



VIEWS & VISIONS

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Moving West Virginia Multimodal Transportation into the 21st Century

The Honorable Robert H. Plymale, Senator
State of West Virginia

As CEO and director of the Rahall Transportation Institute (RTI), Robert Plymale leads a dynamic team of business, academic and research professionals working to enhance safety and economic development opportunities through transportation. He also is the director of the Multimodal Transportation & Infrastructure Consortium (MTIC), a Tier I University Transportation Center led by RTI.

In addition to managing the day-to-day operations at RTI, he is currently serving his fifth term in the West Virginia State Senate, District 5. He is chairman of the Senate Education Committee and serves on the Budget Conferees, Rules, Finance, Pensions, Confirmations, and Transportation and Infrastructure committees, respectively.

In 2003, Senator Plymale was appointed to the Board of Control for the Southern Regional Education Board and now serves on the executive committee. He also is president of the Council of University Transportation Centers.

He is the recipient of the Presidential Citation from Glenville State College, a Distinguished Service Award from the West Virginia Athletic Directors Association and the Michael Prestera Award of Excellence in recognition of his efforts to improve the lives of individuals living with behavioral health issues. In 2005, he received the Distinguished Service to the Community Award from Marshall University.

Senator Plymale is a graduate of Marshall University.

Warren Gamaliel Bennis, an American scholar widely regarded as a pioneer of the contemporary field of leadership studies, once said, "Leadership is the capacity to translate vision into reality." The Rahall Transportation Institute (RTI) became reality in 1999, when Congressman Nick Joe Rahall, II persevered in translating his vision of a multimodal research institute to enhance economic development through safer, more efficient transportation infrastructure throughout West Virginia and the Appalachian region.

In 1999, RTI conducted a commodity flow study for the West Virginia Department of Transportation (WVDOT). This study provided information on existing transportation infrastructure in West Virginia that emphasized the need for additional studies related to the lack of container shipments in the tri-state region. A subsequent effort identified two major impediments for global shipments, one being the lack of a container pool and the other being the inability to ship double-stacked containers by rail. The study highlighted that



the height of tunnels would need to be increased to accommodate double-stack containers, as well as a need for an intermodal facility along the Norfolk Southern rail corridor that would become known as the Heartland Corridor. It was determined that Prichard, West Virginia would be the optimal regional location for the state's first intermodal facility.

The impetus for changing the way we, as West Virginians, plan, finance and conduct research to develop the multimodal transportation system for the 21st century, is precipitated by a shift in



RTI's Traffic Management Center in Huntington, West Virginia utilizes Intelligent Transportation Systems applied research



An artist's rendering of West Virginia's first intermodal terminal, to be located in Prichard, West Virginia

the conditions by which transportation infrastructure decisions are made. We can no longer assume resources of the past will be available to fund future transportation projects. Changing economic conditions, globalization, technological developments and the like call for new strategies. RTI continues to partner with some of the most innovative public and private groups across the state in the following areas:

Planning is a key element for transportation and economic development throughout West Virginia. It provides greater clarity to economic developers on where to effectively focus increasingly scarce resources. It is imperative that, through our planning efforts, we develop and support a smart growth model for West Virginia which addresses the diverse needs of our state and provides a blueprint for economic progress. Smart growth principles aim to develop sustainable communities that are good places to live, conduct business and raise families. While these principles are very basic in nature, the goals are lofty but obtainable. A goal of the smart growth plan for our state should be to ensure we are competitive for new business opportunities in both regional and global markets by providing the most efficient, cost-effective and timely methods to move goods and people.

The strengths and weaknesses of transportation and economic development planning strategies in our state are becoming

evident through projects such as the development of Corridor H, I-73/74 National Highway System (NHS) Corridor and US Route 35. These projects are examples of future critical commerce corridors that will benefit from land use planning and economic development strategies. For example, the Mingo County Redevelopment Authority's creative land use master plan serves as a model component of a comprehensive transportation and economic development plan.

Financing transportation projects has always been a challenge, but we must continue to find new and innovative means to build and maintain our transportation system. I commend Governor Earl Ray Tomblin and appreciate his forward thinking of our state's need for a long-term strategic plan for transportation. The process Governor Tomblin has set forth will include funding options for maintenance, construction and expansion of the state's transportation system.

West Virginia must have a comprehensive plan that allows multiple alternatives for financing of transportation, which include, but are not limited to, Tax Increment Financing (TIF), market tax credits, and Transportation Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (TIFIA) funding for surface transportation projects. The new federal transportation bill, Moving Ahead for the 21st Century Act (MAP-21), includes a rural component of financing

that requires a project to be regional in nature. Corridor H, I-73/74 and US Route 35 are examples of projects that fit this type of funding requirement and should be considered in the future.

Research and development must continue to be a priority for effective multimodal transportation and infrastructure development. Investments in applied research and technology deployments provide the means for solving some of the state's most pressing problems. RTI continues to lead the way in Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) applied research by providing traffic management solutions in Morgantown, Fairmont and Huntington. A study conducted by RTI's Transportation Economics group has been crucial in identifying the economic benefits of public-private partnerships on reclaimed mine sites in the construction of the I-73/74 NHS Corridor. We must continue to make the investments into research that pave the way for our safe, livable and sustainable future.

It is imperative we foster economic growth and development with new strategies. While there is still work to be done, these collaborative strategies, combined with vision and leadership, will drive multimodal transportation into the 21st century. ▽