



COALITION FOR SMARTER GROWTH

Testimony by Stewart Schwartz Regarding the Draft Virginia State Rail Plan

July 29, 2008

Testimony before the following officials:

VDRPT Director Matthew Tucker

Supervisor Sharon Bulova, Fairfax County (and VRE)

CTB Member Doug Koelemay

CTB Member Judy Connally

VDRPT Staff Kevin Page

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Thank you for the opportunity to testify. Following additional review of the plan we will add details to the following testimony. We commend the staff for its hard work on this plan.

Earlier there was mention of the traffic trying to get to the Fairfax County Government Center for tonight's hearing. This points out that our transportation problems are more truly land use problems the result of poor land use planning. I am certain that the current Fairfax Board would not have placed the Government Center where it is today and would have linked it directly to a future Metrorail station.

A few years ago, a Virginia Conservation Network board member tried to take former NJ Governor Christine Todd Whitman to Amtrak at the Richmond Main Street station only to find out that the trains did not stop there in the early morning. He proceeded to have an embarrassing race the 8 miles to the Staples Mill Station. I recently checked, and Trenton NJ has dozens of trains per day. We need to do better for our own capital city.

I take Amtrak on 90% of my trips to Richmond and I've noted the benefits of the \$60 million investment you have made in the I-95 rail corridor including the Quantico Bridge. Train on-time performance is much, much better. Still, freight trains south of Fredericksburg cause delays and real frustration for passengers even while ridership is growing due to high gas prices.

The world has changed. We face a world of permanently higher gas prices and must fight climate change. Our economic security, national security and personal economic security are at stake.

Recent polling shows public understanding. The public overwhelmingly (60-70%) supports better growth management over more highways, and more transit over more highways. And the market demand for mixed-use walkable communities is widely estimated to be 40% or more of households.

The world has changed in another way we are deep in debt and will not have huge new resources for infrastructure. I could not believe that we have raised the national debt ceiling to somewhere around \$10 trillion and that the deficit is reaching \$480 billion. In addition, the state's VTRANS 2025 long range plan is unaffordable. At \$203 billion we were an estimated \$108 billion short in 2005 or \$5.4 billion per

year over and above our current \$4 billion or so in spending.

Clearly, we cannot afford everything and need to make choices and fundamental shifts in our funding. We need to invest in these freight rail proposals instead of building an 8 lane I-81. We need to finish the Heartland Corridor rail investments and Port rail investments instead of building a second Route 460. We need to invest in the I-95 freight and passenger rail instead of never-ending lane additions to I-95.

We need to do these rail investments in addition to our other transit investments, not at the expense of existing transit funds. In this regard, we agree with the Virginia Transit Association and we also agree that for intercity rail we should not be requiring a local match. We don't do so for interstate highways, so we shouldn't for intercity/interstate rail.

We should tie our rail and transit investment to pricing of road travel through congestion pricing (*note this does not imply endorsement of the current approach to public-private partnerships for highways under the PPTA*), parking pricing, taxes based on vehicle miles traveled, and pay as you drive auto insurance, and we should use the revenues to pay for transit and rail investments in parallel corridors to reduce traffic and improve the efficiency of the roadways.

We should tie our rail investments to land use, transit oriented development, and rural/agricultural land protection before rail investments are made. If you want a local match it should be in the form of real, well-designed plans for TOD and in comprehensive plans that will prevent sprawl from accompanying major rail investments.

We are hearing reports of the major railroads not adequately consulting with local communities or adequately addressing community and environmental impacts. We urge you to require a Context Sensitive Solutions approach with full public involvement and to require a strong standard of environmental compliance like we want to see from our own state agencies.

In terms of project priorities, we would make the I-95/I-64 Urban Crescent the top passenger and freight priority far above any priority set on the Route 29 corridor. As noted in your briefing, the I-95/I-64 crescent is where 60-70% of our population resides, 60-70% of our population growth will occur, and where we generate an equal percentage of our Gross State Product. The Urban Crescent rail project must include a rail tunnel to cross the mouth of the James River to Norfolk. In short, the Urban Crescent rail project should be our top state transportation priority.

The I-81 rail freight corridor should be our next priority given the extensive N-S freight shipment in this corridor.

In terms of VRE and other passenger rail, priority should go first to increasing ridership through transit-oriented development, bike/walk and local bus access to existing stations, before spending on extensions.

We also hope a priority will be placed on increasing the staff and funding for VDRPT in the hope that one day the office will no longer be the "second fiddle."

One final observation: We can be bolder in our rail investments and funding. You are proposing \$4.9 billion in funding over at least 20 years, yet we are already spending \$4.7 billion on only about 20 miles of highway in Northern Virginia that's \$2.4 billion for the Woodrow Wilson Bridge, \$700 million for the Springfield Interchange and \$1.6 billion for the HOT lanes.

Thank you.

Stewart Schwartz, Executive Director