

The Future of Hampton Roads, Inc.
Hampton Roads Regional Structure Project
Improving the Competitiveness of Hampton Roads

**Symposium on Regional Unity:
Does the Legislative Caucus Have a Role?**

26 April 2008

Panelists: Delegates John Cosgrove, Glenn Oder, Joe Bouchard. PDC Exec. Director Art Collins

Executive Summary

The questions posed to the panel were: What issues and shared interests require us to work together regionally? How do we reach agreement on solutions? If some solutions must come from Richmond, by what process can our legislative delegation deliver results?

Panelists made the following principal points:

- The legislative caucus can only be unified on issues if the localities are unified. Virginia's allocation of power to the state makes regional cooperation voluntary, so achieving unity is difficult.
- Transportation is the overriding current issue, and the caucus is working closely together to find a solution to the funding question. It is complex and difficult, as exemplified by the current demand to have an additional Hampton Roads tunnel or bridge included in the MPO's list of projects.
- While transportation is always a key issue, there are others, but annually there are also hot issues that dominate discussion and create distraction. Media criticism and election contests complicate the process. Thus, ongoing dialog is important. The Hampton Roads Partnership can help with that.

Breakout discussion groups reached the following general conclusions:

- There are a number of key regional issues on which the legislative caucus should work closely with local elected officials to arrive at unified positions for action in Richmond. These include, among others, transportation, education, the environment, the port, taxes, jobs, infrastructure and other economic development opportunities, and redistricting.
- In working together to reach agreement on solutions, there is a need for much more public engagement in discussion based on sound information. A process for developing a short annual regional legislative agenda might include meetings among citizens and officials in the various localities followed by a regional summit involving legislators.
- With respect to transportation in particular, in order to achieve timely coordination of planning and funding, a much closer working relationship should be established between caucus members and the the MPO, possibly by having several legislators as members of the MPO board.

A more detailed transcript of the proceedings follows, including questions asked of the panel and the detailed reports of the discussion group facilitators.

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Proceedings

Of the Steering Committee meeting of 26 April 2008
at the Regional Building, Chesapeake, Virginia,
and the

Symposium on Regional Unity: Does the Legislative Caucus Have a Role?

Chairman Vince Thomas called the meeting to order and welcomed the participants on behalf of the board of Future of Hampton Roads. A total of 35 persons were in attendance.

Status of the Regional Structure Project

Vice Chairman Jim Babcock reported on the status of the Structure Project. This ninth meeting of the 38 member organizations of the Steering Committee will be its last as the need for their overall direction has now concluded. Implementation continues in the form of personal interviews with decision makers to present study group reports, discuss the research, and seek agreement to implement the study group recommendations. Four reports dealing with efficiency will be presented to the Chief Administrative Officers on May 21 with the request that the proposals be reviewed and referred for action to the Mayors & Chairs. Thereafter all study group reports will be listed on the FHR Web site for reference and a final written report will be prepared for distribution. Mr. Babcock thanked the Steering Committee members warmly for their work and encouraged them to “continue to join with us and our leaders in America’s Great Conversation, by which we all participate in governance.”

The Symposium on Regional Unity

The questions for today’s gathering: What issues and shared interests require us to work together regionally? How do we reach agreement on solutions? If some solutions must come from Richmond, by what process can our legislative delegation deliver results?

President Ray Taylor introduced the members of the Symposium panel: Delegate John Cosgrove, (R) Chesapeake, Chairman of the Legislative Caucus; Delegate Glenn Oder, (R) Hampton; Delegate Joe Bouchard, (D) Virginia Beach; and Art Collins, retiring Executive Director, Hampton Roads Planning District Commission. Each was invited to speak for seven minutes, then answer questions from the audience.

Delegate’s Remarks (summarized, not directly quoted):

Mr. Cosgrove: The Hampton Roads Legislative Caucus is working closely together in a bipartisan way on transportation. Highway prices are rising; if we don’t act now we won’t be able to afford new construction. The process is complex, involving land planning, the environment, and the need for hurricane evacuation. Our economy also depends heavily on transportation. Moreover, the

political reality is that we representatives get beat up in the press and at public meetings, and an election with the usual negative campaigning is coming. Nevertheless, we are working hard. We are talking to Northern Virginia. What is needed is an unbiased layout of the numbers, and then we have to analyze the data. And we do know we have to work together. A request: To offset the naysayers, participate in public meetings on April 29 and May 7.

Mr. Oder: Peninsula voters see congestion at the Hampton Roads Bridge Tunnel as the source of all their frustrations on transportation. There are other problems, such as Rt.199. I acknowledge the expert work of the Planning District Commission [on the regional plan], but the political reality is that HRBT is the main problem. The solution is a bridge—a 250 foot high span—an idea I originally opposed. But it can be built, for one-sixth the cost of an additional tunnel, and it can be protected from terrorists and military attack. And it can be an icon for our region. I'm now working on getting buy-in from local governments and the Navy. The lesson: We must listen to people's concerns and confront them.

Mr. Bouchard: I have long been a proponent of regionalism, for pragmatic reasons. First, many local government functions could be performed regionally. The Navy did it, as I saw when commander of the Naval Base in Norfolk, and millions of dollars were saved. And it was just as hard to get base commanders to work together as it is for the cities. And there are other examples of successful regionalism. A second pragmatic reason: Coming together will give the region more influence in state and federal legislatures and agencies. The challenge we face is that the issues that should unite us also divide us, transportation being an excellent example. It's difficult to work together. The role of the Legislative Caucus? It's either part of the problem or part of the solution. Currently, I am encouraged by the dialog. The caucus needs to deal with regional problems because of the Dillon Rule [that puts power with the state]. But our Legislative Caucus can only be as united as our local governments. We see this on the transportation issue. Legislators are pulled in conflicting directions by urban-rural differences, party differences, different priorities. Many good goals are offered, but they conflict. I offer these comments: At this stage, the Hampton Roads Partnership can play a role in bringing government and business together; a unified message gets results. Ongoing dialog is also important. For example, I would like to see an annual Hampton Roads summit of local government and general assembly leaders to identify issues and discuss solutions.

Mr. Collins: Virginia's leaders like the present allocation of power to the Governor and the General Assembly. Given this reality, it is remarkable that our localities have cooperated on water, trash, a jail, and other matters. But other regions have done better, even making joint investments. Virginia law makes regionalism optional: membership in the Planning District is voluntary. But think about this: On the matter of a water supply for Virginia Beach, would the state have done it? The Beach made it happen, with the help of others. Our localities *are* working together, meeting regularly and talking to each other. And it was the local leaders who who took the political hits on transportation over the past twenty years. They *do* work on it. The question on the HRBT is: How would you pay for it? We must follow federal rules [to get our matching transportation funding], which require that localities make the plan and the state provide the funds. The Planning District *did* give the legislators opportunities to be involved, but the fact is we didn't see collaboration. Other states do it; we do not. The General Assembly needs to understand that economic competition is not among our localities but comes from other regions.

Questions and Answers (not a literal transcript):

Q. Cleon Long: How far are we from having a light rail transit system?

A. Mr. Collins: The regional plan includes transit from the Beach to the Peninsula.

A. Mr. Dickens: Norfolk's is a starter system, and work is being done on expanding it to Virginia Beach.

A. Mr. Oder: Everywhere that has transit, there is still congestion. It's hard to hear Art say we legislators haven't participated. I've voted for everything—the referendum and the tax increases. We won't build the Third Crossing unless we address HRBT.

A. Mr. Collins: All the local officials voted for the regional plan [which excluded HRBT].

A. Mr. Cosgrove: Light rail is always heavily subsidized.

Q. Mayor Oberndorf: I want to thank the legislators for being here. The mayors used to “converse” only through the media, then Joe Leafé [former mayor of Norfolk] created the Mayors & Chairs Caucus to hold monthly dialog. We need to have dialog also with the members of the Legislative Caucus, but when we go to Richmond to meet with the Caucus most of the legislators are too busy to attend. The Northern Virginia legislative caucus meets regularly with their mayors and chairs. The problem is that our Mayors & Chairs Caucus as not created a package we can all agree on. We are still looking for that Northern Virginia cohesiveness, the same way the rural legislators are organized.

A. Mr. Taylor: The Regional Structure Project has a proposal for a more formalized structure for the Mayors & Chairs.

Q. Herb DeGroft: How do you deal with the no-tax people?

A. Mr. Cosgrove: The legislators who took the no tax pledge are a problem to overcome, but their numbers are dwindling and they are less of a problem than they were a few years ago. Party leadership is the key to getting their cooperation.

A. Mr. Bouchard: I was told that “no one ever lost an election by voting against a tax increase.” This is true of both parties.

Q. Bruce Williams: Mr. Cosgrove, I commend you on your efforts to bring together the Hampton Roads delegation. We've heard about a regional transit plan and we've been talking roads. What is it going to take to get the delegation to think in terms of a comprehensive multimodal transportation plan and consider it an investment in infrastructure? Mass transit isn't a panacea but an option; Hong Kong is the only transit system in the world that makes a profit and it's multimodal and comprehensive.

A. Mr. Cosgrove: We are working toward that. I have to take issue with Mayor Orbendorf's assertion about the legislators in the Western part of the state being cooperative. But we do work with them.

A. Mr. Oder: We have to have 51 votes [to get what we need from the legislature].

Q. Bruce Williams: But we have a huge problem!

A. Mr. Oder: That's why we held a referendum. We couldn't get the 51 votes in Richmond.

Q. Michael Katchmark: With reference to the footnote in the Virginia Supreme Court opinion invalidating the Hampton Roads Transportation Authority, does the General Assembly's review indicate whether a regional tax would be unconstitutional under the special and local law prohibition of the Virginia Constitution?

A. Mr. Cosgrove: The General Assembly will carefully review any proposed legislation [for constitutionality]. The opinion has been out only a short time so it is too early to reach any conclusions. Some other regional taxes exist across the state, and they may provide a model to ensure a regional transportation tax that will pass eventual review by the Supreme Court.

Q. Jim Babcock: Given that localities must prepare the transportation plan and that the legislature must provide the funding, and both groups are accountable to the electorate, what are the chances of members of our Legislative Caucus joining the board of our Metropolitan Planning Organization and working together directly?

A. Mr. Cosgrove: They do that in Northern Virginia, which has a three-state MPO.

B. Mr. Bouchard: There is a growing emphasis at the federal level on regional approaches. It's hard to do in Virginia, but it has to be addressed.

Mr. Taylor thanked the panelists for their participation in the Symposium.

Breakout Discussion Groups

Attendees participated in facilitated breakout discussions of the following questions:

1. To what extent is "regional unity" important for Hampton Roads?
2. What are the key issues for our region in Richmond, such that a unified position among caucus members is necessary to get results?
3. What process could be followed annually to help the caucus create a unified legislative agenda for the region?
4. Is a similar process needed for the region's Congressional members?

The group reassembled and each facilitator gave a five minute report of his or her group's thoughts.

Suzanne Puryear's Report

To what extent is "regional unity" important for Hampton Roads?

Very significant

- Citizens work in one community and live in another
- Hampton Roads is an integrated community for many functions (water, waste treatment)
- Region also crosses state lines into Currituck, Camden and Gates counties in NC
- There is interdependence, along with interrelationships in the region's economic development efforts
- Regional infrastructure
 - Cable
 - Technology
- Higher education system linkages
- There is a balance of the practice of daily life and the structural idiosyncrasies of the region and its individual communities

What are the key issues for our region in Richmond?

- Transportation – trumps all
- Economic development projects (Example: modeling and simulation)
- Technology
- Education – Pre-K to Higher Ed
- Public awareness/education of the interdependence of regional communities
- Regional identity/Regional mindset: Younger generation does not see regional barriers; is more mobile throughout the region
- Arts, culture and tourism
- Environment (acts as a unifying force, at times)
- Regional perspective makes legislative process easier
- Quality of life and economic competitiveness are the overarching goals

What process could be followed annually to help the caucus create a unified legislative agenda for the region?

- Solicit data from regional alliance groups and consortia (Example: Convention and Visitor Bureaus) to obtain information about the economic and competitiveness impact of legislative issues
- Engage business community in the legislative process; i.e., voting in addition to lobbying
- Provide examples that reinforce that the caucus can accomplish more together than separately
- Conduct, and promote attendance at, joint meetings between locally elected officials and state legislators
- Create and implement a coherent strategic communications plan, which promotes regional interests
- Hold an annual summit to discuss key issues and include the region's Congressional delegation.

Is a similar process needed for the region's Congressional members?

Yes

- Regional issues that impact both state and federal elected officials include:
 - Military
 - Ports
 - Shipbuilding

Rich Werber' Report

1. Annually, legislators face both ongoing key issues and hot button issues of the moment.

Key Issues include:

Transportation (always at the top of the list)

Health Care (especially drug rehabilitation and psychiatric care, and senior care)

Crime

Taxes

Education

The Economy (usually stated as jobs, economic development, tourism, ports)

Environment

The following are key issues that do not receive much public attention:

Military relations and planning for the future of the military in Hampton Roads

Ports, Ports, Ports

Hot issues change from year to year. This year, the hot issues were:

Immigration

Property taxes.

The following are perennial hot issues that do not rate as key issues:

Abortion

BRAC.

2. A process for the Hampton Roads delegation to arrive at an annual agenda would include:

a. A system for shared dialogue

b. Working with an existing group (perhaps the Hampton Roads Partnership) on annually to lead the delegation in planning meetings that include general assembly, congressional and municipal elected officials

c. Systems for creating a better informed public. The Hampton Roads Center for Civic Engagement is a good start.

3. General comments:

a. To make key issues into hot issues, ensure they are consistently discussed annually as part of a planned movement.

b. To encourage the delegates to think and act more regionally, the business community is key because they have the money, and an informed public is key because they have the votes.

c. There should be a regional scorecard much like the business community scorecards.

Peter Shaw's Report

Attention to regional issues requires greater collaboration among Hampton Roads legislators, local governments, and public. These regional parties have drifted away from a "regional interest" to a "special interest" focus. This must be corrected in order to address regional issues and solutions. Collaboration between the region's legislators, local governments, and public requires a focus on:

- The regional benefits of dealing with regional issues,
- The relationship between the H.R. Partnership and the H.R. Legislative Caucus,
- The possible appointment of Hampton Roads legislators to the HR MPO.

1. Regional issues must show regional benefits.

- Start with the collaboration process:
 - Cultivate the following trust elements necessary to make collaboration work:
 - Must have openness between all parties
 - Must have all parties listen to each other
 - Must have understanding among parties
 - All parties must be understood
 - Include as participants regional legislators, local government officials and public
 - Overcome public apathy
 - Creatively deal with Dillon Rule challenges to region
 - Increase presence of HR regional leadership participants
 - Focus marketing of HR regional issues to public
 - All parties make full disclosure of self interests in all regional issues
 - Develop a vision building process with these outcomes for Hampton Roads:
 - A clear and easily understood regional vision to all parties
 - A clear picture of regional benefits
 - Acceptance of the vision by a majority of all parties
 - A display of shared economic benefits to the region
 - A focus on practical solutions to real regional problems

2. Relationship between the HR Partnership and the HR Legislative Caucus.

The Partnership can help the legislative caucus focus on regional issues by

- Emphasizing practical solutions to real not political problems
- De-politicizing the process for solving regional issues
- Focusing on a clear and easily understood regional economic vision
- Helping the legislative caucus "connect the dots" (both on a macro and micro level) as they develop and solve regional issues

3. Possible appointment of a Hampton Roads Legislator(s) to the HRMPO.

- Research how NOVA MPO allows legislative membership to their MPO board
- This proposal provides the ability to match up the MPO planning process with its financing source (the legislature)
- This proposal does show promise to allow a greater efficient use of time involving the planning and financing process/timeline
- This proposal does show promise for better communication between the current MPO and the HR legislators

- Unresolved issue: group had mixed feelings as to what type of legislative appointment to the MPO should be made and these two options need to be explored:
 - Voting member
 - Ex-officio member with no voting power

Jake Tobin's Report

A. Regional unity is important on issues that benefit all cities and counties: those issues that improve our collective quality of life, gain efficiencies in operations, improve collective infrastructure, and allow us to compete more effectively for scarce dollars.

B. Key Issues (in priority order)

1. Transportation:

- Solving the funding problem
- Improving the capability of the Port to generate revenue and jobs

2. Gaining economies of scale through efficient purchasing and operational cooperation

- Regional purchasing agency
- Disaster preparedness
- Public utilities

3. Other Regional opportunities

- Human Services (i.e., ageing, homelessness)
- Public Education
- Environmental Quality

C. How do we get there?

Obtain reliable and objective data sources

Educate, educate, educate

Communicate to every level

Get to the public

Get to the leadership

A regional summit (hosted by HRCCE/HRP) to explore items for the regional agenda.

Elevate the status of the Mayors & Chairs Caucus

Propose the Regional agenda

- Summit to the Mayors and Chairs
- Mayors and Chairs to the Regional Caucus
- Regional Caucus to the General Assembly

Betsy McBride's Report

1. Key issues - those beyond one locality's capacity to solve or manage:

- Transportation
- Regional governance – legislature needs to provide a vehicle
- Housing
- Maritime industry

- Revenue sharing – the state needs to provide a mechanism
- Environment – erosion, climate change
- Redistricting

2. There is a serious disconnect between the legislators and the constituents. They should be brought together more.

- The “people” can be the unifier. Decision making has been top down instead of bottom up.
- To gain regional collaboration, need a process that “harvests” citizen input.
- If the people in the region can achieve collaboration, the caucus will follow.
- Getting the caucus in the same room to hear the same thing is a good strategy.

3. Problem: Information is not getting to the grassroots. They need more information on critical issues. The newspapers own a piece of this. They should do more teaching, e.g., who should answer all the letters to the editor suggesting things that cannot be done in a Dillon Rule state? Who should clarify this misperception?

4. Suggestions for an Annual Regional Summit:

- Every jurisdiction have a “regional public meeting day” and select representatives.
- Representatives take recommendations to the regional day with mayors and chairs.
- Mayors and chairs take the recommendations to the legislative caucus.
- Involve different kinds of groups in organizing the summit.

Value of the above process:

- Opportunity to understand the context, i.e., what is important to others
- Find out where interest “circles” intersect
- Recognizing someone will eventually decide

5. Legislative delegates need to be added to the MPO.

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1 May 2008