

Agenda Item 14

Submitted Public Comments

Hampton Roads Transportation Planning Organization
September 15, 2016



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**HRTPO Comment**  
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Date: 09/14/16

Subject: HRCS - SEIS

Comment:

Unless and until we create the transporter as seen in Star Trek and all its iterations, there will be no ideal solution to the problem of moving people rapidly from one destination to another to eliminate traffic congestion. And even transporters seem to have a hitch or two.

BLUF: Bottom Line Up Front

For a variety of reasons, I come down to two choices, Option A or Option D with conditions:

1. High on the list of reasons for the HRCS is improved transit access and to address the lack of transit access across the Hampton Roads waterway.¹ Fixed transit routes must be part of any of the solutions as they are the only definitive transit access improvement offered. They represent a minimal nod to that expressed intent and, by extension, expansion of regional multi-modal transportation. *"Multimodal transportation refers to the network of airports, seaports, roads, rails, transit systems, and walkways that are integrated to form a seamless system for moving people and freight from point to point. Typically, the more viable options there are for movement -- and the better these modes support and interconnect with each other -- the less congestion and stress there will be on all systems."*²
2. Care must be taken to ensure the selected harbor crossing solution does not sacrifice vital communities (human, non-human and our ecosystem) in the name of progress. We must avoid a continued national history of displacing and destroying low-income communities, particularly those of color. Market value compensation is a poor exchange for displacement and is rarely, if ever, adequate for resettlement. I agree with Transportation Secretary Anthony Foxx: *"America can do far better at balancing needed infrastructure expansions with the interests of local communities... It just has to try."*³ The HRCS does appear to have taken this issue into consideration.⁴ There are pages and pages of data on wetlands, waterways, fisheries, wildlife in the sea and on land, birds, plants and any number of other environmental impacts are contained in this extensive study. While I am concerned about ecological impacts, it will take those more involved in advocacy for these concerns to help me interpret the substantial data presented in this study. The sheer volume of information contained in the Indirect and Cumulative Effects Technical Report⁵, as well as all the technical reports, is daunting. But within its 128 pages plus appendixes is information crucial to the Harbor Crossing solution decision.

¹ Item 8, HRCS SEIS, Draft Supplemental Impact Statement, Executive Summary, Jul 2016

² Virginia Performs <http://vaperforms.virginia.gov/indicators/transportation/multimodalTransport.php>

³ "Top infrastructure official explains how America used highways to destroy black neighborhoods". Think Progress, March 31, <https://thinkprogress.org/top-infrastructure-official-explains-how-america-used-highways-to-destroy-black-neighborhoods-96c1460d1962#.upz80cqi2>

⁴ Page 106, HRCS SEIS, Indirect and Cumulative Effects Technical Report, Jul 2016

⁵ HRCS SEIS, Indirect and Cumulative Effect Technical Report: Prepared in Support of the Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement, July 2016

The Executive Summary Impact Matrix⁶ boils down some of this information and indicates the limit of disturbance (LOD) in several categories by each respective alternative. The numbers alone require a closer look as they increase exponentially from Option A to Option D. But what is not included in the matrix requires an even closer look. While Option A lists a potential 9 potential residential relocations, it indicates 24 residential right of way impacts. Is that half a resident's yard, a wall where a view used to be or splitting a neighborhood in two? Option D increases those numbers to 20 and 69 respectively. Is a possible relocated business a payday loan establishment or the only grocery store in the area?

Option A

I attended Hampton's VDOT Crossing Study event September 7th. When asking about option A, which basically expands the current crossing and HRBT from Hampton to Norfolk, I assumed VDOT meant expanding each of the current two lanes into a third one on each side. Further discussion indicated plans to turn the current lanes to go one direction, and the additional build would add the three lanes going in the other direction. By my calculation that means a total of seven lanes, not six. I asked more than one briefer to ensure I understood the plan correctly. For an additional billion at most, it seems an additional lane could be added providing for the dedicated transit lanes in each direction. This solution is still less than option B, the next least costly option. If the region cannot provide more funding allowing for more frequent bus scheduling, the transit system must be allowed the best possible chance for on time arrival and departures. This cannot happen when the buses are stuck in the tunnel with all the cars in the region.

HRBT configuration and the current problems with higher profile vehicles was another topic. The impression was VDOT is aware of the problem and would be working to mitigate but I did not get a clear sense of a definitive solution.

Issues tanking prior HRBT initiatives were also discussed; namely the Emancipation Oak and the National Cemetery. Both these sites are important to me as well. As we looked at the map it was clear the widening could best be done at the most southernmost point of the peninsula, Strawberry Banks(?). Other participants indicate a hotel used to be there but has since been torn down. Apparently it may belong to Hampton University and they had considered building dorms there but it is quite a ways from campus. It is apparently a fairly good sized tract of vacant land.

Option D

This option clearly presents a multitude of options for several localities and many would argue is the biggest bang for the buck. It is also the biggest challenge logistically, financially, and environmentally. I am a transplant to the region and am not as familiar as others with the specific areas represented on the maps but it is clear a project of this magnitude impacts a number of populations, human and non-human. It will take more time to study before providing more specific response other than that already provided. I will need to spend more time examining the operationally independent portions of this option while simultaneously getting to know the areas impacted to have a fully informed opinion.

⁶ Item 20, HRCS SEIS, Draft Supplemental Impact Statement, Executive Summary, Jul 2016

The Problem and What To Do

Addressing traffic congestion in Hampton Roads is not an easy task. First there are the varied theories, models and authorities to use as yardsticks when evaluating the problem and recommended solutions. There's Noland, Cervaro, Duranton/Turner, Handy/Boarnet, TRB, NHI, and USDOT, etc. "Induced demand", "added capacity", "road pricing", "no build", "land use", "downstream congestion", "peak period mobility"...not the exact science many would have us believe since there are varying points of view and interpretations of facts. One of the latest treatises I've read on congestion and traffic planning speaks to "generated traffic" which is defined as: *...the additional vehicle travel that results from a road improvement, particularly expansion of congested urban roadways.*" Todd Litman of the Victoria Transport Policy Institute asserts: *"This is not to suggest that increasing road capacity provides no benefits, but generated traffic affects the nature of these benefits. It means that road capacity expansion benefits consist more of increased peak-period mobility and less of reduced traffic congestion."*⁷

I might have suggested an additional crossing that would have been a non-POV alternative. Three additional lanes would have provided for rail, bus, and freight vehicles (rail back and forth in the middle, respective north and south shared lanes for bus and freight). The HRBT would then have become a POV/smaller vehicle only crossing and the height challenges presented by the current tunnel would have been addressed in the bargain. Of course, (and clearly) I am neither an engineer nor urban planner. But an option with a nod toward multimodal transportation and its future expansion from those who are would have been most welcome.

DRPT recommended discontinued study of dedicated light rail based on preliminary ridership projections provided by the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transport and Hampton Roads Transit Agency.⁸ The first step in classic four step demand forecasting model tools is trip generation which determines the frequency of origins or destinations of trips in each zone by trip purpose, as a function of land uses and household demographics, and other socio-economic factors. The HRCS acknowledges 39 per cent of economic activity in Hampton Roads is directly or indirectly related to defense spending⁹ and acknowledges NAVSTA's 45,000 military and 12,000 civilian jobs in Norfolk. But it fails to acknowledge the significant military presence on the peninsula other than a general statement of an additional 100,000 military jobs in the Hampton Roads area.

Joint Base Langley Eustis (JBLE) is one of only 12 Department of Defense joint bases and combines Langley Air Force Base in Hampton¹⁰ and Fort Eustis in Newport News¹¹. Both installations are home to strategically key military training commands, TRADOC and ACC for the Army and Air Force. Not only is the presence absent in the respective city descriptions, but the trip generation of military

⁷ "Generated Traffic and Induced Travel Implications for Transport Planning", 12 September 2016, Todd Litman, Victoria Transport Policy Institute <http://www.vtpi.org/gentraf.pdf>

⁸ Item 16, Draft Supplemental Impact Statement Executive Summary, HRCS SEIS, July 2016

⁹ Page 29, Economic Growth and Development, Indirect and Cumulative Effects Technical Report, HRCS SEIS, July 2016

¹⁰ Page 25, Hampton, Indirect and Cumulative Effects Technical Report, HRCS SEIS, July 2016

¹¹ Page 26, Newport News, Indirect and Cumulative Effects Technical Report, HRCS, July 2016

members/employees and their families on the peninsula is overlooked. The Government Accounting Office was assigned by Congress to provide some oversight of the progress of the 12 joint bases before and since their activation in 2010. One of the most often cited hindrance by joint base officials was the 17 mile geographic separation with JBLE reporting the highest percentage of functions adversely affected; in fact significantly higher than the next highest adversely affected installation (Langley-Eustis 76%, McGuire-Dix-Langhurst 46%). The joint base serves a large population of more than 145,000 active duty, Guard and Reserve, family members, civilians, contractors and retirees. The Langley portion of JBLE is at the southern end of the peninsula, and Eustis at the northern.

The Hampton VA Medical Center serves one of the largest DoD active duty and military retiree populations in the United States serving Southeastern Virginia and Northeastern North Carolina. It is the only VA medical facility for veterans on the peninsula and is located at its southernmost point. Thousands of trips are generated to and from this facility every week, perhaps daily.

Ferguson Enterprises, headquartered in Newport News, is the largest plumbing wholesaler in North America and a major distributor of HVAC&R equipment, waterworks and fire protection products, and industrial pipes, valves and fittings generating an estimated \$13 billion sales annually.

In 2014, Governor McAuliffe announced a \$152 million four year manufacturing and equipment expansion by Continental Corporation for the manufacture of turbochargers. This international corporation is one of the top 5 automotive suppliers worldwide. With average annual salaries of \$50,000 the workforce is expected to swell to 1,000 by 2019.

Then there are the added attractions of world renowned Virginia Beach to the south and the most historically significant locations in our nation's history throughout the Peninsula culminating with Colonial Williamsburg and Jamestown to the north.

That's additional data of which this transplant to the area is aware.

The fight in Virginia Beach over light rail might be a lot easier if there was a demonstrable indication Norfolk and Virginia Beach are early steps in Hampton Roads' commitment to move the region into the 21st century; that other HR communities are aware they would be called upon to make a similar sacrifice and show some willingness to do so; and that those with the purse strings (at all levels) see the need and share the commitment. Virginia Beach and Hampton Roads are not the only communities biting their nails over the transit showdown at the ballot box. The American Public Transportation Association reports \$200 billion of public transportation initiatives are at stake this November.¹²

Some see the Virginia Beach light rail controversy as progressives against conservatives. The American Conservative Center for Public Transportation's director, William S. Lynch states: "Conservatives have traditionally supported a strong national defense, and nothing is more essential to America's security than reducing our dependence on automobiles powered largely with imported oil. Improved public

¹² "\$200 Billion of Public Transportation Ballot Initiatives at Stake on Nov. 8", civil + structural engineer, <http://cenews.com/post/8959/200-billion-of-public-transportation-ballot-initiatives-at-stake-on-nov-8>,

transportation can be an effective partner in this process, with technologies, especially electric railways, that have been tested and proven in more than a century of service.”¹³

Yes, yes there are any number of concepts and vision statements from various organizations in the region surrounding multi-modal travel, but I have yet to see it in any regional long or short term plans or priority lists. A plan includes specific objectives and a schedule with committed resources. In my experience, a vision without a plan is nothing more than a dream. I, like Langston Hughes, wonder about the consequences of a dream too long deferred.

Funding

In the recent joint HRPDC/TPO Legislative workshop (August 31) it was pointed out any harbor crossing solution could be in funding danger due to low gas prices and area transportation funding being tied to gas taxes. Some say that if ever we were to consider a bond, now would be the time with record low interest rates. But, fluctuating gas prices also figure into the income stability and repayment ability that affect bond terms.

While the alternatives are being presented as general purpose lanes, the HRCS did present information on toll scenarios. The HRCS clearly leaves the door open for HOT lanes or other managed toll options.¹⁴

Of course, there are any number of other funding options: taxes (sales, property, income, etc), state fees¹⁵, public-private partnerships (P3s)¹⁶, local revenue options, etc.

Serious Business

No matter the final solution, this is a daunting task. Transportation projects, by their very nature, are a commitment to the future. We can only hope the choice is made wisely.

“We are made wise not by the recollection of our past, but by the responsibility for our future.” - George Bernard Shaw

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¹³ American Ideas Institute, The American Conservative Center for Public Transportation, <http://www.theamericanconservative.com/cpt/who-we-are/>

¹⁴ S-5, Item 17, Will There Be Tolls?, HRCS SEIS, Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement, Executive Summary

¹⁵ State Fees as Transportation Funding Alternatives, Alternative Fuels Data Center, http://www.afdc.energy.gov/bulletins/technology_bulletin_2014_03_10.html

¹⁶ Public Private Partnerships, Innovative Finance Support, Federal Highway Administration, U.S Department of Transportation, <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/ipd/p3/default.aspx>