

# Good Intentions/Bad Policy?

---

By Richard L. Beadles

Volume III No. 2. January 31, 2011

The Commonwealth of Virginia -- including all of its political subdivisions, agencies, commissions and authorities -- needs a better way to coordinate and prioritize transportation initiatives. We need to insure that such initiatives are consistent and do not negate the intent of each other. At times they seem to do just that. This occurs from top to bottom -- from the Governor's Office and the General Assembly to the lowest echelons at VDOT, DRPT, Aviation and Ports. We also need a better financial scoring methodology, some way of getting to the bottom line. How else could one explain:

- PPTA planning for a potential new Route 460 to, among other things, speed trucks hauling cargo containers to and from the ports in Hampton Roads, which highway, if built, will require a large public subsidy to induce those trucks to actually use it.
- A proposed \$50 per-cargo-container income tax credit to encourage shippers to use rail or barge transportation, instead of highway, to move such cargo to the ports.
- Construction in downtown Richmond of yet another costly state-funded parking garage, which will presumably offer parking to state employees at below-market rates, while at the same time, the state seeks, by financial inducements, to promote employee use of public transit, a mode of travel heavily funded by all levels of government.
- The RIC Airport Commission has initiated, and is apparently funding, a \$600,000 outreach program to beseech travelers to forsake legacy airlines which have served this market for decades in favor of "low cost" carriers which have a history of dropping short-hop flights. At the very same time, the Dallas Morning News is telling us that Southwest, our highly-coveted new carrier, is seeing a significant reduction in short-haul flyers. Delta and Jet Blue tell us they can't make money on some short-hauls due to high fuel and other operating costs, regardless of how many passengers use them. Are we chasing the wrong rabbit? We can't be making any friends at United, Delta or American!
- Encouraged by Norfolk Southern's successful public-private Heartland Corridor project, CSX is promoting something called the National Gateway. No question that the Virginia Avenue freight tunnel in D.C. needs to be fixed, but by whom and for whose benefit? Virginia has programmed \$30 million, or more, to help CSX, on the apparent assumption that this will benefit the Port of Virginia, but no credible evidence has yet been forthcoming that Virginia will see much, if any, direct benefit. Are there better places for the state to invest *on CSX in Virginia*? Are we asking the right questions?

Regrettably, Virginia's one-term gubernatorial limitation does not lend itself to development of much expertise, and certainly not continuity, at the cabinet level. Meanwhile, the state transportation agencies tend to continue their "silo" routines, and the General Assembly is

faced with many inconsistent special interest requests. Wow! Real world reform is difficult, but it should not be viewed as impossible!

---