

# Workforce Development Project Best Practice Study Transportation Work Group September 15, 2008



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## **Objective and Overview**

*Transportation Objective:* To address the issue of ensuring that prospective workers have convenient and affordable transportation options. Develop short-term strategies such as employer-provided vans for groups of employees, VDOT Ride Sharing, regional public transportation express service connecting the Peninsula and Greater Williamsburg and long-term strategies such as light rail and other public transportation options.

Over 4,000 jobs are currently unfilled, and the shortage over the next ten years is projected to be over 50,000 workers. The labor deficit is predicted to be especially acute in low-skill, entry-level jobs in the restaurant and lodging industries.

Other communities are finding that they are able to connect suburban workers with major employers using innovative transit solutions. The solutions seem to involve advanced technology for scheduling and routing coupled with public authorities providing the vehicles and insurance for employer use.

The region has traditionally pulled workers from surrounding areas. The *current forms of transportation* for commuters are unlikely to meet the needs of the large numbers of workers needed to sustain the expected growth in the Greater Williamsburg Area (GWA). The movement of workers into and within the GWA has been enhanced with consolidation of mass transit systems and establishment of a link with the Hampton Roads Transit system. However, transportation issues remain, especially with respect to the limited provision of commuter express bus services moving commuters from Norfolk and the nearby urban areas to jobs in GWA. Traffic problems are compounded by the large number of more skilled workers and professionals who commute in single occupied automobiles out of the GWA for work.<sup>1</sup>

## **Best Practices in Transportation**

Workers in hospitality and retail often rely on public transportation for commuting to work because they lack the income to own and operate their own vehicles. Temporary workers from abroad likewise rely on public transportation or walk/bike to work.

Mass transit systems in the U.S. have been established to move workers from the periphery to the center of urban areas, which is an inexpensive and efficient means of providing mass transit. Job opportunities began to suburbanize in the 1970's; effectively, removing low-wage workers in inner cities from growth opportunities in regional labor markets. Inner cities fought suburban routing because they feared it would accelerate movement of population and business from core to periphery locations. Major urban centers began to recognize that they needed to reconnect inner city workers with suburban jobs just to sustain their economic growth. Suburban transit systems were formed to provide an infrastructure for creating mobility for workers living in both suburbs and urban cores.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Workforce Best Practice, GWCTA, December 2007, page 2-4.

<sup>2</sup> Workforce Best Practice, GWCTA, December 2007, page 34-36.

## **Transportation Strategy Goals**

While the GWA could require an additional 50,000 workers in the next ten years, the Transportation sub-committee established an incremental goal to provide Transportation Options for 15,000 workers in the GWA over the next 10 years. To tackle this, we established three objectives:

- I. Transportation options to address convenience and cost*
- II. Short-term strategies (1 to 5 years)*
- III. Long-term strategies (6 to 20 years)*

### **I. Transportation options to address convenience and cost**

#### **Best Practices and Potential Initiatives**

**Gasoline Price:** Gasoline has hit record levels – and experts say it will likely continue to soar in tandem with the skyrocketing price of crude. Experts say motorists should prepare to pay nearly \$4 a gallon – and in some places even more than \$4.<sup>3</sup> As a result, high gasoline prices are leading consumers to cut their demand for gasoline. The American Public Transportation Association reported that Americans took 10.3 billion trips on public transportation in 2007, up 2.15% from 2006 and the most in 50 years. During the same period, Williamsburg Area Transport experienced a 15 % increase, an outgrowth of increased connections to Newport News for employment and continued use by international employees supporting the area’s retail/hospitality industry. The group attributed the gain in ridership in part to higher gasoline costs.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, current and prospective employees, particularly those in lower-wage positions, are tending to be much more aware of the length of commute and about the portion of their total compensation that must be spent driving to employment that does not provide “transportation options” or “employee transportation programs.”

**Incentives to Attract More Prospects:** Bon Secours Home Care provides a Transportation Program by leasing white Toyota Corollas for registered nurses who have worked there for at least six months. Bon Secours pays for the lease, maintenance, insurance and gas. Providing vehicles is the latest effort by Bon Secours to fill difficult positions.<sup>5</sup>

**Entry-Level Jobs:** *Explore a comprehensive approach to helping workers transition from low-income, entry-level positions into advanced career ladders and/or apprenticeships:* The attraction, retention and advancement of workers can be challenging because limited transportation options restrict access to and by the Hampton Roads region’s large pool of prospective employees. Also, with rising costs for transportation and limited public transportation options, there may be an even greater tendency for employees in entry-level positions to hop from job to job, constantly seeking a position that offers a more convenient and less costly commute. Constant turn-over means constant training and re-training by employers. There are no “magic bullets” and relatively few programs or efforts to improve transportation options for entry-level jobs. More aggressive programs are needed for the GWA to be competitive. For example, could a business realize a reduction in turnover and training costs by

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<sup>3</sup> Gasoline price spike has only just begun: By Steve Hargreaves, CNN Money

<sup>4</sup> \$4 a gallon gas forecast in some areas: By Barbara Hagenbaugh, USA Today

<sup>5</sup> Some nurses get a free ride: By Veronica Gorley Chufo, Daily Press

instituting some sort of transportation ‘incentive’ for entry-level positions? Doing nothing has its own price tag. Therefore, the expenditures of greater effort and resources by the public and private sector on promising efforts to improve these outcomes seems warranted.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

**Compensation and Benefits:** Businesses should be encouraged to implement Transportation Fringe Benefit Programs to facilitate ridesharing, provide information about public transit options or even to supplement regular compensation to help cover for commuting costs. Offering commuter benefits can expand the workforce pool by providing access for those without their own transportation.

A good example of such a program is the Cape Fear Breeze, which provides information about and assistance with transportation alternatives in the Wilmington, North Carolina and the surrounding areas of New Hanover, Brunswick, and Pender counties and beyond. Their program educates and offers transportation choices and the benefits of using them. It also educates employers and employees about how to get started with easy services such as *instant personalized matching* to carpool partners, bike buddies and bus information. Their *Way2Go Club* provides registered alternative transportation users with additional rewards from the Breeze and participating employers. They also offer *special services for employers* by adding transportation benefits to the employee compensation package. In addition, they provide assistance addressing traffic or parking issues at places of business.<sup>6</sup>

**Transit Services:** Charles City and New Kent Counties provide public transportation system “Curb-to-Curb” services for all residents. The cost is \$1.00 each way anywhere in Charles City or New Kent. Discount Tickets (10 rides for \$8.00) are also available. Residents can call 24 hours/7 days a week to schedule a ride. The GWA should investigate opportunities for this service to be expanded so that Charles City/New Kent residents (i.e., prospective employees) can be dropped off at one of VDOT’s Park and Ride lots or the nearest WAT bus stop

**Encourage support of Regional Commuter Services:** Several commuter services connecting Greater Williamsburg with the Peninsula have begun by Williamsburg Area Transport (WAT) and Hampton Roads Transit (HRT) to address employment needs and rising commuting costs. They include the following:

- James City County/Newport News Employee Connector providing transportation commuting options between Industrial Developments on the Peninsula and GWA is now in its third year. This WAT service has been supported by Congestion Mitigation Air Quality (CMAQ) 80% Federal and 20% State grants that will end in FY 2009
- Metro Area Express, commonly known as the MAX, began this fiscal year by HRT provides express commuter connections between Southside, the Peninsula and Greater Williamsburg. These services offer 121 connections between Patrick Henry Mall and Williamsburg Transportation Center four times daily. In turn commuters can continue on to the Newport News, Hampton and Norfolk transportation Centers through MAX services.
- WAT will begin increased frequency and Sunday service this Fiscal Year improving transportation opportunities for employment within GWA and support of Regional connections. This service is supported by CMAQ grant revenues over the next three years.

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.capefearbreeze.com/> : Cape Fear Breeze Transportation Choices, Wilmington, N.C.

## II. Short-term strategies (1 to 5 years)

### **Best Practices and Potential Initiatives**

**Carpooling:** *Explore ways to encourage more commuters to join rideshare programs:*

Carpooling (also known as car-sharing, ride-sharing, lift-sharing), is the shared use of a car by the driver and one or more passengers, usually for commuting. Carpooling arrangements involve varying degrees of formality and regularity. Formal carpool projects have been around in a structured form since the mid-1970's. Carpoolers use pool member's private cars, or a jointly hired vehicle, for private shared journeys. The vehicle is not used in a general public transport capacity such as in car sharing, share taxis or taxicabs. Carpooling is also distinct from the use of a company/government or private vehicle by several pool members but at different times, for economic or other reasons, such as in a military *motor pool*. Carpooling reduces the costs involved in repetitive or long distance driving by sharing cars, sharing rental charges, or paying the main car owner.

Virginia has introduced high-occupancy vehicle (HOV) lanes to encourage carpooling and use of public transport to combat rising traffic congestion. Commuters benefit not only because of the cost-efficiency of sharing rides but also because the HOV lanes often function as “express” lanes. A form of ad-hoc carpooling between strangers is called Slugging. This approach is very popular method of commuting in Northern Virginia. No money changes hands, but a mutual benefit still exists between the driver and passenger(s) making the practice worthwhile (i.e., the driver, who would otherwise have a “single-occupancy vehicle”, gains one or more passengers, thus becoming a “high occupancy vehicle” and becoming eligible to travel in the HOV lanes. In some cases, companies or local authorities will introduce services or facilities to encourage private carpooling, often as part of wider transport programs. These can include central listing facilities, defined pick-up points, preferential parking and general advice. This has increased through use of the Internet, mobile phones and other software support systems. A third party rideshare agency may also provide services to enable regular carpooling in defined areas. In the "dynamic ridesharing" concept, a separate system performs a carpool match automatically for approval by the travelers. To address the inflexibility that can be a disincentive to carpooling (e.g., accommodating en-route stops or changes to working times/patterns) some larger carpools offer 'sweeper services' with later running options. A further backup can also be a 'guaranteed ride home' arrangement with a local taxi company.<sup>7</sup>

**Rideshare Rewards:** The San Francisco Bay Area (Metro Transportation Commission) area provides a Regional Rideshare Program which offers a variety of free services and tools to help put together a successful Employee Transportation Program. Under their program, employees who switch to carpooling are offered incentives such as FREE gas or grocery gift cards. An employee can earn \$10 for every five days of carpooling within a 90-day period up to \$100 and a chance to win a \$1,000 in gift cards in a grand prize drawing. The program is based on first come, first served and until funds are depleted.<sup>8</sup>

**Ride Match:** The Wisconsin Department of Transportation offers “Ridematch Yourself” to find out if there are matches in the database for ridesharing. The system database matches commuters based on their individually created profile for similar interests and locations/destinations.<sup>9</sup> The

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<sup>7</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carpool>

<sup>8</sup> [http://rideshare.511.org/rideshare\\_rewards/rewards.asp](http://rideshare.511.org/rideshare_rewards/rewards.asp) Metro Transportation Commission

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.dot.state.wi.us/travel/commuter/rs-index.htm>, Wisconsin Department of Transportation

TRAFFIX system in Hampton Roads provides similar ride-matching/ride-sharing initiatives and expressed an interest in establishing an office in Greater Williamsburg.

**Expanding Transportation Services:** WAT should explore opportunities to expand and/or link to transportation services in Charles City, Gloucester, New Kent and Surry counties to help expand labor pool access to the GWA. WAT expanded services to Surry County in FY 2008 to provide transportation options to GWA.

**Anheuser-Busch Adventure Parks, Kings Dominion and Newport News Shipyard**

**Recruitment Model:** All three of these companies have some form of an employee transportation program and those programs should be studied and used as models for other employers.

**I-64 Widening:** The Virginia Department of Transportation will be developing environmental documentation and 30% design plans for the widening of I-64 from Jefferson Avenue to Route 199 near Busch Gardens. Funding currently exists to support advancing the environmental phase of project development. However, serious shortfalls in implementation funding remain an issue. This project will be costly and would be even more so if the widening (to 6 lanes, ultimate 8 lanes) must occur to the outside rather than the median for aesthetic reasons. While the area jurisdictions and other stakeholders previously endorsed a “protect the treed median” position, those positions were taken without benefit of information on the cost differential. Given the continuing escalation of cost and congestion, and the limited availability of construction funding, here should be more discussion with the localities and other stakeholders concerning the appropriate balance between right-of-way/construction cost and aesthetics.

**Competitive Pay and Attracting Qualified Employees:** With the competitive labor market, and companies without “Transportation Options,” the GWA can be at a competitive disadvantage. Recent High School/GED graduates entering the labor force may lack transportation, but are potentially excellent employees. As difficult as it may be, businesses may need to consider “transportation supplements/incentives” of some type in order to attract qualified employees.

**Williamsburg Area Transport (WAT):** Provides a transportation system for James City County, the City of Williamsburg and the Bruton District of York County. There should be consideration of expanding services and express bus services.

**Hampton Roads Transit (HRT):** Serves all of North and South Hampton Roads. There should be consideration of expanding services and express bus services.

**Taxi Services:** How do you find a taxi in the GWA? The GWA should explore working with franchised taxi operations to enhance the quality of services. Taxi services will play a unique and important role in transportation options. Not only will such services provide a source of transportation for workers and a component of a guaranteed-ride home program, but also they are critical to providing citizens and tourists with personalized point-to-point transportations services. In order for the GWA to continue to be a unique community, it is important to improve the variety of services and quality of taxi services and to enhance the competence and customer service spirit of the taxi drivers. The GWA needs to establish a stronger relationship and partnership with the taxi trade.

**Thomas Nelson Community College Historic Triangle Campus (TNCC):** Efforts should be made to work with TNCC to determine the transportation needs and options for the first phase building on the Historic Triangle Campus scheduled to open January 2009.

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

**A GWA program for Transportation Alternatives:** The TRAFFIX program is currently providing a Guaranteed Ride Program to those who live in or work in Hampton, Newport News, Norfolk, Portsmouth, Chesapeake, Virginia Beach or Suffolk. The TRAFFIX program should be expanded to the GWA as a partnership with employers to provide the services to fit their needs. TRAFFIX has expressed an interest in having an office in Williamsburg. Perhaps, in-kind office space can be considered by stakeholders benefiting from this service. The Guarantee Ride Program assures employees will never be stranded at work without a ride home and is available 24/7. The service adapts to alternative life styles and forms of transportation for those who bike, carpool, vanpool or take public transit and provides an emergency ride back to one's point of origin for just \$1.50. The program is available 7-days a week, 24-hours a day. However, at this time this service is available only for those who work and live in the Hampton Roads Transit service area.<sup>10</sup>

The NuRide is a program of TRAFFIX that rewards employees for sharing rides. Anyone 18 or older with an email address from their employer or school is eligible. The program allows an individual "Plan a Trip" by picking a day when they need a ride just like booking an airline ticket online. Once one's trip is planned, NuRide shows a list of people going to the same location. Should an emergency arise, one would then be able to use the TRAFFIX Guarantee Ride Program.<sup>11</sup>

Both of these programs can be used in a variety of ways, from a large employer or multiple small businesses partnering together. For example businesses in New Town might collectively work with the GWCTA and the New Town Commercial Association to establish such a program.

**Park and Ride Lots:** Consider expanding WAT services and connections to VDOT's Hampton Roads Park and Ride Lots in Charles City, Gloucester, New Kent and Surry counties, and at commercial developments nearby interstate exchanges (Patrick Henry, Marquis Etc.) to meet the region's employment pool needs.

**Williamsburg Area Transport (WAT):** Consider expanding the WAT routes within James City County, the City of Williamsburg and the Bruton District of York County.

**Hampton Roads Transit (HRT):** Investigate and evaluate opportunities for expanding HRT service, or connections to HRT service, particularly convenient employment related connections and express routes.

**Regional Comprehensive Plan:** The GWA needs to continue to work together to develop a regional plan with polices to address the issue of ensuring that prospective workers have transportation options that are convenient and affordable GWA should participate in Hampton Roads 2035 Public Transportation Vision Plan being conducted by HNTB on behalf of the Hampton Roads Planning and Department of Rail and Public Transportation. The primary purpose of the plan is to develop a regional vision of public transportation corridors. This will become part of the Statewide Transit Plan as well as Hampton Roads Metropolitan Policy Organization Multi-Modal plan. Those regional transportation goals and strategies should incorporate a Vision and Workforce Development – Transportation Best Practices.

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<sup>10</sup>TRAFFIX Commuter Guide

<sup>11</sup>TRAFFIX NuRide

### **III. Long-term strategies (6 to 20 years)**

#### **Best Practices and Potential Strategies**

**Virginia High Speed Rail and Light Rail:** *Explore best practices applications for rail vs. rubber tire transit and linking transit to land-use and economic development funding:* The Hampton Roads Transit (HRT) and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) are continuing an Alternatives Analysis/Draft EIS (AA/DEIS) for the Peninsula Corridor to provide rapid transit service to the Peninsula region of Hampton Roads, with the intent to connect major activity centers and points of interest within the City of Newport News as a starter line. Targeted activity centers include Christopher Newport University, Riverside Regional Medical Center, Patrick Henry Mall, Newport News/Williamsburg Airport and Mary Immaculate Hospital.<sup>12</sup> The Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT) is investigating improved passenger rail service between Richmond and Hampton Roads to ultimately connect to the Southeast, Northeast and Mid-Atlantic regions as an extension of the Southeast High Speed Rail Corridor (SEHSR). This could include improvements to existing service or the development of new rail service to accommodate frequent passenger trains. In 1999 VDOT completed the I-64 Major Investment Study, which included recommendations for enhanced intercity rail service on the Peninsula. In 2002, DRPT completed the South Hampton Roads High Speed Rail Feasibility Study which reviewed the feasibility of high-speed rail between Richmond and South Hampton Roads via Petersburg and the U.S. Route 460 Corridor.<sup>13</sup>

**Transit Private Partnership:** King County, Washington enacted the “Transit Now” initiative to expand Metro Transit Service. The measure was intended to help King County meet its workforce need and keep pace with regional growth by expanding service by 15-20% over the next 10 years. The initiative is to act as tool to help local jurisdictions, developers and employers become partners in offering new transit service to meet growth targets and improve transit market share to support employee commuting. The program includes two types of partnerships; **1) Direct Financial and 2) Speed/Reliability** partnerships.

*1) Direct Financial Partnerships* provide a means for partners to increase service on an existing route or establish new routes by agreeing to pay toward the fully-allocated cost of providing the service.

*2) Speed and Reliability Partnerships* provide additional service hours to jurisdictions that make capital investments or traffic operation changes to create transit speed and reliability improvements along corridors or “core service connection” corridors.<sup>14</sup>

**Surface Transportation - Private Public Partnerships (P3s):** *Explore partnerships between the public and private sectors to plan, finance, build and operate a variety of transportation options and strategies.* With the recent downturn of the economy and the elimination of the abusive driver fees, VDOT’s budget and Six-Year Program will be reduced by approximately \$1.1 billion. The areas that will feel this massive reduction the most will be the Commonwealth's urban and secondary roads, which will see a decrease in funding of approximately 44%, and transit funding which will be cut by 10%. By law, funding for these types of construction projects must take a back seat to other statewide transportation funding needs, so this means that many of

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<sup>12</sup>Source of Update, Federal Transit Administration Monthly Progress Report, HRT

<sup>13</sup><http://www.rich2hrrail.info/>. The Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT)

<sup>14</sup> TRANSIT NOW Service Partnerships; King County Metro Transit, February 2008

the Commonwealth's much-needed local transportation improvements will have to be removed from the VDOT's Six-year Improvement Program, putting the GWA in a position to receive less local road funding than it did in **1996!**<sup>15</sup> As a result, more partnerships will need to be established to meet the area's surface transportation needs.

**Bike Program:** *Explore working with Williamsburg Area Bicyclists to offer information and assistance to employees who are interested in biking to work but are not sure how to begin.*

**Multi-Purpose Trails:** *Explore constructing pedestrian trails specifically to encourage neighborhood businesses in the GWA to connect with each other (not necessary for recreational purposes).*

**Water Taxi:** *Explore providing water taxi "seasonal" daily services to and from key labor markets. A stellar example is the National Harbor, which offers an exciting new way to interact with the river that is not only fun, but also practical to meet workforce needs. Water taxi service is available to and from points around Washington D.C., Virginia and Maryland. On April 1, 2008, the Potomac Riverboat Company began operating water taxi service between National Harbor and Old Town Alexandria, with additional boat service to Mount Vernon and Georgetown. Water taxis will run every half hour between National Harbor and Old Town Alexandria. There will be three daily trips to Georgetown's Washington Harbor, and a single daily trip to George Washington's Mount Vernon Estate.*<sup>16</sup>

## **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

**Employee Transportation Vision 2030:** Establish a plan to address the issue of ensuring that prospective workers have transportation options to include short-term and long-term strategies. An example for reference and information purposes could be the Baltimore Workforce Transportation and Referral Center (WTRC), which is a federally funded initiative designed to improve mobility for the Baltimore Metropolitan Region's workforce. The WTRC meets transportation requirements that cannot be met by fixed-route transit services. It coordinates reliable and affordable transportation for everyone (job seekers, job developers, staffing agencies, employers and the general public). WTRC's vision is the following:<sup>17</sup>

- Coordinate transportation services for employment-related initiatives including daily transportation to employment sites, and other demand requests
- Close employment gaps between job sites and qualified workers
- Seek affordable and quality transportation solutions
- Support initiatives designed to solve workforce problems
- Promote and support private, as well as public transportation service providers

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<sup>15</sup>VDOT's funding decrease to hit Virginia's counties and cities the hardest, Virginian for Better Transportation, March 5, 2008.

<sup>16</sup><http://hotels.gaylordhotels.com/gaylord-national/directions-transportation/water-taxis/>, Potomac Riverboat Company, Alexandria, VA.

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.workforcetrc.org/> Workforce Transportation and Referral Center

**Private Public Partnership (P3s):** The GWA has the opportunity to invest in the mobility of its Workforce, to maintain a competitive position in the regional employment and market sectors, and to protect the quality of life for its citizens. The required investments seem daunting, but through a partnership of federal, state, local and private sources they are doable. New approaches and options are critical, but accomplishing the ultimate vision will not happen without strong, active leadership from all levels of government as well as the private sector. To be successful, the GWA needs four partners - federal-state-local-private.<sup>18</sup> All play a critical role and, importantly, the local business community cannot take a hands-off role and expect other partners to shoulder all the financial responsibility. Support from all sectors must grow, but the private sector needs to be the catalyst for the other partners. Prior success stories of workforce development programs absolutely would not have happened without the private sector's leadership in finding approaches to connect suburban workers with major core area employers using innovative transit solutions.

### **Summary**

While we face a number of fiscal challenges in our region, we believe that investing in our workforce transportation needs is vital to maintain our mobility, our quality of life and our economic competitiveness. With these investments, the GWA will continue to thrive and we will maintain and enhance the mobility of our workforce. Given expected regional competition for workers, increases in population, an already overburdened highway system and potential further increases in gasoline prices, it is critical that we make the necessary strategic investments. The decisions we make about our workforce transportation needs should be bold and forward thinking. With the right leadership and vision, the generations ahead of us should be able to look back at this effort as a bold step in the right direction.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> <http://www.apta.com> A Vision for Public Transportation

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.apta.com> A Vision for Public Transportation