

# Structural Change and Consequences

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In the midst of this political season we hear a lot about jobs, domestic manufacturing, unemployment, education, and economic growth, or lack of it. All this has an urban sprawl and transportation dimension as well. No mode of transportation has witnessed more challenging “structural change” than have railroads. Some external changes have been very unfavorable to rail. Often a photo is helpful. Before you read on (if you choose to!), scroll down to page two, for *then-and-now* photos of a “repurposed” fifty-three year-old former rail-served “industrial” site in suburban Richmond, VA.

The original owner/developer of the site employed many unskilled workers to, among other things, manufacture hassocks. RF&P railroad delivered raw material, including excelsior (remember that?) from a mill only twenty miles away, and transported finished products outbound to markets in the northeast, and elsewhere. Production workers need not have been high-school graduates, but some undoubtedly were. When the market for products made at this location declined, or was otherwise supplanted by offshore manufacturers, many workers lost their jobs, and the railroad lost a customer (RF&P may not have made any money on this account anyhow!). However, the real estate lent itself to adaptive reuse and today Comcast Corp. occupies the site, and uses it as part of its high-tech communications network, as a base for regional technical service, and for other purposes. Unskilled workers need not apply, nor railroad freight salesmen for that matter! Meanwhile, our local inner-city schools, once highly regarded for their effectiveness in turning out college “prep” material as well as “blue collar” job seekers, now struggle to graduate 59% of those who should receive a diploma (P.S., the then-chairman of the school board was the late Supreme Court Justice, Lewis F. Powell).

Note of the absence of automobile and truck traffic on the adjacent road in 1959. The wave of suburban sprawl was just then reaching this area. Prior to that time, most of Richmond’s industry was concentrated in a small cluster of perhaps twenty-five miles in diameter. Most of it was then rail and transit-served. Like most other metropolitan areas, commercial and industrial firms are now spread over an area three or four times as large. Few firms have direct access to rail or transit. Highways are usually the only way. Low-wage people often spend more money buying, maintaining and operating autos than they do on shelter. Inadequate preparation for life’s challenges and opportunities puts them at a disadvantage from the start. There are fewer jobs for people like the former hassock makers. Railroads, on the other hand, are doing fairly well – although not well enough -- by reinventing themselves. But the human condition just described defies easy solutions. Few people seem to be able to “reinvent” themselves unless assisted by the rest of us.

Creating the right atmosphere for economic development is important, but encouraging *human development* may be even more critical. Early childhood programs and vocational-type training are part of the answer, but so is mobility and transport. We need better regional transit systems, complimented by intermodal freight and passenger rail connections with other metro areas. The Richmond region has work to do. #####  
1959 Example; Domestic Manufacturing, Unskilled Jobs and Rail Freight.

*REBP 1959 ANNUAL REPORT*



*Plant of B. T. Crump Company, Dumarton, Va.*

**Industrial Development**

Your Company continued its intensified industrial development program to promote industrial growth in the territory served by it and thus to increase its freight volume. That program resulted in the location of many important new industries and distribution facilities on property served by your Company, among which are the following:

- U. S. Plywood Corporation
- Hill Chase Steel Company
- International Harvester Company
- Georgia-Pacific Plywood Corporation
- Harley and Bailie Mobile Feed Service

- Southern Materials
- Capitol Bakers Supply Company, Inc.
- West End Paper Stock Company
- Lowes' Richmond Hardware Company

There is a vast industrial potential in the area served by your Company. The members of its industrial development and freight solicitation staff are constantly alert for industries interested in new plant sites, the operations of which will increase traffic sources and volume. Your assistance in furtherance of those efforts will be most helpful

2012; Same Site, Same Building: High-tech, Service Jobs. No Rail Freight.

