



www.railsolution.org

David L. Foster, Executive Director
342 High Street, Salem, VA 24153
540-389-0407 railsolution@aol.com

**Virginia Department of Transportation
Commonwealth Transportation Board**

Six-Year Plan Public Hearing

Roanoke, Virginia

May 19, 2014

We have a crazy dilemma here in Virginia that we, the public, need your help with.

On one hand, many official Virginia documents, such as the Statewide Freight Plan, the State Rail Plan, and VTRANS2035, have extolled the need for multi-modal planning and analysis. But such rhetoric has not been successfully transformed to actual practice. It's time to walk to talk!

A very highway-centric mentality dominates transportation planning in Richmond. Too many projects continue to be advanced with little thought or planning, following the traditional, but no longer sustainable, mantra that every problem of congestion and growth can be solved with more lanes of pavement.

Nowhere is this more tragically illustrated than in the U.S. 460 expressway debacle. We now learn that it may cost the Commonwealth as much as \$500 million to shut down this unneeded project. This money, invested instead in the parallel rail line, could have funded a third track on Norfolk Southern's mainline between Petersburg and Norfolk. That would be capital on the ground, an investment in infrastructure for centuries to come, and with far more freight-carrying capacity and far less environmental destruction than the proposed expressway.

In recent years we have seen the transportation funding gridlock in Virginia broken, along with bi-partisan enthusiasm that new funding mechanisms put in place will mean consistent new transportation investment in the Commonwealth. But it also greatly increases the risk that in a rush to spend the new funds, misguided, short-sighted decisions like the U.S. 460 expressway will proliferate.

More rigor and discipline is needed to safeguard and ensure the intelligent deployment of these transportation funds. We will never maximize the return on taxpayers' transportation investments until we insist on examining all transportation alternatives for adding new capacity prior to start of construction.

At minimum, the process must include:

- Determine the need for new capacity. This involves far more than simply extrapolating past traffic trends. Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) in recent years has plateaued, even declined, in many corridors for both cars and trucks.
- Examine alternatives. Where need for new capacity is validated, a rigorous assessment of the economic and environmental costs of ways to supply that new capacity must be made.

→ Intelligent implementation. Once the analysis of life-cycle costs of various alternatives is complete, select the alternative, or combination of alternatives, that supplies the needed capacity at lowest economic and environmental cost.

Though I don't have time to share the details here tonight, this same flawed planning process underlies the Salem District Six-Year Plan project to widen I-81 between Exit 118 and Exit 150 to eight lanes. Obsolete traffic growth projections, completely at odds with VDOT's own traffic counts, are being used to justify and promote another expensive, disruptive, and unneeded highway project.

Accordingly, I am attaching the comments RAIL Solution submitted last year on the I-81 widening, which are still relevant and appropriate, and to which I urge your further attention.