

can we get there from here?

THE FUTURE OF DOWNTOWN NORFOLK

IN A SPLIT SECOND, MAKE A DECISION. Do not hit the brakes. Do not hesitate. Decide. Hard left? Hard right? Detour? Eight signs pointing in three directions advise drivers at the intersection of Duke and York streets near Freemason in downtown Norfolk. The signs force drivers to quickly process information before accelerating boldly into the unknown. What requires eight options at one intersection – so many that drivers are left nearly paralyzed by indecision? Progress or chaos? Months of heavy construction and a half-dozen major projects have revealed a bleak downtown underbelly that is difficult to navigate by car or on foot.

City leaders understand the frustration. But they warn that the next three months will be worse.

"We know we're making life miserable," said Philip Shucet, the head of Hampton Roads Transit, the agency installing light rail.

Drivers gaze out the window at the torn-up streets and don't see the possibilities. They sneer at the construction worker holding a "Slow" sign. Slow, they scoff, would be an improvement.

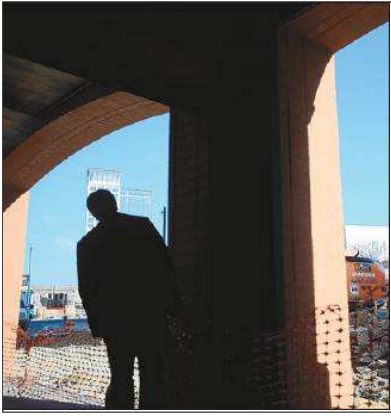
And then they do what they always do. They wait. Impatiently.



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I look out from the York Street Garage into a morass of construction. Well, it's progress ...



A tangle of detour signs on Duke Street can leave drivers paralyzed: Which way do you turn? How far will you get before you hit another roadblock? Will this mess pay off for Norfolk soon?

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