Planning for Tomorrow's Changes Today

MONICA BACKMON

While Northern Virginia is defined by its economic opportunity and cultural diversity, we all share a common denominator: frustration about how difficult it can be to get from A to B. That's why planning and investing in a regional transportation network that meets our travel needs is so important.

The key to meeting these needs is performance-based planning, a systematic approach to setting goals and measuring the impact of individual strategies to guide the selection of transportation investments that will achieve the goals or targets.

Congestion in Northern Virginia is at an all-time high, worsening travel times and increasing passenger frustration. (Image via VDOT)

While the Northern Virginia Transportation Authority's (NVTA) TransAction 2040 plan, adopted in 2012, focused on prioritized projects that deliver travel that is efficient and reliable, new regional transportation funding from legislation passed by the General Assembly in 2013, as well as recent technological advances, is spurring the NVTA to rethink and retool its plan. By incorporating data-based research, strategic planning and public involvement, we will update our plan to accommodate these new changes.

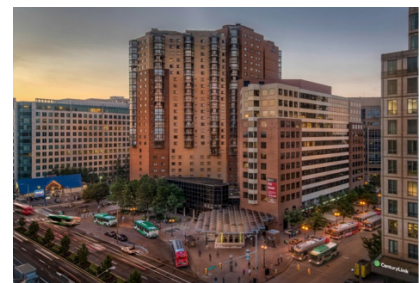Performance-based planning involves three basic steps:

- Setting a direction ("where do we want to go?");
- Evaluating the existing conditions ("where are we now?"); and
- Determining the best course of action to achieve the desired goals ("how do we get there?").

The process is "mode-neutral," focusing on the ends rather than the means of getting there. It's also adaptable to diverse contexts, recognizing that while we all need efficient travel, the way that need is met is different in Loudoun County than in Arlington County.

Careful measurement also serves to guide and direct performance-based planning. The NVTA is using state-of-the-art techniques to both predict future conditions and understand how the transportation system

The varied landscape of Northern Virginia, from rural Loudoun County (top) to bustling Ballston (bottom) means that different areas of the region demand different transportation solutions. Images via Wikipedia and Arlington Transportation Partners.

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may perform under a range of 'alternate futures.' Performance measures include how many miles we travel in the region, how long our trips are, the modes we use to get there, and how efficiently traffic flows on our roads and transit lines. These quantifiable measures tell us how the region is performing today and predict how our transportation assets will perform in the future.

We're also applying lessons learned from other metropolitan areas, including Philadelphia, Boston, Vancouver, and Toronto metro areas, which have recently adopted and begun to implement performance-based plans as seen below:

How Have Other Cities Used Peformance Based Transportation Planning?

PHILADELPHIA

Cooperation between jurisdictions allows the greater region to better assess transportation improvements

BOSTON

Transporation upgrades are used as a way to promote urban livability, and strengthen connections between neighborhoods

TORONTO

Congestion management improves transportation performance, and reduces overall environmental impact

The final and most critical element is involving the public. We are going out to where Northern Virginians live, work and play to learn what they think are our biggest transportation issues and how we should prioritize a range of possible solutions.

During the spring, we learned a lot about what Northern Virginia residents think about area transportation and the region's current and future needs. We received nearly 1,400 comments from residents all across the region. Most respondents felt that improving transit access and network coverage, addressing roadway congestion and automobile capacity, and improving transit service, safety, and reliability were the most important issues and pressing needs for the region. In addition, 87% of respondents also believed that a 25% increase in population would worsen area congestion, citing the need make travel smooth and reliable despite more people in the region and on the roads. These inputs and responses will help us as we devise ways to plan for the future of transportation in the region.

With performance-based planning, we will measure how future transportation solutions can deliver the future that we desire. By doing so, we're ensuring a higher quality of life for our children and their children. Find out more on our website and take our survey to let us know how we can change transportation for the better in Northern Virginia.

Monica Backmon is the Executive Director for the Northern Virginia Transportation Authority. With more than 19 years of public and private sector transportation planning experience, Monica Backmon has served as the Executive Director of the Northern Virginia Transportation Authority (NVTA) since May 2014. She has established herself as a leader in the region through her collaborative work with the Virginia Department of Transportation, the Department of Rail and Public Transportation, the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments, Prince William County, the Northern Virginia Transportation Commission, the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority, the Virginia Railway Express and the Potomac and Rappahannock Transportation Commission.

NVTA's
Trans**Action**

Transportation Action Plan for Northern Virginia