

VB CCO REPORT

The January meeting provided members the opportunity to develop recommendations for a strategic plan for the year. The executive board will prioritize the recommendations into an action plan.

Guest speaker, Ray Taylor spoke about High Speed Rail. He's a member of a Future of Hampton Roads, a think tank. His report and other information can be found at Smartregion.org. Essentially, the high speed rail effort is defining moment in the future of Hampton Roads' economic health and quality of life, one that will affect the region over the next 50 years." Planning for high speed rail's Southeast Corridor has gone on since the early 90s. Hampton Roads was part of the "main line" on the original conceptual plans. North Carolina ran the tri-state commission tasked with finalizing plans. Studies were completed in 2000 and produced an EIS (Environmental Impact Statement), and Hampton Roads, as a result, is no longer part of the proposed "main line." In 2001, 18 public hearings were held prior to the Final EIS and ROD (Record of Decision), none of which were held in Hampton Roads. "If we do nothing, Hampton Roads may become a cul de sac."

Interest in HSR has now been reactivated with the potential availability of federal monies from the Obama administration. The **Richmond to Hampton Roads Passenger Rail Study** ([R2HR](#)) is undergoing modifications resulting from Federal Rail Administration (FRA) comment and should be completed in early 2010, but "no one is involved in the process on behalf of Hampton Roads."

According to Louis Guy, we are "wasting time seeking answers to the wrong questions," and Hampton Roads is at the same place now with rail as we were 50 years ago with the planning of the federal highway system, which left the region with only one interstate connection. "Hampton Roads hasn't been at the planning table for the last 20 years." Addressing the maps provided, "North Carolina used a different process than Virginia to determine routes. NC solved their connection issues with a loop to connect more cities to rail." "We've been advised that no funding is available to Hampton Roads if we do not agree to routes already established in plans, if we "rock the boat." "It's not too late for Hampton Roads; paper decisions can be reversed."

Brad Face, a regional advocate and volunteer with Virginians for High Speed Rail ([VHSR](#)), said Hampton Roads hasn't been taken seriously in the past, because we have no political will. "Let's grab what we can get and not be left out." "Light rail currently under construction was positioned as a 'feeder system' to support HSR in order to sell it." Both sides of Hampton Roads Harbor must be served and can be accomplished by improved rail on the Peninsula and a new High Speed Rail – designated route on the Southside. Mayors on the Peninsula agree. If we move along with the process as-is, we could have HSR service to South Hampton Roads within 2 years, down the 460 corridor." Our geography does not lend itself to "through service" on the established "main line." Hampton Roads could be the Southern Terminus of HSR on the east coast as Boston is the Northern Terminus. Yes, we've been "asleep at the switch," because we never thought HSR would even happen. And, in all fairness to NC, they're spent millions of dollars to develop an intrastate rail system, and Virginia has not. We should not "upset the apple cart" and ask for a bend in the established line or we will lose out. We have opportunities here. Amtrak is looking for southern locations for its trains due to backups at DC's Union Station.