



Transit still getting more than its fair share

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It will be an early Christmas for local public officials who make up the Northern Virginia Transportation Authority. The massive transportation tax increase passed by the Virginia General Assembly and signed by Gov. Bob McDonnell gives them \$190 million to spend on regional projects and \$85 million for local projects next year. The huge financial infusion of \$1.9 billion over the next six years is supposed to be spent reducing congestion in the most traffic-choked region of the commonwealth.

But congestion-weary commuters are unlikely to see much real relief. NVRTA's Six-Year Plan, which has not even been coordinated with the Virginia Department of Transportation's similarly named capital construction blueprint, spends too much on transit and too little on new roads. The original list had 26 transit projects compared to just 16 road projects, all selected without public input. This is the same misallocation of resources that caused Northern Virginia's traffic problems in the first place.

Fairfax County Board Chairwoman Sharon Bulova, a voting member of NVRTA and the top public official of the region's largest jurisdiction, wants to spend most of her county's transportation windfall on the Route 28 Metrorail station. There will be no major highway construction project despite the fact that 73 percent of Bulova's constituents drive alone to work and only 10 percent take mass transit.

It's the same in NVRTA's other eight jurisdictions, where 42 percent of the long-awaited transportation money will be spent on buses, streetcars, pedestrian bridges, commuter rail platforms and even power upgrades on Metro's Orange Line without any cost/benefit analyses answering the basic question: Will this project reduce traffic congestion when upwards of 85 to 90 percent of our commuters simply cannot use transit?

We already know from the Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority's consultant that the sky-high tolls needed to pay for the Silver Line will divert three drivers off the Dulles Toll Road for every one new Metrorail rider. But MWAA built an electrical substation in the same spot engineers determined was the best place for footers for the "Soapstone Bridge," a project Reston 2020 describes as "the one infrastructure project that gives the most hope of improving access to the Wiehle-Reston East Metro Station and relieving congestion on Wiehle Avenue."

As Cato Institute transportation expert Randal O'Toole put it, "a cost-benefit analysis is essential for a rational planning process, but government planning can never be rational because politics always overwhelms reason."

