

The Region Is ...



My Backyard

The Newsletter of the Richmond Regional Planning District Commission Fall, 1999

Calling All Conventions!

The new Richmond Convention Centre, which will cover the blocks bounded by Leigh, Fifth, Marshall and Third streets is under way and on schedule for its Grand Opening in July 2002. The expansion



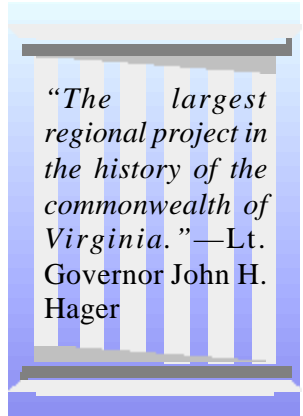
of the Centre will increase present exhibit space from 62,000 sq. ft. to 180,000 sq. ft., making it one of the top five convention centers in the mid-Atlantic cities. Also included in the expansion is a 30,000 sq. ft. Grand Ballroom, serving as a meeting and banquet facility. Funding for this venture is being financed through an occupancy tax paid by visitors to the Region who rent hotel rooms in Richmond and the counties of Chesterfield, Hanover and Henrico as well as a \$10 million state grant.

Lt. Governor Hager recently called it “the largest regional project in the history of the commonwealth of Virginia. It

is economic development which will annually bring over \$90 million of traveler dollars into the Virginia economy.”

Two bridges will connect the main center across Marshall Street with a ballroom on the site of the current Marriott Hotel parking lot and a parking deck. Plans also call for moving the Metro Richmond Convention and Visitors Bureau headquarters into the centre along the Third Street side, along with the visitors center, which is now on Robin Hood Road. Fourth Street will be closed between Broad and Leigh streets, and Third Street will be widened and made two-way according to the plans. Part of the expansion will take the former Joseph W. Bliley Funeral Home on Marshall Street.

Additional plans focus on several blocks of Broad and Grace streets near the Greater Richmond Convention Centre and call for a potential four-star hotel to serve the convention centre, as well as a new office tower, retail shops, apartments and theaters.



Calvin Jamison, Richmond’s City Manager, recently stated, “It’s a good plan overall. Most importantly, it includes not only development of a vibrant downtown, but also carries some economic development into Jackson Ward.”

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What's Happening in Our Capital Region?

Sports...

The thrill of victory, the agony of defeat... Richmond definitely comes out a winner in the X-Trials. The event, which took Richmonders by awe May 7 through 9,



attracted 84,000 ready-for-adrenaline-rush-spectators to Tredegar Iron Works and Brown's Island, and included bicycle,

skateboarding and in-line skating stunts.

This spectacle was a great opportunity to showcase the reopening of the James River canals – and that it did. There were river raft rides, canal tours, wakeboarding, moonwalks and human fussball games. It's no wonder the event drew in so many area residents!

Jobs...

The Richmond Regional PDC approved additional funding at its September meeting to the Greater Richmond Chamber of Commerce for WORKFORCE ONE. This funding will continue the regional efforts of the project and allow the Region to become more competitive in the job market by preparing for the diverse business and employment opportunities coming to our Region.

Virginia's unemployment rate is currently at its lowest level in the 107 years of tracking these statistics. In addition to lacking the people to fill jobs, there is also a disconnect between the skills and workplace ethics. "Unskilled jobs"—those requiring a high school diploma or less—will account for only 15 percent of jobs by 2000.

Through the Chamber of Commerce, the Region's largest manufacturers have developed and piloted a regional assessment process using Work Keys, and have profiled jobs using uniformed standards. To complement this, a regional skill bank has been developed, which will provide information in skills requirements via the Internet to job seekers, providing unparalleled personal and regional opportunities. Citizens will be able to better compete in the marketplace and experience job security that comes from having the necessary skills, while businesses will benefit from a highly educated and job-ready workforce.

Entering into its second year, the program's top priority is to help the Region develop an effective plan for implementing a competitive workforce. The continued implementation of PathFinder software in all locality high schools and middle schools will provide a more coordinated approach to linking students and teachers with work-based learning opportunities.

In addition, a soon-to-be-hired director of education/training will provide a single point of contact between the education and business communities, allowing for a more coordinated alignment of activities in these two sectors.

Census 2000...

Census Day – April 1, 2000 – is just around the corner. Staff at the Richmond Regional PDC have been busily preparing for that day so that operations go smoothly. In order to have a reasonable reflection of conditions such as population, age, etc., there must be a certain amount of people in each geographical area to get a good sampling.

In order to achieve this, the PDC, with local jurisdictions, have reviewed census geography to ensure that they can reflect changes in population as the decade progresses. These boundaries have been submitted to the Census Bureau for approval. We will be able to review the proposed changes once more this fall. Look for an update in our next newsletter.

What's Happening in Our Capital Region?

On the James...

If you haven't been down to the riverfront lately, you might want to check it out. An on-going facelift has given the area a new charm, providing a spot for fun-filled activities and events. Envision dinner in Shockoe Slip, then a stroll down to the river to enjoy its rich history, including the canal system that George Washington designed or listen to a concert. With the opening of the Richmond Canal Walk on the James River and Kanawha and Haxall Canals on June 4, Richmonders and tourists can now enjoy the restored area at their leisure.



The Riverfront project begins at 5th Street and reaches out to 17th Street. This stretch includes 32 acres with 11 sites for commercial development. A two mile stroll along the James River completes the Canal Walk and features an outdoor history museum. Planning for the museum began in 1997 with a \$90,000 grant from Philip Morris U.S.A. which was used to hire a planning expert (whose portfolio includes the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. and the Country Music Hall of Fame in Nashville) who would transform the riverfront into the museum.

Don't want to walk? Visitors are able to ride riverboats on the Kanawha Canal or rent smaller boats at the Haxall. A 30-minute historically narrated Kanawha Canal tour is a well-spent \$4.00 for adults and \$3.00 for children. Tots under four cruise free. Or tour the river on your own: A privately-rented boat that holds six passengers

costs \$35/hour; an intimate boat for two is priced at \$20/hour.

The entire project totals \$53.5 million, according to Brenton S. Halsey, president of the Richmond Riverfront Development Corporation—about \$1.5 million more than originally anticipated. Once completed, the development is predicted to generate \$450 million in private commercial and residential development during the next 10 years, resulting in \$10 million a year in taxes to the city and 6,000 jobs.

Governance...

Have you noticed all the new cell towers that seem to be "growing" all around us? Seems like they just sprout out of nowhere from surrounding fields and buildings! In order to maintain some sort of count on these antennae, the Richmond Regional PDC has teamed up with surrounding localities to provide some organization to the chaos by mapping and tracking cellular phone towers across the metropolitan area. By creating this regional database of tower sites and providers, the agency will be able to provide its jurisdictions with detailed information on present and future tower locations and providers.

The RRPDC staff:

James R. Hassinger	Executive Director
Jo A. Evans	Assistant Executive Director
Tracy P. Sheets	Finance/ Contract Administrator
Patricia A. Villa	Communications Coordinator
Larry J. McCarty	Director of Planning
Jacqueline S. Stewart	Principal Planner
Chester A. Parsons	Senior Planner
Joseph M. Ndanga	Senior Planner - Computer Sys. Adm.
Christine D. Holt	Associate Planner
Alan W. Gregory	Principal Planner - GIS Coordinator
Leigh R. Medford	Planning Technician - GIS
Daniel N. Lysy	Director of Transportation
Jin H. Lee	Senior Planner
Wanda G. Moore	Principal Planner
Daniel E. Rudge	Principal Planner
Bradley R. Shelton	Associate Planner
Katherine E. Barrett	Executive Secretary
Runda J. Bailey	Administrative Secretary
Vonne L. Fagan	Receptionist/Secretary

What's Happening in Our Capital Region?

Air, Land and Water...

The Planning Department at the Richmond Regional Planning District Commission was busy this year, assisting our nine localities with major undertakings. Included in that list are:

City of Richmond Empowerment Zone: Richmond Regional PDC staff assisted the City of Richmond with an application to improve economically depressed areas within the city. The federal application, which seeks \$100 million over a 10-year period, would be used to provide improvements ranging from infrastructure to job training.

Report on Private Road Standards: This report examines private road standards used by rural localities within the Richmond region as well as a collection of standards used by other rural and suburban localities in and out of the Region. It also includes information about one locality that developed a system to assist private road owners in converting their private road to a state-maintained road.

Charles City County Housing Needs Assessment: Charles City County has recently been interested in applying for a grant to the Department of Housing and Community Development which would assist the county in comprehensive housing improvements. The county is continuing to investigate methods to best identify housing needs and asked the Center of Rural Development (CORD) for guidance on how to develop a strategic action plan, utilizing citizen involvement.

Goochland County Courthouse Village Square Study: Staff at the Richmond Regional PDC met with county officials to assist in identifying and assessing potential transportation enhancement improvements in the historic village square, including street lighting, sidewalks, vegetation and signage control. This project will be conducted during FY 00. Last year, staff conducted such a study for Powhatan County which

leveraged over \$650,000 in transportation-related improvements to their village square area.

Richmond Regional Surface Water Management Area: This project, aimed to designate the portion of the James River between state Route 522 in Goochland/Powhatan counties eastward to I-95 in the City of Richmond as a surface water management area would regulate water users when water levels drop to a level that could be potentially adverse to public welfare, health and safety.

Learning...

Stewart D. Roberson, superintendent of Hanover County schools, and a man described as being uniquely humble, gifted and a true visionary, was named Virginia's Superintendent of the Year for 2000. In a county with one of the state's fastest growing school districts, his many successes include reducing Hanover County's dropout rate to the fourth lowest in Virginia—down to .33 percent, and increasing student achievement scores to the top 10 percent of the state.



Roberson was lauded for making the whole community part of a decision-making process, for his vision and for his success in building a team of people who share that vision.

Even with these achievements, Roberson contends that Hanover's challenge is to raise the bar of excellence so that Hanover's standards remain well above the state and national norms.

For additional information on these and other documents, visit our web site at www.richmondregional.org

Strategic Planning...

The Future's So Bright

When you think about what life will be like in the next century, do you ever see yourself riding a canal boat that takes you to an outdoor café for lunch, riding the rails from downtown Richmond to Washington, getting to work and back without traffic jams, being able to find the job you want, seeing your children graduate from high school with a solid education, living in a safe neighborhood, breathing clean air and drinking clear water?

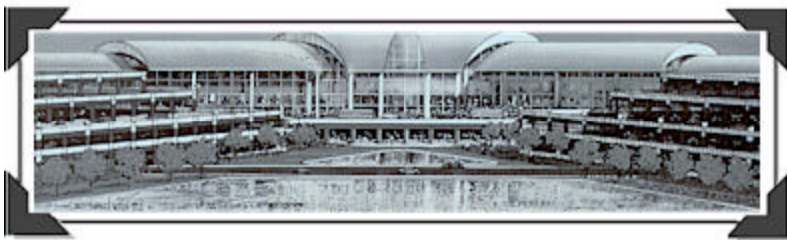
All of this can happen—but it takes a lot of planning to get it done. That's what the Richmond region is doing now—planning for our future. Through the Richmond Regional PDC, your local governments are looking at plans for the future, suggestions by various organizations throughout the Region and the visions and goals

developed by citizens to provide the road map to a bright future...a future where we can all live in “a Region where people share a sense of unity and stewardship, neighborhoods flourish and lifelong learning supports economic opportunity accessible to all—a place where everyone is proud to say, “the Region is my backyard!”

The region's strategic plan has ideas for improvements in the areas of Air, Land & Water; Arts, Heritage & Culture; Downtown; Governance; Homes & Neighborhoods; James River; Jobs; Learning; People; Recreation & Sports; and Transportation.

Highlights of projects underway and ideas for the future include:

- Larger Richmond Convention Centre (See page 2) with expansion of the Carpenter Center and economic development in Jackson Ward.



- A new facelift to our regional airport with expansion and improvements will promote additional service and lower fares.

- Reconstructed Riverfront Canal (See page 2) celebrated its grand opening this summer; places to eat, shop, work, live and play yet to come.



For our comprehensive strategic plan, please visit our web site at www.richmondregional.org

Getting There...

What is the MPO?

The Richmond Area Metropolitan Planning Organization is the federal and state designated regional transportation planning organization that serves as the forum for cooperative transportation decision-making in the Richmond area. The MPO's geographic area of concern is that area projected to be urbanized within the next 20 years. The Richmond Regional Planning District Commission serves as the contracting agent for the MPO and provides the administrative and technical staff. Special MPO committees (Technical Advisory, Citizens Advisory and Elderly and Disabled Advisory Committees) routinely

advise the MPO on major plans and studies.

The MPO produces a regional, long-range 20-year transportation plan, a three-year transportation improvement program and related plans and studies. Within the regional MPO framework, local governments and state and local transportation agencies refine project proposals submitted to the MPO for review and approval as part of its TIP. Be sure to visit our web site at www.richmondregional.org for additional information on the Richmond Area MPO.

2018 Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP)

Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)

The Richmond Region's Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) serves as the initial step and framework in developing a regionally based network of transportation facilities and services. It covers the next 20 years and is the major document from which other transportation plans and programs will be drawn. It includes a "vision" plan and a federally required "constrained" plan. The constrained plan deals only with projects for which funding is known to be reasonably available.

The Richmond Region's Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) is developed and updated annually by the Richmond Area MPO. It must be consistent with the LRTP and, through air quality conformity determination, improve air quality. Preparation of the TIP is required for the continued receipt of federal assistance for transportation projects and programs.

Included in the TIP is a list of prioritized projects to be carried out within each three-year period after its initial adoption. Only those projects or specific phases of projects for which full funding, both public and private, is anticipated to be available within the time period contemplated for project completion are included.

Specific projects or programs in the TIP include highway improvements; capital expenditures; operating assistance for transit activities; improvements being implemented by VDOT, the City of Richmond, Henrico County, the Town of Ashland, the Richmond Metropolitan Authority and Ridefinders; Charles City County projects receiving Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) funding; private nonprofit organizations that are programmed to receive FTA Section 16 capital funds for the elderly and disabled; and organizations that are programmed to receive funds for transportation enhancement projects.

For additional information on these and other documents, visit our web site at www.richmondregional.org

Getting There... (cont'd.)

Beyond Automobiles...*a.k.a. Life beyond SOVs (single-occupant vehicles)*

GRTC – This past legislative session provided GRTC with \$5.2 million to expand bus services into neighboring counties. This includes monies from federal and state agencies as well as a match by the state Commonwealth Transportation Board for up to \$840,000. In addition, the Richmond Area MPO has allocated \$461,753 toward a comprehensive operational analysis/regional public transportation study. The study's goal is to make the existing GRTC service network more productive and efficient, address expansion viability and assist in meeting evolving regional economic goals.

Richmond International Airport – Baggage claim areas on both sides of the terminals; an additional seven gates in just one corridor; new, covered parking spaces; a dual-level arrival and departure system—not to mention your favorite coffee shop. These are some of the conveniences—no, necessities—the Richmond Airport will highlight within the next five years. Travelers for some time now have reiterated the need for expansion of our capital city airport. With \$98 million in current funding (or at least in the mail), land clearing started in June to get the ball rolling, but for many Richmond residents the question is not how much but how can we get it done sooner.

Congestion Management...

CMS, or Congestion Management System, is a requirement of federal legislation TEA-21 (Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century) and impacts those urban areas larger than 200,000 in population. The intent of the CMS is to provide a documented process for managing highway congestion in the Richmond region and must be updated annually.

This year's update incorporates a few new features. The Tri-Cities area has been incorporated into the travel
(Continued on page 8)

Priority Projects...

The MPO approved the following seven transportation projects in priority order at its March 11, 1999 meeting and presented them to the Commonwealth Transportation Board on March 16, 1999 for the VDOT Richmond District Preallocation Public Hearing:

- 1 RIC Expansion and Access Improvements.** Expansion of Richmond International Airport and provide direct, convenient access through the I-64/Route 895 Direct Airport Access Road.
- 2 Route 288.** Continued funding for the western leg of the region's circumferential highway.
- 3 Route 360 East of I-295 (Hanover County).** Continued funding for widening of this major arterial in this high growth corridor.
- 4 Main Street Station, High Speed Intercity Rail, GRTC Improvements.** Continued funding for the Main Street Station project in downtown Richmond, development of high speed rail linking the Richmond and Washington metropolitan areas, and funding for Greater Richmond Transit Company (GRTC) facilities and current services.
- 5 Route 360 West and Route 10 Widening (Chesterfield County).** Funds needed to add capacity to improve traffic flow in these two high growth corridors.
- 6 RMA and Powhite Parkway Extension Toll Removal.** Pay off highway construction bonds used to fund the Downtown Expressway, Powhite Parkway, and the Powhite Parkway Extension.
- 7 Parham Road/Patterson Avenue Urban Interchange (Henrico County).** Urban interchange needed to provide congestion relief at the juncture of two major highways in the Region's West End.

Please direct questions, comments and kind words regarding this newsletter to Patricia Villa at the Richmond Regional PDC at (804) 358-3684.

Getting There... (cont'd.)

(Continued from page 7)

forecasting model to give a more realistic set of data from which to gauge congestion. Based on the results of the model, moderate congestion may be experienced on roughly 50 miles of Richmond highways by the year 2018, and heavy congestion is expected on approximately seven miles of Richmond highways. The entire updated CMS document is available on our web site.

In addition, staff is excited about the incorporation of a satellite-based system developed by the US Department of Defense (DOD) called **Global Positioning System (GPS)** into the CMS data collection cycle. GPS is used to locate latitude, longitude and height by receiving signals from satellites. Users are able to determine position, velocity and time 24-hours a day. This summer, using the GPS, staff began an extensive data collection routine on major Richmond roads to collect real-time speed data that will be used to study traffic delays in future CMS updates. Staff can now identify areas of

congestion, compare speeds of roadways before and after transportation improvements and analyze peak periods. Used with special mapping software, data is displayed in the form of maps and charts for easy interpretation.

GPS is better than the traditional methods of collecting speed and time data because unlike previous methods, only one person is needed to collect the data, the person does not have to record while driving and there is less room for error, making the data more accurate.

The Richmond Regional PDC is breaking ground in Virginia by being the first planning agency in the Commonwealth to use this system for transportation data collection and analysis. Other agencies are showing their interest and are looking to the Richmond Regional PDC for guidance.

For more information, contact Wanda Moore or Brad Shelton at 358-3684 at the Richmond Regional PDC.

Richmond Regional Planning District Commission

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ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

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