

Stimulus Money Fuels New 69 Million Dollar HRT Headquarters

The Virginian-Pilot

April 6, 2009

BY Debbie Messina

An infusion of federal economic stimulus money will help Hampton Roads Transit build a \$69.3 million campus on 18th Street to replace its aging administration and bus maintenance buildings.

The transit agency's South Hampton Roads operations will be consolidated at the 10-acre site, freeing its Monticello Avenue office in an old Cadillac dealership for new development.

"This is stuff that's been long overdue," HRT President and CEO Michael Townes said.

"The administrative office is outdated, inefficient and overcrowded," Townes said. Plus, light-rail operations are projected to start in Norfolk later next year, placing more demands on the space.

The main bus operations buildings on 18th Street are more than 100 years old and were built for streetcars. "Not only are they decrepit," Townes said, "but the only way to maneuver a large bus inside the bays is to fold in the side mirrors and have staff on both sides direct the driver through the narrow opening."

Despite many years of planning, the project had been on hold because of a funding shortage.

With \$14 million in stimulus money for transit, construction can now start in October.

"Being in the right place at the right time has played in our favor," Townes said. "We have a shovel-ready project that will create jobs in Norfolk."

Cheryl Openshaw, HRT's chief project management officer, estimates 200 temporary construction jobs will be created.

HRT, through city allocations, will pay for \$4.25 million of the costs. The federal government is contributing \$48.5 million, which includes the \$14 million in stimulus money, and the state about \$16.5 million.

Originally, the project was going to be phased, with the bus operations portion coming first, but the stimulus funds accelerated the schedule.

"We have this need with or without implementation of rail transit," Townes said. "The more efficiently and effectively we run buses, the better overall transit operation we'll have."

City officials are excited that the Monticello Avenue land, which abuts two vacant city-owned properties, will be available.

"It opens up all kinds of development opportunities," Councilman and HRT board member W. Randy Wright said.

"It's all speculative at this point," Townes said. "We have not agreed upon a development plan."

The new HRT complex at 18th Street and Armistead Avenue will include a parking deck that separates the bus maintenance facility and the administrative offices.

About 570 employees will work there. HRT has offices and bus operations on the Peninsula as well.

The buildings will meet environmental standards and will include a rain water harvesting component for bus washing.

The bus area will be 63,000 square feet and will include 20 bus bays. The second floor will include 16,000 square feet for dispatch, operations and training.

A separate 15,000-square-foot building will be used for bus fueling and washing.

The administration building will be 36,000 square feet and may include a green roof which would be partially or completely covered in vegetation.

During construction, bus operations will move to a portion of the vacant Ford truck plant in Norfolk, which HRT will lease. The new bus facility is projected to open in December 2010 with the new administration building to follow in early 2011.