

Coalition for Smarter Growth -- Fairfax Alliance for Better Bicycling
Piedmont Environmental Council -- Prince William Conservation Alliance
Sierra Club Virginia Chapter -- Southern Environmental Law Center

May 9, 2018

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

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

The Coalition for Smarter Growth, The Piedmont Environmental Council and Prince William Conservation Alliance are submitting these comments on NVTAs 6-year plan (FY2018-23). During the past 15 years, northern Virginia and the metropolitan Washington region have moved toward focusing development in more compact, mixed-use communities near transit. These decisions are reaping significant economic benefits as major employers and retail businesses seek to locate near transit. They are creating vibrant communities where people want to live and can walk, bicycle and take rail, local buses or express bus service for everyday trips. They are also mitigating traffic congestion by giving people more transportation choices.

Activity centers near transit exist or are in development in every part of our region. They include the Silver Line station areas in Fairfax and Loudoun, the developing communities and historic downtowns around VRE stations in Prince William, Manassas, and Manassas Park, and transit-oriented development along the Orange and Blue lines in Arlington, Alexandria, Falls Church and Fairfax.

The region's historic investment in Metro will support transit-oriented activity centers throughout the region while relieving pressure on our roads. A stronger Metro system is the backbone for our entire regional transportation network. It makes travel easier for everyone in the region, including people who do not ride on Metro.

In April, our groups released a Blueprint for Better Transportation for Northern Virginia that recommends a set of cost-effective investments in transit, road, and pedestrian and bicycling projects. Most of these investments are relatively low-cost projects that take advantage of our existing transit assets. The Blueprint also includes strategic road improvements and connections that make the road network more efficient.

We recommend that NVTAs prioritize funding for the following projects in its 6-year plan, per the recommendations of our Blueprint:

Transit access improvements: By making it easier to get to Metro and VRE stations on foot, by bike and by automobile, these projects will leverage private investments in mixed-use development and expand transit use:

- Ballston Metrorail station west entrance (Arlington)
- Crystal City Metrorail station east entrance and intermodal connections (Arlington)
- VRE Crystal City station improvements (VRE)
- Shellhorn Road - Loudoun County Parkway to Randolph Dr. (Loudoun)
- Prentice Drive/Lockridge Road West: extend Prentice Dr. from Lockridge Rd. to Shellhorn Road (Loudoun)
- West Falls Church and Joint Campus Revitalization District Multimodal project (City of Falls Church)
- Improvements to W&OD trail in Falls Church (NOVA Parks)
- Soapstone Dr. Extension (Dulles Toll Road Overpass) (Fairfax County)

- Frontier Drive extension (Fairfax County)
- Dulles Toll Road – Town Center Parkway underpass (Fairfax County)

New Bus Rapid Transit: These projects complement local land use plans that call for compact development within walking distance of new transit stations. By adding cost-effective bus service on dedicated lanes, they provide fixed-guideway transit that will spur walkable, mixed-use redevelopment. They will focus growth in walkable, bikeable, transit-oriented communities, making the region more economically competitive and allowing existing roads to be much more efficient.

- Route 1 BRT from Huntington Metrorail station to Fort Belvoir (Fairfax County)
- Route 1 widening from Mt. Vernon Memorial Highway to Napper Road (Fairfax County). This project provides the right-of-way needed for BRT and separated bike and pedestrian facilities. ROW should be narrowed where possible to shorten pedestrian crossing distances and reduce ROW acquisition costs.
- Pentagon City multimodal connections and Transitway extension (Arlington)
- West End Transitway: northern segment (Alexandria)
- Duke Street Transitway to Landmark Mall (Alexandria)

Strategic road improvements: These targeted projects will mitigate traffic congestion by augmenting street grids and improving hot spots, but without creating the induced demand and spurring the sprawling development patterns that only create more traffic problems.

- Rte. 28 corridor improvements Fitzwater Drive to Pennsylvania Avenue (Prince William)
- Construct Rte. 28 corridor improvements (Prince William)
- Rte. 9 traffic calming, Town of Hillsboro (Loudoun)
- Intersection improvements at Chain Bridge Road and Eaton Place (City of Fairfax)
- Northfax west street grid (City of Fairfax). Both this and the above project will support focused redevelopment at Northfax at the intersection of Fairfax Boulevard and Rte. 123.

For several proposed road improvements, we support more targeted and cost-effective alternatives, as follows:

- Rte. 15 north of Leesburg: Construct roundabouts at White’s Ferry Road and other major intersections, while maintaining the road at two lanes north of White’s Ferry with strengthened grassy shoulders and traffic calming features. Allow evaluation of this alternative to include options for maintaining two lanes south of White’s Ferry Road.
- Northstar Boulevard extension: Although we understand the desire to alleviate some hot spots in the vicinity of the existing northern section of Northstar Boulevard and improve access to the Brambleton and Stone Ridge areas, we have serious concerns with this project becoming a link in a major new highway corridor, which would spur more development in Loudoun County’s designated Transition Area. We instead support other connections that would provide similar local connectivity benefits as extending Northstar Boulevard without the same potential for generating sprawl. If the NVTVA feels compelled to fund an extension of Northstar, any proposal to do so should be designed as a local road or at most a minor collector to discourage through traffic, should have a design speed of no greater than 35 miles per hour, and the right-of-way should be limited to four lanes. These design parameters would help reduce the project’s cost and ensure it serves more of a local connector purpose.
- Route 28 widening in Fairfax County: We oppose widening Route 28 from the Prince William line to Route 29 to 8 lanes. We support widening to 6 lanes, provided that one lane in peak direction be reserved for HOV and buses. This level of added capacity can relieve congestion from existing conditions while also encouraging more compact growth patterns and transit use in the 28 corridor. The inclusion of bicycle and pedestrian improvements, particularly a shared use path on both sides of the roadway, would provide needed connections to a regional active transportation network.

- Route 28 feasibility study and Environmental Impact Statement, Prince William: We support strong public involvement to develop solutions in this part of the Route 28 corridor that protect natural and historic resources, and completion of a full EIS rather than an abbreviated Environmental Assessment.

In conclusion, our recommended projects leverage the region’s investment in a strong Metro system to achieve more walkable and bikeable, transit-oriented communities. They also leverage significant private sector investments in redeveloping areas near transit to expand transportation choices and make regional travel easier for everyone. They make use of the limited funds available to create a more efficient transportation network.

Sincerely yours,

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