



March 31, 2015

The Honorable William D. Sessoms, Jr.
Members of Virginia Beach City Council
2401 Courthouse Drive
Building 1, Suite 234
Virginia Beach, VA 23456-9000

Dear Mayor Sessoms and Council members:

Virginia Beach Vision, Inc. through its Board of Directors continues to be a strong advocate for a multi-modal, regionally connected transportation system and asks the members of City Council to support adoption of the light rail extension to Town Center as its “locally preferred alternative (LPA).”

The citizens of the City of Virginia Beach voted overwhelmingly in 2012 to support city council using "all reasonable efforts" to find financing and develop plans to extend the light rail service to the oceanfront. Selecting the extension from Newtown Road to Town Center as the LPA will allow those efforts to continue by initiating the next phase of study to a 30% design/engineering level when the ability to estimate costs will become more reliable. Today's estimated project costs of \$324 million are based on a 5% engineering level and are far too preliminary to base a final decision upon.

By moving forward to the next level of study, Virginia Beach follows the wishes of the voters and keeps its options open at little financial risk. Should City Council not select the extension of light rail to Town Center as their LPA, no further study will be authorized and consideration of the project will stop. Doing so will jeopardize \$180 million in funding commitments and prior investment.

Terminating the option of extending light rail to the oceanfront will likely result in the City having to reimburse the Commonwealth for the \$20 million it provided in the purchase of the Norfolk Southern right-of-way. The match funds of \$155 million committed by the Commonwealth of Virginia will no longer be available for construction. Federal funds totaling \$8 million that have been earmarked to fully fund the next level of study will also be redirected.

Though less quantifiable, the investment the city has made over the past eight years in planning the Strategic Growth Areas will be compromised since six of the SGAs are contingent on being served by light rail.

For these reasons, Virginia Beach Vision encourages the Virginia Beach City Council to move expeditiously in endorsing the Newtown Road to the Virginia Beach Town Center area as the LPA. Adequate park and ride opportunities at a Town Center station that can be expanded as needed in the future to facilitate links to other destinations within the City and the region should be central to the plan. The selection should preserve the City's ability to seek federal funding support of future expansions of the system and have a flexible design able to incorporate alternative transit technologies if found appropriate for such extensions.

Respectfully,

Craig Poppen

President

Virginia Beach Vision, Inc.

Cc: City Manager James Spore
SGA Director, Barry Frankenfield
William Harrell, Hampton Roads Transit