

MINUTES
NVTC COMMISSION MEETING – MAY 7, 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

Charles Badger
Sharon Bulova
Kelly Burk
Adam Ebbin
John Foust
Jeffrey Greenfield
Mark R. Herring
Pat Herrity
Catherine Hudgins
Mary Hynes
Dan Maller
Jeffrey McKay
Paul Smedberg
Christopher Zimmerman

Members Absent

David Albo
William D. Euille
Jay Fisette
Joe May
Thomas Rust
Mary Margaret Whipple

Staff Present

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

Minutes of the April 9, 2009 NVTC Meeting

Mrs. Bulova moved, with a second by Mr. Smedberg, to approve the minutes. The vote in favor was cast by commissioners Badger, Bulova, Foust, Greenfield, Herring, Hudgins, McKay, Smedberg and Zimmerman. Commissioners Hynes and Maller abstained since they did not attend the April meeting.

VRE Items

Report from the VRE Operations Board. Mrs. Bulova stated that there are no VRE action items this month. She reported that the total number of VRE trips in March, 2009 was 6.1 percent higher than the same time last year. Although the growth rate has slowed, ridership continues to increase. Chairman Zimmerman noted that ridership has increased even with a recent fare increase, gas prices plummeting and the economic situation. He announced that there will be no Operations Board meeting in May.

When Mr. Zehner arrived, he was given an opportunity to comment on VRE items. Mr. Zehner stated that on-time performance for April was 93 percent on the Fredericksburg line and 94 percent on the Manassas line. Following six locomotive failures in March, VRE has taken a proactive approach and now has a contractor at the yards inspecting and maintaining the locomotive fleet on a daily basis.

GEORGE Bus

Mr. Taube announced that effective with this meeting, Dan Maller, who has been serving as an alternate, will now be the NVTC commissioner from Falls Church and Dave Snyder will serve as an alternate.

Mr. Snyder stated that it has been an honor to serve on NVTC and he continues to look forward to staying involved as an alternate. He will also continue to serve on the Transportation Planning Board. He recognized NVTC staff's hard work to correct some erroneous information about the GEORGE Bus system that had recently been circulated.

Mr. Taube added that the Falls Church City Council has agreed to continue the local bus system for FY 2010 at a cost of no more than \$300,000. Funds held in trust for the city at NVTC are available for that purpose. A working group will be formed to

examine the long-term future of the GEORGE Bus service. NVTC staff has been invited to participate.

I-66 Transit/TDM Study

Chairman Zimmerman introduced Corey Hill from DRPT, who gave a presentation on the I-66 Transit/TDM Study. Mr. Hill reviewed the study's goals and objectives, which include identifying more transportation choices through transit and transportation demand management (TDM) enhancements that will create mobility in the I-66 corridor; developing a recommended plan for short-term and medium-term transit and TDM service improvements in the I-66 corridor between Haymarket and Washington, D.C.; and providing input into the restart of the I-66 Multimodal Transportation Environmental Study.

Commissioners Burk and Ebbin arrived at 8:23 P.M. and 8:24 P.M., respectively.

Mr. McKay requested that under the BRT types of investments "bus-only" include existing lanes as well as the shoulder lane. Mr. Hill stated that the study will look at as many options as possible. There may be some low-cost and easy solutions that can be implemented in the corridor. He stated that he would be happy to return for a future meeting and update NVTC on this study.

Mr. Herrity arrived at 8:26 P.M.

2007 State of the Commute Survey

Mr. Hill explained that the survey expanded on one conducted by the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (MWCOG) in 2007. The Virginia State-of-the-Commute (SOC) project surveyed approximately 7,000 employed residents of the Commonwealth of Virginia. The purpose of the survey was to document trends in commuting behavior and collect attitudinal data regarding Virginia commuters. Mr. Hill reviewed some of the key findings of the survey:

- 1) When it comes to work trips, Virginians are embracing transportation choices;
- 2) Infrastructure and outreach are key for transportation choices;
- 3) Employer involvement lifts participation in transportation choices;
- 4) Telework has tremendous growth potential; and
- 5) Investment in transportation choices has broad based support.

In response to a question from Delegate Ebbin, Mr. Hill stated that the survey was scientifically balanced and he provided more details about how the survey was conducted and used.

Mr. McKay asked if employers in Virginia are doing a better job of offering employer-provided commute services than employers in Maryland and Washington, D.C. He also asked if the Commonwealth is reaching out to the other local governments who do not offer assistance to their employers in their jurisdictions. Mr. Hill responded that is a great question and it would be helpful to know if Virginia is as far ahead in this area as it thinks it is. He stated that he will further research this. Mr. McKay observed that if a commuter living in Virginia but working in Maryland or the District is not using transit because his employer is not providing these services, then it affects Virginia.

Chairman Zimmerman observed that the survey was conducted before the big spike in fuel prices. Therefore, some of the survey results may be understated because transit ridership significantly increased after fuel prices skyrocketed. Also, there needs to be a way to express the difference between using transit versus driving alone when transit is available. There is a dramatic difference in results of respondents living closer to the Beltway compared to those that live farther out. Mr. Hill stated that the survey was broken down by inside the Beltway and outside the Beltway for analysis and he will provide NVTC with this information. Mr. Maller stated that it would be helpful to have this information by zip code. Mrs. Hynes asked if DRPT cut the data by socio-economic or ethnicity criteria. Mr. Hill stated that DRPT can analyze the data in all different ways and would be happy to analyze the data to answer specific questions from commissioners.

Mrs. Bulova stated that it is interesting that people are not aware of the guaranteed ride home programs in the region. She suggested getting the word out through different media outlets. Mr. Zehner stated that VRE has a 30 percent turnover rate because of the transient nature of the region, so it is important to consistently educate riders.

In response to a question from Mrs. Hudgins, Mr. Hill stated that there is a lot of survey information about the respondents' commuter patterns (satisfaction of commute, how long is your commute, how do you commute, etc.) Mrs. Hudgins stated that it would be interesting to look at the frequency of transit.

Chairman Zimmerman expressed his concern about the short notice for the public hearings. Mr. Hill stated that there was a 30-day advanced public advertisement for the I-66 public hearings.

Support for Northern Virginia's Bus Rapid Transit Initiatives

Mr. Taube explained that the Transportation Planning Board of the National Capital Area, led by its Scenario Study Task Force, is preparing a proposal for federal stimulus funding of a regional Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) network. The commission is asked to go on record in support of regional efforts to initiate Bus Rapid Transit service in the I-66 and I-95/395 corridors within three years using federal stimulus funds that may become available from a discretionary \$1.5 billion nationwide program. However, the criteria have not been identified yet. Commissioners were provided with a proposed statement crafted by Chairman Zimmerman and Vice-Chairman Hudgins.

Chairman Zimmerman stated that this is an exciting opportunity since the stimulus bill has a \$1.5 billion provision for competitive grants, with no funding matches required. Awards can range from \$25 - \$300 million. By its nature, the grant application needs to be a region wide project.

Mrs. Hudgins moved, with a second by Mrs. Bulova, to go on record in support of regional efforts to initiative BRT service using federal stimulus funds if awarded, using the language in the written statement provided to commissioners (copy attached).

Mrs. Hudgins agreed that this is an opportunity to jumpstart BRT in the region, which will benefit the entire region. Even if the region is not successful in acquiring the funding, the initiative is still critical. Mr. McKay agreed, but suggested being more vague and taking out the word "two" in the sentence "existence of transit-advantaged facilities in two existing corridors" in paragraph C of the statement. Chairman Zimmerman observed that the proposed statement provided to commissioners will not be the exact language of the grant application. In response to a question from Mr. Smedberg, Mr. McKay stated that Fairfax County has decided to list many possibilities with the hope that some projects will qualify. Chairman Zimmerman observed that ultimately there will need to be a very specific application.

The commission then voted on the motion and it passed. The vote in favor was cast by commissioners Badger, Bulova, Burk, Ebbin, Foust, Greenfield, Herring, Herrity, Hudgins, Hynes, Maller, McKay, Smedberg and Zimmerman.

I-95/395 HOT Lanes

Mr. Taube reported that NVTC finally received a response from Secretary Homer to its December, 2008 letter. Commissioners were provided with a copy of the Secretary's letter.

In response to a question from Mr. Smedberg, Mr. Taube responded that the BRT study for HOT lanes is expected to be completed by July and is, in his opinion, progressing well. Chairman Zimmerman observed that the potential for stimulus funding is timely with this study.

Mrs. Hynes suggested responding to Secretary Homer's letter with specific questions concerning the challenges listed in his letter, such as timing issues.

Mrs. Hynes moved, with a second by Mr. Smedberg, to authorize Chairman Zimmerman to send a letter to Secretary Homer in response to his letter with specific follow-up questions.

Mr. Ebbin stated that the letter should be clear that NVTC and the region want to be included before the commercial agreement is approved. Mr. McKay suggested that better information on performance measures is needed. Mr. Herrity asked for clarification of the issues to be addressed in the letter. Emphasis would be on the timing of actions described by the Secretary.

The commission then unanimously approved the letter. The vote in favor was cast by commissioners Badger, Bulova, Burk, Ebbin, Foust, Greenfield, Herring, Herrity, Hudgins, Hynes, Maller, McKay, Smedberg and Zimmerman.

Preliminary State Aid for FY 2010

Mr. Taube stated that as jurisdictions act on their FY 2010 budgets, to date no official indication has been received from DRPT on proposed state aid. The Commonwealth Transportation Board will be shown a draft program on May 21st and after that grantees will have limited opportunity to comment before the CTB adopts the final program in June. DRPT's grantees must submit their grant requests by February 1st each year, well before their own budgets are adopted. Grantees budgets are then adopted before the amount of state aid is known.

Mr. Taube explained that the commission is asked to authorize Chairman Zimmerman to deliver a statement to CTB at its June 2nd public hearing on its draft six-year program for FY 2010-15. The proposed statement cannot be provided to NVTC at this time because DRPT has not released the draft state program. It is expected to be available only after the CTB meeting on May 21st, providing less than two weeks for staff review and no opportunity for the commission to act prior to the hearing. Mr. Taube stated that the NVTC statement should emphasize the need for increased flexibility in administering DRPT's state aid programs, among other concerns.

Mr. Taube explained that NVTC and its jurisdictions are experiencing several serious consequences of DRPT's rigid approach to its grant-making responsibilities, which has evolved over the past two years or so. One of NVTC's jurisdictions has recently reluctantly agreed to return unspent grant funds to DRPT from a significant grant awarded in FY 2007. The jurisdiction is unable to proceed because the developer is not prepared to say when or if it will go ahead with the project in the current severe recession. DRPT's grants now generally expire in two to three years and DRPT has been unwilling to allow the grant to be used for another project within that jurisdiction. Unfortunately, the unintended consequence of this action impacts NVTC's process of allocating state aid through its Subsidy Allocation Model. Other jurisdictions have received a lower share of state aid in anticipation of this project going forward as planned and the inability to bill the grant means less total state aid is available to share. To remedy this situation, jurisdictions' staff recommended that DRPT be asked to reconsider its policies to provide more leeway in situations like this in order to extend the grant, or to use it for other eligible projects. DRPT staff has indicated that it is willing to consider such requests.

Chairman Zimmerman noted that the \$115,940 budget reduction for the ART Bus system was restored in Arlington's final budget. However, there is still a net reduction for transit overall since Arlington is taking over two Metrobus routes.

Mrs. Hynes moved, with a second by Mr. Smedberg, to authorize NVTC's chairman to give testimony on behalf of the commission reflecting NVTC's adopted positions. The vote in favor was cast by commissioners Badger, Bulova, Burk, Ebbin, Foust, Greenfield, Herring, Herrity, Hudgins, Hynes, Maller, McKay, Smedberg and Zimmerman.

Legislative Items

Mr. Taube reported that the Obama Administration has announced a Vision for High-Speed Rail in America, which provides a strategy, implementation schedule and funding approach. The program should benefit corridors used by VRE.

Mr. Taube stated that the Virginia Department of Taxation has replied to NVTC's March 31st letter documenting a discussion of SB 1532. The department will not be formally cooperating with documenting whether more or less taxes will be collected using this new method. NVTC will have to do the analysis.

WMATA Items

FY 2010 Budget. Public hearings were conducted and the WMATA Board approved the budget on April 30th. Many of the public comments at the hearings favored fare increases rather than bus service cuts, but the District of Columbia vetoed any such considerations of fare increases. Chairman Zimmerman announced that WMATA's General Manager, John Catoe, will attend NVTC's June meeting.

Clean Cities Grants for Hybrid-Electric Buses. WMATA is seeking funding from a grant program to help buy 150 hybrid-electric buses. Vice President Biden announced the new program in a ceremony at the Carmen Turner Maintenance and Training Facility.

SmarTrip Improvements. WMATA has implemented improvements for users of Smar Trip cards. Currently 1.6 million cards are active and 58 percent of Metrobus customers and 72 percent of Metrorail riders use these cards.

Transit Ridership and Gas Prices

Mr. Taube stated that staff is continuing to monitor the relationships between transit ridership and gas prices, vehicle miles traveled (VMT) and employment. The greatest visual correlation with VMT appears to be employment and the Consumer Confidence Index. Transit ridership appears to be strong, despite dips in gas prices and employment.

Mr. Maller expressed his appreciation for staff putting this information together and stated that one can start to see relationships between the data. He stated that this

historical data is very useful, but suggested also including some predictions, such as scenarios of lack of investing in public transit. It is important for the Commonwealth to focus on this.

WiFi/WiMax Capabilities in Northern Virginia Transit Vehicles

Mr. Taube stated that NVTC staff has completed a survey of the availability and costs of these potential transit amenities. Within Northern Virginia, PRTC is proceeding with plans to offer WiFi to customers on some of its buses providing service to Tysons Corner. Arlington's ART will be adding WiFi to its Shirlington Transit Center, three "super Stops" on Columbia Pike and all of WMATA's 16-series Pike Ride buses. Loudoun County surveyed its LCT customers and they are strongly opposed. VRE is unable to offer service because of dead zones.

Regional Transportation Items

GEORGE Bus System. As reported previously, Mr. Taube stated that the GEORGE bus service will continue with reduced service. Mr. Maller observed that it has been a painful process and unfortunately Falls Church staff did not utilize NVTC's expertise quicker. It is a temporary solution. Effective July 1st, service will be reduced by 50 percent. Mr. Maller also recognized Arlington County for their assistance and Falls Church will likely contract with the ART Bus system for operation of the GEORGE Bus system. Chairman Zimmerman stated that Arlington County looks forward to working with Falls Church on this issue. He stated that if GEORGE service is permanently reduced as proposed, it is his opinion that it will not be successful since GEORGE service was not running frequent enough service before all this happened. To run successful bus service, frequency is the key.

Preliminary Results from Regional Bus Survey. MWCOG conducted a regional bus survey during 2008. Fairfax County also conducted an expanded bus survey during the same time period and the results have been incorporated together wherever possible.

Amphibus Tour Bus. An article was provided describing a possible alternative to ferry commuter services, although very calm water is needed. An amphibus is a fifty-seat road coach bus with sailing capabilities to be able to go from water to road.

VTrans 2035. The workplan for the statewide surface transportation plan calls for completion by the end of 2009. Several strategic corridors are being chosen as a means to establish priorities for focused investments and other initiatives. A workshop was conducted in Charlottesville on April 27th.

Bike to Work Day. The annual event is scheduled for May 15, 2009.

Virginia Survey on Climate Change. A new survey of Virginians shows that three quarters believe global warming is happening and 90 percent have made major or minor changes in lifestyle to protect the environment. A reported 62 percent are driving less. Also interesting is the fact that 55 percent support cutting funding for new highways to increase funding for rail, transit and other alternatives to driving.

NVTC Financial Items for March, 2009

Commissioners were provided with a copy of NVTC's financial reports. Mr. Maller observed the striking decline of gas tax revenues over a several month period. Chairman Zimmerman stated that it is mainly a result of a significant drop in vehicle miles travelled (VMT). Mr. Taube stated that as long as VMT and gas prices are low, it can be predicted that gas tax revenues will also be low.

Adjournment

Without objection, Chairman Zimmerman adjourned the meeting at 9:22 P.M.

Approved this 4th day of June, 2009.

Christopher Zimmerman
Chairman

William Euille
Secretary-Treasurer