

APPENDIX G

THINKING OUTSIDE THE CAR: THE ROLE OF NVTC IN ACHIEVING ENHANCED MOBILITY FOR THE REGION'S CITIZENS

-- November, 2002 --

The Northern Virginia Transportation Commission (NVTC) includes six jurisdictions (Arlington, Fairfax and Loudoun counties and the cities of Alexandria, Fairfax and Falls Church) with a population of over 1.5 million covering 1,000 square miles. Its 19 board members include local and state elected officials and a senior representative of the Commonwealth's Secretary of Transportation.

While the commission is not widely known to the general public, it works very effectively behind the scenes to plan, fund and coordinate vital components of the region's public transit network. In many respects, it serves as the glue holding together the diverse governments that are struggling to resolve the current traffic congestion crisis through strategic investments in public transportation. NVTC shines a spotlight on the contributions of public transit to a balanced transportation system.

- In 1964 the Virginia General Assembly, through the Transportation District Act, created a unique role for NVTC unlike the other districts in the Commonwealth. NVTC would assist in the creation of the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA), utilizing the commission's powers to issue bonds, condemn land and receive grants to help the metropolitan region organize its public transportation system.
- The WMATA Compact, approved by legislative bodies in Maryland, the District of Columbia and Virginia, as well as the Congress of the United States in 1966, specifies that Virginia's members of the WMATA Board must come from NVTC's board and that WMATA service in Virginia can only be provided to jurisdictions that are members of NVTC.
- Effective in FY 1981, the Virginia General Assembly provided NVTC with a source of funding for WMATA, which is not available to any other transportation district (unless that other district is contiguous to NVTC). The funding source is a two percent motor fuels tax currently yielding about \$20 million annually (and now also available to Loudoun County for any transportation purpose).
- For FY 2003, NVTC will receive about \$100 million in state assistance, bond proceeds and regional gas tax revenues to be held in trust and invested. NVTC's members who receive WMATA service share these funds according to a carefully negotiated formula that is designed to balance the interests of NVTC's large and small jurisdictions. NVTC's staff manages these funds (and performs its other important workprogram tasks) at an administrative cost of \$1 million (about one percent of annual grant funds managed). As a percent of annual local contributions to NVTC serves the region at a cost of about 21-cents per capita annually, which compares very favorably to the best performance achieved in the public and private sectors.
- NVTC's mission and workprogram have evolved over the decades to provide strong leadership that is responsive to the changing needs of this rapidly growing region. One role that has not changed is that of a policy forum in which local and state elected officials identify and resolve key policy issues affecting public transit and ridesharing. For example, the commission has adopted policies for preserving rights-of-way for future transit and ridesharing investments and for crafting effective congestion management plans. **The opportunity for elected officials to come together at NVTC to focus on public transit has led to a balanced approach** in this region with current and planned investments almost evenly split between highways and transit.

- Another unique role for NVTC has been to coordinate transit services between jurisdictions, by assembling performance data to facilitate efficient management, by identifying innovative funding sources and by initiating demonstration projects. Currently, the commission is managing projects involving cutting edge technology (new bus service in Falls Church and SmarTrip fareboxes regionwide), corridor development (U.S.1), free bus fares on Code Red air pollution days, and regional bus performance data collection. The commission also provided coordination for the Pentagon Metro Entrance Facility restoration, Springfield Interchange congestion mitigation plan, Dulles Corridor Bus Rapid Transit/ Metrorail extension, and regional bus fare buydown program. **No other Virginia agency is charged with helping local governments focus on connecting several public transit services to serve better those citizens who use transit by choice or necessity.** A measure of success is the 276,000 average weekday trips being provided by 11 different transit systems in Northern Virginia, each serving distinct but interconnected markets. Transit now enjoys a 35 percent share of peak period commuting trips to the core of the Washington Metropolitan Region.
- Since its first meeting in 1964, NVTC has worked to establish commuter rail service to supplement Metrorail, Metrobus and local bus systems. By 1992, this effort succeeded and the Virginia Railway Express was born. VRE, which is already the 12th largest system in the U.S., has reached as high as 14,000 daily riders (with a current daily average of over 13,500), carrying the equivalent ridership of at least two rush hour freeway lanes in the heavily congested I-66 and I-95/395 corridors. NVTC has issued and refinanced about \$170 million in bonds for this project, which it co-owns with the Potomac & Rappahannock Transportation Commission (PRTC). Without NVTC to advocate tirelessly for this project and to engage in the creative institutional architecture necessary to form PRTC and VRE, contract with several freight railroads and secure local, state and federal funding, this congestion-relieving rail service would be very unlikely to exist. Without VRE, its enthusiastic customers and even those who prefer to drive would be considerably worse off.
- NVTC has taken on vital new challenges, including an expanded role as legislative, financial and public advocate for effective public transit solutions. In this expanded capacity, NVTC will publicize the excellent performance of the region's public transit systems, such as the surprising fact contained in an NVTC report that single occupant vehicles carry a minority of persons traveling during peak periods in Northern Virginia's major commuting corridors (I-66, VA 267, I-95/ 395, US 1), as a result of public investments in frequent, reliable and affordable transit service and ridesharing. NVTC will continue to provide its publications (e.g. annual compendium of public transit performance data) and expand its web-site (which is linked to over 50 relevant transportation sites). Finally, NVTC has taken the lead in developing an integrated transit response to emergencies and security needs.

In summary, **NVTC is an action agency with a well-defined mission, a detailed workprogram that evolves to anticipate and address vital transportation issues, and an energetic and committed board of local and state elected officials who are dedicated to forging regional consensus and providing effective leadership by focusing on strategic investments in public transit.**