

MINUTES
NVTC COMMISSION MEETING – JUNE 6, 2002
NVTC CONFERENCE ROOM - ARLINGTON, VIRGINIA

The meeting of the Northern Virginia Transportation Commission was called to order by Vice Chairman McConnell at 8:12 P.M.

Members Present

James F. Almand
William Bogard
Sharon Bulova
Gerald Connolly
Kerry J. Donley
Paul Ferguson
Jay Fiset
Katherine K. Hanley
Tanya Husick (VDRPT)
Elaine McConnell
Gary A. Reese
David F. Snyder
Christopher Zimmerman

Members Absent

Richard H. Black
William D. Euille
Dana Kauffman
William C. Mims
Scott Silverthorne
Mary Margaret Whipple

Staff Present

Rhonda Gilchrest
Scott Kalkwarf
Stephen MacIsaac (VRE)
Adam McGavock
Kala Quintana
Pete Sklannik (VRE)
Jennifer Straub (VRE)
Richard K. Taube
Alfred Titus-Glover
John Tuohy (VRE)

Oath of Office for New Commissioner

Vice Chairman McConnell announced that the commission has been notified by Speaker Vance Wilkins that Delegates Almand and Black have been reappointed to NVTC for two-year terms commencing July 1, 2002. Delegate Gary A. Reese has also been appointed to fill an unexpired term on NVTC and to serve for the succeeding two years.

Vice Chairman McConnell administered the oath of office to Mr. Reese and commissioners welcomed him to NVTC.

Minutes of NVTC's Meeting of May 2, 2001

Without objection, the commission accepted the minutes.

Status of FY 2003 State Grant Applications

Mr. Taube stated that new state transit aid for NVTC's jurisdictions in FY 2003 totals \$68.7 million, down from \$78.6 million in FY 2002. If sufficient funds were provided to meet the statutory target matching ratios, NVTC would have received \$75.4 million more for FY 2003 including \$57.8 million for fuel, tires and maintenance and \$17.6 million for capital. Mr. Taube went on to say that for the entire commonwealth, the corresponding shortfalls are \$88.8 million for fuels, tires and maintenance and \$22.6 million for capital, or a total shortfall of \$111.4 million compared to available funds of \$97.4 million.

NVTC's request for state assistance to evaluate the performance of new transit technologies in our area, including the SmarTrip fareboxes, was funded with \$100,000 of state money. NVTC's request for funding of the third year of its ongoing marketing/public outreach campaign was not funded.

Mr. Ferguson joined the discussion at 8:14 P.M.

Mr. Connolly moved, with a second by Mrs. Bulova, to authorize NVTC's executive director to sign contracts with VDRPT to receive the FY 2003 state grant funds. The vote in favor was cast by commissioners Almand, Bogard, Bulova, Connolly, Ferguson, Fiset, Hanley, Husick, McConnell, Reese and Snyder.

NVTC Products and Communications

Gas Tax Audits. Mr. Taube reported that staff had a productive meeting with the Assistant Commissioner for Compliance of the Virginia Department of Taxation on June 4th. Staff has developed a newsletter designed to serve as an informational brochure for motor fuel retailers and wholesalers to detail their tax obligations. It is currently being reviewed by NVTC's MAC Group and will be presented to the commission at its July 11th meeting.

Farebox/Clearinghouse Procurement. Factory testing of the SmarTrip fareboxes has resumed and may be completed soon. NVTC's consultant, IBI Group, is monitoring testing along with consultants for WMATA and MTA. In Service Qualification Testing (ISQT) may begin later this summer on Metrobuses garaged in Arlington. NVTC is convening a meeting of Northern Virginia's transit systems to review several issues including the spare parts list and possible sharing of these parts among systems, as well as plans to test components of the system that are unique to Northern Virginia.

Transit Systems Emergency Response, Coordination and Communication. Transit systems meeting monthly at WMATA have sent a letter to John Mason (as chair of the MWCOG/TBP Task Force on Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness/Transportation Group) and Dave Snyder (as chair of the MWCOG/TPB Management, Operations and ITS Policy Task Force) requesting \$150,000 of funding for consulting assistance to accomplish a scope of work to develop the transit component of the Regional Emergency Response Plan. The transit operators have expressed their willingness to assist TPB as it develops the transit component of its plan.

Falls Church Bus Project. WMATA staff and consultants spent two days at the Thomas factory in South Carolina with engineers from that firm. Earlier, Cummins Diesel had offered a new prototype engine with exhaust gas recirculation (EGR) features built-in. It has turned out that the use of this type of engine would require significant re-engineering of the bus. Accordingly, WMATA is recommending that the EGR units be retrofitted (the original plan) and work is proceeding on this basis.

Code Red. All of NVTC's jurisdictions with transit systems have executed MOU's with NVTC to support Code Red Day free bus fares again this summer. WMATA has not yet responded. The MWCOG Board of Directors passed a resolution on May 8th to execute a contract with the Virginia Commonwealth University to conduct Code Red Day surveys. Up to three surveys will be conducted on the evenings of Code Red Days.

WMATA Items

Metrobus Routes #5A and #5B. Mrs. Hanley reported that the WMATA Board has now agreed on a cost-sharing arrangement for Route #5A (demonstration job access route), which will be based on jurisdiction of residence of riders. The Operations Committee is also considering Route #5B, which links the District of Columbia to Tysons Corner. D.C. currently pays the entire \$690,000 annual subsidy. Some board members believe that Route #5A could be altered somewhat, such as adding a stop at Tysons Corner Westpark, to accommodate current Route #5B riders. WMATA staff was asked to conduct detailed ridership surveys to help resolve any questions of whether Route #5B should be continued and which jurisdictions should pay. The survey results are expected to be available this fall. Mrs., Hanley stated that 33 percent of #5A ridership riders are from Loudoun County.

Rail to Dulles. Mrs. Hanley reported that the EIS for rail to Dulles has been released from FTA and the next step is public hearings. Mr. Connolly asked if the public hearings have been scheduled. Mrs. Hanley replied that they are scheduled for July 24th and 25th.

Bike Racks on Metrobuses. Bike racks will be installed on the fronts of 1,440 Metrobuses starting this fall. Each rack will hold two bikes and costs \$1,000, including installation. Total project cost is \$1.65 million using jurisdictional CMAQ funds. Virginia's share is \$407,000.

Voice-Enabled Ride Guide. WMATA will be the first transit system in the U.S. to offer fully automated, voice-enabled itinerary planning 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The new system, to be completed later this year, is being provided by LogicTree and Nuance.

FY 2003 Guideline Based Bus Service Changes. WMATA staff is proposing changes funded in the FY '03 budget that would improve time on four Virginia routes and provide direct service from Columbia Pike to Farragut Square. As recommended in the Regional Bus Study, Route #16 S, U, W, X would be extended to D.C. Route #N22 would be extended from the Navy Yard to Union Station in D.C. to provide enhanced shuttle service for VRE and MARC customers.

Series 6000 Railcar Procurement. An award has been recommended to Alstom, for up to 182 new railcars. With award in June, 2002, the first car could be in service by June, 2005 and final acceptance of the base order of 62 could be completed by December, 2005. Jurisdictions have been working with WMATA to negotiate satisfactory agreements that will ensure funding for the initial purchase. These jurisdiction/WMATA agreements should be executed in the next few weeks.

Legislative Items

Mr. Taube provided some highlights of the VTA conference, including a productive meeting with the FTA Regional Administrator Susan Schruth to review FTA regulations and funding prospects. At the request of VTA, FTA has agreed to provide more training for transit systems regarding grants management. Jeff Southard, an assistant VDOT commissioner, alerted members to the expectation of an eight-hour ozone standard to be imposed by EPA, which would result in an increase in the number of regions throughout the commonwealth not meeting compliance standards. Mrs. Hanley stated that EPA has not promulgated the standards yet.

Mr. Donley joined the discussion at 8:25 P.M.

Mr. Taube stated that VTA members also met with Ralph Davis, the new Deputy Secretary of Transportation. Staff would like to invite Mr. Davis to a future NVTC meeting to acquaint him with the needs of public transit. VTA also met with Secretary of Transportation Whitt Clement, regarding VTA's resolution objecting to CMAQ/RSTP reductions. Secretary Clement indicated that he will look for ways to correct the problem. Mrs. Hanley stated that it is important that NVTC monitor this issue and stated that if the state restores other region's CMAQ/RSTP funds, it should also restore Northern Virginia's funds. She stated that Northern Virginia doesn't have a process problem with CMAQ/RSTP fund allocation as do some other regions in the commonwealth.

Regional Transportation Items

APTA Safety Awards. The city of Fairfax CUE and Alexandria DASH both won safety awards from APTA. The awards were presented at APTA's bus conference in Minneapolis in May, 2002.

Bus Rapid Transit and Light Rail Showcase. Mr. Taube passed around a brochure for the June 15th Showcase, which is being hosted by WMATA and the National Building Museum. The purpose of the event is to bring together experts in transit and planning to discuss how to create and influence urban places and to allow citizens and elected officials the opportunity to see the successes of other areas.

Census Data Regarding Trips to Work. Mr. Taube introduced Adam McGavock, a new NVTC employee, who helped research this issue. Mr. Taube explained that several articles have appeared in area newspapers recently showing the results of the 2000 U.S. Census long form regarding trips to work. Headlines portrayed soaring single-occupant auto use and declining transit and carpooling. Reporters speculated that these findings could adversely influence voting on the November sales tax referendum in Northern Virginia with the implication that transit investments have been and will be ineffective.

Mr. Taube stated that an issue is whether the 1990 to 2000 comparison provides a realistic picture of historical trends, since 1990 might have provided an unusual trough in single-occupant auto use (perhaps due to a spike in gas prices resulting from the Persian Gulf War during which gas prices jumped by over a third in the last few months of the year). Another issue is the level of statistical significance for the data reported for individual jurisdictions. Mrs. Hanley stated that one of the maps describes large parts of Fairfax County as unincorporated. She stated that it is unclear what it all means since there is no data for at least half of Fairfax County. Mr. Taube added that it is readily apparent that jobs and population are becoming more dispersed in the region, so it is not at all surprising that transit and carpooling could be losing market share to single-occupant vehicles in some parts of the region.

Mr. Taube stated that the Northern Virginia Transportation Alliance usually refers to transit's share as less than five percent of total trips, while the census data shows transit shares as high as 23 percent in 2000 for work trips. Measured as shares of commuting in Northern Virginia's main commuting corridors, MWCOC data used by NVTC consistently show transit capturing very substantial portions and the census data reinforces this conclusion. What is most alarming about the recent articles is the emphasis on reduced absolute numbers of transit riders, since the region's transit systems are reporting record ridership and many are bursting at the seams.

Mr. Connolly observed that between 1990 and 2000, VRE began service, WMATA added stations in Northern Virginia (Franconia/Springfield, Van Dorn), parking capacity was increased at Vienna, Franconia/Springfield and VRE stations, so it seems counterintuitive that transit usage is in a decline. Mr. Taube stated that during the decade, every major transit provider grew in total ridership, including Metro ridership which grew from 250 million annual trips in 1990 to 350 million annual trips in 2000.

Vice Chairman McConnell stated that those areas that don't have transit available should be factored out of the equation. Mr. Fiset stated that part of the population growth has been where transit isn't available. NVTC needs to demystify these inaccuracies and he expects that WMATA will respond as well. Mrs. Hanley stated that it is NVTC's role to respond. Mr. Bogard observed that Loudoun County has had a 97 percent increase in population, but according to the Post article there has been a zero increase in commute times. He would be interested in knowing about the utilization of mass transit compared to 10 years ago when it had a smaller capacity. Mrs. Hanley stated that Virginia is the success story in transit usage.

Mr. Reese stated that the referendum is coming up in November and if the public is convinced that transit is declining and not working, they will not vote for the referendum. The commission should take immediate action.

Chairman Zimmerman arrived at 8:45 P.M. and took over chairing the meeting. He stated that APTA is going to be preparing a response because it is a national story and misinformation is being spread across the country. It needs to be combated on a national level, as well as locally. Mr. Snyder stated that the numbers suggest a land-use issue and it is important to convey to what extent the projects to be funded by the referendum are oriented to providing transit to areas that now don't have it.

Mr. Donley observed that NVTC could spend a lot of time disputing the numbers, but questioned whether it would advance the cause. He stated that there needs to be a better message, which is that ridership is up and the systems are full and need more equipment. He stated that transit is needed at employment and activity centers, which are outlined in the referendum. This information can be used as an argument for the referendum. Mr. Connolly stated that history shows that if you build it, they will use it. Mrs. McConnell suggested that NVTC personalize its message by showing how transit impacts the individual. Mr. Reese gave the example of 3-4 million people a year who are expected to visit the new Smithsonian Annex in the Dulles Corridor but only one interchange was added to accommodate this increase.

Mrs. McConnell suggested providing a transit fact of the week on NVTC's website. She stated that she would like to include these nuggets on her website as well.

Mr. Fisetto stated that this type of article needs a 24-hour response because of the initial impact. Chairman Zimmerman stated that there should be two kinds of responses, including a quick response and then following it up by addressing it with facts. Mr. Donley stated that any response should be coordinated with APTA and WMATA and responses need to be concise and carry different messages from each agency. Mr. Connolly expressed his amazement that an article like this would make it into the paper without any comment from a transit agency, such as NVTC. Mr. Donley stated that staff should talk to the reporters.

Mrs. Hanley stated that NVTC needs to respond immediately with a headline like "Northern Virginia leads the region in transit use" showing that Virginia increased in absolute numbers of transit riders over the ten-year period. Mrs. Hanley stated that the next headline could be "Orange Line Bursting At Its Seams." She stated that there needs to be an immediate response in light of the referendum. Mr. Fisetto stated that NVTC needs to get on reporters lists and get them to talk to NVTC before articles are printed.

Chairman Zimmerman directed staff to follow through on the suggestions of commissioners.

NVTC Financial Items for April, 2002

The financial report was provided to commissioners who noted a substantial increase in gas tax collections for Loudoun County in the latest month due to reallocations described at the May commission meeting.

VRE Items

Report from the VRE Operations Board. The minutes of the VRE Operations Board's May 17th meeting were provided to commissioners. Mr. Sklannik reported that VRE ridership topped 13,000 daily passenger trips. For May on-time performance dropped to 92 percent mostly due to weather-related incidents. Governor Warner is scheduled to be the keynote speaker at the Manassas Line 10th Year Anniversary Celebration on June 21st. The Fredericksburg Line anniversary event is scheduled for July 20th.

Mr. Sklannik also reported that staff has put together contingency plans in the event that Amtrak shuts down operations. Should Amtrak cease operation, VRE would terminate service at L'Enfant and work with WMATA to provide further service. In response to a question from Mrs. Hanley, Mr. Sklannik explained that VRE would not be permitted access to the Union Station terminal since no personnel would be available to direct trains into the terminal. VRE provides the funds for the Amtrak crews to run VRE service, so VRE service should not be shut down. VRE staff will monitor this issue.

Construction of Woodbridge Surface Lot by Prince William County. Mrs. Bulova reported that the VRE Operations Board recommends approval of Resolution #923, which would authorize VRE's Chief Operating Officer to contract with Prince William County for construction of a 150-space surface parking lot at the Woodbridge station. The cost would not exceed \$385,000 and funds are available in VRE's approved CIP, consisting of federal funds and a local match provided by Prince William County in the form of donated property.

Mrs. Bulova moved, with a second by Mrs. McConnell, to approve the resolution (copy attached). The vote in favor was cast by commissioners Almand, Bogard, Bulova, Connolly, Donley, Ferguson, Fisette, Hanley, Husick, McConnell, Reese, Snyder and Zimmerman.

Lease with CSX for Quantico Station Building. Mrs. Bulova stated that the VRE Operations Board recommends approval of Resolution #924, which would authorize the VRE Chief Operating Officer to execute a lease with CSX Realty for the Quantico station building. The lease payment will begin at \$12,650 with annual escalation, but a \$200,000 offset will be provided to reflect VRE's expenses for rehabilitating the building.

On a motion by Mrs. Bulova and a second by Mrs. McConnell, the commission unanimously approved Resolution #924 (copy attached). The vote in favor was cast by commissioners Almand, Bogard, Bulova, Connolly, Donley, Ferguson, Fisette, Hanley, Husick, McConnell, Reese, Snyder and Zimmerman.

Increased Scope for AF Interlocking Contract with CSXT. Mrs. Bulova stated that the VRE Operations Board recommends approval of Resolution #925. It would allow VRE's Chief Operating Officer to amend the AF contract with CSXT to provide an additional \$750,000 for items authorized by VDRPT, including construction of turnouts, tracks and signals. VDRPT is providing the additional funds with no local match required.

Mrs. Bulova moved with a second by Mrs. McConnell, to approve the resolution (copy attached). The vote in favor was cast by commissioners Almand, Bogard, Bulova, Connolly, Donley, Ferguson, Fisette, Hanley, Husick, McConnell, Reese, Snyder and Zimmerman.

Lease for Parking at Rippon. Mrs. Bulova reported that Resolution #926, recommended by the VRE Operations Board, would authorize the VRE Chief Operating Officer to conclude negotiations and execute a lease (subject to review by VRE's legal counsel) for additional parking of up to 300 spaces at VRE's Rippon Station. The lease would be for a minimum of three years at a market competitive rate, which includes the cost of developing the surface lot and providing ongoing insurance. Work on the lot would begin during this construction period.

Mrs. Bulova moved, with a second by Mrs. McConnell, to approve Resolution #926 (copy attached). The vote in favor was cast by commissioners Almand, Bogard, Bulova, Connolly, Donley, Ferguson, Fisette, Hanley, Husick, McConnell, Reese, Snyder and Zimmerman.

Refinance VRE Office Condominium. Mrs. Bulova reported that in FY 1998, VRE executed a financing agreement (with NVTC as signatory) for \$900,000 for the purchase of its office condominium in Alexandria. The agreement is due to expire on July 1, 2002. In response to a question from Chairman Zimmerman, Mr. Sklannik stated that VRE is now using the space that it sublet previously. Due to the sublease, the entire original financing was structured as taxable. Since VRE is now occupying the entire space, the new financing will be structured as tax-exempt and will, therefore, bear a lower interest rate. VRE requested proposals from several major lenders to refinance the loan. The best proposal came from SunTrust Bank, which has offered a 15-year variable rate loan at an initial rate of only 1.72 percent (adjusted monthly). The new loan will be bank-qualified, which means it is tax-exempt when it is held by banks, and will cover principal and interest. The proposal has been reviewed by VRE's bond counsel, McGuire Woods, and will incur minimal closing costs of less than \$10,000. Resolution #927, drafted by bond counsel, would accomplish this.

In response to a question from Mrs. Hanley, Mrs. Bulova stated that at the time of the original loan, VRE did not need all the space and it was ideal that they could sublease part of the space. VRE staff has grown along with ridership and responsibilities and needs the space.

Mrs. Bulova moved, with a second by Mrs. McConnell, to approve Resolution #927 (copy attached). The vote in favor was cast by commissioners Almand, Bogard, Bulova, Connolly, Donley, Ferguson, Fisetete, Hanley, Husick, McConnell, Reese, Snyder and Zimmerman.

VRE Promotional Videos. A VRE promotional video was shown to the commission promoting VRE's overall operation and the need for additional capital funding.

Other VRE Items. Chairman Zimmerman announced that Mrs. McConnell received the Virginia Transit Association's 2002 "Outstanding Contributions by a Public Official" award at VTA's annual conference on May 30, 2002 in Virginia Beach.

Adjournment

Mrs. Hanley moved, with a second by Mr. Donley, to adjourn the meeting. The vote in favor was cast by commissioners Almand, Bogard, Bulova, Connolly, Donley, Ferguson, Fisetete, Hanley, Husick, McConnell, Reese, Snyder and Zimmerman. Chairman Zimmerman adjourned the meeting at 9:23 P.M.

Approved this 11th day of July, 2002.

Christopher Zimmerman
Chairman

William Euille
Secretary-Treasurer