

**Coalition for Smarter Growth * Sierra Club VA Chapter * Bike Loudoun
Active Prince William * Prince William Conservation Alliance
Sierra Club Mount Vernon Group * Alexandria Bicycle and Pedestrian
Advisory Committee * Liveable Alexandria: Housing and Transit Advocates
Grassroots Alexandria * Fairfax Alliance for Better Bicycling * Arlington
Coalition for Sensible Transportation * Arlington Neighborhoods Forward
The Piedmont Environmental Council * Southern Environmental Law Center
Audubon Naturalist Society * Chesapeake Bay Foundation**

May 11, 2020

Hon. Phyllis Randall
Chair, Northern Virginia Transportation Authority
3040 Williams Drive
Fairfax, VA 22031

Dear Chair Randall:

The undersigned groups are submitting these comments in regard to the Six-Year Plan update for 2020-25. We appreciate that the 2018-23 Six-Year Plan, in comparison to previous funding cycles, includes a broader range of projects that improve pedestrian, bicycle and transit networks and complement more compact, efficient, transit-oriented land use. Central to creating a better and less polluting transportation system is creating mixed-use, walkable and bikeable, transit-oriented communities that provide more affordable travel choices, reduce the burden on our roadways, and use our available assets more efficiently.

Our groups support transportation investments that expand travel choices. New road projects are sometimes needed to connect street grids, improve safety, and create “complete streets.” However, adding more major regional road and highway capacity for single-occupancy vehicles has repeatedly been shown to fail as a solution to traffic congestion. Indeed, adding such capacity often increases overall vehicles miles traveled, as people decide to live farther away from work to take advantage of the initial time savings the new capacity may offer, or decide to switch to driving from other modes or to drive more often.

Since the Six-Year Plan was adopted two years ago, we’ve seen economic development in northern Virginia gravitate even more toward transit and more compact, mixed-use communities. Expansions of transit such as the Silver Line in Fairfax and Loudoun, increased VRE capacity in Prince William, and future Route 1 Bus Rapid Transit in Fairfax and potentially Prince William provide new opportunities for both economic growth and a more efficient transportation network. Areas such as the Rosslyn-Ballston corridor have demonstrated that sustained economic growth can occur while minimizing congestion.

It is also likely that the current recession will reduce revenues from NVTA funding sources such as sales taxes and the transient occupancy tax. With limited funds, the need to plan our transportation system more wisely is paramount.

With this in mind, we recommend that NVTA fund the following projects in the 2020-25 update:

1. **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:

- North Woodbridge mobility improvements, Prince William
- VRE Woodbridge Station improvements, Prince William
- Rosslyn multimodal network improvements, Arlington
- Ballston MU Metrorail station west entrance, Arlington
- West Falls Church access to transit and multimodal connectivity, City of Falls Church
- Crystal City to Reagan Airport intermodal connector, Arlington
- VRE Crystal City Station improvements, Arlington
- Old Lee Highway multimodal improvements, City of Fairfax
- Vienna Regional Bikesharing, Town of Vienna

2. **New Bus Rapid Transit:** The two projects below 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.

- Duke Street Transitway, City of Alexandria
- Route 1 Bus Rapid Transit, Fairfax County

3. **Strategic road projects:** These targeted projects will augment street grids and address hot spots, but without creating the induced demand and spurring the sprawling development patterns that only create more traffic problems:

- Frontier Drive extension and intersection improvements, Fairfax County
- 7 Corners Ring Road improvements, Fairfax County
- Route 123 and Eaton Place intersection improvements, City of Fairfax
- Government Center Parkway extension, City of Fairfax

In addition to highlighting the above proposals we support, we wish to raise serious concerns regarding the proposal to extend Godwin Drive along Flat Branch that is one of the alternatives being considered as part of the Route 28 corridor improvements for which Prince William County has applied for additional funding. The region should not prioritize capacity expansion that will incentivize additional single occupancy vehicle commuter traffic along Godwin Drive or the eastern bypass alternative.

Instead, the Environmental Analysis for the Route 28 corridor improvements should consider a parallel southbound alignment just west of Centreville Rd (Route 28) as part of Alternative 4 (improvements along existing Route 28) to support near-term capacity improvements while also providing options for stakeholders to transform and revitalize Centreville Rd, through the Yorkshire Small Area Plan, as a true multimodal corridor.

Looking beyond the Six-Year Plan, we encourage the members of NVTA to find ways to incentivize submission of more projects in the next cycle that enhance non-motorized safety and mobility. Specifically, we request that NVTA set benchmarks for 20% or more of localities' requested funding to be directed toward new infrastructure intended to improve safety of non-motorized road users and enhance mobility by means other than privately owned vehicles.

The closure of parking lots at parks during the COVID-19 pandemic elevated alternative modes of transportation and demonstrated the necessity of upgrading sidewalks, trails, and other bike/pedestrian capacity. This includes redesigning both secondary and primary arterials to be "complete streets" with protected bicycle facilities, wider sidewalks, green infrastructure, native shade trees, safer and more frequent pedestrian crossings, and lower design speeds (35 mph for arterials and 20 mph for residential roads).

In addition, as NVTA begins the process of updating the 25-year Transaction plan, we urge NVTA to incorporate modeling and project screening that include robust metrics for:

- Reduced vehicle miles traveled;
- Reduced greenhouse gas emissions;
- Transportation that supports efficient, compact land uses: While transportation-land use coordination is measured in NVTA's current scoring rubric, we recommend developing more robust tools that prioritize improved access for trips of 1 to 3 miles, which comprise a large share of everyday trips.

Thank you for considering our comments.

Sincerely yours,

Stewart Schwartz, Executive Director
Coalition for Smarter Growth

Karen Campblin and Douglas Stewart
Virginia Sierra Club

Lisa Campbell
Bike Loudoun

Kim Hosen, Executive Director
Prince William Conservation Alliance

Rick Holt, Chair
Active Prince William

Steve Banashek, Transportation Chair
Sierra Club Mount Vernon Group

Jim Durham, Chair
Alexandria Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory
Committee

Ken Notis, Chair
Liveable Alexandria: Housing and Transit
Advocates

Jonathan Krall, Steering Committee
Grassroots Alexandria

Sonya Breehey, Chair
Fairfax Alliance for Better Bicycling

Chitra Kumar, Founder
Arlington Neighborhoods Forward

Christopher Day, President
Arlington Coalition for Sensible
Transportation

Dan Holmes, Director of State Policy
The Piedmont Environmental Council

Trip Pollard, Senior Attorney
Southern Environmental Law Center

Renee Grebe, Northern Virginia
Conservation Associate
Audubon Naturalist Society

Lee Epstein, Lands Program Director and
Special Counsel
Chesapeake Bay Foundation

Cc:

Monica Backmon, Executive Director, NVTA

Keith Jasper

Hon. Jeffrey C. McKay

Hon. Ann Wheeler

Hon. Harry J. Parrish II

Hon. Katie Cristol

Hon. Justin Wilson

Hon. Jeanette Rishell

Hon. Derrick R. Wood

Hon. David L. Meyer

Hon. David Snyder

Jim Kolb

Mary Hynes

Helen Cuervo

Jennifer Mitchell

Peggy Sanner, Executive Director, Chesapeake Bay Foundation Virginia Office