VRTC
Visitors Reception and Transportation Center
Charleston, South Carolina
FOUR GOALS

The Charleston VRTC (Visitor Reception and Transportation Center) will provide a new cornerstone for tourism management and will help create a more integrated transportation plan for Charleston. Located on Meeting Street one half mile south of the interchange of I-26 with U.S. Route 17, the site is particularly well suited to receive visitors to Charleston. Of particular interest, are the many important historic, cultural, and commercial components which come together in this one location across from the new Charleston Museum. This two block, mixed use development should also encourage residential and commercial revitalization north of Calhoun Street.

The following goals summarize the purpose of the Charleston VRTC:

1. TOURISM MANAGEMENT

As a historic city of national acclaim, Charleston has witnessed a remarkable increase in tourism over the past decade. This rapidly increasing tourist activity comes as a mixed blessing; while the commercial benefits are welcomed, the negative impact of traffic and congestion within the residential districts is detrimental. The VRTC signifies a new and comprehensive approach to tourism management through the creation of a new cultural magnet: a consciously designed district which will include The Visitor Center, The Charleston Museum, a railroad museum, and three significant Charleston antebellum residences. From this location, a new multi-modal transportation system will circulate visitors throughout the peninsula.

2. INTEGRATED TRANSPORTATION

In the decades ahead, a better balance of energy efficient transportation is critical to the mobility of America’s urban centers. The VRTC site is conceived as one of several multi-modal transportation hubs needed for the metropolitan area. As such, the two block district permits a tying together of various movement systems on both a city and regional scale. The integration of these systems with the Visitor Reception Center offers new possibilities for both tourism management and citizen mobility in Charleston.

3. RAILROAD HISTORY

The VRTC falls within a site of national significance: the birth place of the Southern Railroad and America’s first passenger rail service. Accordingly, the master plan reflects the synthesis of many factors, with special emphasis on the history of Southern Railroad. Therefore, the “DASH” Transit Mall aligns itself along the original Southern right-of-way and is conceived as being part of an open air railroad Museum. This Transit Mall, along with the interpretive reuse of the Old Camden Depot Towers, creates a transportation center reflective of Charleston’s rich railroad history.

4. URBAN REVITALIZATION

Urban revitalization can only succeed when a strategy is devised which balances public commitments with private investments. In the VRTC project, new office space and hotel accommodations are conceived as integral parts of the site. Adjacent to the Visitor Center, a family style hotel of approximately 300 rooms will be constructed. On the northern portion of the two block site are three phases of office development which will total over 300,000 square feet of floor area. Moreover, the prestige which this development brings to the area should positively impact surrounding properties.
BENEFITS

ECONOMICS
Investments and returns.

Public and private investments on the two block project area will total over $35,000,000. The tax benefits to the city and county from such improvements are estimated to be over $800,000 annually.

PRESERVATION
Preserving historic buildings.

The project will result in the preservation of the significant structures on site, as well as encourage the restoration of such important adjacent structures as the Governor Aiken House.

REVITALIZATION
Renewal of adjacent neighborhoods.

Adjacent neighborhoods and the upper King Street commercial district should directly benefit from site development. In addition, further commercial and office development should be stimulated in the King/Meeting Streets corridor north of the project site.

ENERGY
Energy savings.

The long term energy implications of a mixed use project of this scale are difficult to measure. However, a more densely developed city, recycled structures, and more fully utilized mass transportation system inevitably will lead to very significant energy savings as compared to suburban type development.