



Coalition for Smarter Growth

DC • MD • VA

June 17, 2016

Chairman Martin Nohe
Northern Virginia Transportation Authority
3040 Williams Drive, Suite 200
Fairfax, VA 22031

Re: Comments on Northern Virginia Transportation Authority re 2017 Program

Dear Chairman Nohe and members of the Authority:

Thank you to all of you and your staffs for the hard work in developing performance metrics, evaluating projects, and producing a candidate list of projects for 2017. Given very limited transportation funds, you have recognized that we need to be efficient in the allocation of the funds you have available. That's why it is so important that you tie your transportation projects to support the forms of land use that minimize the amount that people have to drive while enhancing Northern Virginia's quality of life and economic competitiveness.

In *Region Forward* and in nearly every local jurisdiction's plans, you have identified walkable, mixed-use, mixed-income transit accessible neighborhoods and centers as the best way to grow. This is the case not just in Arlington, Alexandria, Falls Church and the City of Fairfax, but in Fairfax County which is placing top priority on transit-oriented centers and corridors, in Loudoun with three new Metro stations, and in Prince William, Manassas and Manassas Park at VRE stations.

Changing demographics and market demand have led to a boom in transit-oriented development, attracting millennials, empty nesters, and businesses. Eight-four percent of new office development has been within ¼ mile walk of a Metro station. Ninety-two percent of office leases over 20,000 square feet have been within ½ mile of a Metro station. The CEO of Marriott has said that the company will be moving its headquarters from an office park to a Metro station location. At a BISNOW forum in Loudoun last year, panelists called mixed-use, transit-accessible development the future of the county and key to being competitive in attracting jobs and residents. Rents and sales prices per square foot for both residential and office development are higher in mixed-use, walkable, transit-accessible locations.

Mixed-use, walkable, transit-oriented communities are a regional transportation solution. Residents own fewer cars, make fewer car trips and drive far fewer miles. They walk, bike and use transit at much higher rates and have lower combined housing and transportation costs. As our region grows by 1.6 million people by 2040, we need to support these communities that help reduce driving demand, otherwise we face both far worse traffic and the severe negative impacts that result from widening roads at great cost to adjoining neighborhoods.

Because of their great value to our economy and transportation system, these transit-oriented communities should be supported with transportation investments that make them successful. Therefore, we recommend that you focus the resources you have first on funding “TOD Packages” – the transit station improvements, local street networks, bicycle/pedestrian facilities, and other measures that make TOD work, and second, toward funding new transit capacity. After highlighting these investment priorities, we will comment on the proposed road and interchange projects.

TOD Related Investments:

- 3Q Manassas Park VRE Station Parking Expansion, because it is part of a plan for mixed-use transit-oriented development including shared parking
- 6W Bikeshare Connection to Orange and Silver Line Metro Stations, because this is one of the most cost effective ways to connect to transit and increase transit ridership
- 8DD Potomac Yard Metrorail Station, because this is tied to millions of square feet of transit-oriented development which has a high likelihood of being realized in just a few years and because the private sector is sharing in the cost of constructing the station
- 6S East Falls Church Regional Connections and Access, because this combination of bus bays, bus lane, sidewalks, and bikeshare will cost-effectively improve access to the EFC Metro station and regional network
- 8Y Crystal City Streets, 12th Street Transitway, Clark/Bell Realignment, Intersections, because this supports growth in two TODs – Crystal City and Pentagon City.
- 6U Seven Corners Ring Road Improvements, because this will support the TOD revitalization plan for Seven Corners, including the grid of streets, while providing an innovative urban, pedestrian and bicycle friendly alternative to traditional interchanges and improving the future Bus Rapid Transit connection to the East Falls Church Metro Station.

Additional Transit Investments:

- 9P Fairfax Connector Buses (11) because of the great need to meet growing transit demand in Fairfax, connecting emerging transit-oriented centers.
- 8FF Blue Line Traction Power Upgrades because these are essential to support 8-car trains.
- 8CC West End Transitway, because this new transit connection that will help link the Van Dorn Metro station with TOD at Landmark, along Beauregard, the Alexandria campus of Northern Virginia Community College, Shirlington, Pentagon City and the Pentagon, with additional connections to the Route 7 Bus Rapid Transit Corridor and Columbia Pike Transit.

A great deal of attention has been focused on the project (6W) to fund Capital Bikeshare to provide access to the West Falls Church and East Falls Church Metro stations. We see it as an excellent example of a cost-effective investment which supports transit-oriented communities and provides a regional benefit. Bikeshare is one of the most convenient ways residents of this community with its excellent network of local streets can provide access to the regional transit network, increasing transit trips and reducing vehicle trips. Investing in bicycle/pedestrian access to Metro stations is far more cost-effective per rider than spending \$25,000 or more per structured parking space, and frees up the land around stations for economic development – TOD that generates yet more walk, bike and transit trips. Again, this investment and other local street, bus bay, and bicycle/pedestrian investments that support mixed-use, walkable and transit-oriented communities are an integral regional transportation solution.

We are very cautious about road widening and interchange projects, because of the problem of induced demand, which will fill up new road capacity in a metropolitan area in as little as five years. This is a widely acknowledged and well-documented problem. In the short term, people change the time of their commute back to the peak hour, leave a carpool or transit to drive alone, or change their route to take advantage of the new capacity. In the medium to longer term, developers will cite the new capacity as allowing for additional auto-dependent development and people will move farther away from work because the commute is (temporarily) better – bringing back even more traffic to the road network. Money spent on road expansion, and then again for additional expansion as induced demand fills the new capacity, reduces the resources you have to make the long-term demand reduction investments that transit and TOD provide.

But we also recognize and understand the concern about near term bottlenecks that stress commuters. You face a difficult balancing act of addressing near term problems while seeking to make the much needed and longer lasting investments in transit and TOD. Therefore, our recommendation is that funds remaining after the transit and TOD supportive projects be selected based on the following principles:

- Any interchange project you select should be designed to incorporate safe, comfortable, and convenient bicycle and pedestrian connectivity.
- Preference should be granted to limiting arterial roads to two lanes in each direction, with protected bicycle facilities, sidewalks, and left turn lanes. Larger roads at three lanes in each direction or greater, are hostile to pedestrians and bicyclists and undermine transit-oriented development.
- Any road widening project that you select, which expands beyond two lanes in each direction, must incorporate dedicated transit lanes from the outset. If need be, they can be initially limited to peak hour/peak direction and also incorporate HOV, but they should also be marked in the plans for future conversion to all-day dedicated lane transit service.
- Any road project that is not limited access must include adequate and safe sidewalks, safe crossings, and protected bicycle facilities.
- In limited access highway and high speed arterial projects, parallel bike facilities within the right of way are better than no bike facilities at all. However, because of air pollution, parallel facilities are better located in offset locations along local street networks, provided relatively direct routing can still be achieved.

Again, we thank you for your hard work on behalf of Northern Virginia and we urge you not to lose sight of how important it is to focus on land use, particularly walkable, mixed-use, and transit-oriented centers that represent the most effective means to address our transportation challenges. After fix-it-first investments which include reinvesting in the Metro system, priority must go to transportation investments that support this more sustainable land use. This must be a core focus of the Transaction 2040 update and six-year plan.

Sincerely,



Stewart Schwartz
Executive Director