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Dr. Gridlock

Your transportation guide around the Beltway and beyond

What do Va. commuters need?

By Robert Thomson

[TRIP](#), a research and advocacy group sponsored by insurance companies, transportation businesses, labor unions and others interested in building the transportation system, released a list today showing transportation projects it says Virginia needs to prosper.

[Release of the report](#) follows a string of announcements and discussions about what projects the commonwealth needs tackle to over the next several decades. On Monday, a research group released a chilling look at how much still must be done to handle the commuters who will head to Fort Belvoir, the Mark Center and other spots across the region that are part of the military's base relocation program.

Last week, Virginia Transportation Secretary Sean Connaughton renewed a debate over the future of I-95 when he announced that Virginia plans to build High Occupancy Toll lanes along the Interstate, stopping just north of the Capital Beltway.

Meanwhile, the Virginia General Assembly has approved Gov. Robert F. McDonnell's plan to spend about \$3 billion over the next three years to advance about 900 transportation projects across the state.

Collectively, the reports, studies and debates should focus commuters' attention on just what it takes to bust traffic congestion, how much they'd be willing to pay for that and what form the payments should take.

The new TRIP report names 50 surface transportation projects in Virginia "that are most needed to support Virginia's economic growth." Transportation improvements that are good for the economy tend to be good for commuters, too. But commuters I hear from aren't necessarily interested in huge investments. Rather, they often yearn for a few more seconds of green on traffic lights or a new turn lane or exit ramp.

So I invite readers to submit their ideas for what improvements would be most meaningful in Northern Virginia. Here are the Northern Virginia projects that are on TRIP's top 10 list for the state:

Widening I-95 between the District and Richmond. TRIP says this \$2.4 billion project would add two to four lanes in several sections of the I-95 corridor. The project would add four lanes on the Capital Beltway from the I-495 ramp to Route 241 in Fairfax, two lanes (in conjunction with Metrorail extension to be studied from Franconia-Springfield to the Potomac Mills Mall) from Route 123 in Prince William County to the Stafford County line, two lanes from the Prince William/Stafford County line to Route 1 in Spotsylvania County, and two lanes from Route 1 in Spotsylvania County to the Henrico County line.

"This is the most heavily traveled corridor in the state, sustaining the economic engine of Northern Virginia," TRIP said in a statement accompanying the report.

"Continued economic success in the state is dependent on maintaining a reliable and high functioning I-95."

Construction of HOT lanes on I-95/I-395 and transit improvements. TRIP says this \$1.4 billion project would construct HOT lanes on I-95 and I-395 in Alexandria, Arlington, Fairfax, Fredericksburg and Prince William County and provide transit improvements. Adding HOT lanes will increase capacity and improve safety on Virginia's highest-volume roadway. "Northern Virginia's continued economic success is dependent on a reliable and well-functioning I-95 and I-395," according to TRIP. (Note that the HOT lanes plan announced by Connaughton last week does not include HOT lanes on I-395.)

Widening I-66 in Prince William County, Fairfax and Vienna. TRIP says this \$761 million project would add two lanes to I-66 in several locations, largely in conjunction with Metrorail improvements. "It would

address growing congestion on I-66 and alleviate congestion at the major chokepoint where I-495 and I-66 meet. The project would reduce delays and maintain Northern Virginia's economic competitiveness and ability to attract businesses and employers." (The Virginia Department of Transportation's HOT lanes project is rebuilding the I-66 interchange at the Beltway. Other plans call for repaving a section of I-66 from the Beltway west to Route 50.)

Extending Metrorail from Fairfax County to Dulles International Airport and beyond to Ashburn. TRIP says this \$3.2 billion project would extend Metrorail from Wiehle Avenue to Ashburn to increase mobility and manage congestion between Dulles Airport and the District. "Completion of the project will provide significant regional mobility and economic development benefits." (This is the second phase of the rail to Dulles project. The first phase will go through Tysons Corner to Wiehle Avenue.)

Widen portions of Route 29 and add two lanes to the Eastern Bypass in Warrenton. TRIP says this \$849 million project would widen several sections of Route 29 in Fairfax, Prince William, Fauquier, Greene and Albemarle counties and would add two lanes to the Eastern Bypass around Warrenton, where Routes 15, 17 and 29 converge. "Route 29 is a major north-south corridor in the Piedmont region of Virginia, serving a significant amount of freight in addition to passenger traffic. These improvements will also create the potential for economic development by improving access in the area."

The list ranges from front-burner projects, like the I-95 HOT lanes, to dreams that aren't often discussed, like extending Metrorail south from Franconia-Springfield. You can dream, too. What's on your wish list and how would you pay for it?