



COALITION FOR SMARTER GROWTH

July 27, 2010¹

Testimony of Stewart Schwartz to the Commonwealth Transportation Board 2011-2017 Six-Year Plan

Secretary Connaughton and members of the CTB, my name is Stewart Schwartz and I am the Executive Director of the Coalition for Smarter Growth. We are a leading organization addressing where and how the region grows and partnering with communities on the interconnected issues of land use, transportation, housing, energy and the environment.

The challenges before us are significant.

First, our oil dependency and the world of higher energy prices that we can expect -- with just 5% of the world's population we use 25% of the world's oil; 70% of that goes to transportation. The spike in gas prices in 2007 showed our vulnerability and is seen by some as the final straw that broke the back of the speculative real estate market. Gas prices increased 3-4 times what they were in 2000 and this broke many families' budgets. Commuter buses were swamped and transit ridership continued to grow even after prices fell back. The cost to own a car according to AAA can be \$7000 to \$8000 per year. The family that has to own two or three cars is spending money that it could be saving for college educations or to invest in a business.

Second, climate change -- it's real and will lead to sea level rise and risk harm the port and Naval facilities of Hampton Roads. The amount of our driving has increased 3 times the rate of population growth according to the Virginia Energy Plan. Not only is that a top cause of our traffic, it means higher greenhouse gas emissions.

Third, our existing infrastructure is in serious disrepair -- last year Virginia reported \$3.7 billion in structurally deficient bridges and \$1 billion in structurally deficient pavement. Our Metro system requires about \$11 billion over the next decade for repair, capital replacement, and expanded capacity on the existing system. Secondary roads are deteriorating. At the same time, in other related sectors we face serious infrastructure challenges including aging water and sewer systems, many of which take out our roadways when they burst.

Fourth, we are broke -- as a state, as a nation, and in many households. We will have to harness our scarcer resources and spend them wisely.

Fifth, there's some good news -- changing demographics and market demand are already bringing people back to places with existing infrastructure -- our cities, towns, transit stations, and some older suburbs. Empty nesters, retirees, and young professionals are increasingly looking for mixed-use, walkable communities -- for cities and towns, for places where they can drive less.

¹ Comments originally provided to the 6-Year plan hearing at the City of Fairfax City Hall
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What this calls for is fundamental change in how we plan our transportation system and what we build. Our first priority, as it is by law in Virginia, is maintenance of our existing roads and transit systems. Still, we are probably not doing enough in this area if we have accumulated such a large backlog of deficient bridges and roadways and transit.

Our second priority should be to choose the new capital projects that best prepare us for the challenges we face, starting with higher energy prices and our oil dependency. We spend far too much money and fuel compared to other nations. We are risking our economic competitiveness if we don't prepare for a world of higher energy prices.

This means investing in freight rail to shift cargo from trucks to rail -- Virginia has a good record here that should continue to expand. The second is more efficient patterns of land use and urban design and the local street networks that maximize non-auto trips. We need to be investing more in primary and secondary streets, not zeroing those out. Third, invest in the transit that will support these more walkable communities, offer an alternative to congestion on the roadways, and increase our energy efficiency in transportation.

The advantage of targeting resources to existing communities and revitalization areas is that you have existing infrastructure that you may have to repair and replace anyway. Doing so matches public and private investment. But if you continue speculative greenfields development then you need to build both the new infrastructure while trying to repair the old. We're broke -- we can't afford to do this anymore. It is Delegate Clay Athey who talked about the problem of local governments sending "unfunded transportation mandates" up to the General Assembly as a result of inefficient land use planning.

Where Republicans and Democrats, General Assembly and Executive Branch, and VDOT are to be commended is in the reforms since 2007 that establish Urban Development Areas, Access Management, Secondary Street Connectivity, and performance standards that collectively seek to reduce the amount and cost of new transportation infrastructure.

But this is not enough. We have to look at the entire program and project list and reconsider everything. A great successful example is the Route 50 roundabout project that hassolved a major traffic bottleneck and avoided the need to four-lane a highway; or for Route 29, the combination of access management in rural areas and local street networks and smart growth in urban areas to reduce congestion without massive and costly expansion.

Perhaps our greatest concern is the priority being set on Route 460 in southside to serve minimal travel -- so minimal that tolls may only pay one-quarter to one-third of the cost, meaning diversion of hundreds of millions from statewide funds critically needed in congested areas. Another is the continued pursuit of the TriCounty Parkway when we need to fix I-66. Or the proposed, unaffordable and likely ineffective \$2 billion transportation "plan" that Loudoun staff and consultants are offering.

Turning finally to the PPTA and HOT lanes, we believe we need a real consensus solution to funding and planning of transportation -- because the PPTA and HOT lanes deals are troubling. For the Beltway, instead of the original promise of no cost to the taxpayer, it's costing us \$409 million, we are providing federally subsidized bonds, have to pay the companies if too many

carpoolers and buses use the lanes, and the private contractors own 75 years of toll revenues -- decades beyond their bond payoff. This money is therefore not available for future transit and road improvements in northern Virginia. The 95/395 HOT lanes are indicative of a bad process -- that fails to consider alternatives or missing pieces like the bottlenecks at the 14th Street Bridge in DC or the impact on the slugging systems. No business leader would run a corporation without full and objective consideration of alternatives.

So, we urge fundamental reevaluation of the list before you and of statewide plans. We can and should talk about funding options, but money without reform should be a non-starter. We will share our specific comments on proposed projects, but first we wanted to share this global view and offer to work with the CTB and the McDonnell administration to address these short, medium and long-term challenges.

Thank you.