



**Charlottesville-Albemarle Metropolitan Planning Organization  
of the Thomas Jefferson Planning District Commission**

POB 1505, 401 E. Water St, Charlottesville, VA 22902 www.tjpd.org  
(434) 979-7310 phone; (434) 979-1597 fax; info@tjpd.org email

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**MEMORANDUM**

To: MPO Policy Board  
FROM: Rhonda Edmunds  
DATE: March 8, 2006  
RE: Regional Transit Authority

Attached is a first draft of Issues and Considerations for a Regional Transit Authority for the Charlottesville Area. Due to timing of this research coinciding with the heavy legislative schedules of transit agencies, this is still a work in progress. More information will be presented at your meeting next week.

Before DRPT Director Karen Rae left, she directed Chip Badger to assist us with the research and analysis efforts of a RTA. We have invited Chip to attend the April MPO Policy Board meeting pending completion of the legislative session. We are also asking Mark Rickards, new Executive Director of the Williamsburg Area Transport (WAT), for assistance in informing us how his region's RTA is being set up, particularly addressing the process of negotiations and discussions between partners.

We are still in the process of getting information from entities of similar size and issues from across the country as recommended by the FTA and the American Public Transit Association (APTA). Along with the Williamsburg Area Transport, Hampton Roads and Northern Virginia Transportation Commission are also being looked at as they are all under the same Virginia statute.

# **Regional Transit Authority for the Charlottesville Area Issues and Considerations**

## **Introduction**

A Regional Transit Authority (RTA) is an authority that brings together independent transit agencies under one umbrella for the purpose of providing seamless transit services in the region. Such an authority can also serve in broader transportation functions such as car/vanpooling and other alternative modes to the single occupant vehicle.

A Regional Transit Authority is currently being considered for the Charlottesville, VA area for the purpose of providing area residents with a seamless system with the most benefit.

## **Analysis of Regional Transit Authorities**

Advantages of an RTA:

- Provides more seamless transit services for riders
- Helps develop a dedicated funding source
- Leads to more effective regional planning
- Allows for more efficient coordination and effective integration
- Addresses regional congestion and air quality issues more effectively
- Integrates land use and transportation planning more effectively

Disadvantages of an RTA:

- Could add another administrative layer
- Potential loss of local autonomy
- Perceived unfair funding allocations can lead to conflict

## **Legal Authority**

There is current legislation under the Virginia Code that allows for the creation of a RTA:

- Chapter 15.2-2400-2403 (creation of Service Districts)
- Chapter 15.2-4504 – 4526 (creation of Transit District Commissions)

According to the Draft Williamsburg Area Public Transportation Study, the latter set of regulations is more commonly used for multi-jurisdictional transit agencies in the Commonwealth. (*See Enabling Authority statutes at end of memo*)

## **Examples of Regional Transit Authorities (Existing or Underway)**

### **Williamsburg, VA**

- In process of study to determine the feasibility of establishing public transportation entity involving all stakeholders while creating an independent, multi-jurisdictional entity to own, plan for, and operate transit services in the region.
- Appear to be leaning toward creation of a Transit District Commission

- Biggest issue is the allocation of costs among the parties
- Partners include James City County, City of Williamsburg, College of William and Mary, and the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation
- Current systems in place are the Williamsburg Area Transport (which includes James City County, City of Williamsburg, College of William and Mary and run by James City County) and the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation

### **North Carolina Triangle**

Since 2002, Triangle urban and regional fixed route and community public transportation systems have undertaken several projects aimed at coordinating and consolidating their services and functions.

In the spring of 2002, the mayors of Cary, Chapel Hill, Durham and Raleigh expressed interest in consolidating their bus systems, along with *Wolfline*, the bus system at North Carolina State University, and the regional system operated by the Triangle Transit Authority. The effort was intended to build on past and current initiatives to streamline transit services, expand transit options and meet future needs of our communities, while recognizing that improved transit services are critical to the Triangle's future economic competitiveness and quality of life. The *Triangle Region Transit Consolidation/Implementation Plan* was completed in August 2003.

Between March-September 2005, urban and regional fixed route transit systems decided to pursue increased coordination. The cities of Durham and Raleigh, the Triangle Transit Authority and the towns of Cary and Chapel Hill developed and initiated the Triangle Seamless Public Transportation Service Project. As part of the Project, staff identified a number of demonstration activities and tasks to be implemented between September 2005 and March 2007 in order to provide the most seamless public transportation service possible in the Triangle region, without merging staffs or consolidating operations under a single regional system.

In the spring of 2005, after meeting with officials from the North Carolina Department of Transportation's Public Transportation Division, Triangle area County Board Chairs expressed interest in preparing a Regional Transportation Development Plan (RTDP) for Durham, Orange and Wake counties. The Plan is intended to assess the opportunities for regionalizing services among their community transportation systems and with urban and regional systems in the Triangle. Efforts to prepare the Triangle Region Transportation Development Plan were initiated during September 2005.

### **Other Examples:**

Hampton Roads  
 Northern Virginia Regional  
 Champaign-Urbana Mass Transit District  
 Lane Transit District, Eugene OR

## **Exploring an RTA in Charlottesville-Albemarle**

### **Charlottesville Area Transit Partners**

Charlottesville Transit Service (CTS)  
County of Albemarle (County)  
University Transit Service (UTS)  
JAUNT

### **Operating Agencies**

Charlottesville Transit Service (CTS)  
University Transit Service (UTS)  
JAUNT

### **Decide legal authority to seek**

- Currently two statutes give authority to create RTA; assess pros and cons of both
- Determine if there is a need to seek new legislative authority

### **Funding Mechanisms Available**

Currently, the two operating agencies receive independent funding. Both Charlottesville Transit Service and JAUNT receive the majority of their funding from the Federal Transit Administration supplemented with funding from the Department of Rail and Public Transportation and local funding. The University Transit Service receives funding from the University of Virginia.

Future additional funding can come from various sources, including dedicated funds from options recommended by the Transportation Funding Options Working Group (sales and/or gas tax were recommended for accelerated funding for transportation projects).

## **Further Issues to Explore**

### **Governance**

- Board structure
- Board role
- Board make-up/selection/length of term
- Advisory Committee

### **Administrative Steps**

- Allocation formulas
- Fiscal agent
- Operating budget
- Capital procurement plan
- Maintenance and upkeep of existing and future bus shelters
- Employee concerns

**Current routes**

- Assess current routing
- Determine needs being met
- Determine overlaps

**Vehicle needs**

- Assess current vehicle fleet
- Assess vehicle needs after “merger”

**Maintenance issues**

- Determine current maintenance
- Assess feasibility of combined maintenance facility, location

**New routes**

- Assess new routes needed
- Growth and new development in the County has created a need for expanded transit service

**Expanded or revised schedules**

- Assess need for increased headways

**Marketing**

- Begins with public education campaign on transit in general
- Have to work to gain “choice riders” faith
- Determine best ways to market actual routes and services

## Enabling Legal Authority

### ▪ **Chapter 15.2-2400 – 2403 (creation of Service Districts)**

#### Chapter 15.2-2400. Creation of service districts.

*Any locality may by ordinance, or any two or more localities may by concurrent ordinances, create service districts within the locality or localities. Service districts may be created to provide additional, more complete or more timely services of government than are desired in the locality or localities as a whole. A public hearing is required prior to the creation of the service district.*

#### Chapter 15.2-2402. Description of proposed service district.

Any ordinance or petition to create a service district shall:

1. Set forth the name and describe the boundaries of the proposed district and specify any areas within the district that are to be excluded;
2. Describe the purposes of the district and the facilities and services proposed within the district;
3. Describe a proposed plan for providing such facilities and services within the district; and
4. Describe the benefits which can be expected from the provision of such facilities and services within the district.

#### Chapter 15.2-2403. Powers of service districts.

After adoption of an ordinance or ordinances or the entry of an order creating a service district, the governing body or bodies shall have the following powers with respect to the service districts:

1. To construct, maintain and operate such facilities and equipment as may be necessary or desirable to provide additional, more complete or more timely governmental services within a service district
2. To provide, in addition to services authorized by subdivision 1, transportation and transportation services within a service district, including, but not limited to: public transportation systems serving the district; transportation management services; road construction; rehabilitation and replacement of existing transportation facilities or systems; and sound walls or sound barriers. However, any transportation service, system, facility, roadway, or roadway appurtenance established under this subdivision that will be operated or maintained by the Virginia Department of Transportation shall be established with the involvement of the governing body of the locality and meet the appropriate requirements of the Department.
3. To acquire in accordance with § 15.2-1800, any such facilities and equipment and rights, title, interest or easements therefore in and to real estate in such district and maintain and operate the same as may be necessary and desirable to provide the governmental services authorized by subdivisions 1 and 2.
4. To contract with any person, municipality or state agency to provide the governmental services authorized by subdivisions 1 and 2 and to construct, establish, maintain and operate any such facilities and equipment as may be necessary and desirable in connection therewith.

7. To accept the allocation, contribution or funds of, or to reimburse from, any available source, including, but not limited to, any person, authority, transportation district, or state or federal agency for either the whole or any part of the costs, expenses and charges incident to the acquisition, construction, reconstruction, maintenance, alteration, improvement, expansion and the operation or maintenance of any facilities and services in the district.
8. To employ and fix the compensation of any technical, clerical or other force and help which from time to time, in their judgment may be necessary or desirable to provide the governmental services authorized by subdivisions 1, 2 and 11 or for the construction, operation or maintenance of any such facilities and equipment as may be necessary or desirable in connection therewith.
10. To negotiate and contract with any person or municipality with regard to the connections of any such system or systems with any other system or systems now in operation or hereafter established, and with regard to any other matter necessary and proper for the construction or operation and maintenance of any such system within the district.
12. To contract with any state agency or state or local authority for services within the power of the agency or authority related to the financing, construction or operation of the facilities and services to be provided within the district; however, nothing in this subdivision shall authorize a locality to obligate its general tax revenues, or to pledge its full faith and credit.

▪ **Chapter 15.2-4504 – 4526 (creation of Transit District Commissions)**

Chapter 15.2-4504. Procedure for creation of districts; single jurisdictional districts; application of chapter to port authorities and airport commissions.

(1) Any two or more counties or cities, or combinations thereof, may constitute a transportation district and shall have and exercise the powers set forth herein and such additional powers as may be granted by the General Assembly. *A transportation district may be created by ordinance adopted by the governing body of each participating county and city*, which ordinances shall

- (1) Set forth the name of the proposed transportation district (which shall include the words "transit district" or "transportation district"),
- (2) Shall fix the boundaries thereof,
- (3) Shall name the counties and cities which are in whole or in part to be embraced therein, and
- (4) Contain a finding that the orderly growth and development of the county or city and the comfort, convenience and safety of its citizens require an improved transportation system, composed of transit facilities, public highways and other modes of transport, and that joint action through a transportation district by the counties and cities which are to compose the proposed transportation district will facilitate the planning and development of the needed transportation system.

Such ordinances shall be filed with the Secretary of the Commonwealth and upon certification by that officer to the governing bodies ... shall be and constitute a transportation district for all of the purposes of this chapter, known and designated by the name stated in the ordinances.

# Regional Transit Authority Analysis Outline

*Excerpted by MPO staff from analysis done for TennDOT by TranSystems, looking at Central Tennessee region. These are not yet in any way recommendations for implementation, merely for further study and discussion.*

## General Considerations

- Geographic coverage
- Types of services provided
- Operations and management functions
- Funding
- Then think about 'models' or structures

## Geographic Coverage

- City
- County
- Multi-County
- Other

## Types of Services

- Single transit mode
  - Bus, rail
- Transit only / multiple modes
  - MATA, Boston, Chicago, Atlanta
- Broader transportation functions
  - HOV lane operation
  - Ports, airport
  - Ridesharing
  - Recreational trails
  - Other?

## Operations and Management

- Planning / Financing only - operations by others
- Operations only
- Both Planning / Financing and Operations
- These decisions heavily influenced by existing situations

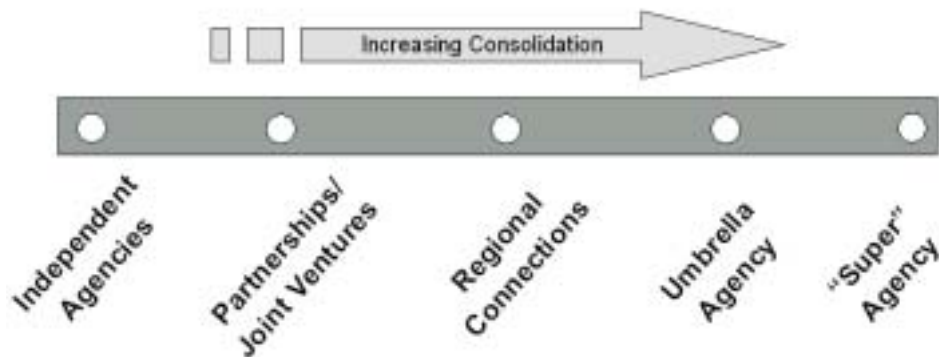
## Funding

- Direct levy of tax or fees with voter approval
  - Chicago, Dallas, Phoenix, Charlotte
- Assess local governments
  - Massachusetts RTAs, Nashville RTA
- Pass through Federal and other grants
  - Most agencies
- Private sector partnerships
  - Corporate, universities

## Overview of Options for structure and funding

- Discuss:
  - Wide range of potential structures
  - Examples
  - Pros
  - Cons
- What might make sense for our region?

## Many Options for structure and funding



### Independent Agencies

#### *Independent Transit Agencies*



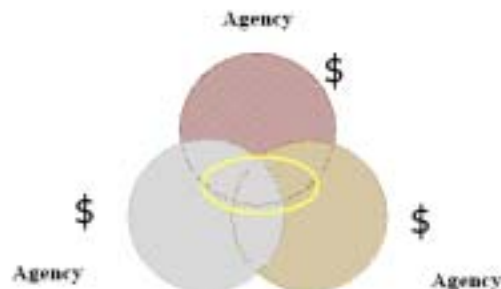
*Multiple entities provide service to an area, and there is no regional transit authority. Each agency receives its own funding and is vested with its own authority. Agencies may coordinate service.*

- Agencies can serve:
  - A particular geography (city or other service area)
  - A particular mode (usually a commuter rail agency)
- Examples:
  - Geographic based
    - ◆ MTA, Franklin, Bay Area, Washington DC area
  - Modal
    - ◆ VRE, Metrolink, ACE, Tri-Rail, Metra, MetroNorth, LIRR

## Independent Agencies pro's and con's

Pro	Con
Agency autonomy can provide local support and responsiveness	Service to customers suffers if coordination between agencies not successful
	Can end up with 'holes' in the system / 'holes' hard to fill

## Partnerships / Joint Ventures



*Multiple agencies or entities entering into and informal or formal agreements to fund and/or provide a specific type of service. An agreement for coordination is an essential element of this type of structure.*

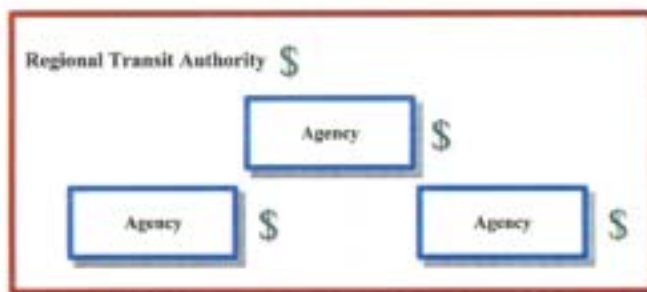
- Coordination can be between:
  - Modal agencies to serve a geographic area
  - Different agencies to provide a new type of service between service areas
- Agreements can range in structure and authority
  - Limited to extensive
- Often exist within a regional structure
- Examples:
  - TRE, VRE, MetroLink, Tri-Rail

## Partnerships / Joint Ventures pro's and con's

Pro	Con
Can provide structure to make services in region more seamless	Difficult if there are limited connecting services
Maintains autonomy of individual agencies	Often difficult relationships between independent parties

## Regional Connections

### *Regional Connections*



*The regional transit authority provides service in areas unserved by independent transit agencies operating in the region. The funding and authority of each agency are independent of the regional transit authority. Services may be coordinated.*

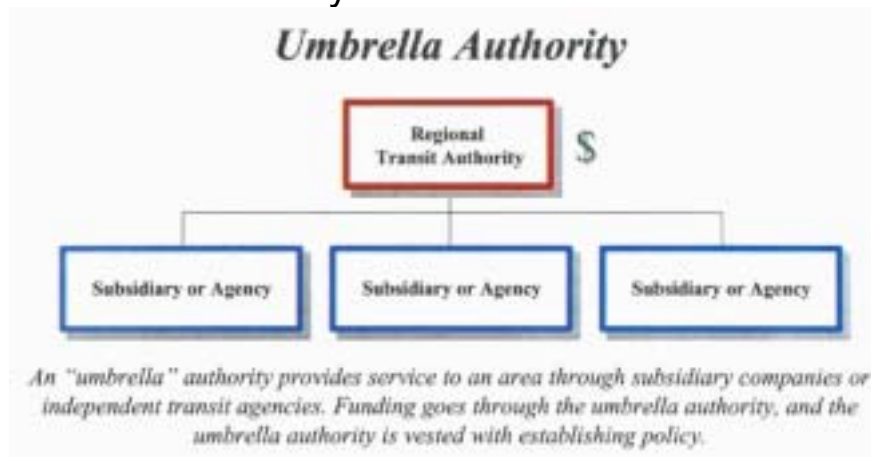
#### ■ Examples:

- ◆ Sound Transit, Valley Metro - Phoenix

## Regional Connections pro's and con's

Pro	Con
<i>Provides platform for regional issues / services</i>	<i>Role of regional agency often disputed, conflicts with in place agencies</i>
<i>Can provide a common 'brand' for independent services</i>	<i>Service to customers suffers if coordination between agencies is not successful</i>
	<i>Can end up with or retain 'holes' in the system</i>

## Umbrella Authority

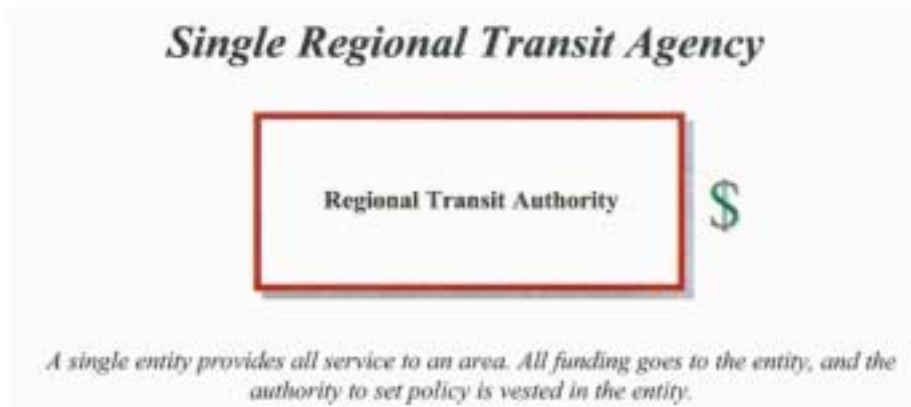


- Key features:
  - Consolidated regional funding
  - Operating entities retain different levels of autonomy depending on the region
- Examples:
  - Chicago RTA, New York MTA, MTDB

## Umbrella Authority pro's and con's

Pro	Con
<i>Possible to obtain single, steady funding source</i>	<i>Still requires high levels of cooperation to build consensus</i>
<i>Provides standardization, coordination for regional issues</i>	<i>Balance of urban / suburban interests and funding can be challenging</i>

## “Super” Agency



- Examples:
  - Houston, Austin, San Antonio, Los Angeles

## “Super” Agency pro's and con's

Pro	Con
<i>Funding and policies all set by single agency</i>	<i>Local autonomy and sport can be limited</i>
<i>Provides standardization, coordination for regional agencies</i>	<i>Balance of urban / suburban interests and funding can be challenging</i>

## Possible Core Powers for RTO

- Develop a plan, conduct research
- Hire staff, consultants
- Enter into contracts with other local government entities (and school districts for pupil transportation)
- Enter into service contracts
- Utilize government-owned ROW and facilities
- Purchase/lease property
- Construct, operate and maintain facilities
- Have jurisdiction over public transportation in area
- Set fees and fares with municipal body approval
- Facilitate coordination of transportation plans
- Borrow money

### Optional Powers for RTO

- Eminent domain
- Issue bonds
- Construct and maintain shelters, bus stops and passenger facilities
- Operate fixed route or other transit service within defined area
- Operate service outside the defined area under contract
- Maintain a security force
- Participate in joint development projects to promote sound growth patterns
- Directly levy taxes/fees

### Ancillary Powers for RTO

- Construct and maintain HOV lanes
- Maintain bikeways and trails
- Acquire, construct, operate or lease terminals, parking facilities, airports, bridges, etc.
- Regulate public providers (e.g., taxis, private bus operators) with local permission
- Provide regional ridesharing, vanpool operations
- Conduct air quality monitoring
- Combine with parking authority by resolution of municipality