

May 18, 2018

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

Re: Draft 6-Year Transportation Plan

Dear Chairman Nohe and members of the Northern Virginia Transportation Authority:

The following comments incorporate by reference and supplement those provided in the joint letter of May 9, 2018<sup>1</sup> and the verbal comments which the Coalition for Smarter Growth provided at the May 10, 2018 NVTAuthority public hearing.

- 1) **Transit Funding:** We recognize the concern that about \$100 million in annual Northern Virginia Transportation Authority revenues are being reallocated to fund WMATA's capital rehabilitation needs. While we too would have preferred new revenue sources and a greater state commitment, it is also the case that maintenance and capital rehabilitation needs of our infrastructure must come first and were overlooked in the 2013 omnibus transportation bill HB2313. It is also the case that HB2313 failed to ensure adequate and growing transit funding at the state and regional level. We therefore, do not believe it appropriate to "punish" other transit projects for the allocation being made to Metro. In fact, if we are to address regional growth, then we need greater investment in transit not less.
- 2) **Transit-Oriented Development:** Our joint letter summarizes the case we have been making that the most effective, sustainable, and competitive approach to addressing transportation challenges in Northern Virginia is to focus our transportation investments to support centers and corridors of walkable, transit-oriented development (TOD). This means supporting new transit lines like the Route 1 Bus Rapid Transit, additional Metro station entrances at Ballston and Crystal City that will increase ridership and fuel economic development, and supporting investments in the street grid, and bicycle/pedestrian connections to transit.
- 3) **TPB and NVTAuthority Long Range Plan Findings:** The Long Range Plan study at the Transportation Planning Board included extensive analysis of 10 major approaches to regional transportation and concluded that Balanced Land Use (TOD and jobs/housing proximity), Transportation Demand Management, Bus Rapid Transit networks, and Metro Core capacity would perform the best of the 10 packages, and the TPB voted, with Northern Virginia concurrence, to advance those four approaches along with express toll lanes (as practiced in Northern Virginia) as priorities for the regional transportation plan. These priorities mirror the transit-oriented approach

---

<sup>1</sup> Joint letter from Coalition for Smarter Growth, Sierra Club – Virginia Chapter, Southern Environmental Law Center, Prince William Conservation Alliance, Fairfax Alliance for Better Bicycling, Piedmont Environmental Council

which we have long advocated. It is also the case that the NVT Authority's own scenario analysis showed that balanced land use was the most effective at improving system transportation performance.<sup>2</sup>

- 4) **Generated Traffic:** New and expanded roads in metropolitan areas can fill up again in as few as five years because of the real-world problem of generated traffic (what some call induced demand). To quote from the best compendium of the research:

If road capacity increases, peak-period trips also increase until congestion again limits further traffic growth. The additional travel is called "generated traffic." Generated traffic consists of diverted traffic (trips shifted in time, route and destination), and induced vehicle travel (shifts from other modes, longer trips and new vehicle trips). Research indicates that generated traffic often fills a significant portion of capacity added to congested urban road. Generated traffic has three implications for transport planning. First, it reduces the congestion reduction benefits of road capacity expansion. Second, it increases many external costs. Third, it provides relatively small user benefits because it consists of vehicle travel that consumers are most willing to forego when their costs increase. It is important to account for these factors in analysis.<sup>3</sup>

This real-world experience indicates the severe limitations of spending too much on road expansion and not enough focus on changing land use patterns and using transit and demand management tools. It is the source of our concern about a number of the road expansion proposals in the draft 6-year plan and the Transaction Plan, and our long-stated concern that the HB599 congestion reduction requirement is contributing to the potential misallocation and even waste of tax dollars on road expansion that will not provide long-term benefits.

- 5) **Route 15 in Loudoun County:** We wish to talk about this proposed project because of how it illustrates our concerns. The current proposal is for expansion from two lanes to four lanes from Battlefield Parkway to Montessor Road at a total cost of over \$81 million with \$54 million requested from the NVT Authority. Rather than reduce cut through traffic in other communities, a four-lane highway would induce more long-distance commuting traffic. This proposal is also just the first phase of another potential project: expansion of Route 15 all the way to Point of Rocks. Not only is this expansion approach very expensive, it will generate additional long-distance travel and traffic. At some point a request will be made for hundreds of millions more in funding to build interchanges in place of signalized intersections. This is why we have joined local community members in advocating the use of roundabouts, traffic calming, and maintaining as much of the road at two-lanes as possible. Wider, reinforced, but grassy shoulders could allow for safe pull-off in emergencies. This approach would be safer and less expensive, while maintaining reasonable traffic flow and not generated new travel and traffic like a four-lane divided highway would. Loudoun County already has one award-winning roundabout and traffic calming project at Route 15 and Route 50 (Gilbert's Corner) and has heard from the residents of Hillsboro about their overwhelming support for two roundabouts and traffic calming on Route 9 (\$22 million, of which \$12 million is

---

<sup>2</sup> Joint comments on Draft Transaction Plan and Projects List, July 22, 2017, retrieved May 18, 2018, <http://www.smartergrowth.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Joint-TransAction-comments-7-22-17.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Todd Litman, Victoria Transport Policy Institute, Generated Traffic and Induced Travel: Implications for Transport Planning, April 24, 2018, retrieved May 18, 2018, <http://www.vtpi.org/gentraf.pdf>

requested from the NVTA Authority. Therefore, we urge the NVTA Authority to fund a roundabout and traffic calming project for Route 15 in lieu of the proposed four lane expansion.

6) **Specific project recommendations:** We endorse the projects called out in the joint letter of May 9, 2018, but with modification regarding Loudoun County and the following additional comments per jurisdiction:

a. Loudoun County priority should go to:

- i. Route 15 roundabouts and traffic calming in lieu of widening
- ii. Route 9 roundabouts and traffic calming
- iii. Shellhorne Road extension to support street network near transit stations and
- iv. Prentice Drive extension to support street network near transit stations
- v. Evergreen Mills road widening and intersection improvements (two projects)

While our joint letter talks about Northstar, our concern remains that this project risks sparking more traffic and becoming part of an outer beltway. It is not nearly the priority that the six projects listed above are and if built should be limited to four lanes and limited right of way as our joint letter notes.

b. Fairfax County priority should go to:

- i. Bus Rapid Transit on Route 1 to support the Embark Richmond Highway plan
- ii. Route 1 widening to support BRT, but crossing distance should be narrowed
- iii. Soapstone Drive extension over Dulles Toll Road to support network near TOD
- iv. Dulles Toll Road Town Center Parkway underpass to support network near TOD
- v. Frontier Drive extension to support network at Springfield Metro
- vi. Richmond Highway, CSX underpass widening
- vii. Seven Corners Loop Road to support local street grid and TOD

c. Prince William County priority should go to:

- i. Route 28 EIS and Route 28 corridor improvements from City of Manassas to Fairfax County – we support continued study and a priority focus on fixing this corridor, and we believe the best approach is a third lane on the current alignment which should be dedicated peak hours, peak direction HOV and bus, along with a series of improved local road connections to improve local traffic movement.
- ii. See also our support for Woodbrige VRE and third track (below)

d. Arlington: We support all listed projects.

e. Alexandria: We support all listed projects.

f. City of Falls Church: We support all listed projects.

g. City of Fairfax priority should go to:

- i. Intersection improvements at Eaton Place/Chain Bridge Road
- ii. Northfax road network improvement
- iii. Old Lee Highway multimodal improvements

h. Town of Dumfries: We support:

- i. Route 1 northbound expansion to six-lanes and conversion to two-way, to allow old

southbound Route 1 to become a two-way Main Street. However cross-section could be reduced by using 11 foot travel lanes, and narrower median.

- i. VRE: We support:
  - i. Crystal City station improvements
  - ii. Woodbridge station improvements and third track
  
- j. NOVA Parks: We support:
  - i. W&OD improvements which will increase bike commuting and improve bike access to East Falls Church Metro station

Projects not listed reflect our concern about the high cost of road expansions and interchanges created by failure to focus development at transit and in mixed-use, walkable communities with a good local interconnected street grid. Spreading outward is leading to auto-dependence and long-distance commutes, and failure to create a local interconnected street grid is driving most traffic onto just a few arterials which in turn places the burden on taxpayers to fund widening and costly interchanges.

Thank you for the opportunity to make recommendations as to priorities for the 6-year investment plan.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Stewart Schwartz". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent initial "S".

Stewart Schwartz  
Executive Director