

February 5, 2021

**Memorandum #2021-24**

**TO: Regional Transit Advisory Panel (RTAP) Members**

**BY: Robert A. Crum, Jr., HRTPO Executive Director**

**RE: RTAP Workgroup Topic Areas – Survey**

At the January 25, 2021 Regional Transit Advisory Panel (RTAP) meeting, the RTAP membership endorsed a process for moving forward to address important issues related to public transportation service in Hampton Roads. At the RTAP's first two meetings, the Panel's membership identified nine topic areas/themes that should be addressed. These nine topic areas/themes were as follows:

- Transit-Oriented Development along the 757 Express
- Affordable Housing
- Bus Stop Amenities
- Transit Advocacy/Ambassadors
- Transit and the Military
- Serving Major Employment Centers
- Transit for the Williamsburg/Virginia Beach Tourism Corridor
- Technology
- Universities/Colleges

The RTAP agreed that our approach forward would be to form workgroups around each of these topic areas and that each workgroup would identify 1 – 2 action steps under each topic area to move progress. To initiate this process, Panel members also agreed that they would first respond to a survey where they would identify the workgroup they were interested in participating in by selecting their first and second choice. After the survey results are received, the HRTPO staff will then convene an RTAP meeting to review the workgroup assignments and confirm the charge for these groups.

**Transit-Oriented Development along Regional Backbone Routes**

The Hampton Roads Regional Transit Fund (HRRTF) provides funding to support the construction of the 757 Express that consists of 13 routes that will interconnect the six HRT localities. The general location of these backbone routes ("757 Express") has been identified in the HRT 10-Year Transit Strategic Plan.

Now that we know the planned location of these regional backbone routes, RTAP members have noted that there is an opportunity to evaluate existing zoning/land use regulations on the properties located adjacent to these proposed routes and promote the consideration of Transit Oriented Development (T.O.D.) in these areas. T.O.D. regulations can promote increased density along these proposed routes, and perhaps mixed-use opportunities, to more fully leverage the potential of the regional transit backbone system to induce well-planned development and create economic opportunity along the proposed 757 Express.

Examples of Questions for this workgroup to address might include:

- Is the zoning along the 757 Express routes adequate to take advantage of these opportunities?
- How can the 757 Express and the 13 backbone route system help support the redevelopment of underutilized properties?
- What are 1 – 2 action steps that should be considered to promote Transit-Oriented Development along the proposed regional backbone transit system?
- Which regional stakeholders should be involved in this effort?

### **Affordable Housing**

RTAP members have stressed the importance of the 757 Express network serving our residents who have limited incomes, have restricted access to automobiles, and reside in low income areas. An opportunity exists to consider Affordable/Workforce Housing locations along with the proposed regional backbone network. Some of these opportunities may include close collaboration with the Transit-Oriented Development Workgroup described above. This issue also relates to our region's ability to provide the workforce to support job creation opportunities in our region. Many residents do not have access to an automobile and rely on public transportation as their primary means of transportation. Some localities have land available for job creation, but may be challenged to provide an adequate workforce to support these opportunities if they don't have access to a workforce that a regionally interconnected transit network could provide.

Examples of Questions for this workgroup to address might include:

- Are there adequate opportunities for affordable housing around the proposed 757 Express network?
- How can coordination between regional transit and affordable housing efforts be better coordinated?
- What are 1 – 2 action steps that should be considered to strengthen the relationship between affordable housing and regional transit?
- Which regional stakeholders should be involved in this effort?

### **Bus Stop Amenities**

At our first RTAP meeting, much discussion occurred about the need for basic amenities at bus stop locations that offer our riders' safety and dignity as they wait for their bus ride. We have all observed that due to a lack of funding, many bus stops have nothing more than a bus stop sign, with no shelter or basic amenities for bus riders. Our goal should be to have bus shelters

that adequately support our transit users with covered shelters, benches, trash receptacles, lighting, and other necessary features. There are examples of local neighborhood groups coordinating efforts to provide benches/seating at local bus stops (East Ocean View) and some businesses that have invested in attractive bus shelters (REI). We need a coordinated effort to ensure that these amenities are provided throughout our transit system.

Some questions this workgroup could address include the following:

- What basic amenities should be standard at each bus stop?
- How can these basic amenities be funded?
- Would an “Adopt a Stop” Program advance this effort, whereby businesses and/or colleges/universities would adopt a bus stop and provide the amenities and maintenance?
- Which regional stakeholders should be involved in this effort?
- What are 1 - 2 action steps?

### **Transit Advocacy/Ambassadors**

At our first meeting, we reviewed successful metropolitan regions from an economic perspective and noted that many of them have top-rated public transit networks. Transit systems in Hampton Roads have been historically underfunded, which has created major challenges to create the type of transit system that will help make our region economically competitive. Many employers who are considering moves to various metropolitan regions are looking for communities with effective transit systems that offer their employees choices for how they move around the community. In our region, major transit initiatives/ideas are sometimes met with opposition, and our transit system providers are often left to present the case for expanded or enhanced transit service on their own.

One potential way for the RTAP to help address this challenge is to create a Transit Advocacy/Ambassador program. This effort would bring together pro-transit advocates in the community who can promote the importance of a strong regional transit system to the health and well-being of our region. These ambassadors would be able to promote public transit in our region and provide input at important times on the value of expanding the efficiency of our region’s transit systems.

Some questions for this workgroup to address might include the following:

- How can a regional campaign that promotes and supports transit be initiated?
- How would this effort be organized and convened?
- Which regional stakeholders should be involved in this effort? How do you bring together all important stakeholders to this effort to demonstrate the positive benefits of transit to all aspects of our community?
- What type of advocacy would make the most impact? Social media, events, public meetings?
- What are 1 - 2 action steps?

## **Transit and the Military**

The Hampton Roads region contains the second-highest number of military personnel of any metropolitan region in the Country (2<sup>nd</sup> only to San Diego). We are home to the largest naval base in the world (Naval Station Norfolk) and have critical military assets on both the Peninsula and South Side of the 757. Studies have well documented the economic impact that our military assets, and the federal funding associated with them, has on our regional economy. This impact is the foundation upon which the Hampton Roads economy is based.

Each of these military bases contains high concentrations of employees that commute to their place of employment from throughout the Hampton Roads region. The Hampton Roads Transportation Planning Organization has analyzed the travel patterns of military personnel in Hampton Roads and can provide a briefing to this workgroup on these patterns. HRT is in the process of evaluating options for extending transit service to Naval Station Norfolk to determine their feasibility.

Potential questions for this group to address might include:

- How can transit best support our military personnel and bases?
- What are some existing barriers to the use of public transit by our region's military personnel?
- How can these barriers be addressed?
- How can our region address the issue of security and transit? For instance, if effective transit service is provided to the front gate of a military base, how do personnel travel around the base?
- Who are the important partners to engage in creating viable strategies for implementation?
- What are 1 - 2 action steps?

## **Serving Major Employment Centers**

In addition to our military assets, our region has other major employment centers that are prime candidates for enhanced transit service. Newport News Shipbuilding is the largest industrial employer in Virginia with over 25,000 employees and is just one example of a major non-military employer in our region. Without efficient transit service, major employers are forced to provide large parking areas, often at a significant cost, which may not be the best use of their landholdings. Many employees would prefer to use public transit as a transportation choice if it met their needs. When considering our region's efforts to attract new employers, we must be able to demonstrate that public transit will be a viable and available option.

Potential items for this group to address might include:

- Who/Where are the existing major employers/employment centers in Hampton Roads that are currently underserved by public transit?
- What is the available demand for this service?
- What are 1 - 2 innovative options/strategies the region should pursue to address this opportunity?
- Which regional stakeholders should be involved in this effort?

## **Transit for the Williamsburg/Virginia Beach Tourism Corridor**

Hampton Roads contains many tourism assets that draw guests from outside of our region who visit and vacation here on an annual basis. Wouldn't it be exciting if our tourism guests could visit our tourism destinations by using a public transit connector between these locations? What if a vacationing family who drove to Williamsburg could take a bus to the Virginia Beach Oceanfront to spend a day? Or if a group who was vacationing in Virginia Beach could take a bus to tourism locations such as Busch Gardens, Hampton, or Norfolk? This opportunity was presented as an idea for exploration at our first RTAP meeting.

Potential items to be addressed by this group might include:

- Is there support for a public transit connector between our regional tourism sites?
- Could this Tourism Transit Corridor enhance our ability to compete for tourism dollars and allow us to promote these tourism assets as a regional tourism hub?
- What role could our Airports have in this effort?
- Who are the important partners?
- What are 1 - 2 action steps to advance this idea?

## **Technology**

Society's reliance on forms of digital communication, such as cell phones, provides unique opportunities for our transit agencies to utilize technology to improve the rider experience. The HRT 10-Year Transit Strategic Plan includes goals for the expansion and use of technology that will allow riders to utilize their cell phones to understand transit routes, learn the status of arriving buses, and purchase tickets/passes as examples. The RTAP membership noted that our goal should be to have a consistent platform that is shared and coordinated among our region's three transit systems where residents and visitors can access one consistent platform and seamlessly access information that allows them to utilize transit throughout our region.

Potential items to be addressed by this workgroup might include:

- Learning about current technology utilized by our region's three transit systems, and plans for enhancements.
- Researching the use of technology that has successfully worked in other metropolitan regions to support public transit
- Working with the HRT, Suffolk, and WATA transit systems to create a vision for a regionally consistent technology platform in Hampton Roads
- Identify funding sources to support this vision
- Identify 1 - 2 action steps to advance this vision

## **Universities and Colleges**

Our region's universities and colleges provide a significant ridership base for our region's transit systems. William and Mary, Christopher Newport University, Hampton University, Old Dominion University, Norfolk State, Virginia Wesleyan, Regent University, Tidewater

Community College, and Thomas Nelson Community College all represent critical concentrations of transit riders in our region.

The goal of this workgroup will be to evaluate the current regional transit system and determine its success in supporting the needs of our colleges and universities. Potential items to be addressed might include:

- Collaboration with university and college representatives to understand their needs and challenges
- Understanding existing barriers to the use of public transit by university/college students and personnel
- Identify 1 - 2 action steps for addressing this opportunity