

Notes from LWNCA Transportation Forum: Crossing Boundaries

March 28, 2015 at NRECA Conference Center, Arlington, Virginia

Diane Hibino welcomed everyone, explained the structure of LWV/NCA and gave examples of the transportation positions on which we can base testimony.

Dan Reed, urban planner at Nelson/Nygaard Consulting Associates, Action Committee for Transit, and writer on planning and design issues.

Mr. Reed began by noting national trends of the last 7 or 8 years: 80% of those surveyed want single family homes. 58% want a walkable neighborhood and will sacrifice home size for it. Young adults (many of whom have been hurt by the recession) especially prioritize neighborhoods friendly to walking and biking. Older adults also want to be able to meet many needs without driving. Chart showed that after years in which vehicle miles driven climbed steeply, that curve has leveled off, though it rose a little in 2014.

Local trends: The region's core is booming; its population is growing and getting younger. Population is also gathering around activity centers, with housing, amenities, and jobs. The DC area is getting more diverse: the number (and percentage) of foreign born in suburbs is increasing; there are also ethnic enclaves; one result is fantastic ethnic food everywhere. There's also a suburbanization of poverty. Sprawl slowed down during the recession, but seems to be coming back. The fastest growing areas are Loudoun County in Virginia, Montgomery & Prince George's Counties in Maryland, and DC.

What to do now: Focus on alternative forms of transportation: bike line, transit.

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Ross Capon, transportation consultant, president emeritus of the National Association of Railroad Passengers, co-founder of Action Committee for Transit.

There are multiple rail companies serving the area. CSX and Norfolk Southern move freight, and spend money to improve, expand tracks. In Maryland, there are 3 MARC lines (Brunswick, Penn, Camden Yard) and Amtrak. VRE (Virginia Railway Express) provides 7 day a week service in Northern Virginia (Penn line). VRE has invested in infrastructure expansion (bridges, additional tracks – new track at VRE's L'Enfant Plaza station will permit freight trains to get out of the way of passenger trains) Union Station is beautiful but bursting at the seams at peak times. MARC survived because there were well placed Capitol Hill staff who commuted to work on it. Frederick now has MARC service and a new intermodal MARC station (also served by buses). MARC has added a 3rd train daily from College Park to Baltimore (Camden line).

There's been some good planning for mixed use development around stations. An ad for Potomac Shores development features "VRE station planned"!

Gerrit Knaap, Professor of Urban Studies and Planning and Executive Director of the National Center for Smart Growth Research and Education at the University of Maryland.

The Purple Line: 16 miles, 21 stops, 61,000 weekday trips, first light rail line in the region, expected to break ground this year, to be operated by Maryland Transit (not by Metro). He expects that the Purple Line will happen. He started the Purple Line Coalition to bring a variety of stakeholders

together in a process to develop a compact focused on housing and community development along the line. It can “stitch communities together” by meeting challenges of cultural, economic, and racial differences. It will connect 4 employment centers (270, Bethesda, Silver Spring, College Park), giving people access to jobs and employers access to potential employees. Many of those jobs will require medium or high skills; lower skill jobs in retail, construction, manufacturing are less concentrated.) Since access to transit makes areas desirable, affordable housing in Long Branch and Langley Park will be at risk and needs to be protected.

Tom Fairchild, principal with City Version 3 that offers strategies to bolster transit and transit-oriented development, (formerly Director of Arlington Mobility Lab, Executive Director of the Clarendon Alliance and Columbia Pike Revitalization.

We’re not “anti-car”; we’re “pro choice”. Metrics: For their weekly commutes: 60% drive alone; 13% use train; 5% carpool, but only 40% of those who drive alone are happy about their commute; those using other modes were happier. The main reasons cited for using other modes were saving money/gas, less stress, saving time. The Roslyn/Ballston corridor illustrates office buildings going up near transit. The COG (Council of Governments) plan shows a whole array of activity centers along corridors, with development concentrated around them, and open space maintained between them.

Technology (smart phone apps) can make it possible for users to easily navigate among multiple transportation modes (26 bus and rail agencies, 2 commuter railroads, 1 bike-share system, 3 car-share companies). Open data fuels multi-modal apps; static data (schedules & routes) and realtime data (where the bus is now); Fairfax County doesn’t yet supply realtime data; Metrobus does. There are several available apps: Ridescout – several modes, SpotCycle – bike-share, Transit Screen (a stationary screen showing what modes are available at a site.)

There are, and will be, street space turf wars. If streets are reserved for cars, where can the other modes operate? The addition of bike lanes went smoothly on Pennsylvania Avenue because it was wide; it’s much more contentious on narrower streets.

The Turnpike Act of 1810 authorized 3 turnpikes: to Baltimore, to Rockville, and Columbia Pike in Virginia, which followed a Native American trail from Alexandria, through Falls Church and Fairfax, from the Potomac to the Shenandoah.. Streets were once gathering places; early photos show markets set up in streets. The “Complete Street” program envisions room for buses, bikes, pedestrians, as well as cars.

The Northern Virginia Transportation Commission: very involved with WMATA, considering funding options for bus, light rail, transit in Northern Virginia, co-owner of VRE (which takes 20,000 people of Routes 66 and 95 every day). Their message is that transit provides individuals access to jobs and businesses access to employees, customers, clients, investors. They may be looking at Bus Rapid Transit on Route 1.

Q & A with the Audience

Q: What about “driverless cars?” A: Not a panacea, but could play a role for “last mile” (could take transit user home from transit stop, then return on its on to the station)

Q: What should (or is) Frederick County be doing? A: MC DOT (Dept of Transportation) is working with Frederick County on a “bus on the shoulder” plan.

Q: Montgomery County used to “get things done”; transit center a fiasco; how to get better elected officials, better transit? A: Sell transit as the key to economic development. Vote! We need idealism and more vocal advocates!

Q: What do you think about suggestion (plan?) to cut bike-share program in Arlington? A: Bike access to Metro is growing fast. Stress that it's fiscally responsible to maximize ways to access Metro because the more of Metro's cost is covered by fares, the less the cost is to the taxpayers.

Q: 395 and 95 are a nightmare at rush hour; hot (toll) lanes are a great way to get around that; are privatized roads the wave of the future? A: The private sector will probably play a growing role.

Q: Transit fares that are too expensive for low income people are a huge dis-incentive for them to use transit. A: The Metro Board sets fares based on negotiation with localities about what portion of costs should be covered by the farebox and what portion subsidized by the taxpayers. It's a political decision. LA voters passed a sales tax increase to expand and subsidize transit; that hasn't happened here. We have a consensus that it's desirable for people to live close to where they work, but we don't apply it to land use decisions. Example: Tax incentives provided to get Choice Hotels to move its headquarters from Rt 29 to Rockville.

Judy Morenoff, LWVNCA

Lunch was spent in small groups with the speakers to discuss further transportation challenges at nearby Ballston Mall's Food Court.

Shyam Kannan, Managing Director of Planning at WMATA (Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority). Also data hound, planning geek, transit aficionado—and real estate economist, steward of public process, collaborator, and problem solver.

www.wmata.com/momentum

Aldea Douglas, AARP Livable Communities team member

AARP has 53 state offices, and they create programming around livable communities.

Today's older adults want to live in their homes. AARP interviewed members and potential members who are aged 45 and up. Of these 78% would prefer to stay in their homes. But most houses aren't designed to be adapted. They were built for 35 year-olds with stairs, narrow hallways, and narrow doors. Of those interviewed 80% want to stay in their community. Yet for the past 50 years we have designed communities around cars.

Interviewees were asked about the community amenities they would like.

- 50% want a bus stop. For many older people riding a bus is often their only chance for social interaction.
- 47% want a grocery store.
- 42% would like a park.
- 42% cited a pharmacy.
- 29% asked for a hospital.

- 29% would like to have a church.
- 23% mentioned trains.

Boomers and millennials have similar preferences. Both prefer living closer to work, and 6 in 10 would take smaller living quarters to live closer to work.

The number of people 65 and over is growing. By 2030 they will constitute 15% of the population in Virginia, 25% of Maryland residents, and 14% of the people in the District of Columbia. The AARP Livable Communities program has offices in the District, Virginia, and Maryland.

AARP Livable communities offers a Network of Age-Friendly Communities with tool kits for us in states. They provide Active Living workshops and Community walk audits. There are currently 43 communities in the network. The District of Columbia network became active in 2012. Today 11% of District residents are 65 or over. Key strategies include developing more parks and outdoor spaces. Their plan mandates strategies for transportation, civic participation, elder abuse, emergency preparedness, community information, social participation, and more. See <http://www.aarp.org/livable-communities/livable-in-action/info-2014/creating-an-age-friendly-dc-action-plan.html>

Maryland recently approved Complete Streets model legislation. Complete Streets is a transportation policy that mandates designing streets that will be safe for travelers regardless of their mode of transportation or their age and ability. Maryland has not yet implemented. They have a lot of state roads, so they have to bring in the state highway administration. Baltimore is in the process of implementing it for 10 neighborhoods using dollars obtained from the casinos.

The AARP Public Policy Institute has developed a livability index. Starting April 20th, users will be able to plug in an address and get a livability score based on 8 factors. They will be available for state, county, and community. AARP Livable Communities also offers toolkits and fact sheets.

Rich Kuzmyak, transportation planner and policy analyst with Renaissance Planning

Accessibility may be the best way to get unstuck on congestion. Washington has great dilemmas. We live in the most prosperous area in the country—we are # 1 in education and income. We are also #1 in congestion. We face the conundrum of mobility and accessibility. Planners have largely pursued mobility, and the response has largely focused on roads.

The dominant trend has been outward expansion. We've seen a huge growth in road mileage and VMT (vehicle miles of travel). The trend back into cities reduces VMT.

Location really matters, as households in outlying areas generate 2 to 3 times the VMT of city dwellers. Lower densities mean more distance.

Residential and commercial separated, and there is no street grid.

Income is less important in measuring VMT.

Commuting accounts for less than 20% of daily travel. The biggest growth is in non- work purposes. People live in places that are not walkable.

Accessibility puts a premium on connectivity over speed. We need collaborative planning and a focus on choices with more trips made to close destinations.

Shorter trips encourage walking and biking.

GIS (geographic information systems) mapping and tools make it possible to measure accessibility with land use and transportation. Scores are calculated for use of autos and public transit and walking. Planners look at work and non-work travel. They look at relevant routes to find the shortest network path. Then they map them to show patterns. In Shirlington they found many barriers to pedestrians. The model shows how the problems of barriers can be fixed.

They picked the I270 corridor and mapped auto access, transit, and walk access to jobs. You can use the scores to predict travel behavior. Planners can go to any place and use scores to quantify relationship between land use and travel behavior. The model can be taken to a finer level of resolution and visualization. How do we shape policy? This model really captures the link between land use and transportation. We can bring walking in as a real mode. It helps identify established land use and access links to transportation. It provides a platform for interactive planning in which you can test changes. The model facilitates coordinated planning across agencies.

Stewart Schwartz, founder and longtime Executive Director of the Coalition for Smarter Growth

The overall common theme is what type of communities are we going to create? Land use is core. Think about where you travel—most often you will find it's in a town or city. They started the Coalition for Smarter Growth in the 1970s. Eighteen years later we have a staff of 6. We have issued reports on affordable housing, transportation, and other issues related to growth. There is an East-West divide in the region.

Transit is our plan forward. There is a Tysons plan, a White Flint plan, a plan for Twinbrook. Montgomery County has been a real leader in smart growth.. The Prince George's County Executive has said: "Transit-oriented planning is our future."

Alexandria is starting to catch up. Arlington has been a national leader in smart growth—they have a great progressive and fiscal conservative story. There is a move for Walkable Waldorf. Everybody in Loudon wants to be a mixed use center. There are 30 major sector plans with 100 communities. Today 92% of office leases signed are within 1/4 mile of Metro. People are demanding to live and work near Metro. The CEO of Marriott has announced that they will move from their Bethesda location when their lease expires in 2022. We have a lot of Metro stations available, including g 15 in Prince George's County. We need to create places that give you choices.

We have concerns. People still think reduction in congestion is the answer. The 2030 Group has leaned that way. The knowledge economy, not Dulles, is the engine for growth. Union Station has been called the region's 4th airport, with more than 30 million passengers annually. Then there is National Airport. The connection is walkable land use.

The Maryland Governor may be getting more facts on Purple Line. The former head of Lockheed wrote a letter of support. Mistakes were made with the DC streetcars. We don't have the engineering expertise we once had at Metro. Every neighborhood should be involved in planning. Smart growth is the way to go to maintain our economic competitiveness. We need to fix our infrastructure. How do we invent ways to make Route 1 and Rockville Pike walkable?

We are concerned about access to jobs, lower combined household transportation costs, and climate change. Transportation needs to be in the forefront. The Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG) has a multi-sector project going on. We must be visionary. And we must sell the case for investments in smart growth transportation.

I am absolutely convinced we must redouble our efforts on transportation. COG can lead to collaboration with other governing bodies. Metro is *us*, not an alien body. We are balkanizing our transit systems, which must be interoperable. See our Next Generation Transit Report. (*Thinking Big, Planning Smart*-- <http://www.smartergrowth.net/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/Thinking-Big-Planning-Smart-final-3.1.pdf>)

We need to fight for more dedicated funding, and we need a regional compact. We have to make hard choices, shifting \$ to transit from highways for example. To push, we must strengthen coalitions. It's a team effort, so we need a team like we had originally for Metro.

Q & A with the Audience

Question: Any thought to another tunnel from Virginia to DC?

Kannan Response: Yes, the only way to expand service is this. We can run 26 trains per hour through the tunnel. We must build another portal, but there is no funding. We were grateful to get funding for new trains.

Question: With the Silver line there was the over or under discussion. Was it that much harder to put the line underground?

Speaker Responses: 1) Underground *is* very expensive. 2) I believe they did not fully study the issues. The American Society of Civil Engineers said it could be done. Two contractors didn't want another contractor for the tunnel. They were afraid conservatives in Richmond would kill the project entirely.

Question: What will Tyson's look like?

Speaker Response: We're going to get 8 semi-circular communities. It is very hard to get across the center. Reston Town Center is doing better because they did a better job of place making.

Question: Are people leaving for life, freedom, and the pursuit of prosperity?

Speaker Responses: 1) People are moving closer to their families, not sunnier skies. 2) We are looking at values framing. The best thing related to smart growth was having everyone at the table planning for a better community and a better formula for people access. There is no one silver bullet—we need a whole array of solutions. 3) There is an isolated high school in Silver Spring. To get there, students take long bus rides. The school is 80% minority, and 55% get reduced price lunches. This lack of access is a problem.

Statement from Someone in the Audience: Professionals (planners and architects, including me) did some bad things. Why do we expect transit to be self supporting? Do we expect roads to be so? Transportation is part of a bigger complex development issue.

Question: Will someone do something only when our transportation system defaults to failure?

Speaker Responses: 1) We are trying to climb out of old ideas and think about pricing, quality of life, and so on. 2) We can do transit and keep roads reasonable.

Question: Is Tyson's going to get serious about being walkable?

Speaker Response: I think they are serious. There is funding. The state of Virginia has been fighting. We had a big fight about Tyson's general station. We need to get rid of the high speed right lane of 6 lanes to put in the other 2 sidewalks.

Question: What is the prospective for an outer loop?

Speaker Responses: 1) The Blue line goes to Largo and shares a track. As long as we are constrained there, we can't add more trains. There is the question of scrambled funding—would \$ from Virginia go to the District? 2) There is the need to deal with the Route 1 corridor and down to Woodbridge. Transit was supposed to be part of the hot lanes. Dedicated lanes would be better. Everything west relies on just a few radial arteries, in part because of all the cul de sacs in neighborhoods. All of these are much higher priorities than another beltway. There is a good George Mason (Center for Regional Analysis) report that notes Dulles is not a good airport for cargo. <http://cra.gmu.edu/global-competitiveness/>

Linda Beebe, LWWNCA

Forum adjourned at 3:30pm with words of appreciation by the president of the League of Women Voters of the National Capital Area Virginia Long