the entire policy paper but may read a short synopsis or the two-page flier. Delegate Albo stated that he will include a cover letter with bulleted points.

Regional Transportation Items

Virginia Transit Association Spring Conference. Mr. Zimmerman announced that VTA is holding its spring conference at the Radisson Hotel in Old Town Alexandria on May 11-13, 2006. Commissioners were encouraged to attend.

NVTA 2030 Transportation Plan Referral to Jurisdictions. Another milestone was achieved with NVTA's referral of the plan to Northern Virginia's jurisdictions. On May 10, 2006 Ms. Lynott will help brief the Commonwealth Transportation Board's VTrans committee in Richmond. Emphasis will be on the performance measures used to select projects.

Mr. Snyder stated that the transmittal information to the jurisdictions was way too detailed so a summary will be coming soon. All jurisdictions need to ratify the 2030 plan. In response to a question from Mr. Zimmerman, Ms. Lynott stated that jurisdictions are asked to ratify the plan before the June NVTA meeting.

Fare Card Vending Explosives Detection. Cubic and GE have developed a new fare card vending machine that analyzes explosive residue on the fingers of customers purchasing tickets.

Simplified Meter Parking. Arlington County's new electronic parking card called the iPark is a credit card sized device that is placed on the car's dashboard. The device is turned on when the passenger leaves the car and turned off when he or she returns so that the person will only have to pay for actual minutes parked.

VDOT/DRPT Capital Beltway/I-95/395 Hot Lane Operations Working Group. NVTC staff has been invited to participate as advisors in this state-level staff effort, representing (along with DRPT) the concerns of this region's transit systems.

VDOT Integrated Corridor Management Initiative. Northern Virginia's VDOT staff is seeking funding from the Federal Highway Administration for a plan for using technology to help manage the I-66/Route50/Route 29 corridor. NVTC staff has been invited to assist in the development process. The first phase is to develop a concept of operations.

NVTC Financial Items for March, 2006

The financial reports were provided to commissioners and there were no questions.

Adjournment

Without objection, Chairman Connolly adjourned the meeting at 9:40 P.M.

Approved this 1st day of June, 2006.

Gerald E. Connolly
Chairman

William D. Euille
Secretary-Treasurer