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Possible Findings

1. Greater Northern Virginia, extending through Fredericksburg, Culpeper, and Winchester, suffers from extensive traffic congestion that has worsened.

2. With further projected increases in population and jobs in Northern Virginia, state data show that congestion in greater Northern Virginia will increase substantially unless there are significant expansions in road capacity or people shift to alternative methods of transportation.
3. Failure to improve transportation in the region will stifle economic growth in Northern Virginia.
4. Residents of Prince William County have the longest commutes (by time) in Virginia, with the average commute in 2000 being about 37 minutes.
5. Enhanced transit has the potential to improve transportation and traffic congestion without extensive additional roads.
6. Increased transit use also has environmental and energy benefits.
7. The potential for transit is affected by many factors, including population totals and density, commuting distances, and concentration of jobs.
8. The potential for transit is affected by land use decisions, with transit oriented development policies contributing to greater transit use.
9. There are many alternatives to the single occupant vehicle (SOV), including high occupancy vehicles (HOV), buses, bus rapid transit, light rail (proposed), heavy rail (Metrorail), and commuter rail (Virginia Railway Express).
10. High occupancy vehicle lanes can carry far more people than SOV lanes, with data on I-395 showing HOV lanes at peak use carrying about 5,100 people per hour while adjacent SOV lanes carry only about 1,500 people per hour.
11. Although there are limited dedicated bus rapid transit lanes in Northern Virginia, data from the metropolitan New York area show that such lanes can move as many as 18,000 to 25,000 people per hour.
12. There is substantial cross-jurisdiction commuting by Northern Virginia residents.
13. Transit has become a major source of transportation in Northern Virginia.
14. Metrorail is the second largest rail transit system in the country.
15. Virginia Railway Express eliminates the need for one additional road lane along I-95/395 and another additional road lane along I-66.
16. Various forms of bus rapid transit provide commuter service over substantial distances across jurisdictional and state lines.
17. There are numerous local bus systems in Northern Virginia, with Metrobus providing interjurisdictional service and many localities having local intrajurisdictional bus service.
18. Northern Virginia has distinctive transportation elements, such as the slug lines that exist in many places, most prominently in Prince William.

19. The public is willing to pay for enhanced transit, with a 2005 survey finding support throughout the Northern Virginia Transportation Authority jurisdictions, including majority support in Loudoun and Prince William.
20. There have been substantial increases in transit use in Northern Virginia this decade.
21. Those increases were very strong in FY2008, most of which occurred before the spike in gas prices: for example, Metrorail use rose 4 percent, Virginia Railway Express ridership increased 5 percent, Arlington Transit (bus) volumes jumped 16 percent, and Loudoun County Transit experienced a 19 percent increase.
22. There have been further increases during the first half of FY2009, with part of that triggered by the high gas prices in the July-September quarter.
23. Partial data, however, show that transit use has remained high, and sometimes increased, even since gas prices began dropping rapidly.
24. Experience has shown that people who begin using transit regularly because of factors such as high gas prices usually continue using the system if they are satisfied with the service even if the precipitating factor in initiation of use, such as high gas prices, no longer exists.
25. Experience also has shown that people who discontinue regular use of transit because of problems or dissatisfaction rarely return to transit when the problem is corrected.
26. Different transit systems are most effective in different situations.
27. There are substantial differences in capital costs for developing transit capacity and in operating subsidies required, and in volumes provided.
28. Commuter rail has high capital costs, although those costs are would be much higher if it were not able to use existing freight rail lines. Metrorail extensions have very high capital costs. Bus rapid transit and local bus capital costs are modest by comparison. HOV lanes require significant capital costs, but costs, such as for parking lots, to enhance HOV use and slug lines are small.
29. The percent of operating costs captured from fares is about:
30. Metrorail: 80 percent;
31. VRE: 60 percent;
32. Bus rapid transit: some exceed 50 percent; and
33. Local buses: 20-33 percent.
34. Commuter rail (VRE) moves people long distances and attracts riders willing to pay significant fares but also has significant limitations because of limited hours that it can use the tracks.
35. Metrorail has far more passenger trips than other transit, providing more than twice as many trips as all the bus and bus rapid transit systems combined, now is experiencing its greatest growth in off-peak hours and weekends, and has convenient and understandable service into District of Columbia and Maryland, but also has limitations because of where its stations are located.
36. Bus and bus rapid transit systems have lower initial capital costs and are more flexible than commuter or heavy rail, with many services recently experiencing very rapid growth in use, but they historically have required greater subsidies and fewer trips than services such as Metrorail.
37. Bus rapid transit is an alternative to heavy rail where volume cannot support heavy rail and can also serve as an interim service until volume can justify heavy rail and the capital can be obtained to build it.

38. The TransAction 2030 plan calls for expanded bus rapid transit, light rail, and extensions of Metrorail to Dulles Airport (and, possibly, eventually to Ashburn in Loudoun County) and to the Potomac Mills area of Prince William County.
39. Fairfax County has extension of Metrorail out Interstate 66 to Prince William in its Comprehensive Plan.
40. VRE has proposals to extend service into Spotsylvania County and to the Gainesville-Haymarket area in Prince William.
41. Only 15 percent of Transportation Trust Fund dollars go to transit.
42. The Department of Rail and Public Transit is developing a state transit plan that should be completed in spring 2009.
43. The Transportation Planning Board is studying development of a BRT network for the Metropolitan Washington Area, with that study to be completed by mid-2009.
44. The Northern Virginia Transportation Authority will soon begin work on its next transportation plan, which is likely to be for the year 2040.
45. Northern Virginia will receive the maximum benefit when it employs a wide variety of transit options to best meet different needs in different areas.

Possible Recommendations

1. Continue the study committee in 2009 to more thoroughly address the issues and to develop a more comprehensive plan. Such a plan could include specific recommendations regarding transit enhancements, identification of enhanced transit corridors, land use and transit oriented development policies, review of data on projected ridership and costs of various options, and identification of significant gaps in service.

2. Encourage the Commonwealth and the regional entities, such as NVTA, NVTC, and PRTC, to move towards operating additional bus rapid transit service in congested corridors, such as Interstate 66 or Route 7.
3. Urge NVTA to examine further expansions of all forms of transit in the 2040 plan and to make recommendations regarding specific new or extended services.
4. Urge the appropriate governmental and operating entities to adopt long-term plans that could form elements of a comprehensive Northern Virginia transportation plan.
5. Require that such long-term transit plans be used in ensuring integration with HOV and HOT (high occupancy toll) lanes and coordination with other transit services.
6. Urge all entities to promote and pursue HOV service where appropriate and to protect efficient existing HOV services.
7. Urge consideration of creative approaches to specific congestion points, such as reversible lanes at designated hours at Richmond Highway and Fort Belvoir.
8. Urge the General Assembly, if and when additional funds are allocated for transportation, to have the percent provided for transit be greater than the 15 percent in the Transportation Trust Fund.