

**REPORT OF THE
JOINT SUBCOMMITTEE STUDYING**

**The Transportation Needs
of the
Hampton Roads Area**

**TO THE GOVERNOR AND
THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF VIRGINIA**



SENATE DOCUMENT NO. 26

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SUMMARY

This study was requested by the General Assembly in 1990 and continued in 1991. Its general purpose was to study the transportation needs of Hampton Roads and make recommendations on mechanisms to meet those needs. More particularly, it was charged with determining the desirability and feasibility of meeting the area's transportation needs through the mechanism of a regional transportation financing authority.

In the course of its two-year study, the subcommittee found that current state and federal funding of transportation facility construction for the region is falling short of its demonstrable needs by approximately \$160 million per year. The group also determined that improved efficiencies in the operation of the Virginia Department of Transportation, the opening of the Interstate Route 664 crossing of Hampton Roads between Newport News and Suffolk (scheduled for April of 1992), and additional revenues flowing to the region from the federal Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 (P.L. 102-240), signed into law December 18, 1991, will afford some relief to traffic congestion for the next several years.

For these reasons and because of the future burden that new taxes and additional tolls would impose on the region in the midst of the present economic recession, the joint subcommittee does not recommend the creation of a regional transportation financing authority at the present time. However, the group feels that it may be appropriate for the General Assembly to reconsider this question in the future.

Should the legislature ever create a regional transportation financing authority, the joint subcommittee recommends (i) that any such entity vested with regional planning and taxing authority be made accountable to the region's voters and (ii) that any such entity be capable of producing practical, cost-effective transportation facility construction programs rather than merely imposing an additional layer of expensive bureaucracy whose impact on the region's transportation needs will be outweighed by its cost.

The joint subcommittee recommends that the region's local governments and mass transit operators move expeditiously to provide transit bus service across Hampton Roads. Currently, transit bus service stops, literally, at the water's edge. There is no alternative to private cars for commuters, shoppers, and others who wish to travel between communities north of Hampton Roads and those south of Hampton Roads. Compared to the cost of new bridges and tunnels, the cost of this service would be minimal.

The group also recommends that the Virginia Department of Transportation study factors affecting and changes in traffic flow, volume, and congestion associated with the Hampton Roads Bridge Tunnel and formulate and present recommendations for ensuring the facility's efficiency, adequacy, and safety. (Legislation providing for such a study is provided in Appendix C.) If the opening of the Interstate Route 664 crossing of Hampton Roads fails to provide the expected relief for the Hampton Roads Bridge Tunnel, the question of new funding for the region's needs will require urgent reassessment.

**Report of the
Joint Subcommittee Studying the
Transportation Needs of the Hampton Roads Area
To
The Governor and the General Assembly of Virginia
January 1992**

To: The Honorable Lawrence Douglas Wilder, Governor of Virginia,
and
the General Assembly of Virginia

I. AUTHORITY

This study was commissioned by the 1990 General Assembly through passage of Senate Joint Resolution No. 94 (SJR 94), sponsored by Senator Robert C. Scott of Newport News. SJR 94 specifically called on the subcommittee to study the Hampton Roads region's ". . . military and other strategic needs; its emergency preparedness needs; and its needs associated with normal commercial, manufacturing, commuting, and other economic activity . . . [and] study and make recommendations on the advantages and disadvantages of establishing a mechanism for long-range transportation planning for the Hampton Roads region, including but not limited to, the desirability and feasibility of creating a Hampton Roads Transportation Authority."

At the request of the subcommittee, the legislature extended the group's mandate for an additional year through the passage of Senate Joint Resolution No. 196. This legislation requested the subcommittee to consider the transportation needs of Hampton Roads in the light of (i) the changing political climate in Europe, continuing tensions in the Middle East, and the impact which these factors would have on the military presence in Hampton Roads, (ii) the effect which local growth management strategies and programs to preserve the Chesapeake Bay might have on population growth and economic activity in Hampton Roads, and (iii) anticipated congressional action to revise the federal highway program.

II. BACKGROUND AND SUBCOMMITTEE ACTIVITIES

In the course of 1990, the subcommittee held four meetings, two of which were public hearings. At these meetings and hearings the subcommittee received testimony and information from Hampton Roads Planning District Commission staff; state and local government officials; representatives of the United States armed forces, business groups, and neighborhood organizations; and individual citizens. One point made repeatedly in this testimony was that current state and federal funding of transportation facility construction for the region is falling short of its demonstrable needs by approximately \$160 million per year.

Proposals made to the subcommittee assumed that significantly increased state and federal financial resources would not be available to meet these needs in at least the near-term future and urged that some form of regional transportation authority be created through which additional locally-generated moneys could be made available to address Hampton Roads' otherwise unfunded transportation needs. These new moneys would be raised through a combination of additional local taxes and direct highway user charges (tolls) on major highways, bridges, and tunnels.

While a survey conducted by the Hampton Roads Chamber of Commerce indicated considerable public support for addressing the transportation needs of Hampton Roads on a regional basis, funded by a combination of regional taxes and tolls, these sentiments were not shared by a majority of the speakers at the subcommittee's public hearings. Although a consensus among those addressing the subcommittee agreed that meeting transportation needs of Hampton Roads is beyond the capacities of the area's local governments and must be addressed on a regional basis, this consensus broke down over the structure and powers of a regional transportation financing authority, particularly its ability to impose taxes, tolls, or a combination thereof. Specific criticisms focused on the need to ensure that:

- Revenues derived from existing sources are being used appropriately, prudently, and efficiently prior to raising new revenues from whatever source;
- Any entity (such as a regional transportation financing authority) vested with regional planning and taxing authority be accountable to the region's voters; and
- The creation of any such entity will produce practical, cost-effective transportation facility construction programs rather than merely an additional layer of expensive bureaucracy whose impact on the region's transportation needs will be outweighed by its cost.

An additional difficulty involved the choice of facilities on which tolls would be imposed (or reimposed), should an alternative involving tolls be recommended by the subcommittee. Many of the heavily-traveled facilities which would be the most obvious candidates for tolls (such as the Hampton Roads Bridge-Tunnel, the Interstate Route 664 Bridge-Tunnel, and Interstate Route 64) are components of the federal interstate highway system, and imposition of tolls would require Congressional approval. These findings were communicated by the subcommittee's chairman, Senator Robert C. Scott of Newport News, to the 1991 Session of the General Assembly and, at the request of the subcommittee, the legislature extended the group's mandate for an additional year through the passage of Senate Joint Resolution No. 196.

The following months saw the rapid defeat of Iraq in operation Desert Storm, the collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe, and the disintegration of the Soviet Union, all of which contributed to comprehensive reexamination of United States military policy. Development of a new federal highway program proved to be even more controversial and time-consuming than had been anticipated, and final congressional action was not taken until late November. Continuing economic recession and resulting declines in business activity made projections of growth patterns more difficult and more uncertain.

Nevertheless, by the end of 1991, the Virginia Department of Transportation was able to supply the subcommittee with information on the recently-approved federal highway legislation (the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991) and the Act's anticipated impact on the Department's projects in the Hampton Roads area. This program will provide \$151.0 billion nation-wide for highways (\$119.5 billion) and mass transit (\$31.5 billion) over the next six years (1992-1997). Virginia's share is estimated at \$2.6 billion over the same six years. This represents an improvement in the return on federal gasoline taxes paid by Virginians from 78.9 percent (under the previous federal program) to 85.7 percent (under the new federal program).

Under this program, nation-wide federal funding for mass transit will double. While Virginia's share of these federal funds may or may not double, it is safe to say that there will at least be a significant increase in federal funding of transit programs in Virginia. The Act provides \$361.7 million in federal aid for bridge construction in Virginia, a factor of particular importance to Hampton Roads, given its large number of bridges.

Hampton Roads (together with the greater Richmond area and Northern Virginia) will benefit, too, from \$108 million available from the federal government for congestion mitigation to air quality nonattainment areas. Several special projects funded under the federal act are key components of the Hampton Roads transportation network: the York River Bridge (\$11.8 million); the Hampton Roads Bridge Tunnel (\$5.9 million); the Interstate Route 64/U.S. Route 17 corridor between Hampton Roads and Elizabeth City, North Carolina (\$17.8 million); and the U.S. Route 17 corridor between Norfolk and Raleigh, North Carolina (\$30.0 million).

In addition to the benefits which these changes in the federal highway program will bring to Hampton Roads, traffic congestion in the region will be improved by the completion of the Interstate Route 664 crossing between Newport News and Suffolk, scheduled for completion in April of 1992. When this facility is opened to traffic, it will provide an alternative to and reduce congestion associated with the existing Hampton Roads Bridge Tunnel. The Department of Transportation estimates that the I-664 tunnel will carry approximately 30,000 vehicles per day in 1992 and reduce traffic through the I-64 tunnel from approximately 80,000 to approximately 73,000 vehicles per day. The Department plans to increase the capacity of the I-64 Hampton Roads Bridge Tunnel by the construction of two additional tunnel tubes by 2010. This project, estimated to cost \$1.0 billion, should enable the facility to handle 120,000 vehicles per day by 2010, according to the Department.

Department plans also call for improvements to the Coleman (York River) Bridge. The nonfederal costs of this project (estimated at between \$80 million and \$85 million) are expected to be funded from the proceeds of a state bond issue supported by tolls on the facility. These tolls would not be imposed until improvements to the facility have been completed and are planned to be one dollar per passenger car (60 cents for commuters).

In addition to these larger projects, over the next several years additional improvements in traffic flow are expected as the result of (i) reconfiguration of key interchanges, (ii) the addition of high-occupancy vehicle lanes to key facilities handling large volumes of commuter traffic, and (iii) a general improvement in availability of mass transit facilities. These actions will permit the movement of increasing numbers of people without the creation of new facilities.

Increases in direct federal funding of mass transit projects, expanded flexibility which the new federal program permits in the use of other federal transportation revenues for mass transit projects, and the limitations placed by the federal Clean Air Amendments of 1990 and federal wetlands preservation policy on new highway construction all combine to make it more imperative than ever that Virginia's transportation policy--especially its programs and projects in Hampton Roads--focus on moving people rather than vehicles.

The subcommittee feels that a key element in this policy must be the development of a mass transit link across Hampton Roads. While construction of new highways and bridges over the past decade has made it easier for passenger cars and trucks to move between the Peninsula and the communities south of Hampton Roads, transit bus service in Hampton Roads still stops at the water's edge. The costs associated with providing this service--especially compared to the costs of new highways and bridges--is minimal; the potential benefit in reduced congestion at key traffic choke points--such as the Hampton Roads Bridge Tunnel--is considerable.

Even though opening of the I-664 tunnel, projected expansion of the Hampton Roads Bridge Tunnel, improvements to the York River Bridge, and increased availability of federal transportation revenues should bring some relief to traffic congestion in the Hampton Roads region in the relatively short term, the underlying causes of the region's traffic congestion still remain. Though the region's economy has been flat over the past year and its population has grown only about one and one-quarter percent, traffic volumes on its major thoroughfares continues to grow at about two to three percent per year. While there has been a recent increase in federal transportation funding, the same can not be said of state and local transportation revenues. As state and local revenues shrink under the impact of an economic recession, the underlying transportation needs of Hampton Roads will continue to grow.

Some estimates suggest that, without new sources of revenue to address the transportation needs of Hampton Roads and other regions of the Commonwealth experiencing higher-than-average growth, commuting time in these areas will increase between 40 and 50 percent and that, by 2010, present state and local revenue sources will be adequate to meet only about one-third of these regions' transportation needs. While the imposition of new taxes, fees, and tolls may be counterproductive in a period of economic contractions, it is vital that the economic and demographic trends of Hampton Roads and other high-growth regions of Virginia be closely monitored and that long-range transportation planning include consideration of regionally-differentiated funding mechanisms.

III. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on studies conducted under the auspices of the Southeast Virginia Planning District Commission and the Peninsula Planning District Commission (now consolidated as the Hampton Roads Planning District Commission), the joint subcommittee found that, at least prior to the passage of the federal Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 (P.L. 102-240), signed into law December 18, 1991, state and federal funding of transportation facility construction for the region was falling short of demonstrable needs by approximately \$160 million per year.

The subcommittee considered proposals to meet these needs by establishing a regional transportation authority through which additional moneys could be made available to address Hampton Roads' otherwise unfunded transportation needs. These new moneys would be raised through a combination of additional local taxes and direct highway user charges (tolls) on major highways, bridges, and tunnels. While a survey conducted by the Hampton Roads Chamber of Commerce indicated considerable public support for addressing the transportation needs of Hampton Roads on a regional basis, funded by a combination of regional taxes and tolls, these sentiments were not shared by a majority of the speakers at the subcommittee's public hearings. A consensus did support the concept of addressing the transportation needs of Hampton Roads on a regional basis, but this consensus quickly broke down on the question of specific funding mechanisms and the role, powers, and organization of a regional transportation financing authority.

The subcommittee does not feel that creation of a regional transportation authority or the imposition of new local or regional taxes or tolls in the Hampton Roads region is wise during the present economic recession. A combination of improved efficiencies in the Virginia Department of Transportation, the opening of the Interstate Route 664 crossing of Hampton Roads between Newport News and Suffolk (scheduled for April of 1992), and additional funding of regional projects under the federal Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 will make it possible to reduce some of the traffic congestion on major regional facilities for the next several years.

However, if Hampton Roads continues to grow at the present rate, many of its underlying transportation needs will continue to go unmet without new sources of revenue. If, in the future, the General Assembly again considers creation of a regional transportation financing mechanism (whether a regional authority or some other mechanism) the subcommittee recommends (i) that any such entity vested with regional planning and taxing authority be made accountable to the region's voters and (ii) that any such entity be capable of producing practical, cost-effective transportation facility construction programs rather than merely imposing an additional layer of expensive bureaucracy whose impact on the region's transportation needs will be outweighed by its cost.

The joint subcommittee further recommends that the Department of Transportation study the Hampton Roads Bridge Tunnel and changes in its traffic flow, volume, and congestion and present recommendations for ensuring the facility's efficiency, adequacy, and safety. (Legislation providing for such a study is provided in Appendix C.) If the opening of the Interstate Route 664 crossing of Hampton Roads fails to provide the expected relief for the Hampton Roads Bridge Tunnel, the question of new funding of the region's needs will need to be reassessed.

The joint subcommittee also urges the Hampton Roads region's local governments and mass transit operators to move promptly and decisively to provide mass transit service between communities to the north of Hampton Roads and those south of Hampton Roads. The lack of transit bus service across Hampton Roads leaves commuters, shoppers, and others no alternative to the private automobile, resulting in unnecessary congestion and strain on already overburdened facilities. Such an extension of existing mass transit service could be carried at relatively little cost--especially compared to the cost of projects such as expanding the Hampton Roads Bridge Tunnel.

Respectfully submitted,

Robert C. Scott (Chairman)

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IV. APPENDICES

APPENDIX A
Senate Joint Resolution No. 94, 1990
(Requesting the Study)

APPENDIX B
Senate Joint Resolution No. 196, 1991
(Continuing the Study)

APPENDIX C
(Recommended Legislation)

APPENDIX A

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 94

Establishing a joint subcommittee to study the transportation needs of the Hampton Roads area.

Agreed to by the Senate, March 9, 1990
Agreed to by the House of Delegates, March 9, 1990

WHEREAS, in the Hampton Roads region, the gap between transportation needs and the ability to find sources of funding that meet those needs is rapidly growing; and

WHEREAS, during the years 1989-1994, there is a projected shortfall in revenue for identified construction needs of \$160 million per year for fourteen cities and counties in the region; and

WHEREAS, on the average, revenues received by the cities and counties in the region amount to about fifty percent of the cost of identified construction needs; and

WHEREAS, at the same time, traffic volume in many of the cities and counties is growing at about six percent per year; and

WHEREAS, local and state elected officials are keenly aware of the widening gap between transportation revenue and needs in the region; and

WHEREAS, the decrease in federal transportation funding assistance has severely strained the conventional revenue sources of both state and local governments and it has become very clear that additional revenue sources must be identified; and

WHEREAS, in addition, it is widely recognized by local officials that Hampton Roads is an environmentally sensitive region; and

WHEREAS, there is a strong desire in the area to create a long-range regional transportation planning mechanism that embraces a concern for the environment and that gives serious consideration to the prospects for developing a mass transit system in the region; and

WHEREAS, Hampton Roads is a dynamic region with a growing industrial and commercial base in manufacturing, commerce, education, and tourism; and

WHEREAS, the region's leaders clearly recognize the direct relationship that exists between its thriving economic activities and a sound, balanced transportation system; and

WHEREAS, the region's business leaders, its state-supported educational institutions, and its local government officials have requested the state elected officials in the region to establish a legislative study group to assist the area in obtaining a clear vision of its transportation needs for the future; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the Senate, the House of Delegates concurring, That a joint subcommittee is established to study the transportation needs of the Hampton Roads area. The joint subcommittee shall be composed of fourteen members: three members of the Senate Committee on Transportation and one member of the Senate at large to be appointed by the Senate Committee on Privileges and Elections; four members of the House Committee on Roads and Internal Navigation and one member of the House of Delegates at large to be appointed by the Speaker; three persons to be appointed by the Governor, two of whom shall be elected officials; and the Secretary of Transportation and the Commonwealth Transportation Commissioner or their designees.

The joint subcommittee shall include in its study the region's military and other strategic needs; its emergency preparedness needs; and its needs associated with normal commercial, manufacturing, commuting, and other economic activity. The joint subcommittee

shall also study and make recommendations on the advantages and disadvantages of establishing a mechanism for long-range transportation planning for the Hampton Roads region, including but not limited to, the desirability and feasibility of creating a Hampton Roads Transportation Authority. Should the subcommittee recommend such a mechanism, the subcommittee, in its report, shall (i) describe the role to be played by the local governments comprising the region, the planning district commissions, and the Commonwealth, among others; (ii) describe funding strategies for the financial support of the regional planning effort and possible structural arrangements of the planning organization; (iii) study the feasibility of alternative systems of mass transit in the Hampton Roads region, such as rail systems, bus systems, and possible combinations thereof; (iv) consider the dangers to the environment posed by increases in conventional roads and automobile transportation strategies, advances in environmental protection measures associated with transportation strategies in other areas of the nation, and other "quality of life" issues; (v) make specific recommendations concerning the establishment of a regional transportation authority to serve the Hampton Roads region, describing in detail the advantages and disadvantages that such an authority would entail for the region; and (vi) consider the selection of the members and the organizational structure of such an authority, the relationships between the authority and local governments, powers of the authority, and relationships between the authority and the Virginia Department of Transportation.

The joint subcommittee shall complete its work in time to submit its findings and recommendations to the Governor and the 1991 Session of the General Assembly as provided in the procedures of the Division of Legislative Automated Systems for the processing of legislative documents.

The indirect costs of this study are estimated to be \$14,095; the direct costs of this study shall not exceed \$6,300.

APPENDIX B

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 196

Continuing the Joint Subcommittee Studying the Transportation Needs of the Hampton Roads Area.

Agreed to by the Senate, February 21, 1991

Agreed to by the House of Delegates, February 20, 1991

WHEREAS, a joint subcommittee to study the transportation needs of the Hampton Roads area was created pursuant to Senate Joint Resolution No. 94, approved by the 1990 Session of the General Assembly; and

WHEREAS, the subcommittee met throughout 1990, conducted two public hearings, considered the views of various state and local government officials and agencies, worked cooperatively with members and staff of the Hampton Roads Planning District Commission, and heard from many concerned citizens' groups and individuals; and

WHEREAS, the subcommittee has concluded that, given the uncertain economic climate of Hampton Roads and the lack of support for the creation of a specifically proposed regional transportation authority among portions of the Hampton Roads population, it is inadvisable to proceed with the creation of a regional transportation authority for Hampton Roads at the present time; and

WHEREAS, several factors affecting the population growth and demand for transportation facilities in Hampton Roads still need to be considered, such as declining economic activity; pending reauthorization of the federal highway program; the changing political climate in Europe; continuing tensions in the Middle East; public transit, ride-sharing, and high-occupancy vehicle facility programs; programs to preserve the Chesapeake Bay; use of innovative growth management strategies (such as impact fees, conditional zoning, and transferrable development rights) by local governments; and transportation initiatives of the Governor; and

WHEREAS, many and significant transportation needs of the Hampton Roads area nevertheless urgently need to be addressed; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the Senate, the House of Delegates concurring, That the Joint Subcommittee Studying the Transportation Needs of the Hampton Roads Area, created pursuant to Senate Joint Resolution No. 94, approved by the 1990 Session of the General Assembly of Virginia, is hereby continued. The joint subcommittee shall continue its assessment of the region's transportation needs and complete its work in time to submit its findings and recommendations to the Governor and the 1992 Session of the General Assembly as provided in the procedures of the Division of Legislative Automated Systems for the processing of legislative documents.

The membership of the joint subcommittee shall continue as constituted in 1990, with any vacancy being filled in the same manner as the original appointment.

The indirect costs of this study are estimated to be \$5,860; the direct costs of this study shall not exceed \$5,040.

Implementation of this resolution is subject to subsequent approval and certification by

the House/Senate Joint Rules Committee. The Committee may withhold expenditures or delay the period for the conduct of the study.

APPENDIX C
(Recommended Legislation)

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 132

Offered January 21, 1992

Requesting the Virginia Department of Transportation to study the Hampton Roads Bridge Tunnel.

Patrons—Scott and Holland, C.A.; Delegate: Grayson

Referred to the Committee on Rules

WHEREAS, the Hampton Roads Bridge Tunnel is a key element in the highway network linking Hampton, Newport News, and other communities north of Hampton Roads with Norfolk, Portsmouth, and other communities south of Hampton Roads; and

WHEREAS, even though its 1990 design capacity is 50,000 vehicles per day, the Hampton Roads Bridge Tunnel carries as many as 96,800 vehicles per day; and

WHEREAS, motorists' demands on the Hampton Roads Bridge Tunnel have so far outstripped the facility's capacity that severe congestion and delays occur frequently and miles-long backups of traffic are not uncommon; and

WHEREAS, congestion and delays associated with the Hampton Roads Bridge Tunnel have significant negative impacts on the region's industry, business, and residents; on visitors and potential visitors to the area; and on many aspects of the quality of life throughout Hampton Roads; and

WHEREAS, it is anticipated that the opening of the Interstate Route 664 crossing of Hampton Roads between Newport News and Suffolk will ease the strain on the Hampton Roads Bridge Tunnel, but that the volume of traffic using the facility will shortly return to approximately present levels as temporary reductions in congestion spur new demands, presently suppressed by the inconvenience of using so overburdened a facility; and

WHEREAS, the impact which changes in the size, composition, and mission of U.S. military forces stationed in the Hampton Roads region, the impact of the Chesapeake Bay initiative on Tidewater's population growth, and changes in transportation policy mandated by the federal Clean Air Amendments of 1990 will have on the use of the Hampton Roads Bridge Tunnel cannot presently be clearly determined; and

WHEREAS, an efficient, adequate, and safe Hampton Roads Bridge Tunnel is essential to the economy and quality of life of the Hampton Roads area, and it is highly desirable that the General Assembly be kept abreast of events, programs, trends and other factors affecting the facility in order that it may take appropriate actions to ensure the facility's continued adequacy and viability; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the Senate, the House of Delegates concurring, That the Virginia Department of Transportation be requested to study factors affecting and changes in traffic flow, volume, and congestion associated with the Hampton Roads Bridge Tunnel and formulate and present recommendations for ensuring the facility's efficiency, adequacy, and safety.

The Department shall complete its work in time to submit its findings and recommendations to the Governor and the 1993 Session of the General Assembly as provided in the procedures of the Division of Legislative Automated Systems for processing legislative documents.