

MINUTES
NVTC COMMISSION MEETING – APRIL 9, 2009
NVTC CONFERENCE ROOM, ARLINGTON, VIRGINIA

The meeting of the Northern Virginia Transportation Commission was called to order by Chairman Zimmerman at 8:10 P.M.

Members Present

David Albo
Charles Badger
Sharon Bulova
William D. Euille
Jay Fiset
John Foust
Jeffrey Greenfield
Catherine Hudgins
Thomas Rust
Paul Smedberg
David F. Snyder
Mary Margaret Whipple
Christopher Zimmerman

Members Absent

Kelly Burk
Adam Ebbin
Mark R. Herring
Pat Herrity
Mary Hynes
Joe May
Jeffrey McKay

Staff Present

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

Minutes of the March 5, 2009 NVTC Meeting

Mr. Euille moved, with a second by Mrs. Bulova, to approve the minutes. The vote in favor was cast by commissioners Badger, Bulova, Euille, Foust, Greenfield, Hudgins, Rust, Smedberg, Snyder and Zimmerman. Delegate Albo was out of the room for the vote.

Senator Whipple arrived at 8:13 P.M.

VRE Items

Report from the VRE Operations Board. Mr. Zehner reported that VRE on-time performance for January and February was over 90 percent for both lines. VRE recently experienced five catastrophic locomotive failures, for which VRE staff is investigating the causes of the failures.

Contract Modification for New Locomotive Purchase. Mrs. Bulova stated that the VRE Operations Board recommends approval of Resolution #2124, which would authorize VRE's CEO to modify the contract with Motive Power, Inc. to increase the base order of five new locomotives up to nine and to increase the contract value to \$36.4 million from \$20.3 million. VRE anticipates receiving \$9.8 million of federal stimulus funds for this purchase. Mr. Taube stated that the resolution has been changed to reflect the new date of approval.

Mrs. Bulova moved, with a second by Mr. Smedberg, to approve the resolution. The vote in favor was cast by commissioners Albo, Badger, Bulova, Euille, Foust, Greenfield, Hudgins, Rust, Smedberg, Snyder, Whipple and Zimmerman.

Elimination of Free Bus Fares on Code Red Air Quality Days

Mr. Taube reminded commissioners that NVTC has been managing the program of free bus fares on forecast bad air quality days since 1999. The program reimburses transit agencies for lost revenue during forecast Code Red air quality days on which all Northern Virginia bus fares are free. The Jurisdiction and Agency Coordinating Committee (JACC) of the Northern Virginia Transportation Authority and NVTC's Management Advisory Committee (MAC) recommend that NVTC discontinue the region's Ride Free program. The remaining unspent funds totaling \$2.6 million would be redistributed to other transit projects to cover reductions in FY 2010 Federal Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality funds.

Mr. Taube explained that staff has been unable to accurately count the number of people riding on free days and consequently could not accurately determine how many new riders were taken off the roads.

Chairman Zimmerman noted that if the program is discontinued then it leaves the question of where the \$2.6 million will be spent. However, that decision is made by the Northern Virginia Transportation Authority and not NVTC.

Mr. Euille moved, with a second by Mrs. Bulova, to direct staff to close out the project and release the remaining funds to be reallocated by NVTA. The vote in favor was cast by commissioners Albo, Badger, Bulova, Euille, Foust, Greenfield, Hudgins, Rust, Smedberg, Snyder, Whipple and Zimmerman.

NVTC Administrative Budget for FY 2010

Mr. Taube explained that the commission asked staff to go back and reduce the size of the FY 2010 budget. This current version of the budget meets all the directives of the commission, including the elimination of all staff salary increases, expenditures held to the FY 2009 level, and local contributions held constant. This was achieved by making some drastic budget cuts in several areas, including removing travel and conference costs, reducing public information/outreach costs, and deferring the purchase of a new telephone system.

Chairman Zimmerman stated that the budget guidance given by the commission is not reflective of the commission's view of the value of NVTC and its staff, just reflective of the economic reality. He stated that this budget holds total spending constant, holds local contributions constant, and holds salaries constant, which is all consistent with the guidance given by the commission.

Mrs. Bulova stated that NVTC's budget is consistent with Fairfax County's budget strategy. She expressed her appreciation to NVTC staff for reworking the budget. Commissioners mentioned that most, if not all, jurisdictions are not including merit increases or cost of living adjustments in their budgets.

Delegate Rust asked why some jurisdictions' subsidies dropped. Mr. Taube replied that the formula is set by state statutes and is based on the shares of state aid and gas tax revenues each jurisdiction receives from NVTC.

Mr. Smedberg moved, with a second by Mr. Snyder, to approve the budget. The vote in favor was cast by commissioners Albo, Badger, Bulova, Euille, Foust, Greenfield, Hudgins, Rust, Smedberg, Snyder, Whipple and Zimmerman.

Briefing on I-66 Transit TDM Study

Chairman Zimmerman noted that Corey Hill from DRPT was unable to attend this rescheduled meeting, so the briefing will be put on next month's meeting agenda. Commissioners were provided with a written report.

Mr. Fisetette arrived at 8:21 P.M.

Legislative Items

Delegate Albo reported that most of the federal stimulus package coming to the commonwealth is tied to certain criteria. The House of Delegates wanted some control over what happens to these funds. However, most of these federal funds flow through existing federal systems and do not go through the state legislative process. Transit funding seems to be flowing through the established formula. Chairman Zimmerman stated that the use of the majority of the funds will be decided by the Commonwealth Transportation Board. Senator Whipple stated that the Finance Subcommittee for the Senate Transportation Committee will meet in May and will try to provide some advice to CTB about how the stimulus funds should be spent.

Mr. Taube stated that NVTC and PRTC staff met with Department of Taxation staff regarding SB 1532. The Department of Taxation insists that no motor fuel will escape taxation due to retailers purchasing fuel prior to the effective date of the legislation of January 1, 2010 for sale after that date. They also insist that the department will be able to accurately attribute sales to the correct jurisdiction. Also they did not feel that any special amendments were needed for the veto session.

Mr. Taube stated that he sent a letter to William White, Assistant Commissioner for Tax Policy, which summarized the discussion between NVTC, PRTC and the Department of Taxation. The letter also requests tracking the changes to measure if the change in revenue is sufficient to provide revenues at least as great as the current two percent tax. If the Department of Taxation does not agree to do this assessment, NVTC staff could do it. The letter also requests an agreement identical to that of PRTC providing consultation with the commission when a taxpayer settlement is proposed over \$25,000.

Mr. Taube stated that a letter has been prepared to send to Congressman Moran expressing NVTC's support for his requests for earmarks from the FY 2010 appropriations bill, including funding for WMATA, Dulles rail, and other transit projects. In particular, NVTC endorses his request for \$500,000 to examine the feasibility of advanced transit in the Route 7 corridor linking King Street Metrorail with the Columbia Pike Streetcar through Falls Church and Tysons Corner.

Mr. Snyder moved, with a second by Mr. Greenfield, to authorize Chairman Zimmerman to sign and send the letter.

Mr. Smedberg observed that the term "advanced transit" is used in the second paragraph for Route 7 but Alexandria has yet not made a decision whether it will be BRT. Chairman Zimmerman observed that the wording was used to be expansive to encompass any possible outcome. Mr. Taube explained that those words were used because they were the words used on Representative Moran's website. Mr. Smedberg asked to follow-up with staff on the Potomac Yard issue. There was no objection to changing the word "buses" to "transit."

The commission then voted on the motion and it passed. The vote in favor was cast by commissioners Albo, Badger, Bulova, Euille, Fissette, Foust, Greenfield, Hudgins, Rust, Smedberg, Snyder, Whipple and Zimmerman.

Mr. Greenfield left the meeting at 8:38 P.M. and did not return.

Response to Public Comments on NVTC's 2009 Workprogram

Mr. Taube stated that NVTC received comments from two citizens about its Work Program at the public hearing in January. Alan Muchnick, president of the Virginia Bicycling Federation, addressed VRE's bicycle policies and web-site information. VRE's CEO responded and NVTC staff is developing further information on the status of other Northern Virginia transit systems' bicycle policies and web-site information.

Ed Tennyson addressed the productivity of WMATA and VRE. His concerns about VRE's insurance costs prompted an analysis by DRPT provided to the General Assembly. Mr. Badger explained that through a data transposition error, the number of unlinked VRE passenger trips was overstated considerably. The result of this error was that the cost of casualty and liability expenses per passenger trip reported by VRE in FY 07 appeared to be in the middle of the range when in actuality it is near the top of the range. DRPT has sent a letter to the General Assembly explaining this error.

Northern Virginia Transit Technology Survey

Mr. Taube stated that DRPT is undertaking a plan for Intelligent Transportation Systems. One component is a survey of technologies in use by transit systems. NVTC staff has supplemented those survey results with further research. The issue of interoperability remains a serious concern. Technologies may not communicate effectively with each other if they are procured at different times from different vendors. More work is needed in this area.

Metro Items

Chairman Zimmerman asked Shiva Pant to introduce new WMATA employees. Mr. Pant introduced Sarah Kline, Director of Government Relations, and Jennifer Green, Virginia Government Relations Officer.

FY 2010 Budget Review. Chairman Zimmerman reported that public hearings for the budget are being conducted next week. Mrs. Hudgins stated that the hearing in Fairfax County is scheduled for April 13th at the Marshall Road Elementary School at 6:30 P.M. Chairman Zimmerman stated that another hearing will be held at the Arlington County Board room on April 14th at 6:30 P.M.

Metro Matters Bonds. Mr. Taube reported that the WMATA Board approved staff's request to issue bonds to finance the ongoing Metro Matters program. Some of NVTC's jurisdictions expect to "opt out" of that bond issue (fully or in part) using funds appropriated by the Virginia General Assembly in 2005. Close to \$40 million will be provided by DRPT for that purpose.

Dulles Rail Full Funding Agreement. Chairman Zimmerman announced that the full funding agreement has been signed for the Dulles Rail project.

Metrorail Delays and Other WMATA Issues. Mr. Snyder stated that the Orange Line has had some serious delays. There needs to be better communication with the passengers. He asked for a report at the next meeting.

Mr. Snyder also stated that in some European cities visitors are given a free transit pass when they check into a hotel. He asked if Metro is doing anything like this because it could be a steady source of revenue. It seems to be a win-win situation.

Chairman Zimmerman stated that Metro does do something similar for conferences. He suggested staff find out more details about the programs in Europe.

GEORGE Bus. Mr. Snyder thanked NVTC staff for correcting erroneous information recently released about the GEORGE system. It is his view that if the Falls Church City Council eliminates this service, it would be a total breach of faith with the region and NVTC. He asked NVTC to strongly urge Falls Church to maintain the system in an efficient manner and that NVTC fully enforce the contractual provisions for the buses as they exist. Chairman Zimmerman stated that Mr. Taube is scheduled to speak at the next Falls Church City Council meeting regarding this issue.

Mrs. Bulova stated that she is personally supportive of the concept, but observed that her own jurisdiction, Fairfax County, is being faced with making hard decision about bus service in light on economic realities. Senator Whipple suggested NVTC write a short letter to Falls Church expressing the commission's understanding of the city's budget situation but hopeful that they can find a way to continue the GEORGE service and that NVTC is ready to assist. Chairman Zimmerman stated that it is important to remind city staff that they cannot dispose of the buses, since they are not the city's assets. Delegate Albo cautioned that NVTC should be responsive to its local government members and not attempt to dictate local policies, but he supported the tone suggested by Senator Whipple.

Without objection, Chairman Zimmerman agreed to send a letter based on Senator Whipple's approach.

Transit Ridership in Northern Virginia in FY 2009

Mr. Taube reported that overall transit ridership in Northern Virginia grew by three percent, but the growth rate is slowing, perhaps reflecting the economic situation.

Regional Transportation Items

Potomac Ferry Demonstration Ride. The Prince William County Department of Transportation has received a \$225,000 VDOT grant to study the technical feasibility of running a high-speed passenger ferry service between points in Prince William County and points in Fairfax County, National Harbor, Old Town Alexandria, National Airport and the Washington, D.C. Navy Yard. Simulated test runs will be performed to measure total trip time and measure noise and wake at several points along both the Maryland and Virginia shores. In response to a question from Mr. Fiset, Mr. McFarland stated

that if there are wake and/or noise problems, the project may not advance. Mr. Taube stated that on May 6th commissioners are invited to attend a Commuter Ferry Summit to discuss commuter ferry service and to take a ferry ride.

Funding to Study a New Potomac Yard Metrorail Station. Alexandria has designated \$1.5 million for WMATA to begin to study a potential Metrorail station in Potomac Yard (between Braddock Road and Reagan National Airport).

VTrans 2035 Work Program. Wilbur Smith Associates is the lead consultant and the plan is due for completion in December, 2009. It will culminate in 10-12 strategic investments recommended for Virginia with detailed documentation. An extensive public outreach program is included.

Testing SmarTrip Autoload on DASH. Alexandria's DASH is serving as a test transit system for new SmarTrip autoload functions. Customers with SmartBenefits can have value loaded automatically by tapping their SmarTrip cards on a DASH bus farebox target. Also, bank accounts can be linked to replenish value on the SmarTrip card and complex pass products can be accommodated. Testing will begin in April and this long-awaited feature should be implemented throughout the region in the fall, 2009.

I-95/395 HOT Lanes Project. There is still no response to NVTC/PRTC/NVTA requests for information from Secretary Homer. Alexandria has adopted a resolution similar to that of Arlington County.

Leesburg Vegetable Oil Trolley. Mr. Taube reported that Leesburg's ongoing demonstration continues to be a success. NVTC staff is exploring whether this approach might work in other areas of Northern Virginia as a means to reduce transit fuel costs, emissions and ground water pollution.

Bus Shelter Scales. A unique advertising approach from the Netherlands links a digital scale to a bus shelter bench. Patrons viewing their weight are directed to a local gym.

MWCOG Stimulus-Funded BRT Project. COG/TPB staff is working with the TPB Scenario Task Force to design a project to compete for up to \$300 million of discretionary federal stimulus funds for a \$1.5 billion nationwide program. The concept currently includes BRT corridors on Route 1 and Little River Turnpike or Route 7 in Virginia.

Arlington County Pursuing Columbia Pike Streetcar Funds. The Arlington County Board is expected to approve \$3 million for environmental planning and preliminary

design. The funds would initially come from the 12.5 cents per \$100 commercial real estate tax.

NVTC Financial Items for February, 2009

Commissioners were provided with a copy of NVTC's financial reports. There were no questions.

Adjournment

Without objection, Chairman Zimmerman adjourned the meeting at 9:02 P.M.

Approved this 7th day of May, 2009.

Christopher Zimmerman
Chairman

William Euille
Secretary-Treasurer