

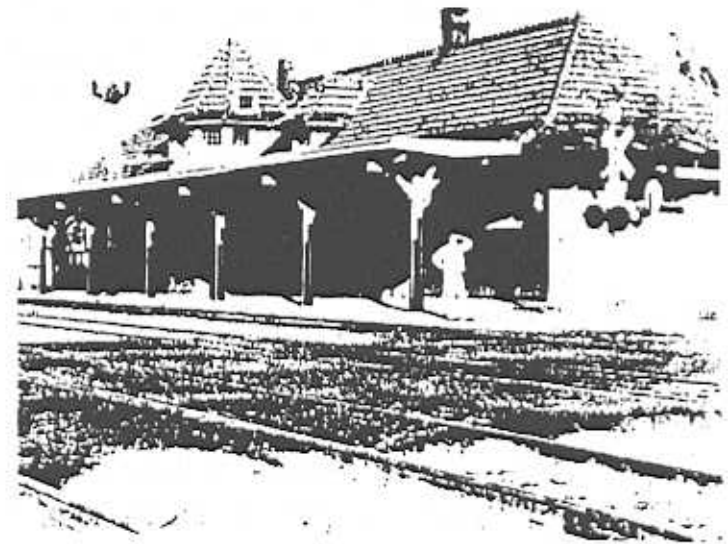
HISTORY AND BACKGROUND OF NORTHERN VIRGINIA COMMUTER SERVICES

III

A. Chapter Summary

It was somewhat ironic that in 1992 Northern Virginia was looking to commuter rail to help relieve rush-hour congestion. It was commuter rail that spurred suburban development in Northern Virginia in the first place. Establishment of frequent, clean and inexpensive electric trolley services between Washington, DC and Virginia led to explosive residential growth in Northern Virginia. Trolley service enabled many government workers to make "rural" Northern Virginia their residential choice.

Economic conditions and competition from automobiles ended the trolley and privately operated commuter rail eras in Northern Virginia in the 1930s and 1950s respectively. However, reactivating commuter rail service was being discussed only a decade after the last privately operated heavy rail commuting trains ceased operating. Discussions continued for over 20 years. A rapid rail system was planned for the metropolitan area that included commuter rail feeder service on two existing lines in Northern Virginia. Construction on the Metrorail system began in the 1970s, but the commuter lines were not funded. Finally, in 1984, commuter rail appeared financially feasible, and the decision to pursue development of a separate system was made. A summary of the activities which led to development of the VRE makes interesting reading, although it may discourage the faint-hearted who



*Northern Virginia Commuter Rail:
A History*

Manassas Station

are seeking to create new commuter rail systems in their localities.

Northern Virginia's commuting alternatives in 1984 included some local bus services in the jurisdictions near Washington, the new Metrorail extensions into Arlington County, express commuter buses in the major corridors, a growing car- and vanpool system, and the SOV.

The same transportation modes—an enlarged Metrorail system, public bus services in the jurisdictions near Washington, express commuter buses, and car- and vanpools—were still being used to help relieve highway congestion in the study area in 1992. The most extensive public rail and bus system coverage was concentrated closest to the Washington core, with Alexandria, and Arlington and Fairfax Counties having both Metrorail and local coverage by multiple public bus systems.

The number and geographical coverage of commuter transit alternatives decreased rapidly toward the outer portions of the study area. Publicly and privately operated express commuter bus systems served the I-95 and I-66 corridors. Also, highly successful car- and vanpool programs operated in Prince William County and the counties to the south. There were no local or shuttle bus services in Prince William, Stafford or Spotsylvania Counties.

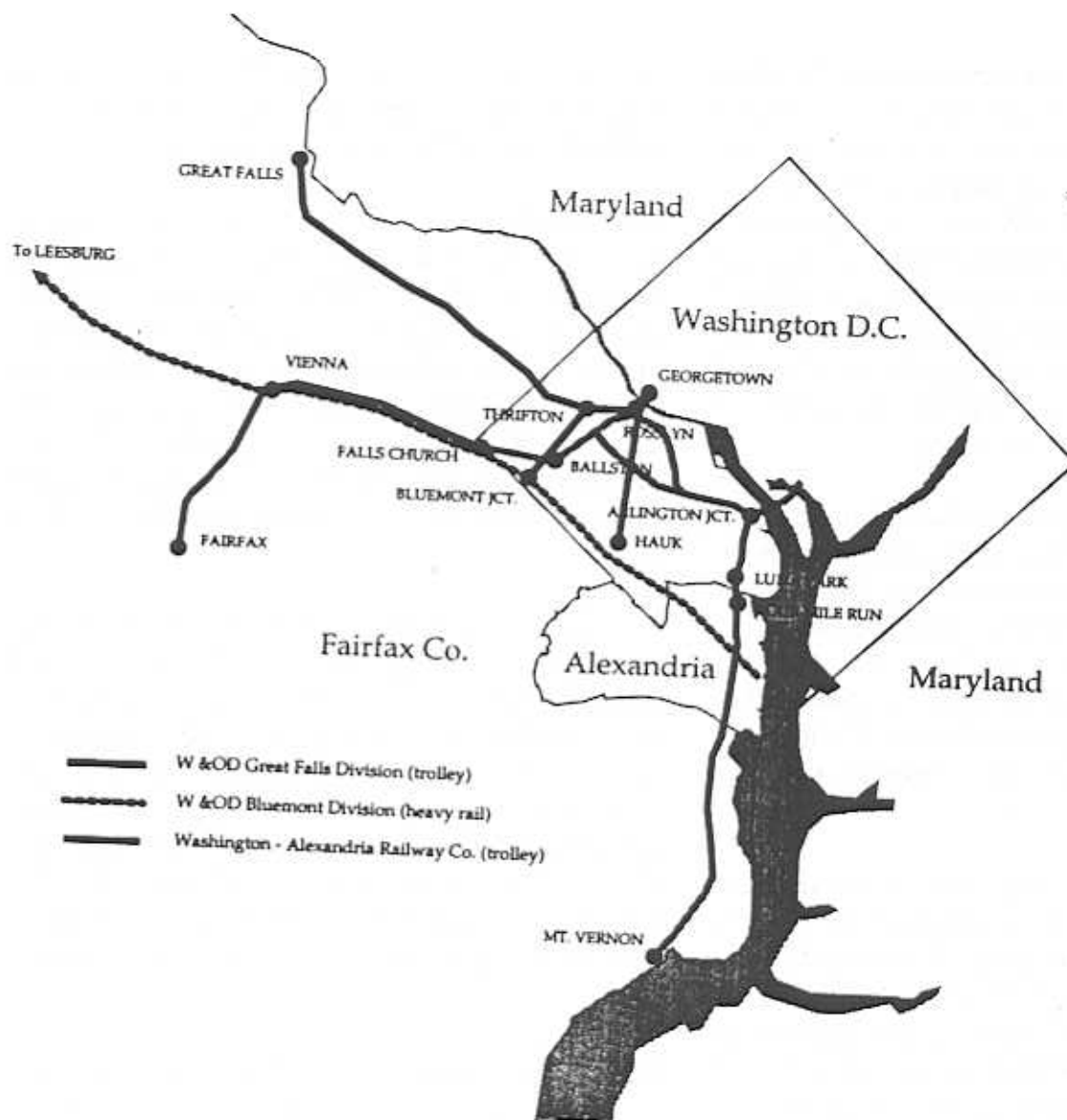
B. Commuting History

1) Trolley Commuting - The radial character of regional development was firmly established with construction of trolley lines connecting Washington, DC to the city of Alexandria and to Arlington and Fairfax Counties (Figure 4). Trolley services in Northern Virginia began in the 1890s with three lines; a fourth line was added in 1911.⁸ These first "commuter lines" led to rapid land development and population growth. For example, the population of Arlington County increased by 149 percent (6,430 to 16,040 persons) between 1900 and 1920.⁹ Trolley service provided a reliable transit means for living in the country and working in the city. That trolley companies were also land developers was no accident. Trolleys provided the access and travel convenience needed for the companies to market their lands in Northern Virginia; simultaneously, the resulting development built trolley line ridership.

By the early 20th century, development in Northern Virginia was closely tied to the trolley service provided by the two companies operating in the region. Trolley service was frequent, inexpensive, efficient, timely, and clean. Such service combined to make it convenient for people to live farther away from their work in downtown Washington and Alexandria and still be able to get there daily. The Washington Board of Trade, in an early publication entitled *The Book of Washington*, discussed the impact the trolley lines had on development

Figure 4

Early Commuter Rail Lines in Northern Virginia



Source: Richard T. Busch, unpublished thesis, 1991.

in Northern Virginia. In commentary about the Washington-Virginia Railway Company's line to Fairfax, Virginia, the book noted that before construction of the line in 1896, the population of that part of Northern Virginia was approximately 2,000 people. The population had subsequently grown to 30,000 by 1930 (an increase of 1400 percent in 30 years). According to the Board, the railway (trolley) service contributed more than any other factor to that growth. It handled two-and-a-half million passengers annually and generated a quarter of a million dollars in revenue each year.¹⁰

The trolley lines were very successful in promoting real estate development and in providing commuting, shopping and holiday travel services during the first two decades of this century. However, a combination of increased competition from individual automobile use, more highway construction, and loss of ridership during the early Depression years led to the closing of all of Northern Virginia's trolley lines between 1928 and 1932.

2) Heavy Rail Commuting - Three heavy rail lines also funneled through Northern Virginia in the first half of this century. The predecessors of two of these lines, the current CSXT (through Fredericksburg) and the Norfolk Southern Railway (through Manassas), had major roles in area Civil War battles as both the Union and Confederate armies sought to control rail routes for movements of troops and supplies. The battles of First

and Second Manassas and the battles around Fredericksburg occurred near major rail junctions or routes which led into the Confederate heartland.

After the Civil War, the restored routes provided passenger and freight services for Northern Virginia. The Alexandria and Harper's Ferry Railroad was originally established in 1847, went bankrupt in 1878, was reorganized in 1900 and extended westward to Bluemont, Virginia. In 1912, the rail line was leased to the Washington and Old Dominion (W&OD) Railroad. This line carried freight and passengers from Leesburg and points westward to Alexandria on eleven round-trip trains per day.¹¹

All three rail lines provided commuter and convenience travel from the outlying cities and towns. However, these passenger services came under increasing competition from the automobile. Privately operated commuter rail service in Northern Virginia originally ended in 1941 when the W&OD discontinued service. Commuter service was re-activated on the line during World War II as a fuel conservation measure. Ridership again declined after the war. The W&OD then ended the last privately-operated, heavy rail commuter service in Northern Virginia in 1951.

3) Metrorail Commuting - A series of studies commissioned by the National Capital Transportation Agency provided the groundwork for future rapid rail

and commuter rail systems to serve the Washington metropolitan area. A 1960 study proposed use of the Norfolk Southern Railway line for commuting purposes. The study also suggested a new commuter track be constructed parallel to the CSXT line (then the RF&P line) for similar purposes.¹² A 1963 study proposed a combination of commuter rail and rapid rail for the Washington metropolitan area.

In 1967, the Washington Metropolitan Area Transportation Authority proposed a combined 70 mile rapid rail system and a 90 mile commuter rail feeder system. Approximately 40 miles of the 90 mile commuter rail would be in Northern Virginia. Two railroad rights-of-way would be used. One route would use the then RF&P right-of-way from below Lorton to provide commuter service to Alexandria, the Pentagon and Washington, DC. A second commuter line would use the old W&OD right-of-way and run from Herndon, through the new development of Reston, through Falls Church, Arlington County and on to Washington. This line had been officially declared abandoned in 1965, and the right-of-way had been purchased by the Virginia Electric Power Company as a power line corridor.

Construction started in the 1970s on a revised 103 mile rapid rail system for Washington and the Virginia and Maryland suburbs. The system, called Metrorail, was planned for completion by the year 2001 and included three lines with service into Alexandria and the coun-

ties of Arlington and Fairfax. The Metrorail system had 18 stations in Northern Virginia in 1992, with one more planned—the Franconia-Springfield station in southern Fairfax County. Three Metrorail routes—the Orange, Yellow and Blue Lines—served the stations. Only two Metrorail stations—Dunn Loring and Vienna on the Orange Line in Fairfax County—were located outside the I-495 Beltway. The two stations were accessible to commuters on I-66. Average daily boardings from the 18 operating Metrorail system stations in Northern Virginia in 1992 were 120,500.¹³

The attraction of construction and operational funding requirements for the new Metrorail system pushed the commuter rail feeder components of the combined rapid rail-commuter rail system to a “back burner” as a congestion relief alternative. The decision not to proceed with simultaneous construction of a commuter rail link to Metrorail would not have had as much impact if the region had not experienced the explosive growth and extensive land development of the 1970s and 1980s. By the time commuter rail was again seriously considered, development had expanded rapidly outward and the W&OD right-of-way had been developed as a hiking, biking, equestrian linear park. The opportunity to have a grade-separated right-of-way on the old W&OD line for commuter rail purposes had been lost.

C. Existing Public Use Transit Systems

Three of the counties and three of the cities in the VRE study region in 1992 did not have public bus systems to provide local transit services. These localities were the Counties of Prince William, Stafford and Spotsylvania and the Cities of Fredericksburg, Manassas and Manassas Park.

There were a variety of large and small public transit systems serving Alexandria and the counties of Arlington and Fairfax. The systems provided inter-jurisdictional travel and feeder services to Metrorail and the two VRE stations in Alexandria and at Crystal City in Arlington County. The various systems were:

- the Alexandria *Dash* system which provided city-wide service in Alexandria;
- the Arlington Trolley which traveled a three-mile circuit and provided commuter rail connections in Crystal City;
- *Metrobus* provided extensive service in central Fairfax County, in Arlington County and in Alexandria; operated by the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority, Metrobus also served Washington, DC and suburban Maryland;
- the Fairfax *Connector* was a public-private system which served southeast Fairfax County;
- the Tysons *Shuttle* served a nine stop circuit in the Tysons Corner area of Fairfax County;

- the Reston *RIBS* (Reston Internal Bus System) served the Reston planned community in Fairfax County;
- the City of Fairfax *Cue* provided limited route coverage in the City of Fairfax, and
- the *Link* Trolley was a cooperative venture providing free trolley transit between the central business district of the City of Fairfax and adjacent George Mason University.

D. Express Commuter Bus Services

Commuter express buses have provided a very important alternative to SOV commuting in Northern Virginia for many years. Most of the commuter express buses were initially privately owned and operated. These systems operated from as far away as Culpeper, Spotsylvania County, Warrenton and Manassas. They primarily traveled in the I-95 and I-66 corridors and provided service to the major employment concentrations at the Pentagon, Rosslyn, Crystal City and the Washington, DC mall area. Riders met the express buses at Park & Ride lots along the major corridors. From 11 private and one public express bus operators providing 43 round trips per day in the VRE study area in 1984, the system has increased to eight private and three publicly operated carriers providing over 128 round trips per day in 1992. These buses carried an average of 4100 round trip commuters per day. Express bus destinations in 1992 were basically the same as in 1984, but

included Fort Belvoir, Crystal City, the Pentagon and Navy Annex, and various points in Washington, DC. One bus also served the Navy Federal Credit Union complex in Vienna daily from Spotsylvania and Stafford Counties. The buses serving the I-66 corridor originated in Culpeper, Warrenton, Front Royal, and Manassas; destinations included Rosslyn, as well as Crystal City, the Pentagon/Navy Annex, and Washington, DC. Additional buses from Manassas also provided express access to the Vienna Metrorail Station. (See more detailed discussion in Chapter IV.E.)

E. Carpool and Vanpool Ridesharing

A matching service for commuters to the greater Washington area was started by the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (MWCOC) in 1974. By 1980, the carpool matching program was expanded to incorporate vanpools, buspools and mass transit matching. The emphasis changed to "ride sharing."¹⁴ The advent of personal computers and interactive software technology led local governments to become interested in operating their own ride sharing programs to benefit their constituents.¹⁵ The car- and vanpool programs in Northern Virginia grew to become among the most successful in the county in the 1980s. The availability of some High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) lanes on I-95 and I-66 encouraged ridesharing as a means of providing access to these faster flowing commuter lanes. The ridesharing modes also provided the only alternative to

SOV commuting from many parts of the VRE study area. (See Chapter IV.D and IV.E for more details on carpool and vanpool programs.)

F. The Northern Virginia Commuter Rail System (the VRE)

Creating a multi-jurisdictional transit system is never simple. The VRE commuter rail system was no exception. Virginia's governmental structure which separates cities and counties required that multi-jurisdictional agencies take the development lead. Special Federal legislation and a Congressionally authorized insurance program were required to enable use of tracks and facilities owned by four existing railroad companies. Many hurdles had to be overcome, and public expectations waxed and waned during the process.

1) Governmental Jurisdictions - Counties and cities in Virginia have a unique relationship; counties and cities are truly independent jurisdictions. Even though completely surrounded by a county, an independent city is not part of that county. Its land area, population and tax base are not included in the totals of the surrounding county. Governments may maintain completely separate infrastructure systems or may participate in shared systems. Cities and counties may also participate in semi-autonomous service districts, commissions, or authorities organized to provide specific products or services. The participating members have established

oversight voting rights and financial support obligations in such organizations. Towns, however, are part of the county. Their populations and tax base are included in the county's base. Towns may participate as members in some multi-jurisdictional organizations but more frequently have the county representing their interests.

As proposed in 1984, the commuter rail system was to have stations in five Virginia counties—Arlington, Fairfax, Prince William, Stafford, and Spotsylvania; four Virginia cities—Alexandria, Fredericksburg, Manassas, and Manassas Park; two Virginia towns—Clifton and Quantico; and in the District of Columbia. In addition, the facilities of four railroad systems—the CSXT, Norfolk Southern Railway, Conrail and Amtrak—would be required. As planning for commuter rail progressed, two of the proposed commuter system jurisdictions, Clifton and Spotsylvania County, chose not to participate. Planned stations were eliminated from those two locations.

The multi-jurisdictional extent of the planned commuter rail system required a multi-jurisdictional organization for system development. The Northern Virginia Transportation Commission (NVTC)—established in 1964 and representing six local jurisdictions—initially spearheaded the effort to establish commuter service on existing rail lines. A new multi-jurisdictional organization, the Potomac and Rappahannock Transportation Commission (PRTC), representing the counties and cit-

ies not part of the NVTC but involved in the planned commuter rail system, was created in 1986 to function in a similar capacity to NVTC. The two multi-jurisdictional organizations became the co-developers and co-operators of the VRE system.

2) Chronology of the Northern Virginia Commuter Rail System - The VRE commuter system was the result of a long gestation period. The VRE Inaugural Program stated "...after nearly two decades of false starts, the commuter rail project finally began to take on a realistic shape."¹⁶ The extended period over which VRE was created provided opportunities for jurisdictions, developers, and individuals to position themselves for its arrival. One of the goals of this study is to discern if and when land acquisition and housing purchase activities began which were based on this future rail service. How system planning and development activities, both positive and negative, affected public perception of the reality of coming rail may have affected timing of related land use and housing purchase activities. The following is a summary chronology from an NVTC annual report and the VRE Inaugural Program of highlights, low points and activities that occurred during the creation of what became the Virginia Railway Express commuter rail system.

1964 The Northern Virginia Transportation Commission (NVTC) was created by Virginia General Assembly.

1965 The Commission acted to oppose abandonment of the Washington and Old Dominion Railway because of its potential for regional transportation and sought financing to purchase the railroad for rapid rail and freight purposes, with emphasis on continued private enterprise operation.

During reconstruction of the Shirley Highway (I-395), Commissioners called for the use of the RF&P (Richmond, Fredericksburg & Potomac, now the CSXT) for experimental commuter rail service to relieve congestion. Self propelled, rail diesel cars (RDCs) were suggested, with service from outlying areas to connect with the planned subway system (Metrorail). The Commission voted to conduct discussions with the RF&P and hire staff to accomplish feasibility studies. Second-hand, good condition RDCs were located.

A consultant (the Transit Engineer for the City of Philadelphia) recommended initial service with RDCs and to accommodate future growth, diesel locomotive-hauled trains and ultimately electric trains. Initial service would include workday trips (and one Saturday trip) extending to Lorton and Woodbridge, and eventually to Quantico and Fredericksburg. Fares would be three cents per mile plus a 15 cent boarding charge (a trip to the current L'Enfant station from

Franconia would have been about 50-cents one way).

The Commission also considered a proposal from an Alexandria company for a monorail connection for National Airport/Crystal City/Pentagon, estimated as a \$5 million project.

Representatives of private bus companies (AB&W and D.C. Transit) agreed to cooperate in providing feeder bus service to commuter rail, using joint fares. A proposed train schedule was submitted to the RF&P. Federal agencies agreed to poll their employees to help NVTC estimate patronage.

The Commission urged Loudoun and Prince William Counties to join NVTC.

1966 Staff discussions with the RF&P continued. Possibilities of operating pooled service with the B&O Railroad, providing direct links between Franconia and Rockville, were explored. In response to many requests from Fairfax County residents, the scope of the study was expanded to include the [Norfolk] Southern Railway.

Commissioners suggested that commuter rail services could be integrated into the planning efforts of the Washington Metropolitan Area

Transit Authority [WMATA], which was created by Interstate Compact in that year.

The Commission voted to commend the RF&P for its "splendid cooperation" in preparing cost estimates and requested that the railroad help to provide a test train with borrowed RDCs from the B&O.

1967 Plans were discussed for a six-year demonstration of commuter rail service on the RF&P between Franconia and Washington, D.C., with one-third of the costs to come from local governments. Commuter rail service could be replaced by proposed rapid rail service at the end of the six-year period. NVTC requested that WMATA apply for a federal demonstration grant.

The Commission proposed a test network to be part of WMATA planning for three commuter rail lines: 1) RF&P, Franconia to D.C.; 2) Southern Railway, Alexandria to Sideburn in Fairfax County; 3) W&OD, on new and abandoned rights-of-way, between Crystal City and Herndon, Vienna and the city of Fairfax. Capital costs would have been \$400 million, including rolling stock.

The Commission, noting great similarities be-

tween Northern Virginia and the Toronto Metropolitan Area, agreed to send observers to the initiation of GO-Transit commuter rail service.

The Commission approved the final report of its commuter rail consultant on feasibility of the RF&P project, and asked staff to continue discussions with the railroad to implement the service.

In a telegram to the Commission, the President of the RF&P objected to the proposal to bring freight and passenger trains from the W&OD right-of-way into Washington Terminal via the RF&P, and called the proposal "operationally unfeasible." The NVTC staff argued that about \$20 million would be needed to upgrade the W&OD, but WMATA's General Manager put the figure at over \$70 million, with an operating deficit per passenger of \$1.25, and service inferior to the rapid rail service proposed by WMATA's consultants for that corridor. He went on to warn that if commuter rail service was provided by NVTC in the RF&P corridor, a 10-year delay in providing Metrorail service would result since the corridor would be given a lower rapid rail priority.

1968 The WMATA staff completed their evaluation of NVTC's proposed six-year commuter rail

demonstration on the RF&P. Capital costs would be \$12.3 million, with a \$4.6 million salvage value. Operating costs would total \$14.7 million over six years, with passenger revenue less bus feeder costs totaling \$5.4 million. The net project cost was estimated at \$17 million, with trains at 15-minute headways over two-hour morning and evening rush periods, plus every 60 minutes mid-day, evenings and Saturday. The subsidy would be \$1.23 per rider, for about 9,000 work day trips.

The WMATA staff warned that seeking federal funding for the six-year experiment could jeopardize funding for the proposed regional rapid rail system. The Commissioners responded that it was wise to experiment with commuter rail service while new rapid transit lines were being designed, financed and built. The initial cost of commuter rail was minimal compared to rapid transit, and it could be integrated with rapid transit and extended outward as demand grew. Consultants informed the Commission that at least two years would be required to order rolling stock, build stations and parking lots, and rearrange tracks.

Following extended discussions and public hearings, NVTC voted to support a regional transit system for Northern Virginia with rapid transit

in the three proposed commuter rail corridors, and only interim commuter rail service. In adopting the regional system plan, the WMATA Board omitted the W&OD corridor but called for a staff study of interim commuter rail services.

1969 A Senate Public Works Committee report reiterated the feasibility of commuter rail service along the RF&P. The NVTC Commission voted to urge WMATA to "redouble" its efforts to investigate the integration of commuter rail service into its rapid transit network, since the Franconia/Springfield Metrorail station was not planned to open until 1978. The Commissioners continued to comment on the difficulties of simultaneously seeking federal funding for WMATA's rapid transit network and interim commuter rail service. The Commission formed a subcommittee to work with WMATA and the Transportation Planning Board to implement commuter rail service, and another to identify consultants to reconcile different conclusions of the Public Works Committee and WMATA regarding commuter rail costs.

1971 USDOT Secretary Volpe favored the use of existing rail rights-of-way for commuter rail service, and his staff undertook a feasibility study of such service in Northern Virginia and Southern Maryland.

- 1972 A consultant's study (the fourth in five years) was presented to the Commission. Four daily trains would carry 2,500 passengers in Virginia (and additional service would capture 4,200 daily riders in Maryland). By comparison, NVTC's Shirley Busway demonstration was carrying almost 18,000 daily riders at the time. Capital costs would be \$9.5 million with used rolling stock, or \$16 million with new, and first year net operating subsidies would be \$500-750,000. It was reported to the Commission that the private railroads were not interested in undertaking such service.
- 1973 The Commission discussed \$1.8 million appropriated by Maryland for state purchase of a commuter rail system. NVTC supported similar action in Virginia and asked the WMATA Board to report to NVTC by January, 1974 on the concept of including commuter rail service in its Mass Transit Plan, as was proposed in pending federal legislation.
- 1974 An Amtrak official contacted the Commission, suggesting that it was possible to obtain funding (one-third from Amtrak and two-thirds from the District of Columbia) for a rail line from Frederick, Maryland to Richmond, permitting commuter service in Virginia as far south as Quantico.

The Transportation Planning Board (TPB) staff urged NVTC to work with WMATA, Prince William County and environmental groups to provide a concrete proposal for commuter rail service to include in the TPB's plans and programs.

Prince William County officials developed a proposal for service on the (Norfolk) Southern Railway and the RF&P (CSXT) after speaking with the Presidents of those railroads. Both were believed to have surplus locomotives and rail-cars that could be refurbished. The County intended to seek \$700,000 in grants to help buy rolling stock and finance parking lots and shelters. Operating costs would be met from passenger fares for the single daily round trip. Stops on the Manassas line would be at Clifton and Burke on the way to the District of Columbia. On the RF&P, service would originate at Quantico with stops at Woodbridge and one site in Fairfax County before reaching the District. An anticipated 600-800 daily riders would generate \$1800-\$2400 per day to cover the \$1200-\$1500 daily operating costs. If no capital grants were obtained and instead equipment was leased, fares would be \$3.00 per round-trip to cover the \$2.69 per passenger daily operating costs, assuming 90 percent of the available seats were filled.

Prince William County did not seek NVTC's support or participation.

Maryland initiated commuter rail service on the B&O's Brunswick Line.

- 1978** The Commission reviewed the status of commuter rail proposals. The RF&P was reported to be "totally disinterested" in any commuter rail service, in light of its heavy freight schedules. Also, difficulties in financing the Maryland system were cited as grounds not to proceed with further in-depth studies on this line. The Commission contacted the Norfolk Southern Railway regarding possible service from Culpeper, Manassas and Burke Centre to the King Street Metrorail station in Alexandria.
- 1980** Legislation providing a two percent motor fuels tax in member jurisdictions was approved to provide system funding for use by the NVTC.
- 1981** The State Rail Plan contained an element concerning commuter rail service for Northern Virginia. The TPB [Transportation Planning Board] asked NVTC to consider coordinating a further study, in light of indications from the Virginia Department of Highways and Transportation that the RF&P might now be amenable to allowing commuter rail service on its tracks. Proposals

for additional passenger service to Newport News and Busch Gardens [at Williamsburg, Virginia] might lead to new opportunities for commuter service.

The Commissioners commented on the results of earlier studies that identified high costs of refurbishing rolling stock and entry into Union Station, as well as the reluctance of private railroads, as stumbling blocks. Staff was directed to update previous studies and report back to the Commission.

- 1983** The Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (MWCOG) completed Phases I and II of a Northern Virginia commuter rail study, which analyzed travel demands, capital requirements, operations issues and institutional problems. Service contemplated in the study would link with outer Metrorail stations and not continue into the District of Columbia. MWCOG requested that NVTC and local governments express interest before Phase III of the study was undertaken. NVTC staff recommended against further study, citing opposition of the railroads and limited funds, among other reasons. Some Commissioners urged that the study proceed, since private conversations with rail officials indicated a willingness for further discussions.¹⁷

1984 The third phase of a state-sponsored commuter rail feasibility study, completed by R. L. Banks and Associates for the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments, called for using new locomotives and railcars, with service terminating at Alexandria. About 3,000 daily riders were expected. The NVTC staff introduced the study concept to the Commission and a Prince William County member of the [Virginia] House of Delegates. The staff was directed to report back regarding the terms and conditions required by the RF&P and Southern [Railway]. [Acceptance of the study findings by NVTC and directions to their staff to initiate discussions with the RF&P and Norfolk Southern Railway began the final process which eventually led to creation and opening of the VRE. This action was selected as the "defining event" and 1984 as the anchor year for this study.]

1985 Monthly briefings were initiated for Commissioners by the NVTC staff. Representatives of the Virginia Department of Highways and Transportation reported that the RF&P was amenable to further discussions if no railroad subsidy would be required. In April, the NVTC staff proposed a two-year experimental service with used railcars and locomotives and with reduced crews at significant savings. A two-year budget was prepared, involving eight trains operat-

ing during rush hours. The NVTC endorsed the plan and provided staff's findings to a new State Legislative Subcommittee on Commuter Rail, to help determine the willingness of local jurisdictions and the Commonwealth to participate financially.

The Commission adopted a resolution approving a detailed scope of work to implement the commuter rail experiment.

The NVTC staff accompanied federal and state officials to examine used railcars and locomotives in Pontiac, Michigan and Toronto [Canada]. Suitable used railcars could not be located, although locomotives were readily available for rehabilitation.

A draft Master Agreement was negotiated with several local jurisdictions, and a basis for sharing costs and revenues was agreed to. Station sites were identified. Outlying jurisdictions discussed joining the NVTC.

1986 The Friends of the Virginia Railway Express, founded by an NVTC Commissioner, held a Rail Rally to drum up popular support on March 17, 1986.

In a June speech to the NVTC, Governor Baliles

committed the Commonwealth [of Virginia] to financial support of commuter rail.

In September, the General Assembly, acting in special session, substantially increased NVTC's transit assistance.

Insurance for the pilot train was not commercially available at any price. The experimental two-year run was delayed.

Work began on establishing a self-insurance trust, with a \$5 million state contingent loan and a \$150,000 grant.

New legislation created the Potomac and Rappahannock Transportation Commission (PRTC) and implemented a two percent motor fuels tax in its member jurisdictions to help pay for the commuter rail project.

1987 An accident between a Conrail locomotive and Amtrak train in Chase, Maryland called into question the enforceability of Amtrak's no fault insurance plan. Conrail withdrew its support for the project despite two years of active cooperation. A ridership study completed by R. H. Pratt raised earlier estimates to almost 4,000 daily, depending on the amount of parking, and provided station-specific estimates.

The NVTC and PRTC endorsed the Master Agreement in concept.

A detailed financial plan was developed with financial advisors, bond counsel and underwriters. A Commonwealth Transportation Board resolution provided a stable financial basis for planned borrowing by NVTC. An insurance broker of record was selected by the Commissioners.

Agreement was reached with Amtrak on an operating contract that provided modest crew reductions.

1988 The commuter rail project was officially named the "Virginia Railway Express." A distinctive, historical logo was adopted.

Financial advisors, bond counsel and bond underwriters advised the [NVTC and PRTC] Commissions on a financial plan and \$79 million debt issue to purchase 38 railcars and 10 locomotives while funding the Self-Insurance Trust.

All six participating and contributing jurisdictions endorsed the Master Agreement and financial plan in concept. Fredericksburg decided not to participate.

Amtrak, the Southern Railway, the RF&P, and the Virginia Division of Risk Management agreed to the Self-Insurance Trust.

VRE's Operations Board was created, selected its officers, and began to meet monthly.

1989 In October, the Commissions voted to execute the VRE Master Agreement, Liability Insurance Management Agreement, and operating agreements with Amtrak, Southern Railway and the RF&P. The agreements were signed in a special ceremony and train ride on October 27, 1989.

1990 Following an exhaustive investigation of the low-bidder in the rail car procurement, the Commissions awarded the contract to Mitsui and Company (USA) Inc. and its Brazilian partner, Mafersa S.A. All railcars were promised in 24 months, with sufficient railcars to start service due by October, 1991.

The Commission's \$79 million bond issue closed on February 7, 1990.

Fredericksburg and Manassas Park agreed to join PRTC and become full participants in the VRE project.

President Bush vetoed Amtrak's re-authorization, including Conrail indemnification for VRE. Congress failed to override. Shortly thereafter, a new bill passed and was signed by the President. The Conrail operating agreement was then executed.

1991 Deliveries of new railcars were delayed.

Rehabilitated locomotives were completed ahead of schedule by Morrison-Knudsen, and some were leased to other operators pending start-up of VRE service.

Serious negotiations began for up to 25 surplus stainless steel railcars from the Metropolitan Boston Transit Authority (MBTA). Discussions with the Urban Mass Transit Administration failed to yield a solution that would permit transfer of the railcars in time to meet the planned October, 1991 starting date. Late in the year, the MBTA agreed to sell 21 coaches to the Commissions. Morrison-Knudsen was chosen to rehabilitate the units in Hornell, New York.

Revised ridership estimates were provided by R. H. Pratt which increasing expectations to about 4,500 daily riders. JHK and Associates completed a survey research study that confirmed these estimates but suggested as many

as 13,000 riders might choose to use VRE each workday.

A staffing plan was approved for the VRE by the Commissions which provided up to 11 employees for the Operations Group. Management and policy making responsibilities were defined.

"The Express" was selected as a system nickname. The motto was "You've got a train to catch."

The Commissions agreed to help sponsor the new Crystal City Transit Store to sell VRE tickets and help respond to telephone inquiries.

1992 The first two Mitsui railcars arrived from Brazil in January and more followed later in the year.

Separate offices were established for the VRE Operations Group.

Staff prepared a \$228 million six-year capital improvements program (CIP) including track improvements, additional rolling stock, new parking, and extended services. If the region determined that it wished to use VRE as part of an aggressive strategy to meet the federal Clean Air Act Amendment mandates, approximately

32,000 daily riders could be served as a result of the investments included in the CIP plan.

Opening dates were chosen: June 22, 1992 for the Manassas Line and July 20, 1992 on the Fredericksburg Line. The inaugural trip, including the Governor as special guest, was set for June 12, 1992, with local station celebrations preceding the openings.¹⁸