

# Virginia: Harry Byrd would be amazed!

---

by Richard L. Beadles

Volume IV, No. 21. November 15, 2012

Post-election buzz about demographic factors invites a review of the Old Dominion's urban population explosion. Those of us of a certain age (read as "old") tend to benchmark everything as being before World War II, or after. In 1940, as FDR's preparation for the inevitable U.S. involvement in the European War gave economic lift to the nation's recovery from the Great Depression, Virginia had a population of only 2,677,773, of which 65% was classified as "rural". Today, the State count is slightly above 8 million, of which perhaps 80% is probably urban and suburban. How did this happen? Look at Virginia's Eastern Urban Crescent for the answer, at least most of it:

<u>Eastern Crescent Regions</u>	<u>1940</u>	<u>2010</u>	<u>Increase</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Northern VA	143,183	2,273,239	2,130,056	1,488%
Fredericksburg	48,895	327,773	278,878	570%
Richmond-Petersburg	367,960	1,096,306	728,346	198%
Hampton Roads Peninsula	115,253	513,704	398,451	346%
Hampton Roads Southside	295,641	1,083,126	787,485	266%
<b>Total of Urban Crescent</b>	970,932	5,294,148	4,323,216	445%
<i>All other Virginia</i>	<i>1,706,841</i>	<i>2,706,876</i>	<i>1,000,035</i>	<i>59%</i>

Federal spending created jobs associated with wars and preparation for wars, space-age technology, the "wars" on poverty and terror, dozens of new agencies and hundreds of government contractors -- the infamous "Beltway Bandits" -- all a manifestation of *Big Government*, which Virginia politicians hypocritically condemn only to protest when funding cuts are proposed. Federal programs have provided the most significant single economic impact upon eastern Virginia, driving our population explosion. Note that Richmond-Petersburg, being somewhat less dependent upon federal programs and relatively more dependent upon State employment, has lagged Northern Virginia and Hampton Roads. Our Urban Corridor represents about 66% of total State population, and mirrors in many respects the Northeast Corridor, demographically and even politically -- nothing like the country courthouse network that Byrd once controlled. All of this contributes to the current "split personality" in our political relationship with Washington. We say we object to *Big Government*, but we can't seem to live without it!

The implications for transportation are enormous. Harry Byrd, elected governor in 1925, is credited with getting Virginia out of the mud. From his early oversight of the Valley Turnpike to the last days of the "Organization", the Byrd name was synonymous with road building. While much work needs to be done to maintain and get the most out

of our highway system, other options must now be pursued with equal vigor. That would include, among other things, rail and transit. Virginia Beach voters seem to understand, with their recent 62% approval of the Tide Light Rail question. Currently the Feds are seeking input on the future of the Northeast Rail Corridor, which arguably ought to include Richmond and Hampton Roads. Many have spoken in favor, but official Virginia remains silent. Are we constrained by our conflicted view of Washington? #####