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Thursday, Sep. 11, 2014

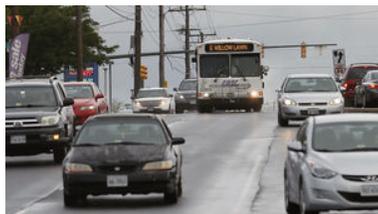


Today's top opinion: Transportation — worth celebrating

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ALEXA WELCH EDLUND

A GRTC bus heads west on West Broad Street to the Willow Lawn bus stop on Willow Lawn Drive Tuesday, September 9, 2014.

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Posted: Wednesday, September 10, 2014 10:30 pm

The announcement that Richmond and Henrico have won a \$25 million transportation grant for a proposed bus rapid transit line is great news, for the most part. It testifies to the soundness of the plan and the care and diligence with which backers have promoted it.

Bus rapid transit has proved itself in several cities across the country. For a region such as central Virginia, where the population is not packed densely enough to support heavy commuter rail systems like those in New York and Washington, BRT is almost ideal. It offers some of the swiftness of dedicated rail lines, without their immense expense, and with much greater flexibility.

The Richmond line would run from Rocketts Landing to Willow Lawn — at least for starters. Ultimately, we'd like to see BRT spanning the region.

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As we explained at length earlier this year in a piece for our series on making Virginia a more dynamic dominion, the Richmond region lags behind the national average on several key metrics: The percentage of residents who live near a transit stop (31 percent vs. the national average of 69 percent); length of wait for a transit vehicle (Richmonders wait 36 percent longer); and access to employment by transit (Richmond ranks 92 nd out of 100 metro areas).

BRT has the potential to move the region forward on those measurements and many others — from employment to housing access and social integration. As head of the Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority, Joe Calabrese oversees one of the most ambitious bus rapid transit systems in the country. On Sept. 17, he will appear at an event at the Science Museum of Virginia to explain his network's potential and its accomplishments. Contact Rapid Transit for Richmond's Future for details — www.rvarapid

transit.org.

Our good cheer at the news is marred only by a tinge of regret over the federal involvement. If Washington were sending Richmond dollars to build a bus system in Boise or Boca Raton, some Virginians might reasonably wonder why. Ideally, federal transportation dollars should build projects of national scope.

That's a debate for another day, however — if it has not already been lost. For now, let's have a round of applause for a development that should help bring BRT in central Virginia one step closer to fruition.

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"That's a debate for another day, however — if it has not already been lost." It has not been lost until we decide to capitulate. This is another example of how funds need to be kept local and out of the hands of the Feds. If we didn't have to pay so much in tax to the Feds the commonwealth would have closer access to the necessary funds without going through the middleman, and a very inefficient one at that. We need to shrink the government and its access to our money on all fronts.

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