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## Northern Virginia Regional Commission

### Steering Committee Meeting Thursday, October 26, 2017

Hosted by:

Kent S. Digby, Executive Vice President of Peterson Company  
The Sunset Room  
137 National Plaza, National Harbor, MD

In attendance:

Frank Principi, Prince William County Board of County Supervisors/ Woodbridge, and Committee Chair  
Noel Comeaux, Transportation Research Board Committee on Passenger Ferry  
Mark Oliphant, Joint Base Anacostia-Bolling  
Tim Payne, Nelson Nygaard  
Bob Williams, Nelson Nygaard  
Chris Borgal, Peterson Companies  
Peggy Tadej, NVRC  
Rosa Krewson, NVRC & Virginia Tech SPIA  
Willem Polak, Potomac River Boat Co. & Entertainment Cruises  
Kerry Watson, MGM National Harbor  
Amanda Rutherford, MARAD  
Tim Pickering, MARAD  
Lynn Keenan, Town of Indian Head, MD  
Robert Iosco, Virginia Department of Transportation/NOVA Regional Office  
Pam Westling, Westling Development Co.  
Diaka So, Greater Washington Clean City Coalition  
Victor Weissberg, Prince George's County Dept. of Public Works  
Fred Jones, MARAD

1. Welcome & Introductions
  - a. Supervisor Principi welcomed all and provided background on the development of the project to solve transportation problems for the region as well as providing a service for emergency management.
  - b. All attendees introduced themselves and shared what their interest in the project.
2. Report on September 21 Ferry Summit
  - a. Great turnout for event in Woodbridge.
  - b. Lauren of MARAD said this coalition is a model for the nation as public-private partnership collaboration.
3. Update on Project Website
  - a. Website will house all meeting notes, presentations, and reports
  - b. Upcoming events
  - c. Problems experienced viewing website from JBAB
4. Update on FTA Grant
  - a. Tim Payne explained the history of the FTA grant to NVRC and VDOT. This project is exploring how to change the lead agency from VDOT to possible PRTC.
  - b. PRTC has added the development of ferry service to their newly adopted strategic plan.
  - c. VDOT is interested in making PRTC the new grantee and is cooperating.
  - d. The grant also needs to be amended to move the point from Jones Park in Alexandria to Woodbridge, VA. The ferry service would run from Woodbridge to JBAB and other points in the District of Columbia. FTA will decide if they will actually sign the \$3.3M once the environmental study has been completed (NEPA documentation). This study determines which class of action the project will fall under, e.g. categorical exclusion, or full EIS, as per NEPA rules.
  - e. Deadline to commit FTA funds is looming – September 2019
5. Social Media
  - a. Participants are invited to like and share, retweet, etc. from the Facebook and Twitter accounts: Facebook Page is Potomac Fast Ferry; and Twitter handle is @potomacfastferr
  - b. For this event, NVRC created Facebook and Twitter accounts to further engage the communities in Prince George's and Charles County
  - c. A Facebook ad was also bought to run for 3 days to target residents from Prince William, Prince George's and Charles Counties that resulted in:
    - i. Target population of 1 million;
    - ii. Over 3,000 reached with 582 views
    - iii. 27 clicks
    - iv. 7 "likes"
6. Report – Water Taxi at DC Wharf opened on October 12, 2017
  - a. The water taxi's arrived and provided free rides during the opening. Willem Polak provided participants with card to try the new water taxis at The Wharf.
7. Progress Report on Travel Demand analysis
  - a. Travel demand model used by WMCOG does not include ferries as a mode of transportation, although it does include "slugging."
  - b. Nelson Nygaard was asked to review the WMCOG model to include ferries and model pilot program using Travel Analysis Zones (TAZ) based upon Census tracts with the current environment.

- c. Using characteristics (demographics, economics, work destination), the model tries to forecast behaviors for transportation; converts time and money spent commuting into costs (\$\$\$)
  - d. Woodbridge market was divided based on time to get to ferry (15 minutes is the primary market; 15 to 30 min is the secondary market because they are less likely to use; more than 30 min, it's highly unlikely, but still within realm of use)
  - e. Occoquan River is a "choke point" along I-95 and Route One for traffic congestion as the bridges narrows the number of lanes to traverse.
  - f. Destination zones are marked as either pedestrian accessible or transit accessible
    - i. Sites under consideration because of these parameters are:
      1. JBAB (N & S)
      2. National Harbor
      3. Diamond Teague Park
      4. The Yards
      5. DC Wharf
      6. Georgetown
  - g. The Department of Homeland Security's new location (directly behind JBAB) only offers 1 parking space for every 4 employees, which means that alternative modes for commuting must be established
  - h. Basic travel demand analysis identified 240,305 daily commute trips occur within the study area and 83% are made by car, 49% by single occupancy vehicle.
  - i. Roughly 50,000 of those trips are produced/attracted by TAZs within 15 minutes of Woodbridge.
  - j. Average commute time from TAZs within 15 minutes of Woodbridge is 90 minutes, while from TAZs within 30 minutes of Woodbridge the average commute is 109 min; noting modeling margins of error. The next step of the model is to compare what the prediction to what is actually happening in reality. Based on these numbers, however, it looks promising for fast ferry commuting due to the time savings by water.
  - k. Concern of elected leaders that SOV's will not actually shift that behavior but rather take people off buses or VRE. Finding is that people who are already using alternative modes rather than SOVs are less likely to switch, but SOVs are still looking for a better way to commute. Based on observations of Seattle area commuters, more options attract SOVs.
  - l. Second factor of switching modes is the economics –how much does it costs to switch will also determine whether someone is willing to switch.
  - m. Diversifying the modes of transportation is the only way to deal with traffic congestion effectively; building more freeways, highways, bridges, etc. doesn't work.
8. Progress on Infrastructure Gap Analysis
- a. The purpose of the study is about – where are we now, and what do we need to do to be up and running within 5 years?
  - b. None of the existing docks today are commercially viable for commuter service
  - c. Criteria and evaluation of sites:
    - i. Transit connections to Metro or bus
    - ii. Parking, walk ways, shelter, lighting
    - iii. Dredging needed
    - iv. Cost of access
    - v. Suitability to apply FTA funds (cannot be used to develop privately owned property)

9. Other Matters of Interest

- a. Difficulty reaching website from certain government computers. After discussion, may have to do with not being a secure site (https).

10. Next Steering Committee Meeting

- a. Date is TBD
- b. Community outreach has been challenging, and no venue or date has been secured for DC. Possibly might not happen until end of January or February
- c. Attendees are invited to stay to listen to the panel and open house outreach event that starts at 3. Spending time with the public is valuable in order to increase awareness and demystify how it might impact local communities.

Community Outreach Presentation (5 to 6:30 PM)

Panelist:

Mark Oliphant, JBAB

Willem Polack, Potomac Riverboat/Entertainment Cruises

Tim Pickering, MARAD

Tim Payne, Nelson Nygaard

### **Welcome & Introductions by Supervisor Principi**

All participants were encouraged to ask questions. A commuter fast ferry is a new concept to the region, and probably the biggest challenge is changing driving behaviors. Ultimately, we will see the river being used for transportation.

Tim Pickering – MARAD designates 29,000 miles of waterways as part of the Marine Highway System. Once a waterway is designated, MARAD can accept applications for service between two points. Normally, MARAD works with public-private partnerships on freight projects with very few stakeholders. As a commuter in the DC area, he knows how important solving the congestion problem. Additional funding for grants becomes available soon. The program is primarily used for land side improvements/investments.

Willem Polak – Sold his Potomac River Boat Co. to Entertainment Cruises based out of Chicago. Business started from Old Town to National Harbor, but now expanded to Nationals Stadium, Georgetown, Mt. Vernon, and The Wharf. Interested in partnership with marinas on the Occoquan. Mr. Polak believes a boat can be built that operates at a maximum speed of 40 miles per hour, ferrying people from Woodbridge to points in the District of Columbia can be done in under an hour, which is significantly less than the current commute time. This boat would cost \$8.5 million. Shorter commutes from Indian Head to Ft. Belvoir in 15 to 20 minutes. New taxi service just opened from the DC Wharf, and will expand to National Harbor from the Wharf with the arrival of two more boats in March 2018.

Marc Oliphant - Represents Jose Rodriguez, commanding officer at Joint Base Anacostia-Bolling; their facilities have about 3 miles of shoreline along the Potomac and Anacostia Rivers. 4,000 people live on the base and an additional 15,000 workers come to the base daily. Naval District Washington, which oversees this and other area Navy installations, is interested in alternative transportation options. Due to the size of the base, they would need shuttles to Metro. There are currently two locations that could be potential terminal sites at JBAB, a recreational marina at the south end and a previously operational dock at the north end. Federal employees could be major drivers of commuter fast ferry because of the federal transit subsidy of \$255 per month that all federal employees are eligible to receive. Ferries are also eligible for the Federal Transit subsidy that employees could use. JBAB was named in the original FTA grant, but has been looking for a sending location. Now it seems like it will be in Woodbridge.

Tim Payne – Shared preliminary findings of the Infrastructure Gap Analysis and overview of what the study covers. Pictures of the sites under consideration were shown. Basically what is available now that could be developed to be fully operational is within 5 years. Study considers suitable vessel designs that are available to be built. NYC is probably one generation ahead of where we are now in terms of vessel design. Challenges on the Potomac River are the depth as it varies and is shallow water in places, floating debris, and ice under the bridges etc. New boat designs produce less wake at higher speeds.

Questions from public:

1. What about service from Indian Head?

- a. There is interest and the Town of Indian Head was involved during the market analysis, but it's a matter of working with the Navy to get the property turned over and a road built down to the waterfront. There is an unused bulkhead that could be used, but at the time was cost prohibitive. The bank is very susceptible to erosion and so a lot of work would need to be done. It is an ideal point, but there is also great cost and time involved in securing the site from the Navy.
2. What about Indian Head to National Harbor to relieve traffic on 210?
  - a. Once terminals are in place, there are many possibilities because boats can travel in any direction, but again land side costs and the market size must be reasonable.
3. What about Ft. Washington Marina?
  - a. It's run by the National Parks Service in a residential area and shallow water. It is unclear what the Parks Service's plans are for the site. Probably not as viable from a commuter or economic perspective.
4. Charles County EDC is interested, but the political branch is pro-environmental and would be concerned about developing parking lots for commuters.
  - a. Waterfront development is gaining momentum, so it's possible that a developer can come into the community and try to resolve some of the congestion issues.
5. How would you engage with smaller businesses that want to bring in smaller vessels?
  - a. MARAD opens granting opportunities as service for P3; the business partner must find a public partner to submit the application for review; if it's vetted, most likely it will be approved. No funding comes with the approval, but it comes with MARAD seal of approval. Then those that are accepted (up to 19 per year), then you are eligible for grant funds. FY17 is \$5M and generally awards less than \$1 million per award. MARAD will host a webinar in Mid-November to explain the process.
  - b. The MARAD website can be reviewed for grants that were approved
6. What would be the hours of operation?
  - a. Possibly start at 5 AM for AM Rush and go until 8 PM for PM Rush, but ridership would dictate changes/refinements
7. Has the system for using Smartrip been worked out?
  - a. Not yet, but it is the most logical thing to do once the project moves forward.
8. We seem to use different terms for the service – fast ferry, taxi ferry, commuter fast ferry; what's the difference?
  - a. Best to call this a commuter fast ferry service. Water taxi might be used interchangeably as the market analysis is conducted.
  - b. Also depends on the type vessel being used. Smaller boats can be used as taxi's.
  - c. Main reason that this should be P3 is so that the private sector can figure out additional markets for how to use ferries, such as freight.
9. What are we doing to make sure the information is getting out to the public?
  - a. An outreach event was held in Woodbridge, with a good turn out, but more needs to be done to engage communities in MD and DC.
10. What are the next steps for service to start in Woodbridge?
  - a. The market will determine to ensure coverage of cost, fuel, number vessels, size, etc.; once the market analysis is done, we'll know what we need to invest in.
  - b. Second piece is land acquisition to develop the terminal sites and a year to build the boats.
11. What is a realistic timeframe for this actually happening?
  - a. Could be 2 years or less
  - b. Point of study is to make sure that it's all running within 5 years

- c. Jones Act prevents buying a vessel from Europe or Asia