

Bikes, Buses, Trains and Planes

by Richard L. Beadles

Volume III, No. 14. July 26, 2011

Political candidates, destined to become public policy makers, often fly around in private planes supplied by their well-heeled backers, are met and whisked away in SUVs, spending much of their time dialing up prospective donors and, consequently, have little time to personally absorb local transportation and mobility issues. Much the same pattern applies to the business elite with their corporate jets, helicopters, and ever-present minions who cater to their every need. This is why ordinary people are often ahead of them. About five years ago, in the context of discussions of what has since become Virginia's very-successful "Lynchburg Train", a ranking freight rail exec dismissed the proposed new passenger train service, then called the Trans-Dominion Express, with the skeptical phrase: "*If anybody rides it.....*" Well, now we know they do!

More recently, perhaps three years ago, the then-secretary of transportation of the Commonwealth, when asked about incorporating rail in the State's planning for a new Route 460 to link Hampton Roads and Petersburg, responded dismissively that 460 was a cargo corridor, implying no role for intercity passenger rail. Well, he is gone, and construction is beginning on rail infrastructure to accommodate inauguration of modern passenger rail service linking Norfolk, Richmond, Washington and the Northeast Corridor. With the future prospect of easy linkage to the soon-to-open Norfolk light rail, and one day, a likely Virginia Beach extension of the Norfolk *TIDE*, it is remarkable that so much is changing so rapidly, public financial woes notwithstanding.

The demographic picture of the Commonwealth is changing rapidly. In less than another forty years, certainly by mid-21st century, Virginia's eight million population will likely grow by another three million, or more, and 80% of them will probably reside in our urban corridors, DC to Hampton Roads, DC to Lynchburg/Roanoke/Blacksburg, and the thriving Shenandoah Valley corridor, Winchester-Harrisonburg, etc. Well in advance of the arrival of another three million citizens, we will need to more fully develop *all* of our transportation and mobility resources. Fortunately, some of those steps are now being taken in spite of the gloom and doom currently paralyzing the nation's capital.

Take note, if you will, of the number of bicycles now appearing in the racks on the front of urban transit buses, and at other transit interface locations. Younger people, without the negative perception of cities that are too often embedded in the minds of their elders, are discovering transit. This writer had the good fortune to be a close observer of the 1960's planning for, and of the 1970's construction of, the Washington Metro as it developed out into Northern Virginia. Some establishment business friends at that time howled about the cost and predicted that nobody would ride it. How wrong they were, and suppose Metro Rail had not been built? Now we look forward to Metro to Dulles.

Not all steps are so grand. Thanks to the persistence of Roanoke Valley leaders and some General Assembly funding, a new feeder bus service has just started, funneling riders to and from Lynchburg, and the train to D.C. and beyond. **Good!** #####