

Northern Virginia Sub-Regional Plan

Richard Lockwood



*State Transportation Planning Engineer
Virginia Department of Transportation*

I would like to focus my comments on the development of the sub-regional planning process in Virginia, with some specific references to the role HOV facilities play in the plan. The portion of the sub-regional plan that I think is of most interest to this group encompasses the area south of the Potomac River. The area includes 4 counties, 5 cities, and 3 towns.

Traffic congestion in northern Virginia today has reached crisis proportions. More than 50 percent of all the vehicle miles of travel during the peak-period occurs at an unacceptable level of service. Overall, average speeds during the peak-period are less than 30 miles an hour. This means that individuals are experiencing speeds lower than this for at least a portion of their commute. Seventy percent of all

vehicles during the peak-period are carrying only one individual - the driver.

Recognizing these problems, in 1987 all northern Virginia jurisdictions were charged by the Governor with working with the Virginia Department of Transportation to develop a transportation plan for the region. It was envisioned that this plan would then be used to prioritize, program, and implement transportation projects over the next 20 years. This joint effort became known as the sub-regional planning process. To accomplish this task, three committees were established to direct the planning effort and evaluate the technical results. The Policy Committee was comprised of mayors or chairs of the Boards of Supervisors of each major jurisdiction, members of the northern Virginia delegation, and heads of regional agencies. The Technical Committee was comprised of the senior transportation planning staff from each of the jurisdictions and agencies. The Citizens Advisory Committee was comprised of some 80 citizens representing all jurisdictions. Many of these citizens also participated in the technical sub-committees.

Early in the process a set of goals and policies were adopted by the Policy Committee to guide the planning effort. These clearly identified the commitment at the policy level to providing a balanced regional transportation system and to identifying the financial resources and potential legislative actions that would be needed to carry out the plan.

A major part of the process reviewed the anticipated growth factors for the region. Between 1985 and 2010, the population for the area is expected to increase by 50 percent. The number of households is projected to increase by 67 percent. Employment opportunities will almost

double. Automobile ownership, a major indicator of the propensity for trip making is expected to double. The sharpest rate of growth in all areas is expected between now and 1995.

Between now and 2010, radial travel across the beltway is forecast to increase by 50 percent and travel from the outlying counties is expected to more than double. Circumferential travel is expected to grow at an even faster rate. The growth and distribution of work trips represents another good indicator of transportation needs. The overall number of work trips is expected to grow and the direction of many of these trips is expected to change, further compounding the problem. In 1985, 63 percent of all work trips were made entirely within the area. By 2010, this is expected to increase to 75 percent. While the District of Columbia continues to be a major attractor of work trips from northern Virginia, major activity centers within the area are expected to attract increased numbers of work trips. Thus, the demand to serve these areas with an adequate transportation system will continue.

A variety of alternatives and options were examined and noted as part of the sub-regional plan development process. Two future year time horizons were examined; 1995 and 2010. The 1995 system included all the projects currently committed. Several different 2010 alternative systems were examined. The recommended 2010 plan includes the following elements:

- HOV - An HOV and transit system grid is an integral part of the plan. These focus on the major travel corridors and will provide a system for HOVs linking the major activity centers. HOV facilities are recommended for I-66 to Gainesville,

the Capital Beltway, the Dulles Toll Road, and sections of Route 234, Route 1, and Braddock Road, in addition to those currently planned for I-95.

- Rail - Substantial increases in rail service is also identified in the plan. This includes completion of long planned service, such as the Springfield Metro rail expansion and the commuter rail line from Fredericksburg and Manassas to the District. It also proposes new rail extensions in the I-66 corridor to Centreville, and new rail service in the Dulles corridor to Leesburg. Extending the Yellow Line to Lorton will also be examined at the request of the Policy Committee.

- Bus - The plan includes significant increases in bus service. New express service would be added to utilize the HOV lanes and other services would be improved. A timed-transfer system is recommended to provide better service to all the major activity centers.

- Highway - The highway component includes a variety of new projects, widenings, upgradings, and the interstate facilities. New highway facilities are relatively limited, with the emphasis on other improvements and the HOV/transit elements.

- TSM - There is also a good deal of emphasis on TSM measures to improve the efficiency of the existing system and to maximize the efficiency of the future system.

Implementation of the recommended 2010 plan will dramatically increase the total miles of transit service provided in northern Virginia. The number of miles of HOV lanes in the recommended plan is a 500 percent increase over existing services, while 54 miles would be added to the Metro rail system, and 97 miles of commuter rail service would be added. The results of all these improvements will increase commuter trips made on transit by almost 85 percent. A number of additional studies are also currently underway. Once completed, recommendations from these studies must be incorporated into the 2010 sub-regional plan.

The plan identifies the estimated capital costs for the recommended system. In 1988 dollars these improvements total some \$7 billion. Approximately \$4 billion of this is for HOV facilities and transit improvements. An additional \$3 billion in transit operating costs will also be required. Obviously, funding has not been identified to cover all these costs. Now that the overall plan has been developed, the next steps include further examination of the recommendations on a corridor basis and further refinement of the financial aspects of the plan.