



## **REALTORS<sup>®</sup> Help Bring Light Rail to Hampton Roads, VA – December 2012**

In 1999, a referendum gauging whether the city of Virginia Beach should pursue light rail as an alternative transportation option failed at the polls. With 13 years' hindsight; traffic not getting any better; and the neighboring city of Norfolk enjoying all the benefits of its new light rail system; the Hampton Roads REALTORS<sup>®</sup> Association (HRRRA) was not about to let the next chance go by.

“In fact, I’ve found evidence in the files that HRRRA has been in support of light rail here since at least 1987,” reports Andrew Sinclair, the 3,300-member association’s Government Affairs Director. “When the 1999 referendum failed, it wouldn’t be up for consideration again for another 10 years – and that gave light rail proponents plenty of time to mobilize. Anything we can do to increase mobility, and encourage regional economic development, including real estate opportunities, we want to encourage.”

The new referendum was put on the ballot back in April, and HRRRA was determined to be involved in the push to pass it. First, Sinclair requested a poll from the NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS<sup>®</sup>, which revealed that the referendum was slightly down, with very few undecided voters. The City Council was known to favor light rail, and wanted the referendum to pass, but would be unwilling to move forward without it.

In talking with representatives of Light Rail Now, a grassroots coalition; and Move Hampton Roads, a political action group, Sinclair learned where they most needed help. “NAR had been doing a great job of promoting its REALTOR<sup>®</sup> Party resources, and our project seemed like a perfect candidate for the services and support it offers,” he says. His request for an Issues Mobilization grant of \$74,000 was approved in short order: \$24,000 for further polling and a focus group; \$50,000 to cover the cost of three direct mail pieces created by a local consultant.

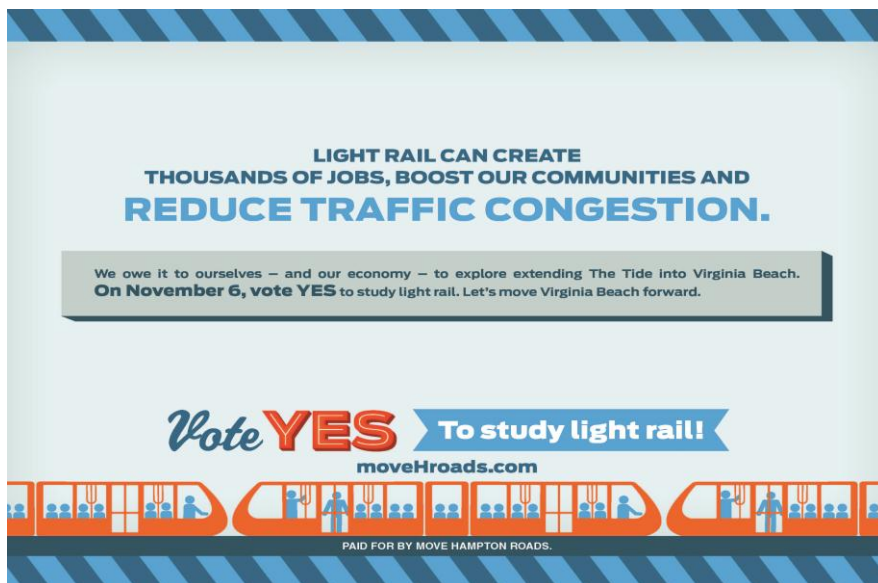
“The direct mailings were highly strategic,” explains Sinclair. “We timed them to raise awareness starting just two weeks prior to the General Election, and that really provided momentum to the cause.” From poll to poll, support for light rail was shown to be edging up, and HRRRA was “cautiously optimistic.” Voter turn-out was strong, with waits of at least an hour reported at every polling station. Even though the light rail referendum was printed on the last page of a very long ballot, 96 percent of voters cast a vote on the measure. At the end of the day, the referendum was carried in 90 of the 95 local precincts, with the approval of 62 percent of the voters.

In addition to the funds from NAR, HRRRA gave Move Hampton Roads \$5,000 from its own Issues Mobilization Fund, and \$7,500 was donated by the state



association – making the REALTORS® the single largest contributor to the cause. “We’re getting lots of gratitude and respect from the broad coalition that supports light rail here, from the business community to the City Council, itself,” says Sinclair. “It’s given us a high-profile platform from which to declare: ‘We’ve made this contribution, and this is why it’s important: for our city to enjoy mobility and growth, transit must be improved – and light rail will do it.’”

To learn more about Hampton Roads’ big step closer to light rail transport, contact Hampton Roads REALTORS® Association’s Governmental Affairs Director, Andrew Sinclair, at [asinclair@hrra.com](mailto:asinclair@hrra.com)



HRRRA’s direct mail pieces to help pass the referendum for light rail in Hampton Roads