

## ***Change in Direction for Transportation Planning***

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On a recent weekend adventure Jane and I drove west on Route 7 through Berryville, Virginia, and past Rosemont, the home of the late Governor and U.S. Senator, Harry F. Byrd. The home is not open to the public, but the historic marker by the roadside reminds us of the dominant role Harry Byrd played in twentieth century Virginia politics and government. Among his accomplishments listed is the start-up of the Virginia Department of Highways. His campaign promise while running for governor in 1925 was to "get Virginia out of the mud." Virginia's roads which until Byrd's administration were maintained by the counties were said to be so bad that persons traveling from state to state would go around Virginia because the roads were so treacherous. Only the private toll roads, or turnpikes, including the Valley Pike on which Byrd had worked as a young man offered much hope for travel. By centralizing the responsibility for roads and providing a dedicated source of revenue, Byrd launched Virginia on a "pay as you go" system to build the third largest and most successful statewide highway system in the country currently with 58,000 miles and 12,000 bridges.

As meaningful as Governor Byrd's efforts were for the past, they do not fit conditions of today. Already the Highway Department has been changed to the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) in name and slowly in culture. The needs of travel today are more complex than building roads. As the department name change implies, we are looking at transportation and not at simply building highways. The planning initiative launched by Governor Mark Warner, VATrans 2025 ([www.sotrans.state.va.us/VTrans/](http://www.sotrans.state.va.us/VTrans/)) takes a multimodel approach that includes sea and air ports.

In a September letter to Governor Warner, the Virginia Conservation Network (VCN) provided a list of seven actions it felt should be taken to address transportation needs in Virginia today. Pledging to work for increased funding for transportation, the Network included an important caveat: "VCN cannot support additional funding without state and local authorities addressing the inefficient land use (suburban sprawl) that is the primary contributor to transportation congestion."

Read the VCN letter in its entirety at [www.vcnva.org](http://www.vcnva.org). Among its thoughtful suggestions are those of tying transportation funding to changes in land use and of demand management programs that reduce land consumption and per capital vehicle miles traveled and vehicle trips. VCN also recommended that state resources be utilized more efficiently by increasing the operational efficiency of the existing transportation system. And VCN recommends a shift to a transportation system "that reduces the current overemphasis on road construction" and provides significant funding to public transit, freight rail, walking and bicycling.

Harry Byrd got Virginia out of the mud. Now it is time to get Virginia out of congestion. But Byrd's answer to build more highways is too simplistic for today. The Conservation Network provides important concepts from which transportation planning for the 21st Century must take direction.