

Northern Virginia Transportation Alliance
Comments on House Bill 2/Six-Year Improvement Plan
October 16, 2014

HB 2 started off based on measuring value in terms of congestion reduction in Northern Virginia and Hampton Roads and economic development promotion elsewhere.

Somewhere along the way in the General Assembly safety, accessibility and environmental quality were added in, regionally funded projects in NV and HR were excluded (but regional funds represent the bulk of the HB 2313 new construction dollars) and a bunch of other categories of projects were also excluded from evaluation.

In Northern Virginia and Hampton Roads congestion is the greatest impediment to economic development and accessibility. In fact, better access to jobs makes areas more attractive to more businesses and higher skilled workers. Safety is always a concern but presumably every project (new or existing) will result in a safer system. As for environmental quality, strict federal and state laws already protect/mitigate environment from degradation. Air quality will continue to improve with cleaner vehicles and alternative fuel entering the market.

Turning to other parts of the state where congestion is not a factor. Again, economic development should be the main consideration (per HB 2's original intent). But "economic development" should be accompanied by a clearer understanding of what in the way of economic development is likely to occur with such an improvement, as opposed to "build it and they will come" approach. Similarly making some parts of the state "more accessible" doesn't guarantee economic development or investment. What about safety? Sure, but again in most cases this should be tied to traffic volume/ADT. In other words most safety dollars should go to address greatest needs in terms of more heavily travelled areas. In fact, it would be helpful for VDOT to develop a list of the most dangerous roadways and a rating scale for such.

As for environment, again observation is the same. Existing laws are quite strict. Air quality is improving. And let's not pretend that improving transportation promotes global warming. In fact not improving transportation results in more congestion and more warming.

Bottom line: Looking closely at these comments we have come full circle. A preponderance of value should be assigned to congestion mitigation projects, with time delay reduction being the key measure, in Northern Virginia and Hampton Roads and a preponderance of weight in other areas to should be assigned to economic development (which by definition most likely involves improved access) with the proviso that economic benefits should be tied to specific economic development proposals as opposed to a general if we build it they will come attitude.