

Rappahannock Rapidan Regional Commission
Rural Transportation Technical Committee (RTC)
Minutes of December 5, 2007

Attendees: James Arrington (Madison County, Board of Supervisors); Mike Collins (Town of Orange, Planning); Rosemary Damewood (Town of Remington, Town Council); John Giometti (VDOT-Culpeper District, Planning and Land Development); Deborah Kendall (Orange County, Strategic Planning); Patrick Mauney (RRRC); Harriet Parcels (RRRC); John Shelburne (VDOT, Transportation, Mobility and Planning Division, Richmond); Jeff Walker (RRRC)

1. Welcome, Agenda, Minutes, Matters from the Public

Acting Chairwoman Deborah Kendall called the meeting to order at 2:00 p.m. Ms. Kendall asked if there were any changes to the agenda. Hearing none, she asked for a motion to approve the agenda. A motion was made and seconded and the agenda was approved. Ms. Kendall then asked if there were any corrections to the minutes of the November 7, 2007 meeting. Ms. Kendall said there were two corrections she had noticed: 1) under Review of Phase I Goals and Objectives and Phase II Planning Process Background Draft, she noted that Orange County, not the Town of Orange, has taken a position opposing roundabouts; and 2) under Announcements, the third item, [misspelled name] should be corrected to Bill Rolfe. With no further corrections, Ms. Kendall asked for a motion to approve the minutes. A motion was made to approve the minutes as corrected and the motion was approved.

2. Phase II-Long Range Transportation Plan

Mr. Walker said that RRRC staff had attended the VDOT meeting on November 15, 2007 in Charlottesville at which the activities and deliverables for Phase II of the Long Range Transportation Plan were discussed. He asked Ms. Parcels to provide the committee with some further details on Phase II deliverables. Ms. Parcels distributed a hand-out to the committee that outlined the Phase II major activities and deliverables and gave an overview of them to the committee.

Mr. Collins asked about the status of the earlier appointed "classification subcommittee" [comprised of representatives from Fauquier and Town of Orange], and whether it might continue to be included as part of the Phase II activities, stating that he thought that the development of a regional vernacular for local street systems should be considered. This would entail providing a more uniform definition throughout the region for defining local roads, something more fine-grained than the current VDOT classification system.

Mr. Walker indicated that its continuation was entirely up to the Committee, adding that identification of regional roadway "hot spots," however, was one of the required deliverables for Phase II. He said that a form had been mailed to all committee members that requested each local jurisdiction to identify the top "hot spots" in their

jurisdiction. He asked Ms. Parcels to provide further explanation of what information is needed. She said that the “hot spots” are intersections or segments of highway that have a current or future capacity deficiency or safety deficiency and that each PD region will be given about 25 hot spots which will then be studied in more detail in Phase III by the VDOT consultant. Mr. Walker said that staff had thus far received responses back from two committee members, asking that those who had not yet had opportunity to do so, please return them, if at all possible, before the next RTC meeting on January 9, 2008, so that they could be compiled into a regional listing and map. Mr. Parks and Ms. Kendall briefly discussed the “hot spots” that they had identified.

Ms. Kendall then asked Ms. Parcels to give a brief description of the Congestion Mitigation Strategies (CMS) that were outlined in one of the materials provided to the committee. Ms. Parcels said that identification of CMS strategies would be an element incorporated into the Long-Range Transportation Plan. A range of possible CMS measures for a rural region might want to consider were identified in the hand-out. Ms. Kendall suggested that the committee members review the strategies and, at a future meeting, hold a discussion about strategies that appear most promising for PD 9. Mr. Giometti suggested that the region focus on the most promising measures and prioritize them in terms of importance. Mr. Collins suggested that under the topic “Growth Management/Land Use Measures,” it would be preferable to state “facilitate in-fill and mixed use development” rather than “promote” such development and that “design of mixed use developments on a grid” would be preferable to “design subdivision roads with fewer cul-de-sacs.”

Mr. Walker then presented a color-coded chart of the 50 largest employers in the PD 9 region produced from Virginia Employment Commission data for use in further promoting ride-sharing and TDM-related effort, and also possibly contribute toward identification of regional freight origin and destination points. Mr. Walker noted that the information includes a few companies located outside the PD 9 region that, probably because of a mailing address, were identified by VEC as being in the region. Mr. Walker also presented a color-coded bar graph, likewise prepared using VEC data, showing projected populations through 2030 for county in the region. In regards to the former, Mr. Collins inquired if the color coding might be done by County, in addition to type of business.

3. Freight Transport in the R-R Region: Guest Speaker, Mr. William Schaefer of Norfolk Southern

Ms. Kendall welcomed guest speaker, Mr. William Schaefer, Director of Strategic Planning for Norfolk Southern Railroad and asked Mr. Walker to provide some background. Mr. Walker gave some brief biographical information about Mr. Schaefer, noting that freight continues to be a very important issue for consideration by the RTC, with direct implications for passenger mobility, safety and the environment. He stated that freight issues will be incorporated into the long-range transportation plan and raised the possibility of sponsoring a larger forum on freight issues in the spring that would

involve rail, truck and other providers, and also ideally broaden the discussion to touch on inter-related passenger rail prospects, as well.

Mr. Schaefer began his presentation by noting that the country is witnessing a renaissance of freight rail transportation. Highway congestion is driving shippers to seek more efficient alternatives, and freight railroads, like Norfolk Southern, are able to provide faster, better service than in the past.

The fastest growing segment of freight rail transportation is intermodal. The Norfolk Southern rail line that parallels Route 29 is a major north-south line for the railroad. It carries domestic containers from J.B. Hunt and other trucking companies and there is a growing intermodal partnership between major trucking companies and the freight railroads, with potential for this partnership to expand significantly in the future.

Mr. Schaefer presented a Powerpoint presentation on the I-81 Corridor and Norfolk Southern's plans for improving and expanding this vital north-south rail corridor. He said it has the potential to take a large number of long haul trucks, many of which traverse the R-R region, off the highways. The vision for the I-81 Corridor is a new network of intermodal trains, extending over a distance of 3,000 miles, that will offer faster service, with projected 90% reliability. The I-81 Corridor proposal has support from major trucking firms who see the potential for shipping partnerships for long-haul freight. NS currently operates 36 intermodal trains daily that take about 5,000 trucks/day off the highways. NS estimates that there are more than one million divertible truckloads that could be shifted to rail, with fully three-fourths of these traveling through Virginia. Substantial public benefits that would result from the new rail service including: improved safety for the highway travelers; reduced highway congestion; reduced highway maintenance costs and need for highway expansions and environmental benefits including reduced emissions, lower demand for land than highways and lower fuel consumption than truck transport. The biggest rail bottlenecks occur on the line between Manassas and Front Royal. Virginia has approved some funding to begin addressing these bottlenecks. The investments have positive implications for future extension of VRE commuter rail service to Gainesville and Haymarket. Finally, Mr. Schaefer mentioned that there is some long-term consideration being given to a Culpeper cut-off to create a rail link between Culpeper and Linden.

As part of the ensuing discussion, Ms. Parcels stated that the Commission had recently applied for a 2008 Multimodal Planning Grant to study the movement of freight within and through the R-R region.

4. Traffic Impact Analysis-Discussion

Mr. Walker said that given the focus of the meeting on the issue of freight, a more detailed discussion of candidate projects subject to upcoming new traffic impact analysis requirement, could be held at a future meeting. He urged committee members, in the meantime, to begin identifying case study-type Traffic Impact Analysis-required development projects, for sharing with and discussion by the group.

5. 2008 VDOT Multimodal Planning Grant Round

In addition to the earlier-referenced Regional Freight Study Multimodal Planning Grant proposal, Ms. Zielinski informed the committee that the Commission had also recently applied for a similar grant to conduct in-depth interviews to assess needs for human services transportation in the R-R region. This grant would complement the recently awarded Transportation and Housing Alliance (THA) Toolkit grant approved for the region, as well as ongoing Coordinated Human Services Mobility (CHSM) planning efforts, required by DRPT, and ultimately to be incorporated into Regional Long-Range Transportation Plan.

6. Announcements and Other Business

Together with the likewise earlier-referenced November 15 VDOT Rural Planning Workshop in Charlottesville, Mr. Walker said that there will be a second VDOT workshop on Traffic Impact Analysis on December 7 at 10:00 am. This will be a more technical workshop than prior workshops, geared to those who will conduct the TIA's in the counties and towns.

On the legislative front, VACO Region 7, encompassing most of the R-R Region, with the exception of Madison County (also invited to participate), has proposed formation of an Inter-Regional Committee, together with Planning District 16 (based in Fredericksburg), for the purpose of further studying the implications of upcoming HB3202 implementation, in addition to providing requested feedback to VDOT and the General Assembly (something the RTC has also expressed a willingness to provide). He indicated that details were still being worked out, but that he would keep the Committee posted.

Finally, he also reported that on January 29, 2008, there will be a meeting of the Transportation Committee of the Virginia Association of Planning District Commissions (VAPDC), in conjunction with the upcoming 2008 VAPDC Winter Conference and General Assembly session in Richmond, to weigh in on many of these issues, as well.

With no further business, Ms. Kendall adjourned the meeting at 3:25 p.m.