

Next on the Agenda

Kenneth R. "Ken" Plum

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A recent Transportation Connectivity Conference in Charlottesville produced some good news and some bad news. The good news is that Virginia is underway with a statewide multimodal, long-range transportation plan. VTRANS2025 as the plan process is called has as its mission "to set the policy framework and make plans for an integrated multimodal transportation system that improves mobility and adds to the prosperity and the quality of life in Virginia.

Such a long-range plan is greatly needed and considerations of intermodal connectivity are overdue. The planning process is forcing the determination of prioritization criteria and the relationships between land use and transportation. Among the goals of VTRANS2025 are to "facilitate the efficient movement of people and goods and expand choices and improve interconnectivity of all transportation modes; through technology and more efficient operations, preserve and manage the existing transportation system; and improve the quality of life for Virginians and the coordination of transportation, land use and economic development planning activities." While none of these goals will be met immediately, it is important that they be part of guiding the planning process.

And for the bad news: even with the efficiency coming from careful long range planning and the consideration of intermodal connectivity, the plan has a big price tag. The revenue to support the transportation system of the future in Virginia has not been identified. The 20-year estimated revenues under the present system of taxation are estimated to be \$71.5 billion; the estimated highway construction and maintenance costs are estimated at \$82.61 billion. Current projections are that Virginia will not meet maintenance costs by 2016 and will have to cut back on maintenance. By 2017 Virginia will not be able to match all federal monies.

The story is no better for the other modes of transportation. Transit and rail are expected to produce revenues of \$6.158 billion; the cost of a fully integrated system would be \$23.88 billion. Just maintaining the status quo would cost \$7.34 billion.

Aviation will produce \$524 million in revenue over the next 20 years; its needs are projected at \$5.45 billion. Ports will produce \$906 million but will need \$2.1 billion to modernize to stay competitive.

The Commonwealth took a major step this year in responding to funding needs in education and human services. Next on the agenda must be transportation. Good long-term planning is underway, but for the goals of quality of life and economic competitiveness there must be the political will to act. Innovative solutions including the use of technology will help. Private-public partnerships are a must. Creative solutions like hot lanes are a certainty. Action sooner than later is needed.