

Introduction

Do you want to help shape new transit services and transportation options in Virginia Beach?

Are you interested in improving public transportation choices and improving mobility?

Currently, residents, commuters and visitors in the Hampton Roads area are experiencing declining mobility, particularly between Virginia Beach and Norfolk along I-264.

This is caused by travel resulting from the high employment and residential growth in the area, which is outpacing the capacity of the existing transportation system.

Roughly 19 of every 20 visitors arrive to the area by car (2008) and currently have few public transportation options.

This booklet outlines the process, purpose, implementation, schedule and proposed alternatives for the Virginia Beach Transit Extension Study (VBTES). **Figure 1** (page 2) illustrates the study process. The booklet also gives information on how you can provide input to HRT regarding this study.



Background

A potential fixed guideway transit corridor between Virginia Beach and Norfolk was identified in preliminary studies conducted in the late 1980s (see map on page 4). These studies showed significant population and employment growth in the corridor and extensive travel between Virginia Beach and Norfolk. These studies evaluated transit options in the Norfolk Southern, I-264 and Virginia Beach Blvd. alignments. The Norfolk Southern alignment was selected as best meeting the evaluation screening criteria and project purpose. Based on the findings of the preliminary studies, an environmental impact statement was completed in 2000, examining the potential for a light rail system between Virginia Beach and Norfolk.

HRT and the City of Norfolk are proceeding with construction of The Tide light rail project, scheduled for completion in 2010. Since 2000, there has been renewed interest in examining extending fixed guideway transit into Virginia Beach. HRT's VBTES Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement (SDEIS) will develop and evaluate alternatives for transit improvements along a corridor

Newsletter Highlights:

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Tell us what you think:

Call Marie Arnt:
757.222.6000, ext. 6291
or visit the
Virginia Beach Transit Extension Study
website: gohrt.com/vbtes

generally following the Norfolk-Southern Railroad right-of-way from the vicinity of the eastern terminus of The Tide light rail line under construction at Newtown Road to the Oceanfront resort area.

Purpose & Need

HRT understands that mobility is the cornerstone of economic development and quality of life in our region. As such, HRT is committed to supporting livable and connected communities in the region. The study area comprises one of the most populated areas and has some of the most traveled roadways in the Hampton Roads region. However, geography limits the travel corridor to a width of 3-miles, and is served by only two continuous roadways, I-264 and Va. Beach Blvd. which are plagued by congestion, and the railroad right of way. There are no planned capacity improvements for I-264 that parallels the railroad right of way.

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The growth in vehicle-miles traveled has far outpaced the growth in population in Hampton Roads. Hampton

Roads had an estimated population of 1,648,000 residents in 2007, up 6% from 1998. During this time the amount of roadway travel in the region increased 16%, meaning that between 1998 and 2007 the growth of vehicle-miles of travel was 2.5 times higher than the growth in population. Although the growth in vehicle-miles of travel has outpaced population growth in Hampton Roads, the growth in registered vehicles has outpaced both. The number of registered vehicles increased 27% between 1998 and 2007, far outpacing the 6% growth in the regional population and 16% growth in vehicle-miles of travel during this time. Regional projections continue to show population and employment growth in the Virginia Beach to Norfolk corridor which will lead to increased traffic and congestion.

Getting Started

The VBTES will develop and evaluate transit alternatives to improve mobility and increase public transportation choices for the traveling public.

The goals of the proposed project are to:

- ➔ Improve access, operations and reliability of the public transportation system
- ➔ Provide a cost-effective, efficient travel option that connects residential and employment areas as well as recreational venues
- ➔ Implement service which helps to manage growth in vehicle miles traveled
- ➔ Support Virginia Beach economic development activities consistent with the City's Comprehensive Plan and related land use strategies

- ➔ Support the tourism industry of Virginia Beach and the Hampton Roads region by providing an alternative to travel on congested roadways
- ➔ Support preservation and protection of the environment

Where Do We Go From Here?

HRT, in partnership with the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), is preparing a Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement (SDEIS) as a follow-up to the environmental impact statement completed in 2000. Information gathered during the 2000 Norfolk to Virginia Beach Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) will be supplemented to reflect updated information directly related to the City of Virginia Beach, as well as regional conditions.



This SDEIS will address changed conditions in the corridor, update ridership forecasts and develop new capital and operating cost estimates. The SDEIS also will explore the potential social, economic, cultural, and environmental impacts associated with extending fixed guideway transit service into Virginia Beach.

Alternatives Under Consideration

Based on the previous environmental evaluation completed for the Norfolk to Virginia Beach corridor in the March 2000 Final EIS, HRT is examining fixed guideway alternatives for extensions of The Tide in this SDEIS to address mobility issues in the corridor. The key alternatives under consideration are:

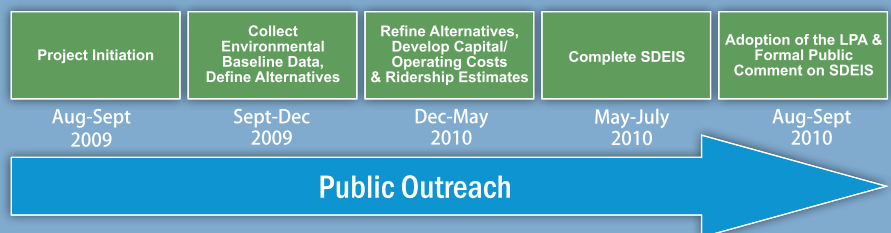
No-Build Alternative: The No-Build Alternative includes all roadway and transit facility and service improvements (other than the proposed project alternatives) planned, programmed, and included in the Hampton Roads Transportation Planning Organization Long Range Plan. It includes minor transit service expansions and/or adjustments that reflect a continuation of existing service policies as identified by HRT. The No-Build Alternative serves as the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) baseline against which the potentially significant environmental benefits and impacts of other proposed alternatives, including the proposed project, will be measured.

Transportation Systems Management (TSM) Alternative:

The TSM Alternative, also known as the Enhanced Bus Alternative, is designed to provide low cost, operationally-oriented improvements to address the project's purpose and need as much as possible without a major

Figure 1: SDEIS Process Overview

Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement Process (SDEIS)



transit investment. It includes modifications to the existing MAX express service, and would augment existing HRT services. Local HRT bus service would be restructured to provide access to a new limited stop service. The revised and updated express routes would begin by serving selected stops, then travel on I-264 to selected stops in the corridor including the Virginia Beach Oceanfront, Virginia Beach Town Center, Newtown Station on The Tide LRT, and downtown Norfolk. This would allow the limited stop services to offer more attractive travel times, and would increase options for commuters in the corridor. This alternative will serve as the New Starts Baseline against which the cost-effectiveness of the proposed project will be measured, and includes improvements identified in the No-Build Alternative. New Starts is a federal funding program for major transit capital improvement projects.

Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) on the Norfolk Southern Alignment: The BRT alternative would use the inactive Norfolk Southern alignment from the end-of-line of The Tide at Newtown Road and would continue to the Oceanfront area. Bus Rapid Transit operates on an exclusive roadway or busway that has limited access. BRT busways provide a very high level of service and allows for high hourly passenger capacities that can be separated from cross streets. Station stops along the BRT guideway are typically spaced every ½ to 1 mile.



Buses may operate non-stop along the BRT guideway or make selected stops. Buses may also exit the designated busway and operate along street networks to provide local area circulation and distribution. The BRT vehicle is typically larger than a standard city bus. Alternative alignments east of Birdneck Road will be studied to determine the most effective method of bringing the BRT alignment to the Convention Center and the Oceanfront area.

Light Rail Transit (LRT) on the Norfolk Southern Alignment: The light rail alternative would extend The Tide LRT along the existing east-west railroad corridor in Virginia Beach. This alternative would provide station stops at various points along the alignment that will be identified and finalized as part of the study.

Preliminary station areas to be studied (for both BRT and LRT) include: Witchduck, Town Center, Rosemont, Lynnhaven, Great Neck, Oceana, Birdneck and the Convention Center/Oceanfront areas.

The BRT and LRT build alternatives will also include the identification of a site for a Vehicle Storage and Maintenance Facility. Consideration will also be given to the location of park-and-ride facilities associated with stations as well as feeder bus service and determination of the need for grade separations where the transit guideway crosses local streets.

Local, state and federal agency representatives will participate in the VBTES process led by the lead agency, HRT. At the conclusion of the process and based on the evaluation criteria established, the alternative that best meets the project's purpose, will be selected as the Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA) and it will be presented to the public during the public hearings and comment period for the SDEIS.

Figure 2: SDEIS Process Overview



Public Input



Early and continued involvement is the best way to make sure community issues and concerns about the project are heard. HRT is using a variety of techniques to make sure that as many people as possible are involved in the process. Some of the ways that you can reach HRT are:

- ➔ Written comment forms
- ➔ Online comment forms
- ➔ Facebook 
- ➔ E-mail correspondence 
- ➔ Telephone
- ➔ Twitter 

Some of the ways HRT will get information to the public include:

- ➔ Newsletters
- ➔ E-mail update (monthly) 
- ➔ Frequently Asked Questions
- ➔ Press releases/news articles
- ➔ Project Web page 
- ➔ Twitter 
- ➔ Community event participation
- ➔ Presentations at community and business organizations
- ➔ Facebook 
- ➔ Virginia Beach Public Access Channel 

For a full listing and details of these public involvement opportunities, please see the public involvement plan at: www.gohrt.com/VBTES or contact Marie Arnt: by phone 757.222.6000 ext. 6291 or e-mail: marnt@hrtransit.org.

Upcoming Public Involvement Opportunities



Public Meeting*

Date: September 9th

Time: 6 pm - 8 pm

6:15 Presentation

Location:

Princess Anne High School
4400 Virginia Beach Blvd.
Virginia Beach, VA 23462



Public Meeting*

Date: September 10th

Time: 6 pm - 8 pm

6:15 Presentation

Location:

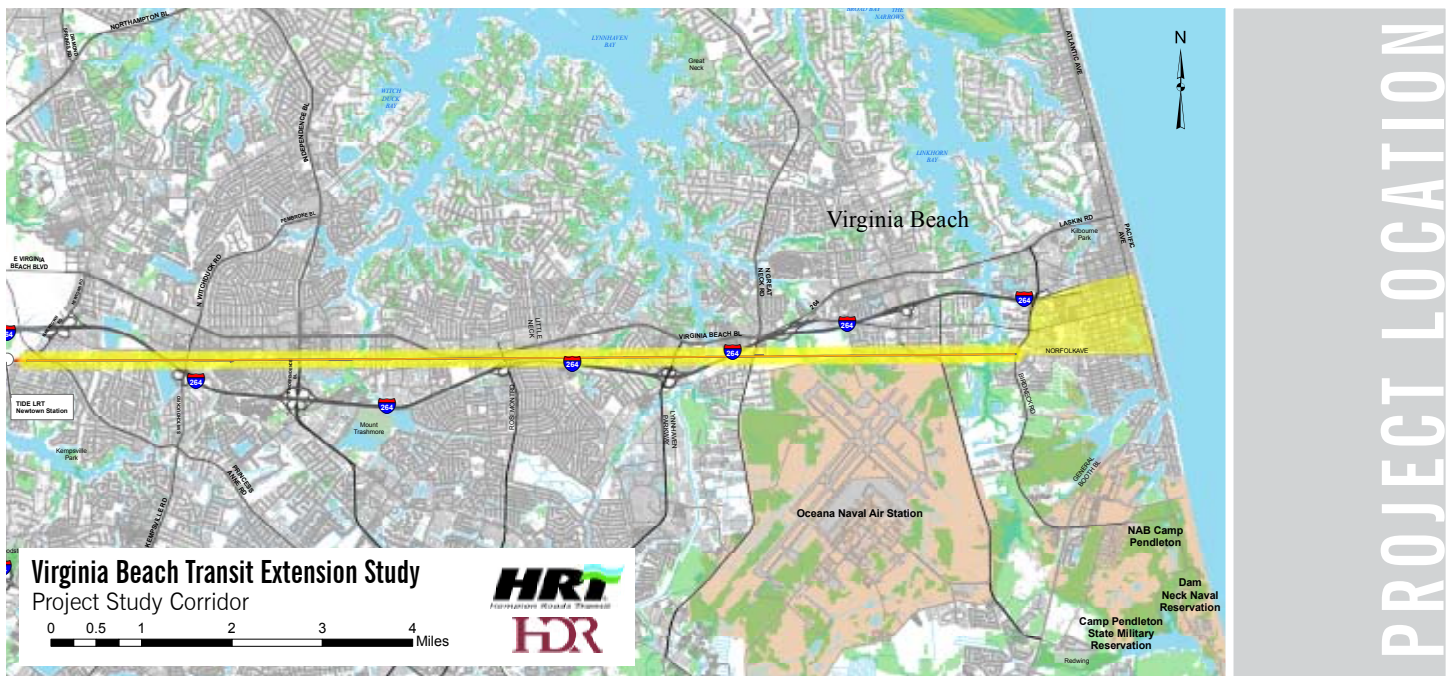
Virginia Beach Convention Center
1000 19th St.
Virginia Beach, VA 23451



Station Workshops

Scheduled for Fall of 2009.

* Individuals requiring language interpretation or have special physical needs are encouraged to contact Marie Arnt at 757.222.6000, ext. 6291 by 11:00 am on Friday, September 4, 2009. Meeting locations are served by HRT Route #20. Both locations are ADA accessible.



We want your feedback!

Tell us what you think, contact Marie Arnt of HRT at:

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