

MINUTES  
NVTC COMMISSION MEETING – MARCH 3, 2011  
NVTC CONFERENCE ROOM – ARLINGTON, VIRGINIA

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

**Members Present**

Sharon Bulova  
Barbara Comstock  
Thelma Drake  
Adam Ebbin  
Jay Fisette  
Mark R. Herring  
Catherine Hudgins  
Mary Hynes  
Jeffrey McKay  
Thomas Rust  
Paul Smedberg  
Lawrence Webb (alternate, City of Falls Church)  
Mary Margaret Whipple  
Christopher Zimmerman

**Members Absent**

Kelly Burk  
John Cook  
William D. Euille  
John Foust  
Jeffrey Greenfield  
Joe May  
David F. Snyder

**Staff Present**

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

## Minutes of the February 3, 2011 NVTC Meeting

On a motion by Senator Whipple and a second by Mr. Smedberg, the commission unanimously approved the minutes. The vote in favor was cast by commissioners Bulova, Comstock, Drake, Fisetto, Hudgins, Hynes, Rust, Smedberg, Webb, Whipple and Zimmerman.

### VRE Items

Mrs. Bulova noted that there are no VRE action items but she asked Mr. Zehner to give an update on VRE service. Mr. Zehner reported that February was one of the best months for on-time performance at 94 percent for each rail line. February 16, 2011 was also the highest ridership day with VRE providing 20,133 passenger trips. Ridership is up 7.5 percent from last year at this same time. There are now standees on many of the trains. Mr. Zehner also reported that with the help of Mrs. Drake, VRE received several appropriations during this past General Assembly session, including \$10 million for rolling stock and \$5 million for the third track project in Spotsylvania.

Mr. Zehner reported that work has begun on the tunnel that will connect the rail station to the King Street Metrorail station and will make it a major intermodal station with transferability between major transit systems. The project will take two to three years to complete.

Vice-Chairman Fisetto asked about the third track project. Mr. Zehner responded that VRE just received \$5 million for work to be done in Spotsylvania County and VRE is working with DRPT to find funding for the rest of the project. The final design phase for the third track in Spotsylvania is underway. If VRE cannot identify all the funding, then the procurement may be divided to allow for work to be done in phases.

Senator Herring arrived at 8:15 P.M.

Delegate Rust asked if there is a rule of thumb as to how long passengers will stand on trains before they leave the system. Mr. Zehner replied that there is no hard and fast rule, but people do not like to stand. Most of the standees are the passengers that board at later stations and have to stand for an average of 20 minutes. So there is only a subset of passengers that have to stand. Mrs. Bulova noted that when VRE started, the goal was to reach 10,000 daily trips. VRE is maxed out in capacity with 20,000 daily trips. The VRE Operations Board will be holding a strategic retreat to discuss how to address growth and capacity issues. One of the main reasons that ridership has increased so much is because of the \$230 transit benefit provided by the federal government to its employees. Senator Whipple stated that ridership has steadily climbed, so this is not just an abnormal spike.

Delegate Ebbin arrived at 8:20 P.M.

Mrs. Hudgins stated that Metrorail and Metrobus have standees all the time and it is more important for passengers to know that service is reliable. Mr. Zimmerman stated that VRE needs to be concerned that riders may continue to ride as standees but are not happy about it and their perception can quickly change if service deteriorates. Once a passenger leaves, it is very hard to get them back.

Vice-Chairman Fisetto stated that fuel prices are increasing and transit usually spikes during these times. He asked if VRE has any projections about the increase in demand in comparison to fuel prices. Mr. Zehner responded that past history shows that transit in general sees an increase when fuel prices go substantially up.

Mr. McKay arrived at 8:25 P.M.

### Legislative Items

Mr. Taube stated that two letters have been drafted for commission discussion. The first one would be sent to members of Congress expressing concern about the cuts to public transit funding included in HR 1, the FY 2011 Continuing Appropriations Act. Of greatest concern is the elimination of funding for WMATA. This would also jeopardize the \$150 million funding agreements from Washington, D.C., Maryland and Virginia.

Mrs. Hynes, moved, with a second by Mr. Smedberg, to approve the first letter.

Vice-Chairman Fisetto asked if Governor McDonnell has commented on this. Mrs. Drake stated that the governor is in support of retaining WMATA funding. The governor is sending a letter and if it hasn't already been sent, it will be shortly. Vice-Chairman Fisetto asked that NVTC receive a copy of the letter. Delegate Rust stated that the Northern Virginia General Assembly delegation has also sent a letter.

The commission then voted on the motion and it passed unanimously. The vote in favor was cast by commissioners Bulova, Comstock, Drake, Ebbin, Fisetto, Herring, Hudgins, Hynes, McKay, Rust, Smedberg, Webb, Whipple and Zimmerman.

Mr. Taube also stated that a letter has been prepared that would thank the Northern Virginia delegation for their efforts during the recent General Assembly session.

Mrs. Hynes moved, with a second by Mrs. Bulova, to authorize the letter to be sent to the Northern Virginia General Assembly delegation. The vote in favor was cast by commissioners Bulova, Comstock, Drake, Ebbin, Fisetto, Herring, Hudgins, Hynes, McKay, Rust, Smedberg, Webb, Whipple and Zimmerman.

### New Motor Fuels Tax Senior Auditor

Mr. Taube reported that the Commissioner of the Virginia Department of Taxation (TAX) sent a letter to NVTC and PRTC recommending that a new senior auditor be hired by TAX to replace an existing administrative position dedicated to the commissions' 2.1 percent motor fuels tax and funded from the proceeds of the tax. The net annual increase in costs from this requested action is about \$40,000, plus a one-time cost of about \$30,000. These costs will be shared equally with PRTC. NVTC staff agrees with TAX that senior auditor skills are essential to ensure proper compliance and allocation of the motor fuels tax. A letter has been drafted that would accept the TAX recommendations and also remind TAX about the misallocation issue.

Mrs. Bulova stated that this seems like money well spent to ensure that the misallocation problem is fixed. Senator Whipple asked if there is another place in TAX for the administrative person. Mr. Taube explained that the current administrative person does not qualify for the Audit Department and it is his understanding that there is not another available position for this person.

Mr. McKay asked what guarantee does NVTC have that after paying these extra costs there will be an improvement and the systemic allocation problem will be fixed. Mr. Taube responded that communication between NVTC and the Audit Department has significantly improved and TAX is aware of the problem. Mr. Kalkwarf stated that NVTC has received a promise that the misallocation issues will be addressed. Mr. McKay stated that he would support this as long as it is clear that NVTC is paying more to address these issues and that it is important that the new person does not get distracted and the problem does not get solved. In response to a question from Mr. Smedberg, Mr. Taube stated that TAX does the hiring and NVTC is not involved in that process. Mr. Webb stated that he would support this if it solves the problem. Mrs. Hudgins stated that it is important to resolve the misallocation problem.

Vice-Chairman Fisette suggested changing the last sentence of the letter to read: "We anticipate that our authorization of this new position will result in a correction of the allocation issues referenced above."

Mrs. Bulova moved, with a second by Mr. Webb, to send the letter to TAX, with the above mentioned change. The vote in favor was cast by commissioners Bulova, Comstock, Drake, Ebbin, Fisette, Herring, Hudgins, Hynes, McKay, Rust, Smedberg, Webb, Whipple and Zimmerman.

### Metro Items

Mr. Taube reported that a WMATA governance committee has been created and is being chaired by Mrs. Hynes. Mrs. Hynes gave an overview of the committee's activities, including writing by-laws for the WMATA Board. In response to a question from Vice-Chairman Fisette, Mrs. Hynes stated that the committee is looking at what

can be done in the short-term versus what will need a Compact change. One thing being done is building performance measures into the General Manager's contract. Mr. McKay observed that the changes that will ultimately be implemented will make the WMATA Board much better.

Mrs. Hynes observed that there is a lot of good information in the Vital Signs report. She appreciates Mr. Zehner's reports to NVTC each month that focus on several key VRE issues and she asked if it would be helpful for commissioners to receive key specific information reported each month on Metro issues. Mrs. Bulova stated that this is a good idea and it could be provided in a written report with bullets of highlighted information. She also suggested that General Manager Sarles, or his representative, could be invited to come and give a quarterly report to NVTC. Mrs. Hudgins agreed that this is a good idea. Vice-Chairman Fisette directed staff to prepare a one-page summary of the most pertinent Metro information for each meeting.

### Transit Performance Comparisons

Mr. Taube stated that each year NVTC compiles transit performance data from all of the bus and rail systems operating in NVTC's district. Many of the systems are showing declining ridership, except VRE. Mr. McGavock gave a more detailed overview of this information.

### Texas Transportation Institute – 2010 Urban Mobility Report

Mr. McGavock reported that the Texas Transportation Institute (TTI) at Texas A&M University released their 2010 Urban Mobility Report, which examines highway congestion in urban areas, as well as providing estimates of the cost of congestion in terms of time and gallons of fuel wasted in traffic, estimating the region-wide benefits for two types of congestion mitigation measures (transit usage and operational enhancements), making comparisons in one area to another, and analyzing an area's congestion over time. For the 2010 report, TTI utilized a new source for data collection, which they claim provides a more accurate view.

Mr. McGavock stated that the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area ranks first nationally in terms of annual per commuter fuel wasted (57 gallons) and annual time loss due to congestion (70 person hours). The new data sources for TTI have allowed them to revise the congestion trends for each urban area, and according to the revised figures, the Washington area had the worst or second worst per commuter congestion performance of any large urban area for some time. This area has been first in terms of fuel loss due to congestion since 1993, and first or second in annual person hours lost to congestion since 1991. In terms of region-wide totals, the Washington region ranks fourth nationwide in terms of total annual fuel loss and wasted hours due to congestion.

In terms of solutions to congestion problems, the report notes that public transportation reduced hours wasted in congestion by 783 million hours in 2009, and fuel wasted in congestion by 641 million gallons, for a nation-wide cost savings of \$18.8 billion. This region ranks third nationwide (behind New York and Chicago) in terms of hours, fuel and cost savings provided to drivers by public transportation usage. For 2009, public transportation in this region reduced the total number of hours spent by automobile commuters in congestion by over 34 million and saved those drivers over \$766 million in excess fuel costs.

### Regional Transportation Items

Unique Bus Shelters. As part of an advertising campaign for their new “Hot ‘n Wholesome” breakfast menu, Caribou Coffee’s ad agency, Colle & McVoy, created a unique bus shelter that looks like a big toaster oven, which includes a heating element on the roof that works to keep those waiting inside warm as they look at the poster of breakfast sandwiches on the shelter walls. Another shelter provides touch screen games played against customers in other shelters.

Potomac Yard NEPA Process Begins. The NEPA process is underway for Alexandria’s proposed new Metrorail station. NVTC staff is participating.

Rail-Volution Conference. Mr. Zimmerman reported that the Rail-Volution Conference is being held in Washington, D.C. October 16-19, 2011. Commissioners are encouraged to provide ideas for speakers and topics. This is an opportunity to promote this region and make it a showpiece. NVTC should be involved.

### NVTC Handbook for 2011

Mr. Taube stated that the annual NVTC Handbook has been updated for 2011 and is available on NVTC’s website.

### NVTC’s Financial Items for January, 2010

Commissioners were provided with the financial report. Mr. Smedberg noted that under investments, Nations Bank is listed but he asked if this bank still exists. Mr. Kalkwarf stated that it should be changed to Bank of America.

Adjournment

On a motion by Mr. Zimmerman and a second by Mrs. Bulova, the commission unanimously agreed to adjourn. Vice-Chairman Fisetto adjourned the meeting at 9:18 P.M.

Approved this 7<sup>th</sup> day of April, 2011.

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William D. Euille  
Chairman

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Jeffrey McKay  
Secretary-Treasurer