

MINUTES
NVTC COMMISSION MEETING – NOVEMBER 5, 2008
NVTC CONFERENCE ROOM – ARLINGTON, VIRGINIA

The meeting of the Northern Virginia Transportation Commission was called to order by Chairman Euille at 8:40 P.M.

Members Present

Charles Badger
Sharon Bulova
Adam Ebbin
William D. Euille
Jay Fisette
Mark R. Herring
Pat Herrity
Jeffrey McKay
Thomas Rust
David F. Snyder
Steven Stombres (alternate, City of Fairfax)
Christopher Zimmerman

Members Absent

David Albo
Kelly Burk
Gerald Connolly
Jeffrey Greenfield
Catherine Hudgins
Mary Hynes
Joe May
Paul Smedberg
Mary Margaret Whipple

Staff Present

Lynn Everett
Rhonda Gilchrest
Scott Kalkwarf
Greg McFarland
Adam McGavock
Kala Quintana
Rick Taube
Dale Zehner (VRE)

Oath of Office for New NVTC Alternate

Chairman Euille introduced Steven Stombres, a new NVTC alternate from the city of Fairfax. Chairman Euille administered the oath of office to Mr. Stombres. Commissioners warmly welcomed him to NVTC.

Minutes of the October 2, 2008 NVTC Meeting

Mr. Zimmerman moved, with a second by Mrs. Bulova, to approve the minutes. The vote in favor was cast by commissioners Badger, Bulova, Ebbin, Euille, Fisette, Herring, McKay, Rust, Snyder, Stombres and Zimmerman.

VRE Items

Report from the VRE Operations Board and Chief Executive Officer. Mrs. Bulova encouraged commissioners to read the VRE Operations Board minutes of October 17, 2008. Mr. Zehner reported that ridership is 9.5 percent higher for October compared to the same time last year. On-time performance also remains high.

Mr. Herrity arrived at 8:42 P.M.

Renewal of Banking Services. Mrs. Bulova stated that the VRE Operations Board recommends approval of Resolution #2116, which would authorize VRE's Chief Executive Officer to execute a contract with Sun Trust Bank for three years, with an option for two additional years. The cost of banking services will not exceed \$60,000 over the entire five-year period (\$12,000 per year). The contract also includes a \$1 million line of credit. Sun Trust Bank, which currently provides banking services for VRE and PRTC, was selected from five competitive proposals.

Ms. Bulova moved, with a second by Mr. Zimmerman, to approve Resolution #2116 (copy attached). The vote in favor was cast by commissioners Badger, Bulova, Ebbin, Euille, Fisette, Herring, Herrity, McKay, Rust, Snyder, Stombres and Zimmerman.

Mid-Year FY 2009 Fare Increase. Ms. Bulova stated that the VRE Operations Board recommends approval of Resolution #2117, which would authorize VRE's CEO to implement a seven percent fare increase effective January 1, 2009. The fare increase is needed to address budget shortfalls due to increased fuel costs, Amtrak labor settlement expenses, and increased locomotive maintenance costs. VRE has conducted extensive public hearings. Most riders understand the need for a fare increase, but feel strongly about no service reductions. VRE intends to hold local subsidies constant.

Mrs. Bulova moved, with a second by Mr. McKay, to approve Resolution #2117.

Mr. Zimmerman stated that the VRE Operations Board assumes that another mid-year fare increase will be needed in July 2009. He stated that VRE will need to closely monitor this because of the potential damage to ridership with these excessive fare increases. It is hard to get people to come back after losing them. Mr. Snyder stated that the record should reflect the reasons for a fare increase. Mrs. Bulova observed that VRE would not be in this position if the General Assembly had passed legislation regarding HB3202, which would have provided additional funding.

The commission then voted on the resolution and it passed. The vote in favor was cast by commissioners Badger, Bulova, Ebbin, Euille, Fissette, Herring, Herrity, McKay, Rust, Snyder, Stombres and Zimmerman. (A copy of the resolution is attached.)

Final Report on Mode Shares of Peak Commuters on I-95 Outside the Beltway

Mr. Taube thanked Valerie Pardo from VDOT's Northern Virginia District office for her help in acquiring funding for this work. He also introduced a new NVTC employee, Lynn Everett, who will be managing these studies for NVTC.

Mr. Taube explained that in fall of 2007 data on inbound traffic were collected at a screen line just outside the Beltway stretching from just west of I-95 all the way to the Potomac River. For the I-95/395 corridor, the two HOV lanes carried almost the same number of people as did the four general purpose lanes at the same time. A media release has been prepared summarizing the results and comparing studies completed in earlier years of other major commuting corridors in Northern Virginia, all of which show very high transit/ridesharing results.

Mr. Zimmerman observed that this information is very important, since it goes to the heart of what NVTC advocates. The results show that nearly half of persons traveling during the peak morning commute time are using transit or ridesharing. This data shows the huge return there is when people use transit or ride in multi-occupancy vehicles. He stated that it is important to find better ways to communicate this information to the public.

There were no objections to NVTC staff issuing the media release and posting the final report on the commission's website.

Final Report on NVTC's Real Time Bus Arrival Demonstration in Falls Church

Mr. McGavock reviewed highlights of the final report. He explained that the MARTHA system was conceived as an inexpensive means of providing real-time bus arrival information to passengers of suburban, small urban and rural transit systems. MARTHA utilizes open, non-proprietary software, inexpensive, off-the-shelf equipment, and proven technology. With a \$199,500 grant from DRPT, the MARTHA system was

developed and tested using the Falls Church GEORGE bus system as a “test bed.” The successful demonstration period ended in October, 2008. The software and documentation will be presented to DRPT for distribution. Recommendations to DRPT include that the software be made available worldwide to the transit community; the software be reprogrammed to work with dedicated GPS tracking devices rather than cell phones; and a technical support services contract be used to maintain the software and manage updates and fix problems.

Mr. Snyder stated that not knowing when the buses are arriving at the bus stops is a real issue for riders. It is important to find a cost effective solution to this issue. In response to a question from Mr. Fiset, Mr. Badger stated that there are other systems that provide real-time information. Mr. Zimmerman stated that Arlington ART buses use a different type of system. The MARTHA system is attractive because of its low costs, but he does not know how it would translate to larger transit systems. Mr. Fiset asked if consideration has been given to having compatible and consistent real-time systems throughout the region. Mr. McKay stated that since it is a low-cost alternative, it would be useful for larger transit systems, too. He asked if there is anything prohibiting it from being used by a large system. Mr. McGavock stated that the technology could be used for larger transit systems, but may need some reprogramming. Currently, the design is targeted for systems with up to 50 buses.

Mr. Zimmerman stated that it would be useful to look at the pros and cons of different systems. DRPT could be instrumental in evaluating this. It is important to let people know what technology exists.

Senator Herring asked that NVTC include in a future agenda an update reporting on what DRPT does with this information.

There were no objections to NVTC staff posting this report on its website and providing the software, documentation and source code to DRPT.

Authorization to Award a Contract for a Tenant's Agent

Mr. Taube explained that last month the commission authorized the release of a Request for Proposals (RFP) for a tenant's agent. In response to the RFP, four firms submitted proposals by the October 24th deadline and were interviewed on October 29th. NVTC staff has checked references and ranked the most responsive and responsible proposers. The top-ranked firm is The Meyer Group of Washington, D.C. William J. Meyer, who is President of the firm, will be NVTC's lead agent.

Mr. Taube explained that NVTC will incur no direct expenses as landlords compensate tenants' agents upon completion of a new lease. Staff expects to return within the next few months to the commission with a report on available locations. Following a ranking of those locations, staff and the tenants' agent would then negotiate a lease and return to the commission for authorization to execute it.

Mr. Zimmerman moved, with a second by Mr. McKay, to authorize NVTC's executive director to negotiate and execute a contract with the top-ranked firm, and if not successful, to negotiate with the other firms in rank order until successful, and at that point to issue a notice to proceed. The vote in favor was cast by commissioners Badger, Bulova, Ebbin, Euille, Fiset, Herring, Herrity, McKay, Rust, Snyder, Stombres and Zimmerman.

First Quarter FY 2009 Transit Ridership in Northern Virginia

Chairman Euille stated that staff has asked that this agenda item be deferred to the December meeting. There were no objections.

Metro Items

Ridership at Virginia's Metrorail Stations. Metrorail ridership remains very strong in Northern Virginia as well as throughout the entire system with many record days of ridership achieved during the last two months.

Possible Relocation of WMATA Headquarters. Mr. McKay reported that at its October meeting, NVTC discussed the proposal by the District of Columbia to relocate WMATA's headquarters. WMATA's consultant determined that this move would cost \$30 to \$70 million. WMATA staff has concluded that unless directed otherwise by the WMATA Board, staff will not pursue this issue.

Mr. McKay moved that NVTC recommend that the WMATA Board of Directors not approve a headquarters relocation, recognizing the urgent capital needs of Metro; the deteriorating financial situation; Metro not having \$30-\$70 million for this project; and that the proposal would benefit one jurisdiction. Mrs. Bulova seconded the motion. The vote in favor was cast by commissioners Badger, Bulova, Ebbin, Euille, Fiset, Herring, Herrity, McKay, Rust, Snyder, Stombres and Zimmerman.

Chairman Euille directed staff to prepare a letter to WMATA for his signature concerning this issue.

WMATA Customer Satisfaction Survey. The most recent in WMATA's customer satisfaction surveys (reported September 29, 2008) reveals that 85 percent of Metrorail riders and 78 percent of Metrobus riders are satisfied with the service. Results are based on monthly telephone surveys of 200 riders.

Credit Crisis Affects Metro. WMATA, like many other large U.S. transit systems, is facing uncertainty over past tax-advantaged leveraged lease transactions. Help has been requested from the U.S. Treasury.

Legislative Items

Chairman Euille reported that NVTC's Legislative Committee will meet in November, chaired by Mr. Connolly. Other members include commissioners Albo, Burk, Euille, Greenfield, Hynes, Snyder and Whipple. NVTC will be asked to adopt the legislative agenda at its December 4th meeting, together with a VRE legislative agenda recommended by the VRE Operations Board.

Regional Transportation Items

The Effect of Higher Gasoline Prices on Driving and Transit Ridership – Have We Reached a Tipping Point? Mr. Taube stated that staff examined the question raised by commissioners at previous NVTC meetings. Many factors influence this issue but no firm conclusion can be reached. While gas prices soared and driving (vehicle miles traveled) fell and transit ridership jumped all in the past few months, there are other factors that suggest that gas prices may not be the greatest determinant. Among these are the inflation-adjusted price of gas at \$4 is not much higher than gas prices in the early 1980's. Also, transit ridership has been trending up since the early 1990's and vehicle miles traveled started down a few months before gas prices began to soar.

Mr. Fisette stated that his initial reaction is that these results do not seem logical. He recognized that there are other factors involved, but behavior seemed to change when the cost of gas skyrocketed. Mr. Taube stated that it would be interesting to see if behavior changes as gasoline prices have plummeted in the last few months. People are also becoming more environmentally aware. Mr. Zimmerman commented on the approach to analyzing such issues typically used by economists.

How Northern Virginia Transit Systems are Organized. A PowerPoint presentation was provided to commissioners that describes the complex inter-relationship in Northern Virginia among the agencies that operate, plan and fund public transit. Mr. Taube stated that transit in this region performs efficiently and attracts increasing ridership with a local level of funding effort that far exceeds any other district in Virginia. He stated that this presentation will be posted on NVTC's website, continuously updated and used to educate policy makers and the public.

Try Transit Week. DRPT held its first annual Try Transit Week from September 22-25, 2008. NVTC supported this effort. DRPT received a total of 1,710 pledges to try transit, almost 1,000 from Northern Virginia, including 362 from the Woodbridge area. Mr. McKay observed that unfortunately the Fairfax Connector was experiencing a bus strike during this time and stated that he hopes this information will be noted in any written materials.

Prince William County HOT Lane Action. The Prince William County Board of Supervisors has gone on record unanimously demanding an appearance by VDOT and Transurban to answer questions and to provide documents, including all correspondence pertaining to the project.

NVTC Financial Items for September, 2008

Commissioners were provided with the financial reports and there were no questions or comments.

Closed Session – Personnel Item

Chairman Euille explained that a Closed Session is not needed, but he asked that the Executive Committee meet with Mr. Taube after the NVTC meeting.

Adjournment

Chairman Euille thanked commissioners for adjusting their schedules to accommodate this different meeting date. He also congratulated Mr. Connolly on being elected to the U.S. Congress.

Without objection, Chairman Euille adjourned the meeting at 9:36 P.M.

Approved this 4th day of December, 2008.

William D. Euille
Chairman

Gerald E. Connolly
Secretary-Treasurer