

Developing Innovative Transportation Initiatives

Transportation is a quality of life issue affecting our families, neighborhoods, and businesses. Continued transportation gridlock will discourage new businesses from locating in Fairfax County, threatening the strong economic base that is the foundation of our high standard of living. While transportation is primarily the responsibility of state government, our government in Richmond has not provided adequately for Northern Virginia's long-term, or even short-term, transportation needs. Faced with a mounting transportation crisis, and political gridlock in Richmond, the Fairfax County government must step in and develop substantial, new, and innovative transportation initiatives on the County and regional level.

Governments and transportation industry experts have for years identified a number of transportation needs that could be met by local government. It is time to sit down with industry executives, local planners, community leaders, and county government, update these proposals, and, most importantly, look for new approaches. New initiatives should be assessed with performance-based criteria. That is, ideas should be judged by the number of people and goods that can be moved from one place to another, with measured time savings, against cost. Political factors should take a back seat to performance-based measurements.

In order to enlist the help of the private sector in developing new and innovative ideas, Fairfax County should pass a Public-Private Transportation Act (PPTA). Such an act, which is currently authorized by state law, would permit private companies to submit unsolicited transportation proposals to the County for consideration. The "HOT lanes" being built on the Beltway are an example of a PPTA proposal submitted at the state level. A Fairfax PPTA would permit the ingenuity of the private sector to be put to work on projects that could be tackled at the local level.

We must proceed with the thoughtful redevelopment of Tysons Corner and the expansion of Metro to Dulles Airport. The construction of “Hot lanes” on the Beltway must continue. These lanes not only provide a mechanism for getting to Tyson’s Corner more quickly, but by adding two additional lanes to the Beltway traffic on the non-toll lanes of the Beltway will move more quickly. The County needs to monitor this construction, however, and work with community organizations to minimize the impact on neighborhoods during construction and ensure adequate sound walls are built and trees replanted where possible along the construction route.

The County needs to think “outside the box” and consider new transportation initiatives. Bus Rapid Transit is one example of an innovative program that deserves consideration. Such a system is *not* a metro bus system. Bus Rapid Transit operates on bus-only or HOV or HOT lanes. This allows buses to commit to a set schedule, similar to a metro train. Bus Rapid Transit buses are more comfortable than regular buses, and bear a closer resemblance to a metro train. A Bus Rapid Transit system could move substantial numbers of people along our primary transportation arteries, thereby taking cars off the road, reducing the commuting times of automobile drivers, saving energy usage, and reducing pollution. Bus hubs could also provide necessary locations for community meeting rooms and senior citizen centers in off hours.

New County transportation initiatives would require funding. Such funding could be obtained through County bonding authority. Selling bonds to finance transportation initiatives would provide substantial funds now for construction, while stretching out payment expenditures over a long-term period appropriate for substantial capital projects. Proceeding with transportation initiatives would encourage economic growth and bring business and revenue to the County. The time to begin a responsible reordering of County priorities is now, when the

County budget is under close review due to prospective shortfalls. In the long-term, the County must place transportation initiatives among the higher priorities of County government. If the County does not begin the process of providing realistic and substantial transportation alternatives, the effect on our local economy will be devastating and long-term. The County can no longer afford to avoid facing our substantial transportation difficulties. Working with the private sector, community organizations, and other local governments, Fairfax County can develop common sense, effective, and responsible transportation initiatives for the future.