

JOINT SUBCOMMITTEE TO STUDY REGIONAL RAPID TRANSIT NETWORKS.

(SJR 122)

<http://dls.state.va.us/transit.htm>

October 22, 2008

10:00 a.m.

Potomac-Rappahannock Transportation District Headquarters
Woodbridge, Virginia

Meeting Summary

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Barker and the members introduced themselves to those in the audience. In brief opening remarks, Chairman Barker explained that, since the Subcommittee had not begun meeting until October 1, it would not be possible to complete its work by November 30, as required by Senate Joint Resolution 122, but that he had received permission from Sen. Whipple, Chairman of the Committee on Rules, to hold the group's fourth and final meeting in December.

The meeting's main focus was four presentations dealing with bus rapid transit (BRT) in Virginia, the first of which was Bus Rapid Transit in Northern Virginia, by Mr. Corey W. Hill, Chief of Public Transportation with the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation (VDRPT). Mr. Hill began by pointing out the common characteristics of BRT systems, pointing out that, at present, no bus rapid transit operations in Northern Virginia display all of them. At present, services with some BRT characteristics are operating in the following corridors: I-95, I-395, I-66, US Rte 1, VA Rte 267 (Dulles Airport Corridor), and VA Rte 244 (Columbia Pike Corridor). Although they are not planned to include fully dedicated bus lanes, Mr. Hill explained that the construction of high-occupancy toll lanes (HOT lanes) on I-95, I-395, and I-495 in Northern Virginia would be very helpful to the further development of BRT operations in the area, not only by providing quasi-dedicated lanes for bus operations, but also by providing additional revenues from concession payments to support public transit. He went on to give specific examples, and to cite ongoing studies, to be conducted by VDRPT, the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT), the National Capital Transportation Planning Board, and George Mason University looking toward expanding BRT to serve population and activity centers throughout the region. In his conclusion, Mr. Hill pointed out that using an incremental approach to expanding BRT in Northern Virginia can not only make the program financially feasible, but bring significant improvements in the short term by reducing travel time, increasing ridership, improving coordination of services, providing relief to passenger rail systems, and encouraging public-private partnerships.

The day's second presentation, Bus Rapid Transit for the Metropolitan Washington Region: A Key Component of the Transportation Planning Board Scenario Study, was given by Mr. Ronald F. Kirby, Director of the Department of Transportation Planning of the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments. Mr. Kirby observed that employment in Northern Virginia has been growing faster than its population, making increased use of mass transit not only feasible, but necessary as well, in order to limit increases in traffic congestion. Several of Mr. Kirby's remarks underscored the interdependence of transportation planning

and land use planning and linked increased transit use to efforts to improve air quality and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Mr. Kirby was followed by Mr. Alfred H. Harf, Executive Director of the Potomac-Rappahannock Transportation Commission (PRTC). His presentation, *Bus Rapid Transit -- An Evolutionary, Not Revolutionary, Concept*, discussed PRTC and how its programs and operation fit into the broader Northern Virginia regional context. He gave several illustrations to show that BRT is actually a continuum of costs and benefits, and that the success of any BRT services depends on maximizing the benefits while minimizing costs. Like the day's other speakers, Mr. Harf pointed out that existing BRT operations in Northern Virginia are at "the lower end of the continuum."

The day's final presentation, *Northern Virginia Transportation Authority Planning and Coordination Activities/Examples of Bus Rapid Transit in Fairfax County*, was made by Mr. Tom Biesiadny, Chief of the Coordination and Funding Division of the Fairfax County Department of Transportation and Chairman of the Jurisdiction and Agency Coordinating Committee of the Northern Virginia Transportation Authority (NVTA). He began by providing the members with the NVTA's background and its mission, focusing on the production and approval of the *TransAction2030*, a regional long-range transportation plan that has identified the need for \$16.6 billion in additional Northern Virginia transportation funding over the next 25 years. His remarks also pointed out to the members the negative impact that the Virginia Supreme Court's ruling voiding the NVTA funding included in House Bill No. 3202 (2007) has had on NVTA's plans and operations. Mr. Biesiadny concluded his remarks by providing the Subcommittee with specific examples of BRT services currently being provided in Fairfax County.

As a last item of business, the members discussed items that the Chairman and staff might include on the agenda of the Joint Subcommittee's next meeting, to be held some time in November.