

2010 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

AN AGENDA FOR JOB CREATION AND ACCESS

The Virginia Transit Association encourages the Virginia General Assembly to enact in its 2010 session the following 12 actions. Together they will help Virginia's 54 public transit systems and Transportation Demand Management (TDM) agencies perform a crucial role in providing access to jobs and boosting economic activity that creates jobs and generates state tax revenues.

According to research sponsored by the American Public Transportation Association, every \$10 million in capital investment in public transit yields \$30 million in increased business sales. Every \$10 million spent on operating public transit yields \$32 million in increased business sales. Half to two-thirds of transit riders on each of Virginia's transit systems are commuting to work. The Commonwealth's past investments in Metrorail are yielding almost 20 percent annually in increased state taxes through induced development. Further, households that use transit to commute save up to \$9,500 annually freeing funds for other purposes such as housing, consumables or education.

For more information about public transit benefits see www.vatransit.com.

MAINTAIN AND INCREASE SUSTAINABLE INVESTMENTS IN TRANSIT/TDM

1. **Protect Transit/TDM Services**—Transit/ TDM is seriously underfunded by the Commonwealth, as are investments in most other modes. Transit/TDM should be a top budget priority for existing funds available to the Commonwealth. Existing state transit/TDM funding sources should be protected from encroachment, either through diversion of revenues from the Transportation Trust Fund to non-transportation uses, for new intercity and high speed passenger rail initiatives, or due to failure to issue previously authorized bonds.

2. **Maintain Funding Commitments**—The Commonwealth should ensure that state transit grants promised in signed contracts with local transit systems are provided in full. In the middle of FY 2009, despite its best efforts DRPT was forced to sharply cut the transit assistance funds it had committed in executed grant agreements. This action seriously disrupted the budgets of Virginia’s transit systems, forcing many to reduce service and/or raise fares. Given the ongoing harsh economic outlook, this unfortunate practice recurred in FY 2010.
3. **Add Revenue Sources**—New revenue sources should be enacted that sustainably keep pace with inflation and do not decline as automobiles become more fuel efficient. Examples include: sales taxes (one percent yields \$1 billion), indexed motor fuel taxes (10-cents generate \$500 million), vehicle miles traveled fees, state/regional income taxes and tolls.
4. **Meet State Share as Outlined in Code**—Whatever the source of state funding, it should at a minimum meet the 95% statutory target for the state’s share of transit operating/capital expenses. A significant share of any new revenue measure for transportation, energy conservation or climate protection should be dedicated for transit/TDM because transit investments are an effective means to achieve the goals of such legislation. Further, public transit systems need additional state funding to maintain effective service and to leverage the significant past and current investments by local governments. The current share of Transportation Trust Fund revenues dedicated to transit is 14.7%. The transit share of recent state bonds authorized for transportation is a minimum of 20%. In the past two years vehicle miles traveled by automobile are declining while Virginia’s transit ridership has grown significantly for several years and has reached almost 200 million annual trips.
5. **Create Regional Transportation Entities**—In regions that desire them, new regional transportation entities should be created by the Commonwealth in order to plan, advocate and help fund transit improvements. This is because effective regional transportation goes beyond local boundaries. The Commonwealth of Virginia has a primary responsibility to fund transportation. Therefore, any new regional fees for transit/TDM, including restoring previously authorized funds for the Northern Virginia Transportation Authority, should be imposed primarily by the state.
6. **Intercity/High-Speed Passenger Rail**—With the increased federal emphasis on intercity passenger and high-speed rail, Virginia should establish a new funding source to fully match federal grants, to integrate service with existing local and regional transit/TDM providers, and to ensure that existing transit/TDM funds are not diminished. Virginia’s existing Rail Enhancement Program should be made available to fund the operating expenses of eligible regional and intercity passenger rail services that have benefits commensurate with costs. Where freight railroads are the beneficiaries of these public investments, they should be required to agree to cooperate with publicly provided passenger rail services on equitable terms.

INCREASED FLEXIBILITY IN TRANSIT/TDM FUNDING

7. **Maintain Current Levels of Service**—Current state policy stresses the need to maintain highways, with funds for capital projects diverted to maintenance if necessary to protect past investments and current levels of service. The same approach should apply to public transit/TDM since transit operations are equivalent to highway maintenance. The Commonwealth Transportation Board should be given the authority to temporarily allow the use of transit capital funds for operating expenses during times of financial crisis.

SAFETY IMPROVEMENTS

8. **Grant Authority to Fingerprint Job Applicants**—Give transit providers and contractors the same authority localities currently have to fingerprint job applicants so that all transit systems can access the Central Criminal Records Exchange of the Federal Bureau of Investigation to screen for criminal history record information regarding an applicant or contractor's employee. Without this access, background checks for bus and train operators and other transit personnel providing public services are incomplete and could pose a public safety hazard.
9. **Increase Penalties for Assaults**—Penalties for assaults on transit operators should be increased.
10. **Require Motorists to Stop of Pedestrians**—Safety in accessing transit should be enhanced by requiring motorists to stop for pedestrians at marked crosswalks without traffic signals where posted speeds are 35 mph or less.
11. **Enact Penalties for Crossing Tracks**—Enact penalties for pedestrians crossing tracks in front of commuter and light rail trains against signals.
12. **Ensure Current Levels of Performance do not Deteriorate due to Managed Lanes**—New public-private partnerships and managed lanes with value pricing offer great promise for leveraging scarce public resources. But vital protections must be included, such as: requiring that lane and shoulder widths are sufficient for safe operation of transit vehicles; ensuring levels of performance of existing high occupancy vehicle facilities do not deteriorate; and mandating that local governments' concerns with congestion and points of access and egress are openly addressed.

