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Hampton Roads Transit Authority
Transit Extension Study
(Light Rail from Norfolk to Virginia Beach)
Public Scoping Session
Wednesday, 9 September 2009
Princess Anne High School

Dear Recorder:

The following attachments are submitted in addition to the narrative below to constitute the input of the Virginia Beach Taxpayer Alliance at referenced scoping session.

Either two scoping sessions separated by at least sixty days is required or this scoping session and the one on Thursday, 10 September 2009 are premature. Is the purpose of the scoping session to define the problem(s) to be solved and defining the metrics of success? The question is posed because no document in hard copy or on the Web has been made available in advance of the two reference public meetings defining the scope of the problem(s) to be solved or the metrics for defining success.

The scoping session has been conducted appears to have the cart before the horse so to speak. All the discussion/scoping by HRTA and their contractor has been about light rail corridor options rather (the means) rather than scoping the public problem/challenge being met (output/ends) and engaging the public how to define success.

The problem is lack of objectivity and diversity of public participation. The appointment process or better said the lack of a public participation process for the naming of members to the study Citizen Advisory Committee in conjunction with a highly managed process would lead any disinterested party to objectively conclude that objectivity is more appearance than substance at this point. Only persons favorably disposed to extending light rail were appointed without public comment by HRTA.

Problem is traffic congestion: Meaningfully reducing the time, it takes the average Virginia Beach residents to commute to and from work each day over the twenty-year evaluation period of transit solutions.

Problem is quality of life deficits: Not adding to density and more intense land use without adding publicly usable open space, public services, and roads paid for significantly disproportionately by increased density development.

Problem is fiscal carrying capacity: Per Forbes Magazine in July 2008 citing the 2007 American Community Survey; Economic Policy Institute's Basic Family Budget Calculator, Virginia Beach is the top ten "Least Family Friendly" cities. This less than favorable designation is because it takes 81% of the average family's budget to meet the very basics of life. Additionally, Virginia Beach has among the lowest, and often the lowest, average private sector weekly wage in the Commonwealth of Virginia. What this means is that families and by extension small businesses have no real capacity to pay net additional taxes or fees for public investments.

Problem is infrastructure deficits: The City of Virginia Beach does not have the fiscal capacity to meet its current requirements for road maintenance, new road construction (nor does the state have the fiscal capacity), school modernization, and school construction.

Problem is the lack of positive incentives for non-material solutions: For example, the lack of dollar for dollar tax credits for business for the issuance of vouchers redeemable for transit be it public or private.

Problem is poor investment choices overtime by the Virginia Beach City Council. During the seven good years of fiscal capacity growth (2000 – 2007) little investment went into new road

construction. Instead, the biggest investment of new public debt went into the pavilion and town center with little regard to the opportunity costs or impact of traffic. Now in the post real estate bubble and forecasted very slow growth rates and slower real wage growth there is little to no fiscal capacity.

Problem is City Council and HRTA in partnership have not made reducing traffic congestion and addressing the real needs of the working poor for transportation options the priority.

Problem is City Council and HRTA in partnership have made redevelopment for the few at the expense of the many independent of addressing the need for traffic congestion reduction and the working poor a priority.

Not knowing how the problem(s) that is(are) being addressed is scope, the aforementioned parameters are offered and strongly recommended for inclusion. **VBTA registers for the record that the ambiguity of the scoping session and paucity of material available in advance of the scoping session except for light rail corridor alternatives establishes a prima facie case of bias of pre-selection to recommending extending light rail from Norfolk to Virginia Beach.**

Not accepting the legitimacy of beginning “scoping” with the identification of alternatives to a yet undefined problem or set of problems, VBTA has previously identified to HRTA’s contractor VBTA’s position on alternatives.

1. Possible alternatives:
 - a. Status quo alternative that includes current levels of bus transit
 - b. Nonmaterial solutions for increase use of current transit service
 - i. Tax credit for employer vouchers to employees on a dollar for dollar basis
 - ii. Social services distributing transit vouchers or bus passes to individuals qualifying for other public assistance
 - iii. Granting real estate tax credits on rental property along bus lines that are rented to households with a to be established qualifying income
 - iv. Positive financial incentives that funded not by increasing taxes and fees on families and businesses but by government shifting its cost curve to the right to enable tax credits and vouchers
 - v. Tax credits of various sorts for businesses for workers that work from home in lieu of commuting to work
 - vi. Tax credits or other incentives for staggering work-hours for major employers.
 - vii. Modify land use plans to decrease densities and relocate job centers to where the population/commuters are to reduce length of commute and number of commuters
 - c. Status quo plus selected pin point improvements at key choke points, for example, longer turn lanes, merge lanes, etc. to improve intersection improvements at peak hours
 - d. Option C in combination with Option D
 - e. Increase bus service using the Norfolk terminus of their rail as hub to feed downtown Norfolk employment centers either as a permanent option or as a long-term pilot to validate demand level
 - f. Option C and E together
 - g. Options B, C and E together
 - h. Light rail terminating right at the oceanfront with eight roadway overpasses and no taking of residential property to include feeder bus system
 - i. With option B
 - ii. Without option B
 - i. Light rail terminating at the Pavilion with eight roadway overpasses and no taking of residential property to include feeder bus system
 - i. With option B
 - ii. Without option B
 - j. Option H and J
 - i. With option B
 - ii. Without option B
 - k. Investing nonrecurring cost and recurring costs of Option h on arterial highway improvements and expanded bus service
 - i. With Option B

- ii. Without Option B
1. Investing nonrecurring cost and recurring costs of Option i on arterial highway improvements and expanded bus service
 - i. With Option B
 - ii. Without Option B
- m. Investing nonrecurring cost and recurring costs of Option j on arterial highway improvements and expanded bus service
 - i. With Option B
 - ii. Without Option B

While ideal characteristics cannot be limiting, VBTA offers the following characteristics as the ideal any preferred alternative should have a very strong alignment/correlation with:

1. Free of subsidy
2. Consumer driven
3. Minimizes externalities
4. Sustains the suburban character of Virginia Beach
5. Does not enable or accelerate transformation of high-density urban development
6. Does not redistribute wealth by government fiscal policy or other regulation
7. Maintaining/sustaining the operational functioning of the status quo takes precedence over new construction. If you are behind on meeting highway maintenance standards, recapitalization of signalization, and bus replacement and refurbishment of bus stops you do not take on new construction or creation of new capabilities, e.g. light rail.
8. System performance metrics from a transportation consumer perspective
9. No presumption that public transit is inherently in the public interest, and when it is in the public interest it is not exempt from being cost and mission effective

The assumptions and data sources validating or documenting the forecasts as appropriate concerning population growth, nominal and real wage growth, employment distribution patterns, fiscal carrying capacity of families and localities, redevelopment rates, opportunity cost of redevelopment, quality of life impacts, e.g. reduce acres of usable open space per 10,000 residents, wealth redistribution, etc. must be documented upfront and available for public comment in advance of developing alternatives.

The scoping needs to address what methodologies will be used to assess the many dimensions of risk for an issue of this magnitude. The scoping needs to address what elements will be subject to sensitivity analysis and the associated methodology(ies) to be employed.

The scoping process must make explicit the relationship of the members appointed to the Citizen Advisor Committee to the property owners and businesses that would materially benefit, if extending the light rail from Norfolk to Virginia Beach becomes the recommended option.


Respectfully submitted by John D. Moss, VBTA Chairman