

# VIRGINIA BEACH TRANSIT EXTENSION STUDY

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### **1. What is the (Transit Extension Study) and who requested it?**

In 2008, the Virginia General Assembly passed House Bill 6028 directing HRT to initiate a study of expansion of The Tide in Hampton Roads, including to the Virginia Beach Oceanfront. In compliance with this legislation, the Virginia Beach Transit Extension Study (VBTES) is the first step required for funding under the Federal Transit Administration's New Starts Program, a competitive federal grant program that has the potential to fund construction of the transit extension.

### **2. Who is doing the study for the VBTES?**

Hampton Roads Transit (HRT) has hired HDR Engineering, Inc. to provide services for the study of two potential extensions to The Tide, HRT's light rail transit system. The first extension under study is a potential fixed guideway connection from the eastern end of The Tide in Norfolk at Newtown Road to the Virginia Beach Oceanfront area along Norfolk Southern Corporation's inactive right-of-way. This study is called the Virginia Beach Transit Extension Study (VBTES). The second segment of study is a potential fixed guideway extension of The Tide to Naval Station Norfolk. Fixed guideway projects operate in their own transit right-of-way.

The VBTES consists of two main parts that will be completed concurrently - an Alternatives Analysis (AA) and a Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement (SDEIS). The AA is focused on developing and evaluating alternatives for the transit extension.

### **3. What is meant by the Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Study?**

The SDEIS outlines the purpose and need for the project and examines the broad and specific environmental impacts of alternatives under evaluation in the AA as required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process. The SDEIS will look at the benefits as well as impacts including, but not limited to, physical and natural, social, cultural, and economic.

### **4. When did the study begin and how long will it take?**

HRT initiated the Virginia Beach Transit Extension Study in May 2009 and it is was scheduled to be completed within 12-18 months. Recent questions concerning project definitions and ridership will result in a reexamination of the study timeline.

### **5. Why is this study needed if an EIS was done in 1999 for this corridor?**

A supplement, known as the SDEIS, to the EIS is required by federal law. It is important that future policy decisions on a potential transit extension are based on the most accurate data available and account for current conditions. According to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) policy, environmental documents for projects not implemented within five years of the document's publishing must be updated and/or re-written to reflect the latest conditions within a project corridor.

### **6. What is the next step once this study is completed?**

Once the study is complete, direction from the Virginia Beach City Council is required in order for HRT to advance to the next phase of the New Starts program. If advancement is authorized, a Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA) will be selected by the Virginia Beach City Council and Transportation District Commission of Hampton Roads (TDCHR). FTA requires that the chosen LPA be adopted in the Hampton Roads Transportation Planning Organization (HRTPO) financially constrained long range transportation plan. Following these actions, HRT would then submit a request to FTA to enter the Preliminary Engineering (PE) phase.

**7. How much will the study cost and how will it be paid for?**

The total contract with HDR for the Virginia Beach AA/SDEIS and the Norfolk Naval Station AA is ~~\$5.7 million~~ \$6.63 million. The funding will come from federal and state resources.

**8. How can I share my concerns and ideas and will they be taken into consideration during the development of the project?**

The Public Involvement Plan contains specific ways that the public can receive information regarding the study, as well as provide information to the project team. There will be several public meetings at which citizens can provide written comments. Input can also be shared by email and telephone. The project webpage, [www.gohrt.com/vbtes](http://www.gohrt.com/vbtes), contains contact information for project team members who can receive input/address questions from the public or the media. The webpage will be updated often with downloadable documents and the project schedule. Comments can be given directly via the webpage as well as HRT's Facebook page and using Twitter. Comments received from the public will be documented throughout the study and will be used to help guide the study process.

**9. What will it cost to build the system? How will it be paid for?**

Preliminary cost estimates for construction and operation will be prepared for each of the alternatives under evaluation in the AA and will be included in the evaluation criteria for identifying the LPA. These cost estimates will be based on a limited amount of design and engineering which is sufficient for comparing the alternatives. As a project moves through each stage of FTA project development – Alternatives Analysis, Preliminary Engineering and Final Design – cost estimates will reflect more detailed design and engineering and reliability will increase.

**10. How often will the new transit service run and how much will it cost to ride?**

The transit system will likely run to match the operating hours of the Tide service. The study will develop an operations plan for both the fixed guideway investment and the related feeder bus improvements. The cost of riding the new transit service is anticipated to be same as HRT's local bus service. At this time, the regular one-way fare is \$1.50.

**11. How long will it be before the transit extension is in operation and I am able to ride it?**

The study itself is was scheduled to take 12-18 months. With the study timeline under review it will take longer to complete this phase of the work. Once the study is complete, at which time

Virginia Beach City Council action is required in order to move forward. After completion, there are still several major steps in the FTA process before construction could begin, including a lengthy process of applying for federal financial help. Many factors must be evaluated and addressed, including the completion of the environmental process and the development of a financial plan for construction and operation.

**12. When is The Tide expected to open in Norfolk?**

The Tide is expected to begin revenue service in ~~fall of 2010~~ 2011. The service will include stops at 11 stations and 4 park and ride locations. The eastern terminus is located at Newtown Road. For more information on The Tide, go to [www.gohrt.com](http://www.gohrt.com).

**13. I don't live or work along the transit line. How will this benefit me?**

There are several reasons for the transit line that will assist in enhancing the quality of life in the City of Virginia Beach and the Hampton Roads region, including:

- Offer better transportation choices to residents of the city of Virginia Beach
- Improve access & reliability of public transportation system
- Cost effective, efficient travel options linking activity centers
- Reduction in the growth of Vehicle Miles Traveled and carbon emissions
- Improve connectivity between activity centers in the corridor & the region
- Support economic development in Virginia Beach, consistent with the Comprehensive Plan & Strategic Growth Areas

**14. Will there be a referendum after the study is completed?**

HRT does not determine whether a referendum would be held. To date, the Virginia Beach City Council has not scheduled a referendum.