TRANSPORTATION TODAY AND TOMORROW: ENVISIONING A GREATER RICHMOND
Transportation is central to life. It is how people access employment, connect with resources such as grocery stores and hospitals, and return home to their families at the end of the day.

Richmond was once a shining example of transportation done right. We had the world’s first successful electric streetcar system, and our streets were accessible for multiple modes of transportation. Today, many of the Richmond region’s streets are packed with cars, often occupied by just a single passenger. Pedestrians and cyclists have a hard time navigating dangerous crossings. And while a public bus system is in place in the city, there are few connections to the greater region. We need to transform our transportation system. Although some significant positive steps have been taken in recent years, much more needs to be done.

This exhibition features the critical insights and hopeful visions of numerous city leaders – people who are doing important work in the realm of transportation – alongside the words and stories of Richmonders who experience the highs and lows of our transit system on a daily basis.

We hope this exhibition will spark dialogue and conversation around the transportation challenges Richmond faces, but also the many opportunities we have for growth and improvement. And so we ask you: what is your vision for a greater Richmond?

About the Contributors

Emily Onufer, '17, a Bonner Scholar and Environmental Studies major at the University of Richmond, curated this exhibition alongside Alexandra Byrum, UR Downtown Educational Programming Coordinator. She has always been interested in the interactions between people and the natural world.

Trip Pollard, Senior Attorney with the Southern Environmental Law Center (SELC) and leader of their Land and Community Program, served as an advisor for this project. He is also a featured interviewee in the exhibition. You can learn more about SELC’s work on their website: southernenvironment.org.

Dean Whitbeck served as photographer for this exhibition. A Richmond-based photographer, educator, and lecturer, his portraiture work focuses on intimate stories about the dignity and courage found in marginalized communities. You can learn more about his work on his website: deanwhitbeck.com.
ANDY BOENAU
Urban Planning and Design Group Leader, Timmons Group

“There have been a lot of studies, a lot of books written about things like how do you make a happy place, how do you make a happy city, how do you make a vibrant downtown? The way you restore peace, love, and happiness is to have places that allow people to move around and interact with each other. And so the best way to interact with each other is walking or riding a bicycle.”
“Charlotte and Richmond were the same size in the 1960s. Charlotte merged with Mecklenburg County, created a racially integrated school system, and began to proceed to develop into one of the largest cities in the South. Richmond did the exact opposite. It stayed split; and we have behaved as if we were the Balkan states. We have been fighting each other, the four jurisdictions here, ever since. The result of that, you can see, is a pettiness, a lack of vision, a lack of any common voice, and a kind of general depression and sense of futility that really infects the entire populace. That doesn't have to be true. There's tremendous wonder and light among many of the people of this city, and the possibility of making it a really healthy place is a simple step away. Public transportation is probably the simplest thing we could do to unite ourselves as one metropolitan city.”
CATHERINE BRAY

Planner, Urban Transportation Planning Division, Richmond Regional Planning District Commission

“We live in a region that’s really polycentric, and it has multiple activity centers in Henrico, the City of Richmond, and Chesterfield, and many of these activity centers are beyond the reach of public transit. There remains an unequal ability for residents without vehicles to access food, medical services, jobs, and education. My vision for the future is that our transportation will expand to respond to the full range of our residents’ needs and more options will become available. Connected regions that work, work for everyone. Equitable communities are more resilient, have stronger economic growth for everybody, and are more sustainable socially, financially, and environmentally.”
DANNY PLAUGHER
Executive Director, Virginians for High Speed Rail

“I think our region truly needs a transportation system that connects all the major hubs and brings them together, and gives our citizens – whether it’s an elderly individual who no longer has the ability to drive or a student who came to Richmond without a car – the option of getting from point A to point B.”
GRETA HARRIS

Executive Director, Better Housing Coalition

“I truly believe that as a community, we will not reach our fullest potential unless we reach back a helping hand to those who are impoverished. Our region has too many families that are just rooted in poverty. It is not their dream to stay that way – but I think they need help to find or even to create paths for them to become their best selves. When we work together, we become better as a community.

One of the key linkages for helping people to reach their fullest potential is employment, at a living wage. Unfortunately, many of those jobs are not necessarily in close proximity to where people of modest means live. So the connectivity between where people live and opportunities for gainful employment is really key. Having a thoughtful, regional transportation system, I think, will be really critical for ensuring sound poverty reduction options in RVA.”
JOHN MOESER
Senior Fellow, Bonner Center for Civic Engagement, University of Richmond

“Richmond was the first city in the United States to develop a commercially successful streetcar system, and it was a world wonder. The interurban line connecting Richmond to Ashland was powered by GE technology and could be operated at top speeds of 90 miles per hour! The streetcar lines were often owned by land developers who were more concerned about selling raw land outside the city than providing mobility for people living inside the city. That’s what led to the creation of streetcar suburbs. Examples included Westhampton (where the University of Richmond built its new campus), Ginter Park, Highland Park, Barton Heights, and Forest Hill. Then in 1949, Richmond fell in love with the private automobile and the consequence was that all of the streetcars were burned.”
LYNETTA THOMPSON
District President, Richmond Branch, NAACP

“The amount of money the City is getting ready to spend on a track to serve what I consider a choice community is very discriminatory. Even though the City is promising to have connectors to the track – after they take care of their priority, no money has been allocated when they come back to hook up the connectors, which really speaks to how concerned the city is about its entire community.”
MAX HEPP-BUCHANAN

Director, Bike Walk RVA for Sportsbackers

“I envision a region that is served by a connected and integrated network of walking, biking, and transit infrastructure that makes those ways of traveling the most convenient, cost-effective, and safe ways of getting around. Regardless of age, ability, income level, or where you live, everyone should feel comfortable and confident leaving their cars at home for basic trips. I want kids to have the freedom to walk and bike to school for a healthy way to start their day, I want elderly people to be able to age in place, and I want riding a bike and walking to be accepted as totally normal forms of transportation.”
“To be able to have the city of Richmond, the county of Henrico, and the University of Richmond come together to say we’re going to work together to invite more people to walk and bike and find a way onto our campus safely is the dream for me. That’s starting already, which is really great... Right now, it’s also hard to get from one side of campus to the other unless you’re using roads. It would be wonderful to have flat, accessible paths for people who use wheels, people who use their legs, and people who get around using non-motorized transport.”
TRIP POLLARD

Director of the Land and Community Program,
Southern Environmental Law Center

“There are so many opportunities to make transportation more sustainable and more equitable. It’s up to us. Technology can play an important role, but policy changes, such as better linking transportation and land use, are essential. For example, many areas have vast stretches of asphalt parking that promotes driving, chews up land, and increases polluted runoff. We can reduce parking requirements for new development and encourage things like converting existing lots to pocket parks or to mixed use development that is walkable and transit-oriented.”
MICHEL ZAJUR

President & CEO, Virginia Hispanic Chamber of Commerce

“So many immigrants’ families and individuals in our community cannot get a driver’s license. When you don’t have a driver’s license and there is not adequate public transportation, you’re at such a disadvantage. It benefits everyone in the community to issue driver’s licenses for safety, security, and practicality. Virginia should allow driver’s licenses for all citizens of the Commonwealth just like many other states already do.”
SHIKEIA RIVERA

Transit Rider

“I catch one bus from where I live to the Transfer Plaza and from the Transfer Plaza to Libbie Avenue. It’s unreal how many hilarious conversations you can hear, and how many sad ones.”
DARRIELLE WATSON

Transit Rider

“I hold conversations with the drivers on a regular basis. I share some of my good experiences with them and sometimes they will share some of their experiences. I actually met a bus driver who is from my hometown which is Philadelphia… What would be a good change for our transportation system? Further distance. What would make it fair for more riders would be further distances, because the buses don’t travel to some communities.”
GRETA LEWIS
Transit Rider

“[I would love] more buses on holidays and weekends. They cut off certain buses on Saturdays and Sundays, and we don’t have transportation out to certain places. So, we have to do everything Monday through Friday.”
DAVID ROBINSON

Transit Rider

“[The bus] is cheap, and you can go just about everywhere you need to go besides Chesterfield. I wish certain buses would run more often. Like the 6, it runs back to back to back to back, but the 32, which is the bus I take, runs about every hour. Sometimes, if I get off work at 3:00, the bus doesn’t come until 3:45, so I have to wait for 45 minutes.”
WILLIAM FUTREL

Transit Rider

“I should be able to tie [my wheelchair] down myself. They don’t lock them in very well, and it is dangerous when some of the parts are not working... I did not really use [public transportation] that much before the last 2 or 3 years. Now I am very dependent on the bus. It’s how I get around.”
ANTHONY SCOTT with JOSIAH WATTS

Transit Riders

“I’ve been riding the buses since I was thirteen, and they always get me where I need to go. The bus drivers are always helpful and nice.”
“On a good day, my route to my mom’s house takes 45 minutes. On a bad day, it takes about an hour... I’ve had a very positive experience riding the bus in Richmond, and I’ve had some very nice drivers.”
APRIL RIDLEY

Transit Rider

“I take the bus every day from Midlothian to downtown to Staples Mill... I love the bus. I love the people. I'm thankful to have the resource.”
KIRK O’BRIEN
Cyclist

“I’ve been biking in cities for 35 years and Richmond is the easiest and safest urban area to cycle in by far.”
ROBBIE WOOD

Cyclist

“When a motorist is frustrated with a cyclist, they refuse to recognize the disparity between the effort the motorist is putting out in the world and the effort the cyclist is putting out in the world. It’s about learning how to respect the work people put into their daily lives and giving them the space to do so. That’s a relationship and a social thing, not advocacy or funding.”
CURTIS

Cyclist

“A car or a bus can’t get me where I need to go as fast as my bike.”