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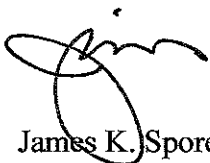
The Honorable William D. Sessoms, Jr., Mayor
Members of City Council

Dear Council Members:

Yesterday at the Hampton Roads Metropolitan Transportation Organization (HRTPO) meeting, a report was presented describing and summarizing the results of a series of focus groups addressing the topic of "The Present and Future of Transportation in Hampton Roads." The written report dated May 7, 2010 is attached for your information. Also attached is a copy of the power point presentation from the HRTPO meeting that captures the essence of the report. The project was managed by Dr. Quentin Kidd of Christopher Newport University with assistance from the Hampton Roads Center for Civic Engagement.

Dr. Kidd will be returning next month to present recommendations on what the Region's leadership could do to address issues such as the lack of trust in government and the public's frustration with the lack of results in addressing the serious transportation issues facing the Hampton Roads region.

With Pride in Our City,



James K. Spore
City Manager

dsc

Management Leadership Team

The Present and Future of Transportation in Hampton Roads

Results of a Series of Focus Groups among Hampton Roads Residents

May 7, 2010

These focus groups were conducted under Hampton Roads Transportation Planning Organization (HRTPO) contract No. 2010-1 by the Judy Ford Wason Center for Public Policy at Christopher Newport University with consultative work by the Hampton Roads Center for Civic Engagement (HRCCE). For further information please contact Dr. Quentin Kidd, Director of the Wason Center, at 757.594.8499 (qkidd@cnu.edu) or Betsy McBride, Executive Director of the Hampton Roads Center for Civic Engagement, at 757.889.9359 (bmcbride@hrcce.org).

CHRISTOPHER NEWPORT UNIVERSITY'S
 JUDY FORD WASON
 CENTER FOR PUBLIC POLICY

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METHODOLOGY

This document reports the findings of a series of six focus groups conducted among adults living in the Hampton Roads region of eastern Virginia.

Focus groups are a form of qualitative research that is used to explore perceptions, opinions and understandings. It is not the goal of focus groups to be an exact proportionately representative reflection of a population, but rather to have as many of the perspectives found in the population represented in the study. As such, the findings of focus groups are not statistically projectable. But they can be invaluable in developing in-depth understanding of citizen perceptions, opinions and understandings.

Qualified participants in this study were adults 18 years of age and older. Groups were recruited to include a diverse mix of adults by race, gender, age, tenure in the region, predisposition to stay in the region community (or not), household type and other basic demographic characteristics. No exclusions were made on the basis of political and economic perspective.

The groups took place as follows:

- March 1, 2010: South Hampton Roads - Western Municipalities
South Hampton Roads - Western Municipalities
- March 2, 2010: South Hampton Roads, – Active Duty Military
- March 3, 2010: Peninsula – Northern & Eastern Municipalities.
Peninsula – Southern Municipalities
- March 4, 2010: Peninsula– Active Duty Military

Study participants were recruited by Martin Research, a reputable independent marketing research firm. Focus groups in South Hampton Roads were held at Martin's Virginia Beach focus group facility. Peninsula focus groups were held at Christopher Newport University.

The moderator for these groups was Christopher F. Bonney, of Bonney & Company. Bonney is an experienced qualitative researcher. He has conducted a number of qualitative and quantitative studies for the United States Department of Transportation, The Federal Highway Administration, The National Traffic Safety Administration, state transportation agencies in Virginia, Maryland and Michigan and a variety of non-governmental organizations with interests in transportation.

We are not aware of any unusual circumstances occurring at the time of this study that we believe could have biased its outcome in any way. A newspaper story about the Peninsula portion of the study that appeared *The Daily Press* the day before the Peninsula groups began merely mentioned that the study would be taking place and does not appear to have had any further impact on the outcome of the study.

n.b. The reader is reminded that active duty military personnel based in Virginia are exempted from state income tax and from personal property tax on their primary motor vehicles.

#

Executive Summary

The results of this series of six focus groups conducted among citizens of the Hampton Roads region of Southeastern Virginia provide interesting insight and feedback to The Hampton Roads Transportation Planning Organization, its municipal and state stakeholders, affiliates and others.

Hampton Roads citizens may not be able to agree about a lot of things. But one thing they all seem to agree on is that transportation is the region's Achilles' heel. Study participants drawn from all of the region's cities and counties tell us that in the absence of any commonly acknowledged icon, cultural value or other point of regional connection, frustration over traffic congestion is the one thing they all have in common.

Hampton Roads residents taking part in this study believe that many elements in the region's transportation infrastructure are broken and that they see little evidence that the region's leaders are taking meaningful steps to either restore current transportation infrastructure or prepare for what they believe will only be more people, more density and more traffic volume in the future. Some have chosen to live in specific locations so that they can avoid the chronic areas of traffic congestion. But even those who live at the rural edges of the region believe the sprawl and traffic of the region's busiest cities will eventually reach out to and surround them.

There was virtually no disagreement about this outlook among our study participants, regardless of their demographic, geographic, economic or political perspectives. There is similarly strong and consistent consensus about what needs to be done to improve this situation; namely, get cars off the road.

In the short-term, study participants believe the region needs to take whatever steps are necessary to restore current transportation facilities and, where needed, expand or build new roads, bridges and tunnels to resolve current bottlenecks. Concurrently, the region needs to begin developing a fully integrated regional light rail networked back up by feeder and distributor bus and shuttle services.

Study participants know that these are not simple tasks. But those who have lived elsewhere, particularly military personnel who have lived in Western Europe and in cities like Tokyo and Singapore, know that these tasks can be accomplished; that ambitious public works projects call for ambitious leaders and that regions characterized by challenging topography and water can indeed be tamed for transportation purposes.

It is also important to note that our study participants do not consider the foregoing tasks to be luxuries. They believe traffic congestion is stifling economic vitality and social and civic cohesion in the Hampton Roads region today, and that the lack of solid planning for ways to beat this challenge today will make Hampton Roads an even less appealing place to live and do business in the future.

The only real question is how to pay for transportation infrastructure improvements. This study identifies three critical issues related to study participants' perceptions of transportation funding streams:

1. They have no idea of the magnitude of costs involved.
2. Their recommended funding streams fall well short of that necessary to make the improvements they believe are critical to the region's vitality.
3. They are driven by a desire to transfer as much of the eventual cost of transportation infrastructure improvements to others—e.g. to facility users, tourists and commercial interests—as possible.

Study participants are not averse to consideration of new dedicated funding streams such as tolls, increased gasoline tax, "sin" and luxury taxes, and increased license and registration fees. They are also open to consideration of a state lottery dedicated to transportation and to the legalization of casino gambling if the proceeds can be dedicated to transportation. Beyond these, however, study participants were grabbing at straws. Their suggestions become more fragmented, more contrary to the traditional conservative values of Virginians and, in some cases, downright outlandish.

Study participants were of one consistent voice, however, with respect to their feelings about funding of transportation infrastructure improvements through an increase in the state income tax. Although some recognize that this might be the best way to place the least and most painless burden on Virginia taxpayers, most are also adamantly opposed to this method because they believe it would 1) make it easy for any such tax rate increase

to remain in effect long after the original need has been fulfilled and 2) monies raised this way could easily become lost in the state budget or be diverted to other purposes for which they were not intended. The concept of a “lock box” or other method of guaranteeing that monies raised could only be spent on transportation was mentioned by several study participants in several different groups.

Trust in government or, to put it more accurately, the *absence* of trust in government is a huge issue for our study participants. Most believe there is an unacceptable level of waste, inefficiency and mismanagement in government. Until they believe otherwise, they say they are unwilling to increase their tax contributions.

To win their support to proceed with costly transportation infrastructure improvements, study participants believe the Hampton Roads region’s leaders need demonstrate regional consensus by creating a plan that reflects careful analysis of current conditions, serious study of other urbanized regions that have similar water and landmass configurations and realistic cost estimates and timetables. Once such a plan is developed, study participants believe it must be taken out into the community and presented to citizens so that they can provide elected leaders and others with the confidence they need to carry out the plan.

At present, however, more than a few of our study participants question the ability and predisposition of the region’s major cities to work together to create a plan or vision that speaks with a single, united voice.

The people who took part in this study believe the Hampton Roads region is blessed with abundant natural beauty and a rich history that deserves preservation. But they also believe that the future success of the region calls for strong, visionary regional leadership, solid planning, careful financial oversight and strong public support. If these conditions are met, study participants say the region will have every reason to be a competitive and appealing place to live and work in the future.

#

Discussion of the Findings

Study Participants

Hampton Roads residents brought a wide variety of perspectives to this study. Each of the Virginia municipalities that are part of the Virginia Beach-Norfolk-Newport News Metropolitan Statistical Area (Gloucester County, Isle of Wight County, James City County, Mathews County, Surry County, York County, City of Chesapeake, City of Hampton, City of Newport News, City of Norfolk, City of Poquoson, City of Portsmouth, City of Suffolk, City of Virginia Beach, and City of Williamsburg) was represented in the study. The study included singles, married persons with no children, married persons with young children and empty nesters.

Many of our study participants are long-time residents of the region and have never lived anywhere else. Others came to the area as the children of military personnel or to serve in the military themselves. Some of the youngest military study participants have only been in the region for a year or two. All, however, feel they have been in the region long enough to form opinions about its current condition and future outlook.

Our study participants bring many geographic reference points to their consideration of the Hampton Roads regions. Study participants who are not native to the MSA have lived in many other places across the United States and around the world, including: California, Arizona, Ohio, Kentucky, Louisiana, North and South Carolina, Florida, Mississippi, New York, Pennsylvania, Texas, Hawaii, Illinois, Alabama, Washington, Washington, D.C., Kansas, Iowa, Germany, Portugal, Spain, Panama, Japan, Greece and the Philippines. They come from or have lived in towns so small they were barely crossroads and cities as big as Houston, New York, Philadelphia, Tokyo and Singapore,

The overwhelming majority of our study participants are in the private or military workforce. Some are in jobs they have held for many years. Some have lost their jobs over the last year and are struggling to find work, or at least regular work. Although study participants were not recruited or discriminated against on the basis of their household income, it is clear that some of our study participants enjoy relative affluence and that most have at least basic financial stability. But those who are struggling to find regular work, especially those who are the chief wage earners in their households, are struggling to hold things together.

The occupations of our study participants who currently work outside the home in non-military jobs include: insurance sales, real estate sales, elementary teacher, teacher assistant, elder care provider, administrative assistant, aeronautical engineer, high school teacher, home remodeling contractor, caterer, accountant, research biologist, electronic systems technician, middle school teacher, industrial salesman, ship designer, substance abuse counselor, legal secretary, carpenter, construction worker, steelworker, shipyard worker and web site designer/e-business consultant,

The study also included several retirees and homemakers.

The perspectives of our study participants vary widely. The study included persons with advanced and continuing higher education as well as a few individuals with barely a high school diploma.

There were interesting and noticeable differences between some of our study participants based on where they live. Peninsula study participants, for example, and those from the more western municipalities of South Hampton Roads exhibited what they described as a slower pace of life. Some do not have to interact with the more fast-paced aspects of the region's life. Some have purposely crafted lives that make it unnecessary for them to do so. All seemed to believe that life in Virginia Beach, Norfolk and Chesapeake is more hectic, fast-paced and chaotic than where they have chosen to settle, and that living in Virginia Beach, Norfolk or Chesapeake requires one to adopt a similar fast pace just to keep up.

Our study participants have daily work commutes that vary widely in length and geographic reach. Most who work at the same location every day said they have fairly predictable routines, usually no longer than five to twenty minutes each way. Those who do not have to use major water crossings say their commuting time is reasonable, consistent and generally trouble-free. Those who depend on one or more of the region's major bridges or tunnels, on the other hand, say their commutes are longer and less predictable. Morning commutes from the Peninsula to the Southside are said to be reasonable, typically twenty-five to forty minutes. However, a single tunnel or bridge interruption can cause lengthy delays, and afternoon crossings are said to be not only longer, on average, but also predictably unpredictable.

Military study participants were a strikingly different mix of individuals than many of our civilian study participants. Just over half are making a career of the military their career. All were born and raised in other parts of the country. With the exception of several Air Force enlistees currently serving their first tours of duty at Langley Air Force Base, all have lived in a variety of places across the United States and around the world.

Some of our military study participants have been in Hampton Roads for as long as twenty-six years. Some have served in Hampton Roads several times. Some have lived in several different Hampton Roads communities and have, they believe, a good perspective on the various local political and socioeconomic conditions.

As a group, our military study participants are very impressive. Younger, newer military personnel have a very logical, systematic approach to doing things. They're very practical and are accustomed to working in a culture where people train and work together toward common goals. Military study participants who come from the officer ranks additionally exhibited a very proactive, "can do" attitude that wasn't always obvious among civilian study participants. When confronted with a challenge, military officers said they work hard to analyze the challenge, develop a plan for dealing with it, and then get to work executing it.

Happiness

To establish context for subsequent discussion of the world our study participants would like to live in the future, each of the civilian groups began with a brief discussion of what makes our study participants most happy. Contrary to what the media might lead one to believe about a consumptive American culture, most of our study participants focused on far more basic aspects of life.

For most of our study participants, happiness is being content. Asked when and where they are most happy, study participants tended to focus on simple aspects of their lives and relationships that sometime get lost in the pace of daily life. They told us they are most happy when they:

- Feel secure because they are free of health worries and their financial affairs are under control.
- Are home, or returning home.
- Are *away* from home and the stresses of everyday life and work.
- Can enjoy the company of family and friends.
- Have the time to take a walk on the beach or enjoy the calm of nature.

As they get older, our study participants hope to have fewer worries. As they get older, they want to be able to worry less:

- They want to know their children are safe and happy.
- They want to maintain their physical and financial health.
- They want to be able to step out of the fast lane and live in a place where the pace is slower and less crowded, surrounded by abundant natural life.
- Some hope to continue to be involved in volunteer activities, hobbies, travel and other pastimes that provide a sense of purpose.
- They hope the world will be a more peaceful place.

Regional Pride & Reputation

Each focus group continued with a discussion of the Hampton Roads region and aspects of the region with which citizens have to be proud.

Many of our study participants do not identify with the concept of a Hampton Roads "region." Almost all of our study participants cross municipal boundaries on a regular basis. But most identify themselves as residents of a particular municipality or community. At most, they might identify with either the Southside or the Peninsula, depending on which of these divisions they live on.

Throughout their focus group discussions, residents of South Hampton Roads did not typically mention or take into consideration the Peninsula unless prompted by the moderator. Peninsula residents, by comparison, were more predisposed to give consideration to South Hampton Roads. But many Peninsula residents feel life is different and better on the Peninsula, and therefore tend to avoid the Southside.

Only those whose work or social lives take them across Hampton Roads bridges and tunnels regularly spoke of themselves in more of a regional citizen context. But just as such persons described how they might live in Hampton, work in Norfolk and go to Virginia Beach for social activities, they complained that doing so is hard in Hampton Roads because Hampton Roads is so spread out compared to other places they have lived, particularly places with traditional single center cities and surrounding suburbs.

Several Peninsula military study participants, for example, said Hampton Roads does not compare favorably to the Richmond area, where they find entertainment activities more geographically focused, where socioeconomically diverse neighborhoods evolve more smoothly from one to the other than they do in Hampton Roads, and where the ease of getting around from one place to the other is said to be far greater than it is in Hampton Roads.

Most study participants do not mention “Hampton Roads” when asked to describe where they live. A key measure of regional identify is how people describe where they live. Study participants were asked what they tell people when they are away from Hampton Roads and are asked where the live.

The majority of our south Hampton Roads study participants name either their specific city or county or something like “Southeastern Virginia.” Some mention “Norfolk,” particularly if they’re talking to people involved in international trade or, if they live in Norfolk, they’ll say, “Norfolk, which is right next to Virginia Beach.”

Many Peninsula study participants acknowledged that many of their municipalities are unknown outside of the region. Therefore, most use either Williamsburg/Colonial Williamsburg or Norfolk as their reference points. Some use Richmond as a reference point. Within the state, some who live in Gloucester County will say they live “close to Yorktown.”

Most study participants are not oriented to a single center city. One of the things that distinguish Hampton Roads from many of the other places where our study participants have lived is its large number of independent municipalities. Rather than be seen as a benefit, most study participants see this as a point of confusion. One young man described it this way:

“Hampton Roads isn’t a big city. It’s a bunch of little cities trying to act like a big city.”

As mentioned earlier, study participants living in South Hampton Roads tend to be oriented to South Hampton Roads. Unless they work on the Peninsula, the Peninsula doesn’t factor into their thinking very much.

Peninsula study participants are drawn in a variety of directions. A small number are oriented to Norfolk by virtue of their work at the Naval Operating Base, the Little Creek Amphibious Base or at the Norfolk Naval Shipyard. But most of their personal lives are oriented to their Peninsula communities.

Persons living in York and Gloucester Counties and along the upper Route 17 corridor tend to be oriented to upper Newport News, Williamsburg and Richmond.

Finally, many of our Williamsburg and James City County study participants mentioned that they are more oriented to Richmond than they are either the Lower Peninsula or South Hampton Roads. One Williamsburg study participant noted:

"It takes me an hour to go to Richmond. It would be closer to go down the Peninsula or to Norfolk. But I know I can count on getting to Richmond in an hour. I can't count on being able to get down to Norfolk or back without delay. It could take 45 minutes or it could be three hours. At least going to Richmond, I know what's going to happen."

Study participants do not believe there is any single unifying icon, place or cultural value that defines and unites Hampton Roads citizens. Study participants believe the ability of Hampton Roads to act as a cohesive region is challenged by its unusual arrangement of waters and land masses. When asked whether there is a single thing, icon, place or social or cultural value that both defines the Hampton Roads region and its people, study participants could not name any.

The two things, though, that study participants believe differentiate Hampton Roads from other metropolitan regions are:

- Water
- Strong military presence.

The region's waters are problematic, study participants said, because just as they provide the backdrop for recreation, natural beauty and world trade, they also separate our region's cities, counties and residents, making it hard for there to be any single point of cohesion. The fact that there are so many bodies of water, and not just one focal point, further confounds the region's efforts to unite citizens around its waters.

Hampton Roads has a mixed reputation among military personnel. Study participants who are currently in the military told us that Hampton Roads has an interestingly mixed reputation among military personnel. When some are transferred here, especially those who grew up in small towns across America that are away from the coast, there is an initial excitement at being assigned to a post so close to desirable beaches. But study participants say this allure wears off quickly once they arrived in Hampton Roads and find that traffic makes it difficult for them to get to the beach.

Some military study participants said they have also found Hampton Roads housing costs and quality to be inferior to what they have experienced elsewhere.

Hampton Roads is also known as “Big Navy,” which isn’t surprising. But those who mentioned it did so to point out that this is not necessarily a good thing, even for Navy personnel. As one Navy officer noted:

“There are so many military people around here that you can’t get away from them. If you go to a party, it’s mostly military people. All you can talk about is work.”

Nearly all military study participants noted that the number of military installations and the proximity of Hampton Roads military installations to the Pentagon makes for a great deal of “management oversight” of activities. Air Force personnel noted that Langley Air Force is home to the headquarters of Air Combat Command and, as such, means that personnel stationed at Langley are subject to high deployment tasking.

Military study participants also noted that Hampton Roads has a mixed reputation with regard to how Hampton Roads citizens treat military personnel. Almost all believe military personnel are treated better by civilians than they used to be. But they also believe that military personnel are so common in Hampton Roads that they are not accorded the same respect and appreciation they receive at some other posts. One officer currently at the Joint Forces Staff College in Norfolk noted:

“When I was stationed in Texas and went out somewhere in uniform, you could practically count on someone buying you a drink or dinner or at least coming up to you and thanking you for your service. That never happens here.”

Other military study participants told similar stories of being treated with greater respect in other places they have served.

What do Hampton Roads residents have to be proud of? When they talked about the attributes of the region about which they are most proud, study participants tended to focus on history and natural assets, rather than modern accomplishments:

- The region’s role in the shaping of American history, and the importance the region places on protecting elements of that history.
- The region’s abundant waters and natural beauty.
- The region’s proximity to the ocean and mountains.
- A sense of personal safety.
- Low unemployment.
- Good, caring people.
- Distinct four–season climate.
- Slower pace of life on the Peninsula.
- Lots to do.
- Famous athletes (Iverson, Vick) from here.

What are the Hampton Roads region's obstacles? When asked whether there are elements of life in Hampton Roads that they are not proud of, study participants had a lot to say. But their lists almost always started with complaints about traffic.

- Traffic congestion on area bridges, roads and tunnel. Particularly at the tunnels. (Discourages discretionary cross-region activity.)
- Lack of useable public transportation system that serves more than the transit-dependent.
- No region-wide integrated light rail system.
- Perceived lack of desire on the part of the region's municipalities, legislators and the state to develop a plan that does anything more than respond to problems and potholes with patchwork repairs. (*"They know how to build highways in North Carolina. What's wrong with Virginia."*)
- Road construction that never ends and "never helps."
- Rampant growth without commensurate infrastructure development.
- Crowding of roads, schools and day-to-day life.
- Inadequate attention to declining neighborhoods and aging housing stock.
- High turnover in the population, resulting in low civic engagement.
- Poor cooperation and communication between Hampton Roads cities.
- Confusion and inefficiency in governance and delivery of public services because there are so many cities and counties and so many likely duplicated services.
- Low wages compared to other regions. (Makes it hard for retiring military personnel to stay in area.)
- Perceived bias for tourists over residents. (Believe locals should get discounted rates and other privileges.)
- Lack of adequate respect for military personnel.
- Threat of reduced funding for already poorly funded public schools.
- Jet noise.
- Predisposition of local governments to "give in" and cancel events quickly if there is trouble rather than figure out how to control or eliminate the problems.

Study participants spent a lot of time talk about how traffic intrudes upon their lives in Hampton Roads:

"Even if you know there might not be any problems, you have to plan your travel around here as if there will be problems."

Peninsula study participants are particularly adamant that the Hampton Roads Bridge-Tunnel is the region's choke point. As study participants put it:

“The tunnel is where everything in the region comes to a standstill. It’s what divides us into two worlds.”

“The tunnel’s a deal breaker. If we want to go to the beach in the summer we have to be out of our house in Hampton by 7:30 a.m. If not, there’s no use trying to get over there.”

The majority of non-military study participants plan to stay in Hampton Roads. A few said they would like to live in more pedestrian-friendly urbanized settings as they age. But most said they want to have more suburban space around them. A few plan to retire to smaller, more rural communities and places that have natural assets (e.g. mountains) not found in Hampton Roads. Some plan to follow their children wherever they might settle so that they can be close to grandchildren. Some want to return to the places where they grew up.

Younger study participants were the exception to many of the criteria that follow. Whereas older study participants are interested in slowing down the pace of their lives, younger study participants are interested in finding more activity, more excitement and greater thrills in their lives as they get older. Most suspect they will not achieve those goals in Hampton Roads.

Some South Hampton Roads study participants said they will consider moving to the edge of the metropolitan area as they age so that they can get back into less densely populated neighborhoods.

Several Peninsula study participants said they would consider moving further up the Peninsula in search of more of a small town feeling. A few said they might well move to rural areas of central Virginia.

Wherever they settle, study participants said they hope to find the following conditions:

- Personal safety.
- Quiet, slower pace.
- More trees and space around them.
- No need to endure or worry about traffic.
- Good schools,
- Good jobs with good pay. (Don’t want children to have to leave area in search of fulfilling careers.)
- Professional sports.
- Access to popular hobbies (e.g. fishing).
- Pedestrian-friendly.
- Convenient access to retail services.

-
- Good alternatives to use of personal vehicle.
 - Affordable standard of living and low taxes.

Military study participants have a slightly different outlook. Most know that their work may ultimately lead them away from Hampton Roads. Only a few said they hope they will be able to stay in Hampton Roads over time, and only one or two of the younger military personnel interviewed have given any thought to staying in Hampton Roads after their separation from the military. Those who would like to stay cited these benefits:

- Proximity to the ocean, mountains and Washington, D.C.
- Lots of history to explore in Virginia.
- Hampton Roads is far easier to get around than Washington, D.C. and its suburbs.
- Professional sports (i.e. Tides and Admirals) at less than “big league” prices.
- Renaissance of downtown Norfolk.

Military study participants who have no interest in staying in Hampton Roads typically said they wanted to seek out areas with better job or wage prospects. Some want to return home to the communities where they grew up, particularly those who grew up in small towns. When asked why they wouldn't want to stay in Hampton Roads, they cited these perceived shortcomings:

- There's not much for families to do here (compared to Orlando).
- Theme parks are not open year-round.
- Traffic is far worse than it should be for a market this size.
- Local highways and interchanges are poorly designed and maintained.
- The region is becoming too urbanized.
- Military personnel underappreciated until there's a threat that their number may be decreased.
- Virginia Beach continues to allow building around Oceana, threatening the loss of the base.
- Too much military in region. Too much Navy. Personnel in other branches are treated like second-class citizens.
- Too much “unplanned” residential development without commensurate infrastructure development.

The Future of Hampton Roads

Members of each focus group spent almost a half hour talking about what they feel the future holds for the Hampton Roads region.

Most study participants are not positive about the future of the Hampton Roads region. When asked what they believe Hampton Roads will be like twenty years from now, most study participants described futures that are little more than extreme versions of the present:

“More people.”

“More traffic.”

“More density.”

“Even more transient population.”

“The reasons that people once liked to live here will be lost in the traffic.”

“More of what we have today.”

“Little cities trying to act like big cities.”

“More spread out.”

“No more control of growth than there has been in the past.”

“All the cheaply built houses of the 70s and 80s will have started falling down.”

“Sprawl is going to spread out to currently rural areas.”

“More apartments and condos downtown.”

“People might be moving to downtown Norfolk. But they won’t be moving to downtown Hampton or Newport News.”

“Fewer family farmers.”

“The Peninsula will expand towards Richmond.”

“The Peninsula is going to be more connected to Richmond and Washington than to Norfolk.”

“The Peninsula’s going to look like the Southside, and the Southside’s going to look like New York City.”

“The Navy might start moving things away from here because of the difficulty of getting around in this region.”

Study participants believe Hampton Roads lacks a clear vision for the future. Some simply believe there is no vision beyond the short term. They are unfamiliar with any plans or thinking to the contrary. They believe growth has been allowed to occur without

thought and, more specifically, without thought to the infrastructure (schools, roads, utilities) needed to serve that growth.

Moreover, they believe there is no vision for anything *better* than what the region is today. Some of our study participants would like to live in a region that has a well-developed public transit backbone. But in light of recent attention to HRT's handling of the cost overruns associated with Norfolk's starter light rail system, not to mention the discord they perceive to exist between the cities of Norfolk and Virginia Beach, few can envision this occurring in Hampton Roads.

A few study participants believe it is ambitious to believe that conditions could be better in Hampton Roads over time. As noted before, some see little sign of Hampton Roads localities being interested in working better together¹. Some also believe that the current economic condition is so bleak that it could be twenty years before the region is restored to the level of economic stability present before the current recession took hold.

When asked what they would like the Hampton Roads region to be like in twenty years, study participants again tended to focus on eradication of current problems rather than on stretching the boundaries of what the future might hold. Asked what they want the region to be like in twenty years, study participants said:

"I want it to be a place of opportunities."

"I don't want to have to drive as much."

"I hope there'll be casino gambling."

"I hope there will be greater appreciation of diversity."

"I hope it will be cleaner."

"I hope the region will encourage its colleges and universities to grow."

"I want it to be safer."

"I hope there'll be better roads."

"I'd like the roads to be more beautifully landscaped like they are in other parts of the state."

"More light rail, everywhere."

"More telecommuting."

"Hopefully, there will be more downtown rejuvenation in Norfolk and Portsmouth."

"I wish I could make there be fewer people."

"Better schools."

"I hope there'll be less of a Bible Belt mentality."

¹ The exception to just about all discussions of friction between the municipalities of Hampton Roads was discussion of the ways that Poquoson and York County are said to be working well together to share police, courts and other public services.

“A place with more big companies and good jobs.”

“A place our children won’t have to leave to find fulfilling careers.”

“Professional sports teams, not only to enjoy but to give the region shared identity.”

“More connected people, more engagement in civic life.”

“Government more focused on doing its job well.”

“A region more progressive in its outlook.”

“Better regional cooperation.”

“A place known more for its intelligence than its brawn.”

“I hope it’ll be more like Richmond, with a traditional downtown—just *one* downtown!—where things are close together and you don’t have to go across the water or from city to city when planning a single night out.”

“A place so nice that it will be known as a place that people want to come to live.”

“More fun.”

“Hopefully there will be more energy efficiency.”

“More things to do.”

“A better live music scene.”

“More cultural offerings.”

“I hope we will continue to protect our historic heritage.”

“More owner-operated restaurants. Less fast food. Fewer chains.”

“No taxes.”

“More relaxed than it is now.”

“Greener, with more trees and parks.”

“I hope the future will bring prosperity back to the seafood industry.”

Some study participants question whether it makes sense to have sixteen independent municipalities in one region. Peninsula study participants do not believe there has been much friction between the cities and counties of the Peninsula. A few military personnel questioned the wisdom of having so many different police departments and other municipal services for such a relatively small area. But as noted earlier, they also pointed to what they believe is a successful collaboration between Poquoson and York County as an example of good inter-governmental cooperation that they hope they’ll see more of between other Peninsula municipalities.

Conditions are somewhat different on the Southside. Study participants in South Hampton Roads, and even those on the Peninsula, made repeated reference to what they perceive to be the inability of the city governments of Norfolk and Virginia Beach to get along together, especially when it comes to regional cooperation and, more specifically, in the planning of the light rail system. They commented:

“This is so silly.”

“Having all these cities and counties just makes for more fighting between them.”

“These cities need to cooperate more and fight less.”

“There’s just too little cooperation.”

“These cities need to get together.”

“If you were starting from scratch, I don’t think you’d have that many separate cities. But since they’re already there, I don’t think it’ll ever change.”

“I can’t believe they couldn’t get their act together to plan right from the start for this light rail system to go to the oceanfront and also down Hampton Boulevard to ODU and NOB.”

“It’s ridiculous that the light rail will end at Norfolk’s border Newtown Road.”

Military personnel were especially amazed at what they believe have to be inefficient and duplicated municipal services for each city and county:

“I can’t understand why this region doesn’t work any better than it does.”

“They have to do a better job of coordinating things and reducing duplication.”

“There’s too much piecemeal action.”

“All these governments just get confusing. If I get a driving ticket in Hampton on my way to work in Norfolk, I have to make a special trip back to Hampton to pay the fine. Why can’t I do that in Norfolk or Newport News instead?”

“Why do we have a dozen different recycling programs?”

“I haven’t been here all my life. So I don’t know about all the history of these different governments. But I’ve been here long enough to see that they’ve got to get their act together to get money for the region and to compete for state funding that will otherwise go to Northern Virginia.”

“I don’t understand why all the problems these cities have aren’t treated as *regional* issues rather than being tackled, unsuccessfully, by each city.”

The Hampton Roads Region's Transportation Future

Nothing seems to frustrate our study participants more as they think about the future of the Hampton Roads region than what they perceive to be the region's casual attitude about addressing its transportation problems.

Study participants believe that transportation is the Hampton Roads region's most compelling issue for the future. Study participants offered on their own that it should be among, if not *the* region's major goal to get more cars off the road in the future. Otherwise they believe the region's economic vitality, social cohesion and quality of life will only worsen.

Study participants believe that traffic congestion in Hampton Roads already inhibits social cohesion and interaction among the citizens of different Hampton Roads communities, and forces even denser development in already densely populated areas. They know that development growth and encroachment has threatened to close off at least one local base. Over time they believe the Navy, other branches of the military and private industry will find local transportation congestion to be so disruptive and costly that they will seek relocation elsewhere. They similarly believe that major corporations thinking about relocating to Hampton Roads will be discouraged from locating in the area when they see current traffic levels and learn that there is no solid plan for resolving the region's transportation gridlock.

Study participants noted that Hampton Roads is competing for economic vitality not only with other regions of Virginia and with other regions in the United States, but also with other nations. It was noted that Japan and China are both making major investments in transportation infrastructure that may put the United State at a global trade disadvantage in the future.

Closer to home, noting that parts of northeastern North Carolina are not only part of the MSA, but also major elements in the region's transportation scene, some study participants pointed out that the Virginia portions of the region must work together with North Carolina so that Outer Banks and other North Carolina traffic from and through Hampton Roads is not impeded by bottlenecks at the state border.

Study participants believe that many of the improvements needed in Hampton Roads' transportation infrastructure are needed today and are not luxuries. Study participants—civilians and military, and across all political lines—believe that current conditions warrant drastic measures to restore the smooth movement of people and vehicles throughout the region. In discussing their transportation priorities, study participants say that they believe current conditions are limiting the region's financial vitality and that if even basic improvements aren't made there is little chance of the region being prepared for future needs.

Study participants believe a culture has to be created in which it is accepted that the region should seek to reduce the number of vehicles on the road. The idea of the need for a change in the culture of the region first came up in the South Hampton Roads military focus group. But although that was the first group to articulate the necessary change in attitudes as a "cultural" shift, practically every group made reference to such a

change. Some study participants expressed it as a very specific goal to reduce the absolutely number of vehicles using the road. Others, like the military officer who first raised the issue of a shift in the cultural paradigm, wrapped the idea in a larger context of environmental sensitivity, energy efficiency and ease of mobility.

Study participants are realistic in their understanding of current economic conditions. But they also know from living in other places across the United States and around the world that large metropolitan regions—even those in Asian with complex land and water relationships such as those found in Hampton Roads—*can* find and implement large-scale solutions to large-scale transportation and mobility challenges. Because they have seen ambitious public projects work elsewhere, they lay blame on Hampton Roads region elected leaders and government officials for not making the tough leadership decisions necessary to create regional visions and comprehensive regional plans for addressing the region's transportation challenges.

Given the obvious problems with Hampton Roads' roadways, bridges and tunnels, study participants believe the region requires an integrated intra- and inter-city light rail network. They believe a light rail network needs to serve each city and connect all of the cities. It needs to either cross over or tunnel under local waterways, whether in or on its own crossings or along with motor vehicle crossings. It has to be connected to a system of feeder and distributor bus and shuttle lines that make it possible for people to be able to reach it. All of its components need to operate frequently enough to be useable. If its stations are likely to be gearing spots of drivers, then ample space for parking needs to be provided.

As before, many of our study participants have experienced subways, light rail systems and other mass transit systems throughout the United States and around the world. Military personnel pointed to cities like Tokyo and Singapore and to the urban and intercity system of Western Europe where, despite complex geographic challenges, transportation systems have been developed that serve citizens well and are well used by citizens.

As one military officer put it:

"I've seen it work elsewhere. So I know it can be done. I can only conclude that it's not bad enough that local leaders around here really want to do anything about it."

Study participants who have not traveled abroad pointed to what they said was the convenience of Washington's Metro, San Francisco's BART, the subways of cities like New York, Chicago and Boston, and other rail systems.

Study participants believe that a good light rail system will help to unite the municipalities of Hampton Roads by facilitating movement among them. They similarly believe that an integrated light rail system is key to connecting Hampton Roads' communities to each other and, through links to Amtrak, to the world beyond Hampton Roads.

Study participants recognize that there are some who disagree with the concept of investment in light rail. But those who have lived where light rail and similar systems

have been built also believe that people come to accept, appreciate and want more light rail quickly once it is up and running. As one study participant put it:

“They may not like it at first. But over time they come to see that it’s a good idea.”

But for this to happen, study participants believe the light rail system has to be far-reaching and carefully integrated with other surface transportation modes. If it is to be built in a piecemeal fashion, they believe the prioritization of segment construction needs to set based on the presence of likely users and destinations; e.g. ODU, NOB, Northrop Grumman Shipbuilding and NASA/Langley, etc.

Along with a regional light rail system, study participants do not believe the region can wait any longer to repair the roads, bridges and tunnels it already has. Study participants cited a number of bottlenecks they believe have regional implications:

- **The Hampton Roads Bridge-Tunnel:** Chief among the region’s roadway choke points is the congestion and unpredictable nature of traffic at the Hampton Roads Bridge-Tunnel. For Peninsula study participants, the HRBT is the major regional dividing point and obstacle to greater cross-regional activity. For South Hampton Roads residents, the HRBT is the gateway into and out of the region. For either group, its congestion, and the perceived inability of the region’s leaders to do anything about its congestion, make the HRBT the most visible representation of the transportation headaches.
- **I-64 west of Jefferson Avenue:** For Peninsula study participants, the next most mentioned highway bottleneck is the narrowing of lanes on I-64 just west of Jefferson Avenue. Given its heavy use by local residents and tourists alike, South Hampton Roads study participants, as well, consider it a lapse of good judgment on the part of the region’s leaders and the Virginia Department of Transportation that I-64 has not been widened all the way from the Peninsula to Richmond.
- **Elizabeth River Crossings:** South Hampton Roads study participants cited nearly every crossing of the Elizabeth River as a problem area.
- **Monitor Merrimack Memorial Bridge-Tunnel:** Some study participants remember when almost no one used this facility. But now they say the MMMBT and its connector highways are frequently very busy and increasingly the site of accidents, breakdowns and other interruptions that remind them how dependent Hampton Roads citizens are on just three crossings of the Hampton Roads and James River.
- **Route 17 between I-64 and the Yorktown Bridge:** For study participants who live in Yorktown or across the York River, this formerly “short cut” highway has evolved into a commercial boulevard as busy and interrupted by traffic signals and Warwick Boulevard, Military Highway or Virginia Beach Boulevard.
- **I-64 Cloverleaves:** Study participants, particularly those who have lived elsewhere, pointed with frustration to what they believe are poorly designed interstate highway interchanges in Hampton Roads. They believe the design of these

interchanges--particularly I-264 at Independence Boulevard, I-64 at Indian River Road and I-64 at Norview Avenue—not only cause congestion but create an intolerable potential for serious accidents.

- **Local Roads:** Not surprising, study participants cited several local roads they believe deserve more attention from transportation planners and engineers. Chief among these were Elbow Road, Indian River Road and Shore Drive in Virginia Beach and Warwick Boulevard on the Peninsula.

Some study participants believe transportation planners might look to the past and “outside the box” of roads and bridges for solutions to the region’s future transportation challenges. Asked to suggest other ideas Hampton Roads transportation planners might consider for implementation in future years, study participants suggested options that look back into history, look to other regions for guidance and, in some cases, looked away from purely transportation-related solutions:

- Peninsula Navy personnel recommended development of passenger ferry service between downtown Hampton to NOB.
- Several Peninsula study participants believe there should be a dedicated expressway between the HRBT to Williamsburg with no “local” interchanges.
- Based on their experience with vehicle ferries in the Pacific Northwest, a few study participants suggested development (or restoration) of vehicle ferry service between the Peninsula and South Hampton Roads.
- Some study participants were particularly adamant that Hampton Roads communities mandate that suburban homebuilders either build or be required to contribute to the cost of constructing infrastructure that will be needed as their developments come on line.
- A Navy officer, citing what she said is a mandate by the federal government that workers who can telecommute at least two days a week, suggested that considerable highway traffic volume could be reduced simply by increasing opportunities for federal and other workers to telecommute.
- Several study participants suggested that better planning and neighborhood redevelopment in the region’s inner cities could result in more thoughtful residential housing infill and less suburban sprawl, increasing both the vitality and density of these areas and, in doing so, increasing the likelihood of success of mass transit in these areas.
- In discussing the region’s future, a number of study participants focused not only on transportation facilities within the Hampton Roads region, but also those that connect Hampton Roads to the rest of the country and the world. Although not a single one of our study participants professed to be familiar with recent public discussions about high-speed rail, members of almost all of the six focus groups recommended that improvement in access, frequency and quality of Amtrak service must be improved if there is any hope of reducing traffic in the region.

Review of study participants' transportation preferences shows general agreement across all groups. Regardless of where they live, study participants in all six groups came to just about all of the same conclusions when asked what the region's transportation objectives should be for the next twenty years.

Chart 1: Transportation Objectives of Focus Group Study Participants

	Focus Groups					
	Southside – West	Southside - East	Southside - Military	Peninsula – North	Peninsula – South	Peninsula Military
Most consensus on objective	Integrated regional light rail network: More, better bus service. Water transit. More taxis. High Speed AMTRAK	Repair/upgrade current roads, bridges & tunnels: Downtown. Midtown. Indian River, Independence intersection. Elbow Rd., Shore Drive	Integrated regional light rail network: More, better bus service. Water transit. More taxis.	Roads & bridges: Widen 64, Fix Rt 17, Widen HRBT, Fix Coliseum central & Warwick Blvd. High- speed expressway from HRBT to Williamsburg.	Integrated regional light rail network: More, better, more frequent bus service.	Increase HRBT capacity
	Repair/upgrade current roads, bridges & tunnels: Repairs Capacity leveling 3 rd crossing Suffolk/Ches connector Peninsula "riverside" parkway	Integrated regional light rail network: Better bus transit.	Roads & Tunnels: no tolls, storm evacuation widen to handle more volume Jeff ave	Integrated regional light rail network: Better bus transit.	HRBT/ Roads New tunnel near HRBT 64 at jeff warwick fort Monroe close Rt 17 Mercury blvd	Regional light rail and feeders
		Infrastructure in synch with new residential & commercial development	Buses, ferries,	Ferries like Seattle		Better Amtrak
		Enhanced AMTRAK				Ferry to NOB
Least consensus on objective		Regional airport, free bikes, Zip cars				Better regional airport

The foundation for getting started is a plan. None of our study participants profess to be familiar with any plans for resolving Hampton Roads' current transportation problems or planning for the future. Despite current economic difficulties, most believe plans must be created and in place for when conditions improve.

Study participants, particularly military personnel, were adamant that the region must commit itself to figuring out its transportation problems, look broadly for input and learn from other regions (both in the United States and elsewhere), and develop a comprehensive regional transportation plan. One officer suggested that the words "ad hoc" should be prohibited from use by state and local governments.

One study participant suggested that the region should invite representatives of the Disney Corporation to visit Hampton Roads and recommend people-moving strategies that will captivate public interest. Others suggested that Hampton Roads invite representatives from Seattle to come to the area to describe how they deal with a region that is similarly defined and divided by so much water.

A plan by itself is not enough. Study participants believe the public must be brought into and sold on the “plan.” Given the difficulty they believe the region has had addressing its transportation needs, not to mention working together on much of anything, study participants believe that citizens need to be consulted in the creation of a regional transportation plan. They also believe that local leaders need to take the resulting plan out into the region to gain popular support for its implementation.

A successful regional transportation plan, study participants say, will have the following elements:

- A future oriented “big picture” perspective.
- A single voice, reflecting the cooperation of all of the region’s municipalities.
- A logical progression of prioritized tasks.
- Reliable cost estimates for each task and description of how completion of each task will improve conditions.
- Reliable projections of the sequencing and completion of each task.

Study participants believe that if such a logical, well-thought out plan is developed and presented to the community that citizens will be willing to support it, at least in concept.

The big question that no one seems to be able to answer is “How do we pay for this?” A large portion of each of the six focus groups was devoted to how the region’s transportation needs should be funded. In every one of the focus groups, discussion that had been lively and full of ideas came to an uncharacteristic silence after just a few minutes of discussion of funding. Two general observations are needed to establish context for the discussion that follows:

- The majority of our study participants have no idea just how big the costs are.
- The means by which they believe the region’s transportation future should be funded are not likely enough to approach a level necessary to pay for these projects.

Generally speaking, study participants are anxious to direct the cost of transportation away from themselves to others. Virtually all of our study participants felt that the burden of paying for the region’s transportation should be borne by someone other than him or her. They are not averse to making a modest contribution toward the cost of transportation infrastructure improvement. But they were clearly not predisposed to take on the full burden.

The first funding suggestions that came up in every one of the focus groups were:

- Increased gasoline taxes.
- Tolls and user fees on new transportation facilities.
- “Sin” and luxury taxes.
- Fees for users of the Port of Virginia.
- Taxes on tourists.
- Higher state inspection fees.
- Increase economic development to bring more companies to the state so that corporate taxes will underwrite more of the cost of transportation infrastructure improvement.

Tolls are a particularly problematic issue with many study participants. They would like for users of new facilities and services to carry much of the burden of those facilities’ costs. (Many seem to believe they know “short-cuts” and work-arounds that would prevent them from having to pay costly tolls.) But they also realize that high tolls and user fees will inhibit use of such facilities and ultimately fail to remove many drivers from the road. They also believe that in inhibiting use high tolls will also discourage and make regional economic and social cohesion harder to achieve.

After their first funding impressions were exhausted, study participants started suggesting increasingly fragmented and, in some cases, outlandish options. When the moderator suggested that these might not be enough, study participants started reaching for new funding possibilities:

- A state lottery dedicated to transportation.
- Legalization of casino gambling.
- Allow foreign investors to own/operation transportation facilities.
- Additional fees for vehicle registration and licensing.
- Increased fines for traffic and driving infractions.

When the moderator suggested that even these revenue streams might be inadequate, study participants started reaching for the increasingly outlandish:

- Eliminate state department of education and related overhead.
- Eliminate other “unnecessary” state services and departments.
- Look for corporate underwriters. Sell naming rights.
- Benefit concerts “for transportation.”
- Taxation of legalized prostitution.
- Taxation of legalized marijuana sales.

-
- Increased taxation of tattoo parlors.
 - Higher taxes on “payday” loan providers.
 - Consolidation of the state’s prison population into fewer prisons.
 - Use of prison labor to build highways, bridges and tunnels.
 - Use social marketing—i.e. texting such as was used to raise funds for victims of the Haiti earthquake—to raise money for specific transportation projects. One young student participant suggested a sign at the entrance to the tunnels asking people to text a number to contribute \$10 to upkeep of the tunnel.

Study participants are almost universally and adamantly opposed to any increase in the state income tax to pay for transportation improvements. Although some acknowledge that the burden of paying for transportation improvements would likely be easier and less obtrusive on Virginia taxpayers than any of the other funding streams suggested, hardly any of our study participants said they would be willing to consider paying for transportation improvements with increased state income taxes.

When asked why they do not favor this method, study participants explained:

“Once something gets into the state taxes, it’s hard to get rid of it.”

“It’s too easy for that money to get lost in the state budget.”

“I don’t trust them to use it for the intended purpose.”

“It’s just too easy for legislators, once the state starts collecting that money, to use it for other things.”

To win the trust of taxpayers, study participants said that state official and elected leaders have to do a better job of demonstrating sound fiscal management of taxpayer funds, guaranteeing they are spent appropriately via something like a “lock box”, creating viable long-range plans and delivering on their promises to see these plans through to completion. Study participants believe there is a great deal of waste and mismanagement in government at all levels and any move to raise taxes should not be initiated until all wasteful spending is ended.

Military personnel realize they have an unusual relationship with Hampton Roads so far as paying their way is concerned. Almost none of our study participants who are on active duty in the military currently pay state income tax or local personal property tax in Virginia, some believe retired military personnel are so plentiful in the region that their taxes more than compensate for untaxed active duty personnel. A few military study participants believe that their exclusion from state taxes should be a given and that it should be expanded to include their spouses, as well as exemption from public transportation fares and highway tolls.

Most, however, are somewhere in between these two points of view, recognizing that military personnel may indeed place a burden on local transportation infrastructure that exceeds the federal government’s compensating assistance to localities where there are large untaxed military populations. Most do not feel local citizens should carry the entire

burden of providing transportation infrastructure to military personnel if the federal government is not otherwise compensating for their tax-free status.

A few believe that states in financial difficulty are likely to begin looking for ways to start taxing military personnel and suggest that a token individual annual fee—perhaps no greater than \$100—be levied on each individual active duty military person.

Still, military personnel were as adamantly opposed as civilians to any state income tax levy for transportation. Most said they military personnel should share in the cost of transportation infrastructure by being exposed to consumption taxes on alcohol, entertainment and other discretionary products and activities.

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Appendix: Focus Group Discussion Guides

TPO – General Audience Focus Group Discussion Guide

I. INTRODUCTIONS (15 minutes):

- a. Welcome.
- b. Moderator introduction.
- c. Explanation of why we're gathered and what we're going to do.
- d. Ground rules:
 - i. Not trying to sell anything, nor change mind about anything. Only interested in opinions.
 - ii. All comments are confidential. Be completely frank.
 - iii. More important that we get different viewpoints out onto the table than that we worry about how many share an opinion or disagree on it.
- e. Here's how we'll do this:
 - i. The role of the independent moderator.
 - ii. Focus groups are an exploratory tool.
 - iii. Explanation of viewing and taping.
 - iv. No selling.
 - v. No right or wrong answers.
 - vi. No forcing of consensus.
 - vii. Please be frank.
 - viii. Agree to disagree.
 - ix. Everyone has a right to his or her opinion.
- f. Participant introductions.
 - i. Name.
 - ii. Family composition.
 - iii. Occupation.
 - iv. Tenure in community.
 - v. How do you get to work? How long does it take you to get there?

II. HAPPINESS (5 minutes):

- a. What are the things that make you happy?
- b. When and where are you happiest?
- c. What do you want your life to be like as you get older?

III. REGIONAL PRIDE (10 minutes):

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- a. Thinking about where you live now, what are the things you think we have to be most proud of in the Hampton Roads area? Why is that?
 - b. Are there aspects of our region that you're *not* proud of? Why is that?

IV. PLACE (5 minutes)

- a. Do you plan to continue living in Hampton Roads, or do you think someday you'll move somewhere else? Why is that?
- b. [*If planning to go somewhere else*] Where do you think you'll go? Why is that?
- c. Wherever you end up, what do you want the place where you live to be like? Again, I'm not thinking of your specific residence, but the area where you live? What characteristics or values do you hope it will have?

V. THE FUTURE OF HAMPTON ROADS (25 minutes)

Let's think about our own area, Hampton Roads, now. I want to talk about what you want our region to be like in the future.

- a. If you had crystal ball and could look into the future, what do you think Hampton Roads will look like in 20 years? Close your eyes for a moment and think about this:

Probes, as needed:

Will there be more people, or fewer?

Where will they live? Do you think they'll be as spread out as they are now, or more concentrated?

Do you think they'll live any differently that we do now?

How will they get around? (Would you *be able* to get around?)

Let's shift gears a little now and talk about what you'd *like* the region to be like:

- b. As you think ahead 10 or 20 years, what do *you* want the Hampton Roads region to be like? If you were in charge, what's the biggest dream you would have for making Hampton Roads the best place to live? How would you go making Hampton Roads into that place?
- c. Complete this sentence: "I want Hampton Roads to be...."
- d. Complete this sentence: "When people hear the name 'Hampton Roads,' I want them to think...."
- e. What characteristics do we want our region to have?
- f. What do we want it to look like?
- g. What are the things worth protecting?
- h. How do you think people are going to get around?

-
- i. Right now we're a collection of 16 independent cities and counties. Do you think that'll make sense in the future?

VI. OUR TRANSPORTATION FUTURE (60 minutes)

Let's talk now about what needs to happen for this future to occur.

- a. What things have to happen for us to be able to achieve the dream we described? Why those things? [*Listen for references to transportation.*] Are there any other things?
- b. As you look forward to the future of our region, how do you think it's going to look from a transportation standpoint? Do you think it will be like it is today, or different in some way? Why is that?
- c. You hear a lot of people talking today about transportation problems in our area.
 - How do you feel about transportation in our region today? How and where do they affect you?
 - What's working? What's not working? Why is that?
 - Why do you think we can't or haven't been able to deal with transportation so far? (*If "trust" comes up, probe for whom or what they distrust and why.*)
- d. Okay, let's get back to the future. Do you think our current transportation systems and infrastructure—that is, things like roads bridges and tunnels—will be adequate for the needs of the region?
- e. For the region to be the way you want it to be, what kind of transportation infrastructure and services do you think we'll need? What will we absolutely need? What would be "nice to have"? [*THIS IS A DISCUSSION ABOUT WANTS AND NEEDS, NOT COST.*]
- f. How would you prioritize changes or improvements? What changes or improvements do you think would help the most people?
- g. What kinds of transportation infrastructure, improvements and services are you most likely to support? Why is that?
- h. How do you think these improvements and services should be paid for? Who should pay for them? How?
- i. If we want to get around now, we usually think in terms of using cars and trucks. Some people use buses. There are also special services for the elderly, and next year there will be light rail, at least in part of Norfolk. As you look to the future of the region, what kinds of transportation needs do you think we will have?
- j. Will these modes of transportation be adequate?

VII. THANK AND CLOSING

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TPO – Military Focus Group Discussion Guide

I. INTRODUCTIONS (20 minutes):

- a. Welcome.
- b. Moderator introduction.
- c. Explanation of why we're gathered and what we're going to do.
- d. Ground rules:
 - i. Not trying to sell anything, nor change mind about anything. Only interested in opinions.
 - ii. All comments are confidential. Be completely frank.
 - iii. More important that we get different viewpoints out onto the table than that we worry about how many share an opinion or disagree on it.
- e. Here's how we'll do this:
 - i. The role of the independent moderator.
 - ii. Focus groups are an exploratory tool.
 - iii. Explanation of viewing and taping.
 - iv. No selling.
 - v. No right or wrong answers.
 - vi. No forcing of consensus.
 - vii. Please be frank.
 - viii. Agree to disagree.
 - ix. Everyone has a right to his or her opinion.
- f. Participant introductions.
 - i. Name.
 - ii. Family composition.
 - iii. Occupation.
 - iv. Tenure in community.
 - v. How do you get to work? How long does it take you to get there?
 - vi. Where else have you been posted? Which places did you like most? Why is that/
 - vii. Which places did you *dislike*? Why is that

II. REGIONAL PRIDE (10 minutes):

- a. As someone who probably wasn't originally from this area, what are your impressions of Hampton Roads compared to other places you have lived?

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- b. What kind of reputation does Hampton Roads have among military personnel?
 - c. Thinking about where you live now, what are the things you think we have to be most proud of in the Hampton Roads area? Why is that?
 - d. Are there aspects of our region that you're *not* proud of? Why is that?

III. PLACE (5 minutes)

- a. Do you plan to continue living in Hampton Roads when you get out of the service, or do you think you'll move somewhere else? Why is that?
- b. [*If planning to go somewhere else*] Where do you think you'll go? Why is that?
- c. Wherever you end up, what do you want the place where you live to be like? Again, I'm not thinking of your specific residence, but the area where you live? What characteristics or values do you hope it will have?

IV. THE FUTURE OF HAMPTON ROADS (25 minutes)

Let's think about our own area, Hampton Roads, now. I want to talk about what you want our region to be like in the future.

- a. If you had crystal ball and could look into the future, what do you think Hampton Roads will look like in 20 years? Close your eyes for a moment and think about this.

Probes, as needed:

Will there be more people, or fewer?

Where will they live? Do you think they'll be as spread out as they are now, or more concentrated?

Do you think they'll live any differently that we do now?

How will they get around? (Would you *be able* to get around?)

Let's shift gears a little now and talk about what you'd *like* the region to be like:

- b. As you think ahead 10 or 20 years, what do *you* want the Hampton Roads region to be like? If you were in charge, what's the biggest dream you would have for making Hampton Roads the best place to live? How would you go making Hampton Roads into that place?
- c. Complete this sentence: "I want Hampton Roads to be....."
- d. Complete this sentence: "When people hear the name 'Hampton Roads,' I want them to think...."
- e. What characteristics do we want our region to have?
- f. What do we want it to look like?
- g. What are the things worth protecting?

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- h. How do you think people are going to get around?
 - i. Right now we're a collection of 16 independent cities and counties. Do you think that'll make sense in the future?

V. OUR TRANSPORTATION FUTURE (60 minutes)

Let's talk now about what needs to happen for this future to occur.

- a. What things have to happen for us to be able to achieve the dream we described? Why those things? [*Listen for references to transportation.*] Are there any other things?
- b. As you look forward to the future of our region, how do you think it's going to look from a transportation standpoint? Do you think it will be like it is today, or different in some way? Why is that?
- c. You hear a lot of people talking today about transportation problems in our area.
 - How do you feel about transportation in our region today? How and where do they affect you?
 - What's working? What's not working? Why is that?
 - Why do you think we can't or haven't been able to deal with transportation so far? (*If "trust" comes up, probe for whom or what they distrust and why.*)
- d. Okay, let's get back to the future. Do you think our current transportation systems and infrastructure—that is, things like roads bridges and tunnels—will be adequate for the needs of the region?
- e. For the region to be the way you want it to be, what kind of transportation infrastructure and services do you think we'll need? What will we absolutely need? What would be "nice to have"? [*THIS IS A DISCUSSION ABOUT WANTS AND NEEDS, NOT COST.*]
- f. How would you prioritize changes or improvements? What changes or improvements do you think would help the most people?
- g. What kinds of transportation infrastructure, improvements and services are you most likely to support? Why is that?
- h. How do you think these improvements and services should be paid for? Who should pay for them? How?
- i. If we want to get around now, we usually think in terms of using cars and trucks. Some people use buses. There are also special services for the elderly, and next year there will be light rail, at least in part of Norfolk. As you look to the future of the region, what kinds of transportation needs do you think we will have?
- j. Will these modes of transportation be adequate?

VI. THANK AND CLOSING

#

Presentation to HRTPO Board

Agenda Item #9

Report to Hampton Roads Transportation Planning Organization

Hampton Roads Residents' Perceptions of Regional Transportation

CHRISTOPHER NEWPORT UNIVERSITY'S



JUDY FORD WASON
CENTER FOR PUBLIC POLICY

Agenda

- Today: What we've learned.
- Next month: Recommendations.

Recent Points of Reference

- HRP survey of 400 registered Hampton Roads voters (November 2001).
- HRPDC survey of 613 resident of Hampton Roads (May 2005).
- CNU-HRCCCE survey of 500 registered Hampton Roads voters (April 2008).
- Six HRTPO (CNU) exploratory focus group interviews with Hampton Roads citizens (March 2010).

Perceptions of Traffic

- Few things unite Hampton Roads citizens as much as our shared dislike of the region's traffic congestion.
 - ✓ Almost 90% say traffic congestion is high or very high.
 - ✓ About 75% believe traffic has gotten worse over the last five years.
 - ✓ Almost 75% say traffic congestion negatively impacts their daily quality of life.
 - ✓ About 75% of residents consider traffic to be the region's #1 problem.

The Paradox of Transportation

- Not everyone experiences traffic congestion every day or in the same way.
 - ✓ TPO data suggest that only 15% of citizens are impacted by congestion on major regional arteries on a daily basis.
 - ✓ Many people experience congestion on local roads.
- Some people have purposely arranged their lives in order to mitigate or avoid congestion problems.
- Perceptions of the problem are created and reinforced by:
 - ✓ Personal experience
 - ✓ Hearsay
 - ✓ Constant media attention to traffic congestion and stoppage throughout the region
 - ✓ Major events (flooding of HRBT last summer).

Current Citizen Frustrations

- Few citizens think there is any reason to believe conditions will improve:
 - ✓ They believe poor maintenance and excessive demand on existing regional transportation infrastructure puts Hampton Roads at a competitive disadvantage.
 - ✓ They believe traffic congestion already stifles mobility and economic vitality within the region.
 - ✓ They expect traffic, sprawl and congestion will only get worse over time.
 - ✓ They find it inconceivable that the light rail starter line will not extend into Virginia Beach or out to ODU and NOB.

The Roots of Citizen Frustration

- They are unaware of any attempts to create a cohesive regional transportation vision.
- In the absence of evidence to the contrary, some conclude that elected leaders at the local and state level must not really care enough to want to do something about transportation.
- Many believe some of the region's municipalities are not predisposed to work together on transportation.
- Those who have lived elsewhere, especially military personnel, have seen other cities and regions throughout the world address and solve similarly complex transportation challenges and wonder why Hampton Roads can't.

Perceived Solutions

- Hampton Roads citizens believe the long-term solution lies in getting cars off the road.
- There must be a well-coordinated, *regional* light rail system supported by an extensive and regular network of buses, shuttles and other feeders and distributors.
- The region must bring current transportation assets up to current demand standards.
- Something must be done about congestion at the Hampton Roads Bridge-Tunnel.
- The region must promote telecommuting and other innovative indirect means of reducing traffic volume.

The Only Question: How to Pay

- Most people have no idea of the magnitude of the costs involved.
- First-impression revenue solutions (tolls, increased gasoline tax, etc.) barely put a dent in the total cost.
- First impression revenue solutions quickly devolve to increasingly incremental and impractical revenue ideas.
- There is inadequate trust in elected leaders and government to support even a modest state income tax increase dedicated to transportation.

Restoring Citizen Trust

- Localities must work together to create a solid and visionary transportation plan.
- It has to be clear that localities have worked on this together and that they all approve of the plan.
- The plan must be taken out to citizens to build consensus. The plan must include:
 - Cost estimates that are realistic and reliable.
 - A realistic and dependable timeline.
 - Noticeable interim improvements throughout the implementation of the plan.
 - Complete and ongoing managerial and financial transparency and accountability.



Questions?

