



December 9, 2020

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Executive Director

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The Honorable Tim Kaine
United States Senate
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The Honorable Gerald Connolly
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The Honorable Don Beyer
United States House of Representatives
1119 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Jennifer Wexton
United States House of Representatives
1217 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 2051

Re: COVID-19 Relief for Transit Agencies

Dear Northern Virginia Congressional Delegation:

At its December 3, 2020 meeting, the Northern Virginia Transportation Commission (NVTC) unanimously approved the attached "2021 NVTC Legislative and Policy Agenda," which calls for continued support for COVID-19 relief for transit agencies. We know that each of you have provided steadfast support for transit in the past and we urge you to continue to negotiate for the full \$32 billion in funding recommended by the American Public Transportation Association to sustain public transit agencies. These funds are absolutely critical to the health of the public transit industry - in particular Washington Metropolitan Transit Authority (WMATA) - as it continues to safely move essential workers to their jobs.

Locally, the COVID-19 pandemic has propelled WMATA to the frontlines to ensure that medical and other essential workers can get to their jobs. At the outset of the pandemic, WMATA continued key routes to essential workplaces, rightsized service to respond to ridership needs and increased cleaning and social distancing measures to protect passengers and employees. However, these measures decimated WMATA's operating revenues as ridership declines reached nearly 90%.

Thanks to your leadership, the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act) provided \$876.8 million in support to WMATA that will sustain the agency until early next year. With those critical funds, WMATA has been able to safely move thousands of essential workers, even as ridership plummeted and revenue streams diminished.

Now, as our economy begins to recover, financial pressures brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic continue to threaten WMATA's ability to provide service.

In the upcoming FY 2022 fiscal year, WMATA faces an unprecedented crisis with an anticipated \$494.4 million operating budget deficit. On top of service reductions and layoffs that are budgeted for the remainder of FY 2021, severe actions are proposed to reduce the budget gap including cutting weekend rail service, closing 19 of its 91 rail stations, shortening hours of operations, reducing bus routes from 66 to 5 and redistributing capital funds intended for system repairs and expansion to cover operating costs. For instance, service on Metroway, the first bus rapid transit line in the Washington Metropolitan Area - adjacent to the future Amazon HQ2 headquarters - would be eliminated in the FY 2022 budget. Key commuter and local Metrobus services in Arlington, Alexandria, Falls Church, Fairfax, Annandale, Springfield and Burke would also disappear. And several Metrorail stations serving communities in Arlington and Fairfax County would be shuttered.

Underscoring the severity of WMATA's budget fiscal situation is the proposal to lay off 2,400 FTE. This proposal would undoubtedly have a detrimental effect on the employees who kept the system operating during the pandemic but also on the agency's long-term operations when ridership rebounds and skilled employees are needed to expand service.

Transit is a lifeline for essential workers and critical to the region's economic health. Nearly \$600 million in statewide revenues are earned each year from economic activities supported by Metrorail and the Virginia Railway Express. Without federal support, WMATA may be forced to make grim cuts that threaten to further delay the region's economic recovery. However, public transit remains critical to keeping our region competitive, equitable and sustainable. Therefore, we encourage you to continue to fight for \$32 billion to support public transportation in the next COVID-19 relief bill.

Please do not hesitate to contact me or Executive Director Kate Mattice at 571-457-9523 if we can be of further assistance on this important issue.

Best Regards,



Katie Cristol,
NVTC Chair

2021 LEGISLATIVE AND POLICY AGENDA STATE PRIORITIES

Protect Existing Transit Programs and Funding



NVTC supports protecting existing transit program and revenue sources and supports protecting dedicated funding for WMATA and VRE. The 2020 General Assembly adopted an historic transportation omnibus bill last spring that streamlined Virginia's transportation funding allocation model and secured sustainable revenues for local transit operators.



Connect Riders to Opportunity through Transit

NVTC supports programs and initiatives that reduce barriers to transit. Accessible, affordable transportation is critical to helping people reach jobs, education and health care. In addition to transit's well-documented environmental and economic benefits, transit can be a powerful tool to advance racial equity and social justice.



Continue Support for the Transforming Rail in Virginia Program

NVTC encourages continued support for the Transforming Rail in Virginia program. Across Virginia, drivers experience 230 million hours of delay resulting in \$6.5 billion in annual congestion costs, and the Long Bridge is at 98% capacity during peak periods. The Long Bridge project along with some of Governor Northam's other rail initiatives are projected to generate nearly \$370 million in annual economic benefits and remove an additional 165 million passenger miles from the state's roadways.



Restore Funding to the Northern Virginia Transportation Authority (NVTA)

NVTC proposes restoring funding for NVTA. Two of the NVTA's three revenue streams were redirected due to the implementation of the WMATA Capital Fund in 2018. The General Assembly passed legislation to secure additional revenue for NVTA, but prior funding levels have not been restored. The loss of these revenues directly affects funding available for transit capital, as well as the local revenues to support transit operations.



Preserve NVTC Stewardship of NVTC Programs

NVTC supports preserving its programs and interests in Northern Virginia. NVTC provides a venue for and is a model of policy coordination and program implementation that works in Northern Virginia and has the participation of its component jurisdictions and their elected leaders. As an experienced steward of transit funding and regional partner to the Commonwealth, the General Assembly should continue to support NVTC's role in administering programs that promote transit and multimodal options that serve Northern Virginia.



Update Remote Public Meetings Language

NVTC supports efforts to provide public bodies with greater flexibility to hold open and transparent meetings electronically and for members to participate remotely outside of a declared state of emergency. In addition, NVTC seeks approval to permanently allow greater use of virtual public meetings and hearings with robust public engagement and feedback, including those that may be joint with other regional and state entities. This includes support for increasing or removing the state limit on how often members may participate electronically when there is a physical quorum present while retaining NVTC's authority to govern such participation with additional guidelines or restrictions.

2021 LEGISLATIVE AND POLICY AGENDA FEDERAL PRIORITIES

Reauthorize Dedicated Federal Funding for WMATA

In 2008, Congress passed the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act, which authorized dedicated funding of \$1.5 billion over 10 years to WMATA for needed capital and safety improvements. With these important federal funds, WMATA has been able to address key state of good repair needs such as replacement railcars, IT upgrades, and station platform rehabilitation. These federal funds continue to be an important investment in sustaining and improving WMATA's regional transit network. NVTC urges Congress to reauthorize dedicated federal funding for both operating expenses and capital and state of good repair needs for WMATA of at least \$150 million per year.

Continue support for COVID-19 Relief for Transit Agencies

Thanks to the passage of the CARES Act, WMATA saw short-term financial relief due to this infusion of federal aid. Due to the prolonged recovery from the pandemic and subsequent shortfalls in ridership and fare revenue, WMATA anticipates additional financial and operating challenges without more federal support. NVTC urges Congress to provide additional COVID-19 relief funding for transit agencies increased costs and revenue losses.

Reauthorize the FAST Act and Fix the Highway Trust Fund

The Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act of 2015 provided \$61.1 billion over five fiscal years for programs administered by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA). The next surface transportation bill should support major transit state of good repair investments, transit innovations and technologies, as well as expansion projects (i.e. Long Bridge, Rosslyn Tunnel Improvements, and roadway upgrades to support Bus Rapid Transit routes). NVTC urges Congress to reauthorize the surface transportation bill funded by dedicated, sustainable revenues to ensure major transit investment programs are adequately funded. Further, NVTC supports Congressional efforts to fix structural issues and address the long-term sustainability of the Mass Transit Account of the Highway Trust Fund (HTF). The HTF shortfall must be addressed to meet the needs of transit today and in the future.

Identify Federal Funding and Financing for Long Bridge

NVTC supports federal funding and financing for the Long Bridge expansion project. The Long Bridge Corridor plays an essential role in the Washington metropolitan region, the east coast transportation network, and the national railroad network. An expanded Long Bridge is projected to achieve \$17 million in time savings for rail users and between \$24 - 59 million in time savings for road users per year by 2040. As the only rail crossing between Virginia and cities along the Northeast Corridor, Long Bridge is vital to the future of mobility and economic growth in Northern Virginia and communities along the East Coast.

Continue Support for Commuter Tax Benefits

Commuter tax benefits make transit service more attractive to commuters who currently drive alone. NVTC supports the continuation of federal transit commuter benefits that are on par with the tax incentive provided for parking. Further, NVTC encourages federal programs that support the use of carpools, vanpools, rideshare, bike share, and transportation demand management (TDM) as effective tools to eliminate traffic congestion.

2021 LEGISLATIVE AND POLICY AGENDA

Making the Case for a Thriving Transit Network

Northern Virginia's economic growth and global competitiveness are directly tied to the region's transit network. With more than 847,000 jobs located within a quarter mile of a rail station or bus stop, Northern Virginia is among the nation's most transit-accessible areas. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on travel behavior and transit ridership. Below are a few messages that underscore why transit still matters in Northern Virginia during and beyond the pandemic:

- During the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak, public transit agencies across the country continue to work tirelessly to provide safe and efficient service and working to secure the health and safety of riders, the public, and transit employees.
- This crisis has thrown into the spotlight the importance of public transportation in keeping our society working and how important it will be to the economic recovery of our communities and the nation.
- Transit provides much-needed access for workers who don't have paid leave and still rely on transit. We also have loved ones, friends and neighbors who need transit to get to supermarkets, pharmacies, and medical facilities.
- Transit provides an economic foundation for Northern Virginia. Amazon HQ2 and other businesses have moved to the region partly due to the extensive transit network.
- Our region invested billions of dollars in building, maintaining and repairing the Metrorail system. We must continue to support the system now or we face the prospect of costly repairs in the future.
- Our region has adopted aggressive environmental goals which include reducing single occupancy car traffic and expanding transit. A robust transit system encourages people to drive less and reduces vehicle emissions. Furthermore, we cannot afford to add a traffic crisis on top of the current crises our nation is facing.

Public transportation in Northern Virginia is as vital now as ever. The pandemic has revealed much about our region, but one revelation is the critical importance of effective, well-funded public transportation that connects us.

Transit Systems that Serve NVTC's Communities

