

# VA Transportation: Sailing Ships to Space Port

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by Richard L. Beadles

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Unless we are content to revert to hunter-gatherer status -- which is of course absurd -- transportation is going to continue to be critical to our national prosperity -- to our survival as a contender for first-tier status among nations. Yet most politicians will tell you that transportation is not normally a "hot-button" issue. Few people appear to take much note of current transportation news, nor the many related issues, excepting only train wrecks! It was for that reason that VA Rail O&C was launched. The hope was to elevate rail as part of a broader public conversation on transport and mobility.

The writer of this VA Rail O&C series has, since his earliest days, been drawn to many of the issues alluded to in the preceding paragraph. He has loved maps and related geographic and commercial data of all kinds. Most of you are aware that the writer enjoyed lengthy rail employment. Less known is that he also maintained an active interest in water transportation -- initially James River and Chesapeake Bay navigation. An observer and admirer of the development of aviation, dating back to the pre-WWII days of air-mail routes, then marked by beacons spaced across the Virginia countryside, he spent many a Sunday afternoon, as a child, at what is now RIC airport. He observed and mimicked road building, from the days of horse-drawn and tractor-drawn road graders with those manually-cranked wheels which manipulated blade angles. Later, when involved in land development, he embraced the traditional developer-mantra: more and better roads. But with retirement and age comes the opportunity for reflection.

Two decades ago this scribe, in cooperation with others, embarked upon a joint campaign to advocate restoration of, and additions to, intercity rail passenger service in Virginia. As result, he is often associated with that subject - including High Speed Rail -- to the exclusion of other important transportation agenda items. While additions and improvements have been made in Virginia rail passenger services, not nearly enough has been done in rail freight. Nor have we scratched the surface in terms of promoting greater commercial use of our coastal waterways -- once the primary north-south means of conveying passengers and cargo from port to port along the Atlantic coast. Urban transit, which the writer and his contemporaries watched shrivel and almost disappear, is making a comeback in Virginia, but there is more to be done. Spaceports, of which Virginia boasts one on the Eastern Shore, will play a role in our future as well.

Seven years ago, I began researching and drafting a narrative describing Virginia's still-evolving transportation history, from Jamestown to date. That project -- a "SURVEY" at best -- will take the rest of my active days. For that reason, this issue of VA Rail O&C will be the final one. I want to devote my time to the larger project just described. That said, I may very well, from time to time, write something along the lines of a more-in-depth (than O&Cs) essay on various aspects of the Virginia transportation story. If you want to shield yourself from such, please let

me know. Otherwise, you may receive one or more of those epistles in 2014. Thanks for tolerating these blasts, twice monthly, for five years. I hope some were of value. Best wishes to all. Dick Beadles.

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