



# **IMPROVING THE COMPETITIVENESS OF HAMPTON ROADS**

**The Hampton Roads Regional Structure Project**

**Recommendations for**

**The Hampton Roads Partnership**

Prepared by the Future of Hampton Roads, Inc.

January, 2007  
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The Future of Hampton Roads, Inc.  
Improving the Competitiveness of Hampton Roads

**THE HAMPTON ROADS REGIONAL STRUCTURE PROJECT**  
**Study Group 2**

**RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE**  
**HAMPTON ROADS PARTNERSHIP**

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Attached:

*Study Group Report 2A: Hampton Roads Partnership – Structure*

*Study Group Report 2B: Hampton Roads Partnership – Visioning*

*Study Group Report 2C: Hampton Roads Partnership - News Bureau*

*Study Group Report 2D: Hampton Roads Partnership – Legal Agenda*

Available upon request:

*Structure Project Report No.1: How the Region Works*

*Structure Project Report No.2: Transforming the Regional Structure*

*Study Group Report 5: Effective Public Participation*

With an overall objective of improving the competitiveness of Hampton Roads, the specific goals of the **Hampton Roads Regional Structure Project** are (a) to accelerate economic development, (b) to achieve economies in local government by additional sharing of services, and (c) most importantly, to create an effective political voice to advance the region's interests.

The Future of Hampton Roads, as the sponsoring organization for the Regional Structure Project, believes—and there is support for the notion—that some simple but fundamental changes are necessary in the way our regional organizations make and implement decisions. While the Structure Project seeks changes, we do not point fingers of blame. Nevertheless, given the even more necessary will for the region's citizens and governments to collaborate, these changes should enable us to work together even more effectively than we have already shown in recent years that we can do.

*How the Region Works*, the first report issued by the Structure Project, justified the need for structural reform of the region's institutions by describing (1) the opportunities that comprise the regional agenda, (2) the public and private institutions that handle the agenda, and (3) the legal framework of regionalism in Virginia. Its message: We do regional cooperation fairly well, but there is room for a more proactive program to enhance our economy and quality of life. While our region has shown a growth spurt since 2001, based mostly on defense spending that has temporarily raised our per capita income to the national average, we need to do much more to sustain our future prospects for growth, better jobs, and increased wealth. The region needs a stronger profile, stronger voice, and stronger program.

*Transforming the Regional Structure*, the Project's second report, offered preliminary proposals for reforming the structure of regional governance in Hampton Roads. The proposals were developed by some 140 conferees in facilitated brainstorming sessions during early 2006. Many useful ideas were offered, and there was notable consensus on fundamental points. Our citizens are not experts on the specifics of governance, but they are both idealistic and practical, and they know what is important. Thereafter, study groups were formed to turn the initial proposals into finished recommendations.

The present report, *Recommendations for the Hampton Roads Partnership*, delivers a summary of the reports of the study groups that dealt with the Partnership. A few of the Partnership's officers and board members participated in developing several of the proposals, and we appreciate their contribution to our deliberations. The Future of Hampton Roads respectfully invites the Partnership board of directors to engage in a thoughtful review of these recommendations with a view to their implementation.

We commend the Hampton Roads Partnership for its many signal accomplishments and contributions to regionalism in Hampton Roads. We know that its members are as committed as we are to an improved performance of our unique maritime economy and a richer quality of life for all of us in Southeastern Virginia.

Hon. Vincent J. Thomas, Chairman, The Steering Committee,  
The Hampton Roads Regional Structure Project, and  
Chairman, The Future of Hampton Roads, Inc.

January 2007

A. A Great Step Forward

The formation of the Hampton Roads Partnership in 1996 was the most important step forward in regional cooperation and regional governance during the region's past three decades. The Partnership was an outgrowth and culmination of several prior events:

- \* the first regional visioning done in the mid-1980s by the Future of Hampton Roads;
- \* the merger of the Tidewater and Peninsula planning districts and MSAs at the end of the 1980s;
- \* creation of the Mayors and Chairs Caucus in the early 1990s;
- \* the regional visioning initiated in the mid-1990s by the Hampton Roads Chamber of Commerce resulting in *Plan 2007*;
- \* the statewide Urban Partnership that resulted in incentive funding for regionalism under the *Regional Competitiveness Act of 1997*.

The region's other principal organizations are the Planning District Commission, the Metropolitan Planning Organization, and the Mayors and Chairs Caucus. Each of these organizations has its separate purpose, but each is composed of the region's local government elected leaders and each is supported by the Planning District staff. The region therefore enjoys a unity of elected leadership and administration that serves as a strong basis for regional planning and concerted action despite inevitable parochial interests. Creation of the Hampton Roads Partnership brought the mayors and chairs into a potentially productive relationship with the region's business, university, and military leadership.

Thus the Partnership is primarily a government-business collaboration. Its 2006-07 board is large: In addition to 38 public sector members—mayors and chairs, university presidents, military commanders, and representatives of several regional agencies—there are 58 business CEOs plus one labor leader. As a private association supported by member dues, the Partnership enjoys the important advantages of being able to operate discretely behind the scenes and to perform advocacy. At the same time, the presence of the mayors and chairs on the board gives the organization political legitimacy for doing public business. Its chosen mission—dealing with strategic regional issues—determines that its primary activity is strategic planning, supplemented by organizing activity directed at implementing key projects through the local governments or businesses or through legislation. Its aggregation of leaders gives it substantial political influence.

In its ten year existence, the Partnership has done invaluable work and established its stature. During its early years it received a total of \$11 million in state grants under the Regional Competitiveness Act, and with these funds it supported more than a dozen innovative regional projects. Following the loss of these grants after 2000, it focused its five-year plans on cluster economic planning, protection of key regional assets, and promotion of regional citizenship. In addition, it rallied scores of other regional organizations in support of the regional transportation funding plan presented to the public in a 2002 referendum. Its most recent achievement was facilitating a \$15 million state grant to support expansion to national prominence of the region's modeling and simulation cluster.

Beyond all the excellent work of the Partnership's small staff stands the overwhelming value of having a large board of concerned public and private leaders in a networking relationship that builds information sharing, mutual respect, and collaborative goal-setting.

Given the standing and achievements of the Partnership, it may seem presumptuous to offer any criticisms as part of an overall assessment. The fact that it is doing public business of course makes the organization eligible for such evaluation. But any shortcomings are best described not as faults but as examples of an incomplete success or of unrealized potential.

In summary, the principal shortcoming is a lack of adequate linkage with the public. Often the “public” is disparaged with the term “Joe Six-Pack,” referring to the passivity of many who don’t vote and don’t bother to follow public issues. This pejorative, however, slights the mass of responsible and informed citizens whose opinions in surveys and votes in referenda and elections determine what can be accomplished politically. This audience comprises the Partnership’s broader constituency which, if brought into its process, can energize more proactive regional development.

The Partnership has on occasion involved selected citizens in its cluster planning or other initiatives. But it has mostly chosen to operate “under the radar,” that is, to provide top-down direction and to rely on private political influence. These techniques are appropriate exercises of leadership, and indeed they will always be available to supplement any more public methods of pursuing results. Nevertheless, one lesson of the 2002 transportation referendum is that, instead of a brief advertising campaign, the process of debate and compromise that brought the leadership to agreement on the complex trade-offs in the highway and transit plan should have been reproduced in a public process aimed at achieving a similar consensus. The process would have taken a year, but it would have produced a more informed vote and perhaps even changed the outcome.

The lack of adequate linkage with the public has several features. First, the Partnership has not developed a complete public communications policy. By and large, the public is ignorant of the organization’s existence, and even many of its board members have no clear idea of its current aims and programs. Indeed, the large board necessarily meets infrequently and is seldom asked to vote on anything other than election of officers, executive committee, and board members. There are few press releases, reports, and no routine media coverage. This approach may be comfortable, but it weakens the ability of the Partnership to marshal political support for its initiatives. Indeed, it is unknown whether the informed citizenry would agree with the Partnership’s choice of priorities (and the experience of Norfolk officials with recent town meetings shows that this can happen).

Second, the aspiration of the Partnership to be the primary leadership organization of the region is undermined by the lack of representation on the board of key non-government non-business sectors—k-12 and preschool education, social services, arts and culture, environment—all of which contribute importantly to the region’s economy and quality of life. Many of the business board members are members of those other organizations, but their informed CEOs are not present. Again, their absence weakens the Partnership’s ability to speak for the region as authoritatively as it might.

Third, the Partnership has not refreshed the regional vision statement, last offered in partial form in 1994 in *Plan 2007*. Visioning is simply long range strategic planning, with stated objectives, strategies, and action plans. A vision statement has utility in aligning a region’s aspirations, in coordinating all the sectors that contribute to rich results, and in

explaining future expectations and possibilities to citizens and corporate decision-makers. A region with an exciting vision statement backed by real plans in the hands of stakeholders is perceived as a place “with its act together,” “on the move,” a “hot spot,” and such perceptions help to bring the desired results. Although the Partnership adopted *Plan 2007*, it has felt constrained to focus its limited staff on a handful of priority issues selected by the executive committee. This is similar to the focus of the Planning District Commission, which does not prepare a comprehensive regional vision because of the difficulty of coordinating the wishes of its member governments. Since visioning need not be done more than once every five or ten years and the sector planning can be done piecemeal, the Partnership could very well undertake this form of strategizing without sacrificing its emphasis on short-term projects. It would fit, too, with the aims of the Council on Virginia’s Future to establish performance planning for Hampton Roads.

Fourth, fostering regional citizenship is one of the Partnership’s important goals. In pursuit of this goal, talking to citizens about regionalism is less effective than involving them directly in the process of goal-setting and prioritizing of regional issues. Where important legislative action is needed, as in transportation funding, contemporary forms of involvement that engender the important “consent of the governed” can be practiced to good effect. To engender all-important buy-in for its activities and proposals, the Partnership needs to consider how to involve its board and the general public more in its decision-making process.

Fifth, because the Partnership is best able to act as the principal convener of regional interests, it should continue to work on a process for developing an annual regional legislative agenda. If supported by adequate research, consultation, surveying, and drafting, the annual list of needed legislative action should have great appeal for the Hampton Roads Legislative Caucus, which does not now go to Richmond with any concerted program on behalf of the region as a whole. The need is clearly demonstrated by the loss of federal transportation funding in 2006 as a result of the failure of the Caucus to produce required state funding for the regional transportation priorities so diligently prepared by the Metropolitan Planning Organization.

### III. Recommendations

The above analysis indicates that the Hampton Roads Partnership can strengthen its support and influence by doing five things:

1. Create a more comprehensive public communications plan.
2. Facilitate the creation of a regional vision that covers all key sectors.
3. Expand the board to include all key sectors of the community.
4. Involve the public appropriately in long range planning.
5. Continue to coordinate creation of an annual legislative agenda.

Each of these five recommendations is elaborated in the following sections. The study group reports in support of the recommendations provide additional detail.

Implementation of these structural changes is no substitute for a shared will to achieve results by taking action on behalf of the region. However, the proposed changes will improve the coming together of leaders and citizens in productive relationships, will strengthen the image and influence of the Partnership, and foster more aggressive pursuit of important regional objectives.

#### A. Communications.

It is recommended that the Partnership establish a “Hampton Roads News Bureau” within the Partnership with the following tasks:

- a. Propose and execute the Partnership’s own internal and external publicity: press releases, newsletters, annual reports, program brochures.
- b. Draft positive articles about Hampton Roads for the national media.
- c. Serve as a contact point for journalists outside the region.

These tasks can be performed by a staff of two—an experienced public relations journalist and a researcher—at an estimated cost of \$100,000.

The goal of this unit would be to increase recognition and understanding of the Partnership and its programs within its board, the media, and the citizenry.

In addition, despite indications that recognition of Hampton Roads has been growing, there is a clear need to actively promote a positive regional image. This is being done to some extent by entities that sell the region’s services externally, such as the universities, economic development organizations, and convention and visitors bureaus. However, the regional image is still fractured, especially in tourism marketing, and routine media reporting is as likely to feature negative stories as positive ones. The proposed News Bureau would issue articles and releases with a “Hampton Roads” byline that describe interesting and significant local achievements—university research discoveries, artistic coups, military evolutions, exciting attractions—both to build internal pride but also to stimulate external awareness in newspapers and magazines with a national circulation. The Bureau would logically also serve as a point of contact for journalists outside the region seeking information.

#### B. Strategic Planning

1. The Partnership, in addition to its planning on selected important issues, should be responsible for organizing the periodic preparation and updating of a regional vision statement that covers all important building blocks of regional development.
2. The vision statement should be supported by suitable strategies and action plans.
3. The long range objectives, strategies, and action plans for each building block (sector) should be prepared with the participation of sector practitioners, assisted by experienced facilitators, and supported by relevant research data.
4. Appropriate techniques should be employed for involving a fair number of citizens in a process of validating the vision statement and its implied priorities.

Visioning and long range planning are the same thing. A vision statement is a statement of what the region wants to become over some reasonable time horizon. It is thus a way of presenting long term objectives. Based on voluntary discussion, it contains nothing mandatory; instead, it emphasizes shared opportunities.

A comprehensive regional vision statement—one that covers all key sectors of the economy and quality of life—if adequately supplemented by sector strategies and action plans, becomes the basis for development activity. In addition, it offers collateral benefits:

- (a) It improves public understanding of the elements required for successful regional performance,
- (b) promotes a sense of regional citizenship,
- (c) fosters regional unity,
- (d) is a useful tool in economic development recruiting, and
- (e) provides input for the plans of local governments, businesses, and service organizations,
- (f) helps promote the region to possible investors, and
- (g) inspires and energizes those responsible for implementing the plans.

The Hampton Roads Partnership is the body most able to do long range planning and visioning. Although permitted by law to prepare a regional plan, the Planning District Commission does not do so because the member cities and counties find it hard to agree; instead, the expertise of the PDC is applied to selected issues. The Metropolitan Planning Organization only prepares transportation plans. Because the Partnership is a region-wide public-private nonpartisan organization, it can provide the most disinterested approach to the preparation of the regional vision statement, strategies, and action plans.

The process chosen by the Council on Virginia's Future for selecting priorities and creating metrics for keying into the State's regional planning goal can also serve as the starting point for a more complete regional visioning process. Late 2007 would be a good year to start a regional visioning process that is sound because prepared by sector stakeholders and widely accepted because based on public participation.

### C. Board Membership

1. It is recommended that the Partnership add to its board the CEOs of the most representative organizations from the following sectors: k-12 education, preschool education, workforce development, social services, arts and culture, environment, and regional service organizations. (A confidential list of prospective organizations has been provided to Partnership officers.)

2. These additional member organizations should be required to pay dues like other members.

The choice of these sectors is based on an analysis of current board membership vs. recognized building blocks of regional development, major employment sectors, and criteria of corporate relocation experts. (Details of the analysis are given in the study group report on Partnership structure.) Especially noteworthy, given the presence of all the university presidents on the board and the importance of education among regional priorities, is the absence of any representatives of early childhood development or k-12 schooling. The 97-member board is already large, like a legislature, hence adding a few more will not weaken the board process itself. In fact, while satisfying the desire of the unrepresented sectors to be at the table, it will strengthen the finances of the Partnership by increasing the dues base.

#### D. Public Participation.

1. Broader participation of citizens should be arranged as part of the periodic reworking of the regional vision statement in order to build regional citizenship and validate priorities in the Partnership's own periodic business plans.

2. The Partnership should organize standing roundtables for City-County Council Members, Citizens, Business, and the Media. These groups should meet in conferences at least annually if not more frequently to share views on regional issues and receive briefings from informed officials.

Public participation in regional decision-making has important benefits, just as it does in the planning process of local governments. Public participation (a) broadens citizen understanding of issues, (b) helps set priorities supported by the public, (c) helps build consensus for political action, (d) fosters the sense of regional citizenship.

Just what techniques are most effective for working with large groups of citizens has always been a challenge. As a resource for local governments and other organizations interested in tapping public opinion, including the Partnership, the participants in the Structure Project's study group on Effective Public Participation expect to create a 501(c)3 that will operate a "Center for Civic Engagement." The proposed Center will sponsor best practices and serve as a source of advisers on meeting planning, goal setting and prioritizing in large groups, sound forms of surveying, and other relevant disciplines.

Even if roundtable conferences are held infrequently, they will foster the spirit of regional citizenship so necessary to build support for effective regionalism. Roundtable discussions can increase knowledge of regional institutions and the regional agenda, presumably improving participants' approach to political issues. Roundtables of individuals with common interests enables them to focus on their shared concerns and establish networking relationships. Some such body for city-county council members appears particularly necessary as an antidote to understandable parochialism. Similarly, an annual orientation of media editorial and news staffs would increase the quality of coverage of regional matters. (The annual workshop offered by the Virginia Council on Economic Education to media representatives offers a useful model for dealing with that important group.)

### E. Legislative Agenda.

1. The Hampton Roads Partnership should coordinate the preparation of an annual legislative agenda to present to the Legislative Caucus prior to each session.
2. The process should include (a) timely canvassing of local governments and other regional organizations for their legislative proposals, (b) screening the proposals to determine which are truly regional in nature, (c) a process for determining the individual priorities of items on the list, and (d) some process for measuring citizen support for each item.
3. While there is no reason why the Partnership, after due study, should not endorse particular legislative requests of other organizations, these should not be included in the list of regional legislative priorities unless they are truly of regional significance.

Unlike legislators in other regions of Virginia, the Hampton Roads Legislative Caucus seldom prepares an agreed list of legislative initiatives before each session. This is a difficult process, given the varying interests of the different sections of the region, even when a single paramount issue, such as transportation funding, is the sole focus. A credible and thorough process that assists the Caucus to determine the most important goals that require legislation should enable the legislators more easily to find common grounds for combined action in time to decide on measures for getting the proposals sponsored, drafted, and passed.

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Implementation of these structural changes is no substitute for a shared will to achieve results by taking action on behalf of the region. However, the changes will improve the coming together of leaders and citizens in productive relationships. They will strengthen the image and influence of the Partnership. And they will foster a more aggressive pursuit of important regional objectives by the Partnership, Legislative Caucus, local governments, businesses, and citizens who are in a position to advance the regional agenda.