



## Mass Transit Open House Participant Comments September 16, 2008 Virginia Beach Convention Center

The following comments and questions were submitted verbally and in writing at a public open house held in the Virginia Beach Convention Center. There were over 100 participants at the open house, which included presentations about the Norfolk Light Rail project by HRT, an overview of the Comprehensive Planning process in the City of Virginia Beach, and a status update of the Norfolk/Southern right-of-way acquisition by the City.

The comments and questions have been grouped by topics.

### ***Public's Comments on General Topics***

- When you get to the oceanfront with the light rail, you have to have real expectations.
- Much support for the light rail system!!!! We are so far behind Europe!!
- I'm opposed because of cost. I would support tax increase for double-decker highways instead. It would take too long to go from my house, to station, to work – estimated 58 minutes – now takes 24 minutes to drive
- I favor light rail. I want it to go places where people go – Resort area, airport, Oceana, Norfolk Naval Base, Amphibious Base, Olde Towne Portsmouth, downtown Hampton.
- VB is so spread out, a light rail line running here (Norfolk-Southern R.O.W.) doesn't serve so many people. This rail line is going to service density that isn't there yet.
- Make environmental impact study publicly available.
  - **RESPONSE:** *Upon completion, the draft EIS will be available to the public on the City's website ([www.vbgov.com/masstransit](http://www.vbgov.com/masstransit)). There will also be additional public meetings and other opportunities for official public input and comments.*
- The cost to the taxpayers for LRT would be too much of a financial burden.
- There will be a lot of major opposition to this if there is no referendum.
- Would like to see if HRT could become private.
- There should be a premium on the fare for services such as the express buses or LRT.
- Negative publicity thru radio station media killed the 1999 referendum. If LRT is put on ballot, proponents need to do homework and educate these radio personalities

- Parking needs to go vertical.
- Run the mass transit to the airport.
- Cities need to work together to achieve regional goals.
- If LRT went up Military Highway it would be a big draw. It would hit more population centers.
- It's difficult to identify destinations with a city this large and sprawled out.
- They will take my house on 22<sup>nd</sup> street.
  - **RESPONSE:** *No property takings have been considered at this time. In fact, a "preferred" route has not been identified. The exact layout (and the need for land acquisition, if any) will be determined after an alignment is agreed upon and initial engineering work is completed.*
- Please, please, please include a bicycle path from Newtown Rd. through downtown Norfolk and in the light rail construction through Virginia Beach.
- I think the light rail should be extended to the Oceanfront.
- Don't let the naysayers get you down.
- Thanks for your leadership-Ride the Tide all the way to the beach!
- Fabulous plans. Hope all succeeds. Thank you for tonight's presentation.
- I applaud the city's effort to take a pro-active approach on transportation and strategic growth. Tonight was a great start on opening a dialog with residents on this important topic. I wish you many successes as the process moves forward.
- Please extend the light rail to the oceanfront. It was needed 10 years ago.
- Consider another station on Kentucky Ave (between Town Center and Rosemont). Many potential riders in Thalia neighborhood.
- Very good presentations. We need light rail to the Oceanfront.
- You need substantial bicycle parking at the stations. Not everyone wants to take a bicycle on the train and four bikes per train is not enough to handle the traffic.
- I would like to see more bridge inspections, including I-264.
- Who rides buses? People love their cars.
- Disappointed that they didn't open the floor for discussion.
- I think that this is a good format.
- Style of meeting and presentation were excellent.
- I anticipated more of a dialogue between staff and citizens.
- If you can eliminate cars, do it. Make it hard as possible for people to drive cars. – Interested in safety of pedestrians and bicyclists.
- Why would we ride the transit to Norfolk? I only go there occasionally.

### **Public's questions regarding the Norfolk-Southern Right-of-way**

- What is the status of the city's effort to acquire the Norfolk Southern right-of-way?
  - **RESPONSE:** *The city is working diligently to buy the right-of-way, which has not been officially abandoned by the railroad at this time.*
- Is it a sure thing that we will acquire the row?
  - **RESPONSE:** *City Council has directed staff to proceed in acquisition of the property, even if condemnation is required. We cannot condemn until the abandonment process is complete, but we are determined to eventually own the right-of-way. Ideally, both parties will be able to negotiate a sale without use of condemnation.*
- What was the cost (per mile) paid for the Norfolk section of the Norfolk Southern right-of-way? How does that figure compare to the offer on the table for Virginia Beach today?
  - **RESPONSE:** *The Norfolk leg cost approximately \$1.5 million per mile. There are no formal offers on the table for Virginia Beach at this time.*

### **Public's questions regarding current bus service**

- What are the requirements for bus system expansion? Does HRT have the capacity to increase its buses now, specifically on Route 1, expanding bus service between Chesapeake and Virginia Beach Municipal Center, as well as a possible bus route along Centerville Turnpike? Can the hours be extended?
  - **RESPONSE:** *Ridership figures and system operations are under regular review by HRT and the City of Virginia Beach. There are no specific requirements or standards that determine expansion or reduction in service. Such decisions are typically done on a case-by-case basis.*

*However, the Hampton Roads Metropolitan Planning Organization is currently looking at the entire HRT system and is preparing a regional long-range transit plan. This project will be completed in early 2009. These specific suggestions will be included in the review.*
- What's wrong with the current bus system? Is it an antiquated or inadequate system?
  - **RESPONSE:** *The current bus system does service a large portion of the City and region, but frequent users, especially those that rely on HRT as their primary mode of transportation, often cite the following needs for improvement.*
    - *More frequent service. Currently, most routes only run once an hour.*
    - *Expanded hours. Many routes do not run in the evening.*
    - *Weekend service is limited on most routes.*
    - *There are many areas of the City where the nearest bus route is not within an easily walkable distance.*

## **Public's questions regarding the planned Norfolk Light Rail Operations**

- What will the progress be on the Norfolk segment of the Light Rail by the end of year?
  - **RESPONSE:** *The construction will continue to move forward towards the goal of opening in 2010. Currently, work is underway on the preparation of the tracks and overhead power system. Construction updates are found at [http://www.ridethetide.com/lightrailconstruction/lightrail\\_construction.html](http://www.ridethetide.com/lightrailconstruction/lightrail_construction.html).*
- Where are the stations located that would be convenient for students at NSU?
  - **RESPONSE:** *On September 26, 2008, the Transportation District Commission of Hampton Roads approved the relocation of the Norfolk State University station to a site just west of Brambleton Avenue. This move was made at the request of the University.*
- How will the system allow you make transfers to the buses?
  - **RESPONSE:** *HRT is converting to a transfer-free single fare system daily, weekly, or monthly pass for all modes, including ferry and the future Norfolk LRT. This conversion is already underway at HRT and was put into effect on October 6, 2008.*
- Is it true permanent bus transfer stations in Norfolk won't be near the light rail stations?
  - **RESPONSE:** *Each LRT station is unique based on the characteristics of their locations. However, five of the stations will have dedicated access to HRT bus routes, including the Newtown Road station located at the Norfolk/Virginia Beach city limits.*
- How many people will light rail move during rush hour?
  - **RESPONSE:** *Daily ridership is expected to be 6,000 – 12,000 riders per day.*
- In most cities, light rail fares are higher than bus fares. What would the fares be here?
  - **RESPONSE:** *LRT fares are higher compared to buses in some cities, particularly where the LRT provides a premium, longer distance service compared to local buses. Pittsburgh and Cleveland would be examples of this. In other locations, such as Baltimore and Charlotte, there are no differences between bus and LRT fares. Norfolk LRT will be in the latter category of instituting a single system fare for bus and rail.*
- How fast can it go?
  - **RESPONSE:** *The vehicle can travel as fast as 55 mph, although physical and operating limitations tend to limit actual travel speeds to less than this maximum.*
- Will there be high-speed internet on the light rail?
  - **RESPONSE:** *Not initially. Possibly in the future.*
- Will the light rail interfere with cell phone service for passengers?
  - **RESPONSE:** *No, you should be able to use your cell phone just as you would in your car.*
- Is an overpass planned over the Sewells Point rail line (near Ballentine)?
  - **RESPONSE:** *An overpass over the Sewells Point rail line is currently under construction.*
- How are the projections for Norfolk's cost now so much lower than from before (1999)? Where did the original figures come from? (Note: The figures quoted by the questioner were an estimate

of \$1,264 million or \$69 million per mile for the Norfolk to Oceanfront line in the 1999 estimate to today's estimate of \$232 million or \$27.8 million per mile for the segment being constructed today).

- **RESPONSE:** *The 1999 figure of \$1,264 million included the capital costs of a 20 year agency-wide bus service expansion and replacement program which included the purchase of approximately 100 new buses, a new bus maintenance facility, shelters, van pools, demand response vehicles, ferry vessels, etc. The 1999 Environmental Impact Statement projected the LRT capital costs from Downtown Norfolk to the Oceanfront at \$465.2 million in 1998 dollars, or \$25.5 million per mile (Page 19-4, Norfolk-Virginia Beach LRT FEIS)The current \$232 million projection for the Norfolk LRT project reflects only LRT capital costs.*
- When the Light Rail is run down existing streets in downtown Norfolk, how much additional traffic congestion will it create due to the loss of 2 lanes of existing roadway?
  - **RESPONSE:** *In actual practice, there is limited loss of capacity. In downtown Norfolk, the LRT is not removing traffic lanes, even on Monticello Avenue, but effectively displaces parking lanes. There is a traffic lane removal on W. York, Bute, and Charlotte Streets that converts these roadways to one way traffic; but existing traffic volumes on these streets are very light.*
- What is the annual operating cost for the Norfolk starter line?
  - **RESPONSE:** *The Operating Cost Projections reflect a range of approximately \$7 million - \$9 million per year through the year 2020.*
- What is the fare per mile for riding the Tide?
  - **RESPONSE:** *Fares are \$1.50 per passenger boarding on the 7.4 mile system. Multiple day passes will be available, based on HRT's new fare policy, that will provide further discounted fares.*
- What are the planned annual costs being budgeted for the replacement of each rail car when it reaches its end of service life?
  - **RESPONSE:** *Each car costs approximately \$3.5 million. Because the major LRT vehicle components are replaced at different intervals, projected annual costs are typically estimated and projected under annual Operating Costs for Vehicle Maintenance from the projected Operations Plan.*
- How long will the Light Rail cars purchased for the Tide last (planned service life)?
  - **RESPONSE:** *HRT Some portions of the vehicle last longer than others and are replaced or overhauled in phases. The electrical components and traction motors generally have a service life of 25 years, the interior seating and components tend to be replaced every 15 to 20 years, the body shell and frame of the vehicle can be expected to last at least 50 years in normal service. Wheels, brakes, and pantograph components tend to be replaced relatively frequently in revenue service.*
- What country manufactures the Light Rail cars for the Tide?
  - **RESPONSE:** *Siemens Transportation Systems, a subsidiary of Siemens AG of Germany, is currently manufacturing the Norfolk LRT vehicles in Sacramento, CA. Moreover, manufacture of these vehicles conforms to the Buy America Act as a Federally funded project.*

- How many police officers will be stationed at each station? How much will that cost?
  - **RESPONSE:** *Patrols for fare evasion as part of normal LRT operation will involve random special police personnel in the inspection of vehicle fares, and these inspectors vary their routine from station to station.*
- How will riders be protected from crime?
  - **RESPONSE:** *HRT All vehicles, station platforms, and parking facilities are well lit, are in open view, are not isolated areas, and the LRT vehicles have monitoring cameras. In practice, regular patrols are made of park and ride areas, and fare enforcement is conducted by a dedicated special police force riding at random, the Va. Beach police department are also available for response as needed.*
- Will riders be permitted to carry firearms on board the Tide (for self defense)?
  - **RESPONSE:** *The Code of Virginia articulates the qualifications for an individual who wishes to openly carry a weapon in the Commonwealth of Virginia. Additionally, the Code of Virginia governs the appropriate type of weapon and the locations where that weapon may lawfully be carried. As a common carrier, it is the responsibility of HRT to take all reasonable steps to insure the safety of its passengers. To that end, it is the policy of HRT to cooperate fully with local law enforcement agencies to insure that HRT passengers comply with the Code of Virginia. .*
- Will the drivers on the Tide be armed?
  - **RESPONSE:** *No.*

## **Questions to be addressed during upcoming Environmental Impact Statement**

*The following questions from the public will be addressed in the development of the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), which is anticipated to kick-off during the beginning of 2009. The draft document will be released to the public for review and comment upon completion.*

- How much will system cost to build, operate, and maintain?
- What are the ridership estimates?
- Do we have the densities necessary for this to be feasible?
- How long will it take?
- How will it be phased?
- When would LRT be constructed in Virginia Beach?
- How can LRT be funded?
- What is the estimated number of commuter vehicles that will be removed from I-264 during the morning and evening peak commuter periods?
- Will the line continue all the way to the oceanfront – how and what happens after that point? Will it parallel with 19<sup>th</sup> St?
- Where at Town Center will the station be located?
- Is BRT ([Bus Rapid Transit](#)) a viable option, possibly using BRT or another transit mode as an interim use prior to a potential of fixed-rail transit?
- If the system could not extend all the way, could an initial phase stop at Town Center?
- Are there any impacts to the environment for the VB proposed line?
- How will the stations affect the I-264 interchanges?
- Will the overall cost of the plan, and the annual cost, ever be divulged to the public? We all need to know both the pro's and more of the cons.
- Are other alternative means being looked at, specific areas for stations and park and ride lots, feeder line connections, etc.?
- Can HRT become privatized? People who don't use HRT shouldn't be taxed for people who do.
- What is the needed volume of riders to make system work?
- Is there any opportunity for a parallel light rail use within the I-264 R.O.W? Why not put a line down the median on I-264? Mag Lev system possibilities?
- What about using similar trains that are used at Disney Land (Historic-style tourist oriented trains)?
- How much of a reality is doing the light rail thing in Virginia Beach?

### **Public's comments regarding the meeting format**

- Why is this not an open forum? What was the intent of this format (breakout sessions).
  - **RESPONSE:** *The four breakout sessions were used so staff could collect and address as many questions or comments as possible. An "open forum" would have only allowed one speaker at a time. With an audience of over 100 participants, there would not have been enough time to answer all questions. In addition, many participants are not comfortable speaking in front of the larger audiences. The breakouts allowed for more intimate discussions and the format turned out to be very successful based on the level of input and discussion at the meeting.*
  
- What are you going to do with this information you get today?
  - **RESPONSE:** *These questions and comments will be used and addressed as we move forward with the EIS.*

## **Public's questions on general topics**

- Why is the 1999 EIS not being used now?
  - **RESPONSE:** *This document will be used as a starting point for the new EIS, but the information in it is quite dated. Many circumstances have changed in Virginia Beach, such as the development of Town Center, the use of Strategic Growth Areas in the Comprehensive Plan, and changes due to BRAC, that necessitate a complete update of the original EIS.*
- Why was this forum not on HRT website?
  - **RESPONSE:** *This was not an HRT sponsored meeting. The City of Virginia Beach conducted the meeting, but invited HRT to present information about the Norfolk LRT project as an informational item.*
- Where did the state allocated \$15 mil, as cited in this meeting, come from?
  - **RESPONSE:** *The funds were appropriated in the 2007 state budget and are still available for the right-of-way acquisition.*
- Where will the \$2 mil come from for the Environmental Impact Statement?
  - **RESPONSE:** *The state allocated funds noted above or other state funds will be used for the EIS.*
- What is the difference between light rail and heavy rail (Amtrak system)?

- **RESPONSE:** *There are several definitions for both light and heavy rail, but here are some general differences.*

*Light rail systems are typically operated at or above ground, sometimes in the right-of-way of city streets. Vehicles are typically electric and have smaller capacity than their heavy rail counterparts. The LRT trackway is not electrified and allows for pedestrian crossing of the tracks. Vehicles are also typically quieter and lighter than heavy rail.*

*Heavy rail vehicles are usually used in dedicated rights-of-way such as in New York City and Washington DC. Some heavy rail systems such as Amtrak, use locomotives-either diesel or electric-and are usually much longer trains with high capacity. They sometimes share freight rail tracks. Electrification is provided via a third rail which prohibits pedestrian crossing of the tracks.*

- Is this the first light rail line system in VA?
  - **RESPONSE:** *There are no other light rail systems in Virginia. The nearest light rail systems are in Baltimore and Charlotte. The DC Metro system is considered heavy rail or "rapid transit". Amtrak also serves Virginia, with the nearest station being located in Newport News.*
- Where does light rail stand in hierarchy of highway projects?
  - **RESPONSE:** *Light rail is not currently a city project. However, the acquisition of the Norfolk-Southern right-of-way for a future city use continues to be a top priority of the City.*

*The City Council will determine the future of a transit project for the corridor after the completion of the EIS.*

- What about linking LRT up to the Naval base?
  - **RESPONSE:** *Continuation of the Norfolk line to other destinations, including the Naval Base, Chesapeake, Portsmouth, Airport, and the Peninsula are all possible future phases of the region's transit/LRT network.*
- Is there a population increase projected for the area?
  - **RESPONSE:** *The US Census Bureau estimates the City of Virginia Beach population at 434,743 for 2007. The Commonwealth of Virginia estimates the population will increase to 493,095 by 2030. The metropolitan area (VB, Norfolk, Chesapeake, Newport News, Hampton, etc) is expected to grow from 1.69 million in 2010 to 1.96 million in 2030.*
- Will there be another referendum?
  - **RESPONSE:** *This would be a decision of the City Council after the completion of the EIS.*
- Will there be a project manager from each of the cities?
  - **RESPONSE:** *HRT would manage and operate the design and construction of a transit project, with significant input from City of Virginia Beach staff.*
- Will stations be accessible to handicapped and elderly?
  - **RESPONSE:** *Stations and vehicles will meet or exceed all federal ADA requirements, providing full accessibility for handicapped and elderly users.*
- How will pedestrians and bicycles cross the tracks? How can we best integrate bicycle facilities?
  - **RESPONSE:** *Details would be determined in the design phase of a project, but all transit improvements would include safely designed pedestrian and bicycle crossings, accessibility, and the inclusion of amenities such as bike racks/lockers. Also, all vehicles would likely accommodate bikes in some way.*
- Are you taking into consideration that development of the SGA's will create more congestion, such as Town Center and the I-264/Independence interchange? Currently the underpass has no pedestrian facilities.
  - **RESPONSE:** *The SGA's are detailed area plans that address all aspects of land use in and around the planning areas, including multi-modal transportation. Transit is a key component in the development of the SGA plans. Pedestrian access to stations and destinations within the planning area will also be addressed in the SGA plans and the EIS.*
- What studies are to be undertaken to move forward (next steps)?
  - **RESPONSE:** *An update to the 1999 Environmental Impact Statement is the next step. This should kick off in early 2009. The draft EIS will be distributed to the public for review and comment. Afterwards, it will be forwarded to the City Council, at which time they will make the decision on the next steps.*