



## Statewide Long-Range Multimodal Transportation Plan Policy Committee Meeting

### Meeting Summary

March 18, 2004

10:30

Virginia Department of Transportation

Ms. Julia Connally opened the meeting and thanked the committee for their participation in the land use and transportation discussions during the January and February meetings. Recommendations from those discussions have been compiled and are being revised for committee approval.

There was no public comment.

The February meeting minutes were approved.

Mr. Ralph Davis introduced the guests. Prior to this introduction, Mr. Davis commented that VTRANS2025 is about a preferred future for transportation and rail should pay an important role in that future. VTRANS2025 can be the seed for a paradigm shift in terms of how we plan for and fund transportation facilities. Therefore, it is important to hear from rail advocates and to afford them the opportunity to provide key policy issues that the VTRANS2025 Policy Committee should consider while envisioning transportation in Virginia in 2025.

Mr. Davis first introduced **Rob Shinn**, Vice President of CSX. Mr. Shinn noted that in order to look at long-term needs, it is necessary to look at where railroads have come from and consider current needs. There is a new era of willingness to partner with government and others. For example, CSX has been more open to establishing partnerships with others, such as VRE, to provide services that serve public purposes. Partnering provides many benefits to both the public and private sector. Public benefits include environmental benefits due to the fact that trains emit fewer pollutants than trucks and get better fuel efficiency; rail reduces congestion by removing both trucks and passengers from roadways; and many safety benefits. From the private side, CSX realizes that public money will benefit CSX by enabling them to fund projects they normally would not have the funds for.

**Phil Light**, President of the Winchester & Western Railroad Company and representing the Virginia Railway Association, presented the relationship between short line operations and the six VTRANS2025 goals:

- Safety and security – employee safety and shipment security
- Manage and preserve – short lines make use of old, sometimes abandoned tracks
- Mobility – move goods by making customers more efficient
- Improve economic vitality to rural areas by providing the link from rural areas that enables rail customers to get their products into the market place
- Improve quality of life – short lines take 20,000 trucks a year off interstates
- Program delivery – rail preservation program funds have benefited short lines by enabling them to upgrade rail lines, which allows them to benefit from changes in technology. Rail Access funds help attract businesses to areas.

Questions and comments

- What policy changes would you suggest to help facilitate short line operation?  
Continue to fund the Rail Preservation program.
- The Rail Preservation program is now codified.
- Virginia's Rail Preservation program serves as a model to other states as it shows how making even incremental investment works to advance the rail lines.

**Dick Beadles**, representing Virginians for High Speed Rail, Virginia Rail Policy Institute, and Virginia High Speed Development Committee, stressed the point that modest public investment yields modest returns. He noted that rail infrastructure projects should be funded much in the same way highway projects are funded which will require federal, state and local policy changes to put public policy and funding behind rail in a meaningful way. Mr. Beadles stated that in the process of fixing freight rail infrastructure problems, passenger rail will benefit. Mr. Beadles ended by recommending the need to establish a State Rail Authority.

Questions and Comments

- It will require a great deal of public support to spend public money on rail.

**Dale Zehner**, acting chief Operating Officer from the Virginia Railway Express (VRE) told the group that VRE is a successful example of a partnership between state, federal and local jurisdictions. Mr. Zehner provided background information of the establishment, performance, and extraordinary growth of VRE, stating that the performance has surpassed expectations. This on one hand is the goal, but on the other hand brings its own set of challenges of being able to keep up with demand and continue to satisfy customers. Needed improvements are bigger and more costly, and substantial improvements must be made to increase the capacity to meet current and future demands. VRE is currently trying to determine what their goal for the future is; whether to continue focus on the CBD and be a catalyst for transit oriented development or try to service the market that is moving out to affordable housing. Mr. Zehner ended by stating that partnerships do work.

### Questions and Comments

- It is a major policy decision to have your board say that it is necessary to manage existing services and facilities. If you have people that want your product you have to find a way to give it to them.

- Traditionally it is easier to get funding if you tie investment to a specific output.

**Rob Martinez**, Vice President Market Services and International for Norfolk Southern, presented Norfolk Southern's participation in addressing I-81 demands. Mr. Martinez introduced the concept of a Public Private Partnership to improve the rail infrastructure along I-81, which would in three years remove over 500,000 trucks annually from I-81.

### Questions and Comments

- Public vs. private benefits do overlap
  - Public benefit – level of truck diversion improves highway capacity, allowing for staged highway improvements
  - Private benefit – without public money, rail companies cannot make necessary improvements
- Freight rail companies don't usually seek public money due to the private nature of their finances. How can you protect public dollars when partnering with private companies?
  - Require level of performance contracts
- Has Norfolk Southern decided to reenter the passenger rail business?
  - There is nothing official, but there has been a change of attitude. There are considerable costs and quality of service that need to be considered.
- Much of the money required for the I-81 improvements is dedicated to non-Virginia infrastructure. Are there any examples of dealing with other states to provide improvements?
  - MAROPS – Mid Atlantic Rail Operations Study involves six states looking at removing rail bottlenecks along the I-95 corridor.

**Robert Stanley** (Cambridge Systematics) and **John Martin** (Southern Institute of Research, Inc.) jointly presented the results of recent outreach activities. Mr. Stanley reviewed the results of stakeholder meetings that have taken place throughout the VTRANS2025 process. These meetings were held across the state and provided a broad representation of Virginia's citizens. The goal of this outreach was to create a meaningful and effective future vision for transportation in Virginia. Following is the recommended vision that is built of commonly-held themes:

*“Virginians wish to provide the highest quality travel experience for all residents and visitors, businesses and industries...on the best network of facilities and services available anywhere.”*

A telephone survey of 1221 Virginia citizens over the age of 18 was conducted in 2004 to test this vision and to assess the relative importance of the VTRANS2025 values and goals to the citizens of Virginia, as well as citizens' perception of the existing transportation system. Mr. Martin presented the following key findings:

- Virginia's transportation system has room for improvement
- Residents support paying higher taxes for transportation improvements but want to be guaranteed that the funds go to specific projects
- Many believe decision-makers don't adequately consider citizen viewpoints
- The values of enhanced safety and protecting the environment rank highest in importance
- Citizens want more involvement in transportation planning
- The goals of safety and security, program delivery and quality of life rank highest
- Threats to safety, the environment and quality of life are more important than promises of transportation improvements.
- Virginians support strategic and fully-integrated approaches to transportation planning... they are no longer content with status quo
- Virginians prefer improvement to roads, highways and public transit over other transportation network infrastructure (rail, ports and air)

Several suggestions were made regarding the wording of the vision and revisions will be made.

There was an overall concern about the gap between the survey findings and what was heard at the stakeholder meetings regarding the importance of safety and security. The stakeholder tended to assume the system would be safe and secure, while those surveyed ranked safety and security as their number one concern. This may point to the fact that the public does not feel that their local officials are in touch with citizens' needs. There needs to be consideration of how to close that gap.

There are a number of ways to cut the research; zip code, planning district, etc.

Please provide comments concerning the stakeholder meetings or survey results to Mary Lynn Tischer. Feel free to suggest any particular cross tabs you would like to see performed.

#### NEXT MEETING

April 14, 2004

9:00

Virginia Port Authority

**Policy Committee members present:**

Karen Rae  
Julia Connally  
Robert Bray  
Ralph Davis  
Gerald McCarthy  
Kenny Klinge  
Cliff Burnette (for Charles Macfarlane)  
Philip Shucet  
Harry Lester  
James Keen  
Hunter Watson

**Guests:**

Mary Isemann - SIR  
John Martin - SIR  
Robert Stanley – Cambridge  
Systematics  
Rob Shinn - CSX  
Dale Zehner - VRE  
Mark Rober -VRE  
Phil Light – Virginia Railway Assoc.  
Dick Beadles – High Speed Rail  
Rob Martinez - NS  
Ryan Houfek - NS  
Robin Chapman - NS  
Steve Eisenach - NS  
Bruce Wingo - NS

**Others present:**

Whitt Clement  
Kimberly Spence  
Katherine Graham  
Jim Lambert  
Gus Robey  
Mary Lynn Tischer  
Ryan Ewalt  
Bill LaBaugh  
Kevin Page  
Marsha Fiol  
George Conner  
Rusty Harrington  
Scott Denny  
Alan Tobias  
Jeff Florin  
Erik Johnson  
Lynda South