

MINUTES
NVTC COMMISSION MEETING – JUNE 4, 2009
NVTC CONFERENCE ROOM, ARLINGTON, VIRGINIA

The meeting of the Northern Virginia Transportation Commission was called to order by Chairman Zimmerman at 8:09 P.M.

Members Present

Charles Badger
Sharon Bulova
Adam Ebbin
William D. Euille
Jay Fisette
Mark R. Herring
Catherine Hudgins
Mary Hynes
Dan Maller
Jeffrey McKay
Thomas Rust
Mary Margaret Whipple
Christopher Zimmerman

Members Absent

David Albo
Kelly Burk
John Foust
Jeffrey Greenfield
Pat Herrity
Joe May
Paul Smedberg

Staff Present

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



Minutes of the May 7, 2009 NVTC Meeting

Mr. Maller asked that a sentence on page 9 of the minutes be changed to read: "Mr. Maller also recognized Arlington County for their assistance and Falls Church will likely contract with the ART bus system for operation of the GEORGE bus system." Without objection, the commission accepted the amended minutes.

VRE Items

Report from the VRE Operations Board. Mr. Zehner reported that VRE on-time performance for May was 91.4 percent systemwide. On-time performance for the last four out of five months has been above 90 percent. He also stated that VRE's contract with Amtrak expires in 2010. VRE has issued a RFP for an operating and maintenance contractor. VRE has already held a mandatory pre-bid meeting on May 29th and 16 firms attended, including Amtrak. Bids are due July 31, 2009.

Mrs. Bulova arrived at 8:13 P.M.

WMATA Items

Presentation by WMATA General Manager John Catoe. Chairman Zimmerman announced that Mr. Catoe was unable to attend but his presentation will be rescheduled for a later meeting.

Rail Modernization Report to Congress by the Federal Transit Administration. WMATA and the other six biggest U.S. commuter, heavy and light rail systems have a \$50 billion backlog of rehabilitation and replacement investments in trains, stations and track improvements that are currently in marginal or poor condition. This represents a third of their assets. Together, they require \$8.4 billion annually over the next two decades to eliminate the backlog, which does not consider expansion or capacity improvements.

RFP for Open Payment System. On May 14th WMATA's Finance, Administration and Oversight Committee recommended that the full Board issue a RFP that asks for descriptions of how WMATA could utilize bank and credit cards for fare collection together with its existing SmarTrip network. An issue of concern to the region's local transit systems is the need for assurance that whatever WMATA ultimately chooses to implement must retain the current integrated regional fare collection partnership. If WMATA ultimately offers direct access using bank/credit cards to its customers, the local transit systems should be able to do the same and the timing and costs of doing so

should be known in advance. Another issue is the need for WMATA staff to complete the implementation of “autoload” features for SmarTrip, including the availability of pass products, in the next few months without being distracted by this new procurement.

Comments on FY 2010 Budget. Mr. Taube stated that a draft letter containing NVTC’s comments was prepared and has been reviewed by NVTC’s jurisdictional staff.

Mr. Euille moved, with a second by Mrs. Hudgins, to authorize NVTC’s chairman to send the letter to WMATA. Mrs. Hynes asked for clarification of the main points of the letter. Mr. Taube explained that the letter refers to the importance of considering a fare increase which was vetoed by one of the jurisdictions. As a result of the way the WMATA budget was approved this year, it pushes a more severe problem to next year’s budget process. NVTC’s letter asks that next year’s budget process should embrace a collegial attitude. Chairman Zimmerman stated that it is relevant today because the Board needs to face the budget problems sooner rather than later. The letter emphasizes that the budget process is important to begin now and not to wait until the last minute.

Mrs. Hynes stated that in her opinion the letter does not make a strong statement. Mrs. Hudgins suggested including more details, such as a statement that WMATA’s customers need to be informed and involved in the budget process. Mr. Fisette suggested listing all the commissioner’s names as signatories. Senator Whipple suggested using language like “on behalf of the entire membership of NVTC” in the beginning of the letter. Mrs. Bulova agreed. Mr. Taube observed that NVTC’s letterhead includes a list of all its members.

Chairman Zimmerman reviewed the changes to the letter: 1) new opening sentence; 2) to convey the importance of customers being able to comment in a meaningful way; and 3) to urge timely completion of the budget process for next year.

The commission then voted on the motion and it passed. The vote in favor was cast by commissioners Badger, Bulova, Ebbin, Euille, Fisette, Herring, Hudgins, Hynes, Maller, McKay, Rust, Whipple and Zimmerman.

State Aid for FY 2010

Mr. Taube explained that each year DRPT provides standard contracts to NVTC covering the terms and conditions for receiving grants on behalf of NVTC’s jurisdictions and VRE. Overall state transit funding for FY 2010 decreased about \$26 million (10.3%) from FY 2009. But with an increase in state-administered federal funds, the net

reduction was \$9.6 million (3.1%). NVTC's share dropped about \$18 million, but DRPT is providing the remaining amount of an earlier General Assembly appropriation for WMATA rolling stock, so NVTC's net reduction in FY 2010 from the revised FY 2009 DRPT program is about \$8.1. VRE actually gained \$2.1 million in FY 2010.

Mr. Taube also stated that commissioners were provided with a copy of the presentation Chairman Zimmerman made on behalf of NVTC to the Commonwealth Transportation Board. Chairman Zimmerman noted that for FY 2009, Northern Virginia's local level of effort for funding transit was \$212 per person. NVTC's five WMATA jurisdictions had a combined local effort of \$278 per person. The next largest effort was in the Richmond District at \$31 per person. The statewide average excluding Northern Virginia District was only \$20.16, so this district's per capita level of local effort is more than 10 times greater than the rest of the commonwealth.

Chairman Zimmerman also noted that if the state was able to meet the statutory funding target of 95 percent of eligible transit expenses for its programs, Northern Virginia would receive another \$166 million.

Mr. McKay observed that he is surprised by the bullet point on page six: "51 percent of Northern Virginia's employers provide commuter services to encourage transit and ridesharing, versus 40 percent in the rest of Virginia." He expected these statistics to be higher. He asked if NVTC should be proactively seeking new employers to join. Chairman Zimmerman asked staff to look into this and find out how these numbers were determined and also look at ways to boost employer provided commuter services. Chairman Zimmerman noted that Arlington County and Fairfax County's efforts are very high.

In response to a question from Delegate Rust, Chairman Zimmerman stated that transit and ridesharing carry two-thirds of commuters in our major corridors inside the Beltway in peak periods and about half outside the Beltway. People do not realize that transit really works.

Chairman Zimmerman thanked DRPT for their assistance in acquiring funding for Northern Virginia. Mr. Taube stated that at the staff level NVTC and DRPT are working together amicably to address some concerns raised following the last NVTC meeting. DRPT staff has been very responsive to local staff as well.

Mrs. Bulova moved, with a second by Senator Whipple, to authorize NVTC's executive director to sign the grant agreements with DRPT for FY 2010. The vote in favor was cast by commissioners Badger, Bulova, Ebbin, Euille, Fiset, Herring, Hudgins, Hynes, Maller, McKay, Rust, Whipple and Zimmerman.

GEORGE Transit Service Agreement with Falls Church and Arlington's ART

Mr. Taube explained that Falls Church intends to contract with Arlington's ART to operate the city's GEORGE bus system effective July 1, 2009. As Falls Church negotiates a new service agreement with Arlington, NVTC needs to obtain the buses from WMATA and provide them to Arlington while retaining the right to repurchase the buses from Arlington in order to comply with requirements of the Federal Transit Administration. The draft contracts are likely to be available in late June and must be executed before July 1, 2009.

Senator Whipple moved, with a second by Mr. Maller, to authorize the executive director to execute appropriate contracts to facilitate the use of NVTC's buses for GEORGE service while retaining the rights needed to comply with FTA requirements. The contracts will be reviewed by NVTC's legal counsel before they are executed.

Mr. Maller stated that as a result of ART's solicitation for operation services, operating costs will be 25 percent below last year's rate. He thanked Arlington County for their cost effective solicitation. As a result, service cuts will be much less than first anticipated. It is his understanding that there may be additional funds available from the initial funding source for the GEORGE bus system. Falls Church staff will work with NVTC staff on this issue.

In response to a question from Mr. Fisette concerning bus service crossing jurisdictional boundaries, Chairman Zimmerman stated that there are already some local bus routes that cross between jurisdictions and there may be some opportunity for more cross-border service. Mr. Maller stated that merging GEORGE routes into the ARTS system is also being explored.

The commission then voted on the motion and it passed. The vote in favor was cast by commissioners Badger, Bulova, Ebbin, Euille, Fisette, Herring, Hudgins, Hynes, Maller, McKay, Rust, Whipple and Zimmerman.

Legislative Items

Mr. Taube reported that the Obama Administration did not include \$150 million of new funding for WMATA to match local commitments. Members of Congress intend to make an effort to add the funds.

Regional Transportation Items

I-95/395 HOT Lanes. Mr. Taube stated that a copy of NVTC's response to Secretary Homer's May 5th letter was provided to commissioners. There were no questions.

VTA Conference. Chairman Zimmerman reported that the Virginia Transit Association's annual conference will be held in Fredericksburg June 8-9, 2009. He announced that Mr. Euille has been named the new VTA president and Mr. Fisette will be honored as the Public Official of the Year.

EDF's Reinventing Transit Case Studies. The Environmental Defense Fund has published a series of case studies about "American communities finding smarter, cleaner, faster transportation solutions." Descriptions of innovative bicycle centers are included. Mr. Taube stated that the Shirlington Transit Center has a new covered bike shelter that is similar to the case study included in the report.

Bus Rapid Transit Update. Mr. Taube stated that Ed Tennyson provided written data on the relative merits of BRT versus rail alternatives. TPB and FTA will be sponsoring a one-day conference on "Opportunities for Priority Bus Transit in the Washington Region" on June 24, 2009 at the Washington Plaza Hotel.

Examining the Speed-Flow-Delay Paradox in the Washington D.C. Region. A December, 2008 final report for the Federal Highway Administration by the Louis Berger Group, Inc. examined the potential impacts of reduced traffic on congestion delay. The study examined "tipping points" at which free flow traffic breaks down as volume exceeds capacity and conversely how much traffic would need to be reduced to maintain free-flowing traffic. The study established that relatively modest reductions in peak demand can often be sufficient to improve congestion markedly. In general, a 10 to 14 percent decrease in peak traffic on congested freeways will reduce delay by 75 to 80 percent.

Transit Ridership

New ridership data for April, 2009 were provided. Mr. Taube stated that the positive trend in ridership continues.

NVTC Financial Items for April, 2009

Commissioners were provided with a copy of NVTC's financial reports. Mr. Taube observed that less driving means less gas tax revenues. Gas tax revenues are down 37 percent this calendar year compared to last calendar year.

Next Month's Meeting

Chairman Zimmerman announced that next month's meeting is scheduled for July 2nd at 6:30 P.M.

Adjournment

Without objection, Chairman Zimmerman adjourned the meeting at 8:50 P.M.

Approved this 2nd day of July, 2009.

Christopher Zimmerman
Chairman

William Euille
Secretary-Treasurer