

ELECTED OFFICIALS PUSH TRANSIT TRIANGLE

By William Nicoson

Last week the Northern Virginia Transportation Coordinating Council (TCC) released for public comment its proposed 2020 Transportation Plan. I rushed to obtain a copy because I love long-term plans. More than 20 years ago I used to review 20-year community development plans for a living. Planning 20 years into the future inspires imaginative thinking about immediate problems. And what more intractable current problem do we face than traffic congestion? So what if the plan turns out in 20 years to be a fantasy? Maybe, just maybe, some advantage will come from thinking ahead.

TCC is an advisory council of 40 members, of which 8 are Fairfax County supervisors, 4 are the mayors of Herndon, Falls Church, Fairfax City and Vienna, and 15 are elected public officials from Arlington, Loudoun and Prince William Counties and 5 related cities. Another 10 members are senators and deputies drawn from the Virginia General Assembly. Two state officials serve *ex officio*, as does the chairman of a citizens advisory committee.

Following public comment and related revisions, projects in the 2020 Plan for which funding is established are submitted by state officials for inclusion in the Constrained Long-Range Plan maintained by the National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board (TPB). After affirmative TPB review, engineering, environmental assessment and construction follow.

The big and joyous news is that, unlike the Northern Virginia portion of TPB's Long-Range Plan, TCC's 2020 Plan is heavy with new transit projects compared to highway projects:

<u>Average Yearly Cost</u>	<u>TPB 1997-2020</u>	<u>TCC 2000-2020</u>
Roadway	\$130,000,000	\$180,000,000
Transit	\$ 35,000,000	\$280,000,000

TCC's plan calls for completion: by 2010 of heavy rail from Metro's West Falls Church station into Loudoun County by way of Tysons Corner, Reston, Herndon, and Dulles Airport and from Metro's Vienna station in the I-66 median into Prince William County; and by 2020 of light rail from Dulles Airport along I-28 to Manassas, connecting with the Virginia Railway Express commuter line to be extended into Fauquier County. These rail proposals would form a transit triangle using rights-of-way along the Dulles Toll Road, I-28 and I-66.

Trouble is easy to predict in finding funds for three costly rail proposals likely to be viewed by some local officials as competing priorities notwithstanding insistence by planners that they are unified conceptually in serving essential transportation needs. There will also be opposition from building lobbyists who care more about constructing roads that open new opportunities for development rather than railroads that fight congestion born of past development.

Does inclusion of rail projects in TCC's 2020 Plan assure their construction? Of course not. There's likely to be more fantasy than reality in any long-term plan. Failure, however, to include these projects in the 2020 Plan would certainly have precluded them from construction. It may only be a first step in an uncertain journey, but there's no journey without the first step.

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