



Virginia Conservation Network

September 22, 2004

Governor Mark R. Warner
State Capitol, 3rd Floor
Richmond, VA 23219

Dear Governor Warner,

The Virginia Conservation Network (VCN) is prepared to join with you and with other public and private stakeholders in discussions about increased transportation funding and to be supportive of such funding. However, VCN cannot support additional funding without state and local action to address the inefficient land use (suburban sprawl) that is the primary contributor to traffic congestion in the Commonwealth. Secretary Clement and Commissioner Shucet have both noted the importance addressing land use.

It is the position of the Virginia Conservation Network, that prior to approving any increase in funding for new highways, State and local governments must take the following actions:

- 1) **Tie state transportation funding to measurable performance criteria including:** reduction in per capita vehicle miles traveled; reduced air pollution from mobile sources and the actual achievement of healthy air quality; increased mode share for pedestrian, bicycle and transit trips; and improved accessibility (this is different from long range mobility) to jobs and other daily needs; decreased land consumption and land consumption per capita. Adopting these performance criteria is in keeping with area best practices. For example:
 - The Northern Virginia Transportation Coordinating Council, now the Northern Virginia Transportation Authority, adopted specific criteria in its 2020 Transportation Plan for reducing vehicle miles traveled (VMT) per capita and for mixed-use, pedestrian friendly development that reduces automobile dependency.
 - The State of Maryland requires the Maryland Department of Transportation to report annually its performance in meeting indicators that include an

increase in total person trips for transit, high occupancy auto, pedestrian and bicycle modes of travel and reduction in automobile traffic.

- 2) **Compile and analyze a build-out analysis along critical corridors and communities of local comprehensive plans and zoning to determine the total transportation and other infrastructure needs and costs that would be generated. Develop alternative growth patterns that will reduce infrastructure costs.** A recent analysis by the Brookings Institution of studies of the costs of infrastructure concluded that smarter growth could reduce total infrastructure costs by 11%. An initial step would be for the Planning District Commissions to analyze local comprehensive plans and zoning affecting major highway corridors.
- 3) **Tie state transportation funding to changes in land use and demand management programs that reduce land consumption and per capita VMT and vehicle trips.** Transportation funding for new highways should not flow until state and local governments meet performance goals on land use. The Commonwealth should enable local governments to adopt more effective growth laws and policies that will revitalize our cities and towns, and give us better designed communities to increase pedestrian, bicycle and transit use and reduce the growth in driving. These policies include:
 - Completing build-out analysis of comprehensive plans and zoning. Adopt alternative growth plans that reduce transportation infrastructure costs and meet measures of effectiveness identified above.
 - Requiring an assessment of the land use impacts of major transportation projects.
 - Targeting transportation spending to existing communities.
 - Providing technical assistance to local governments to help promote transit-oriented development and mixed-use, pedestrian friendly development.
- 4) **Use our resources more efficiently by focusing on repairing and increasing the operational efficiency of our existing transportation system before spending billions of dollars on new roads.** VDOT has recognized the growing costs of maintaining our expanding transportation infrastructure. Previously, the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee found that VDOT had underestimated the serious backlog of maintenance on highways and bridges. Analysis of VDOT's allocation of federal funds (1998-2003) by the Surface Transportation Policy Project showed that VDOT has not spent \$230 million of federal funds authorized for bridge repair, having diverted the money to other categories.
- 5) **Shift significant funding to public transit, freight rail, walking, and bicycling, and secondary in order to level the playing field and move Virginia toward a more balanced transportation program that reduces the current overemphasis on road**

construction. These transportation modes, including better local street networks (connecting the substantial private investment in neighborhood streets), can reduce congestion, are ultimately cheaper and less destructive than costly new highways, and several provide better services for elderly, disabled, and low-income citizens. Yet, Virginia allocates just 5 percent of its transportation budget to transit projects and less than 1 percent to pedestrian and bicycle needs. A goal should be to have, at least fifty percent (50%) of new funding directed to these transportation modes. A related measure would be to pass through more funds to local governments for use in building essential local street networks, pedestrian/bicycle facilities, and transit service.

- The Northern Virginia 2020 Transportation Plan (Senate Document 14, 2000) recommended allocating 54% to roadway improvements and 43% to transit to produce a balanced transportation plan for the next 20 years. Northern Virginia's needs are not unique. Growth and traffic demands in other metropolitan areas of the state, including Hampton Roads, Richmond, Roanoke, Fredericksburg, Harrisonburg and Charlottesville will demand an increasing investment in transit and other modes, in conjunction with improved land use.
 - An analysis of state spending of authorized federal Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality funds (1998-2003), by the Surface Transportation Policy Project, shows that VDOT has not spent \$67 million of the federal funds authorized for air quality improvement projects. These funds should be allocated to transit, pedestrian, and bicycle facilities.
- 6) **Redirect funding from construction of the majority of bypass highways and focus on access management, corridor preservation and other alternatives.** Bypasses often undermine existing businesses and fuel additional sprawl development without reducing traffic congestion. Proposed bypass highways consume a large share of VDOT's annual budget. These funds could go further to reduce congestion if used for less expensive yet effective alternatives such as access management, interchange improvement, stoplight timing, and incident management. Preserving the intercity function of Virginia's primary roads through corridor preservation is essential.
- 7) **Reform the Public-Private Transportation Act.** The PPTA takes Virginia yet further away from addressing the land use problem before building new highway projects. It is generating a poorly evaluated set of new highway projects with no connection to more efficient land use. Among the troubling aspects of the PPTA are: no requirement for public hearings, undermining of the National Environmental Policy Act, questionable financial estimates that will ultimately put the financial burden on taxpayers, and the advancing of projects that are not high priorities, including some that will increase suburban sprawl. Unsolicited PPTA projects are taking up the time of staff, making first claim to state resources, and moving projects ahead of more important transportation priorities for local governments. With reform, PPTA or similar finance mechanisms that are tied to congestion reduction priorities remain a potential avenue for funding.

It is the position of the Virginia Conservation Network that these measures are essential for achieving a more rational, more efficient and affordable transportation system for the Commonwealth of Virginia, and should be adopted prior to, or concurrent with, any increase state funding for transportation.

We look forward the opportunity to work with you and your Administration to develop integrated land use and transportation solutions for Virginia. Finally, we request the opportunity to meet and provide constructive input prior to the upcoming release of your transportation funding proposal.

Sincerely,

Martha Wingfield, President

C:
Secretary Clement
Commissioner Shucet

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