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The Virginia Transit Association hosted its 2005 Awards Luncheon on May 10th to recognize outstanding service by individuals and exceptional transit programs, and to advance and expand public transportation in the Commonwealth.

Richmond, Virginia - Held at the Crowne Plaza Ft. Magruder Hotel in Williamsburg, the *2005 VTA Awards Luncheon* honored the outstanding public transportation leadership and innovative and effective programs by transit systems.

The following awards were given:

Innovative Program Award (Large System) – Blacksburg Transit received the 2005 Virginia Transit Association Innovative Program Award for the implementation of two technological advances to improve internal and external operations. The first of these was the application of an online scheduling system to gain greater efficiency in manpower usage and time. Before the system, known as “WhenToWork” (W2W), was implemented, operators wanting to work an open shift had to physically appear at Blacksburg’s facility and change the weekly paper schedule. If shifts were available, and no one signed up for them, managers would have to manually call and locate operators to fill the vacancies. Blacksburg Transit implemented WhenToWork and adapted the software to reflect the unique shift structure and large part time operator base. Scheduling information has been reduced to one master source, and implementation has shown an overall reduction in open and unfilled shifts.

The second innovation was implemented in coordination with the Town of Blacksburg. In 2003, Blacksburg began a partnership with a local e-government company, Tele-Works, Inc. – to establish Blacksburg Alert. Blacksburg Alert is an emergency notification system that sends coordinated information to all communication devices simultaneously. When not in use for emergency notification, the system allows citizens to subscribe to public information notifications. The Town can then send a single message that is automatically translated for email, telephone, fax, TTY, cellular, pager, PDAs and web pages based on each subscriber’s personal preferences. The ability to communicate with all devices 24/7 is a unique attribute of Blacksburg Alert. Blacksburg Transit (BT) uses this communication service to instantaneously advise passengers of delays, snow emergency routes and detours.

The award was presented by Chris Zimmerman, President of VTA and Vice-Chairman of the Arlington County Board.

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VTA is a trade association based in Richmond, VA representing transit agencies of all sizes throughout Virginia and businesses that support public transportation. VTA’s members provide a wide range of services to the communities in which they operate. www.vatransit.com