

COMMENTS TO THE COMMONWEALTH TRANSPORTATION BOARD

Regarding Draft Six-Year Improvement Program

APRIL 27, 2011

Good evening Board members. I am Barry Bishop and I'm here this evening speaking on behalf of a number of business leadership organizations, including the Greater Norfolk Corporation, Hampton Roads Chamber of Commerce, Portsmouth Partnership, Virginia Beach Vision, Chesapeake Alliance and the Future of Hampton Roads. All are in strong support of the State's efforts to introduce conventional inter-city passenger rail service to South Hampton Roads no later than December of 2013.

We especially appreciate the pro-active efforts of the Department of Rail and Public Transportation and in particular, Thelma Drake and Kevin Page, as well as the strong support of the Governor, Secretary Connaughton and the Commonwealth Transportation Board that culminated in the signing of the agreement with Norfolk Southern to begin improvements to support the extension of passenger rail service to Norfolk.

It's our understanding that the agreement with Norfolk Southern provides for three slots or three daily roundtrip passenger trains in the Norfolk to Petersburg NS corridor, but that improvements to the Appomattox River Bridge are necessary in order for us to be able to use two of the three available slots; thus limiting us to one daily roundtrip from Norfolk until those improvements can be made.

We are absolutely convinced of the huge potential demand for passenger rail service from South Hampton Roads to Richmond, Washington, D.C. and beyond, but frequency of service is critical to realizing that potential. We need those two additional roundtrips sooner as opposed to later, ideally by the end of 2013 when service begins.

To that end, we strongly support the State undertaking the improvements to the Appomattox Bridge as a State project, particularly since projects funded independently by the State can advance far more quickly than those using federal funds. In this case time is of the essence. It should be noted that

improvements to the Appomattox Bridge will benefit the entire corridor, including Richmond.

In addition, we also support efforts to introduce a third daily roundtrip service to the Peninsula.

Finally, it's critically important that Virginia identify a dedicated funding source for Virginia's inter-city passenger rail service. Creation of the Intercity Passenger Operating and Capital Fund was an important and necessary first step, but it's imperative that the Commonwealth now identify a dedicated source of funding to keep the inter-city passenger rail service that we currently have and to grow it into the future.

In the meantime, we urge the CTB to allocate the funds necessary to keep the trains running.