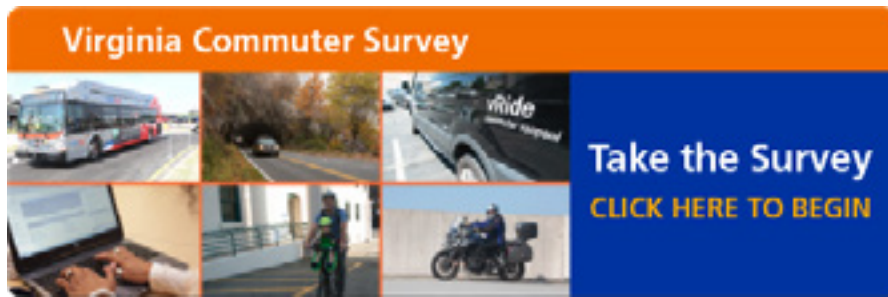
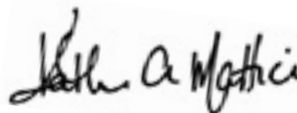


Cherry blossom season brings hope of renewal to our region and we have other reasons to be optimistic this year. While we haven't reached the end of the COVID-19 pandemic, with the increasing pace of vaccinations there are signs that our lives will return to some sense of normalcy. However, big questions remain about how quickly people will return to in-person work and riding our region's buses and trains. The Virginia Departments of Transportation and Rail and Public Transportation are once again asking commuters who live or work in the Commonwealth to answer a [survey](#) to understand how commutes are changing due to the pandemic. Check it out and let VDOT and DRPT know your plans!



While COVID has upended public transit in the short term, we are grateful that leaders at the highest levels recognize its importance to the long-term viability and growth of Northern Virginia, the Washington region and the country as a whole. Partnered with a celebration of the American Recovery Plan Act's \$1.4 billion investment in D.C.-area transit systems, U.S. Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigieg, Gov. Ralph Northam and the leaders of CSX, Amtrak and VRE came together on March 30th to sign the monumental Transforming Rail in Virginia agreement, paving the way to expand and improve VRE and Amtrak service in the Commonwealth.

Between the Federal investment and passenger rail partnerships, things are looking bright for our region.



Executive Director

Key Dates

- April 16 - VRE Operations Board
- April 22 - NVTC/PRTC Joint Commission Working Group
- April 22 - Program Advisory Committee
- April 28 - Commuter Choice Virtual Town Hall
- May 6 - Commission Meeting

Northern Virginia Transportation Commission
2300 Wilson Blvd., Ste. 230
Arlington, VA 22201

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Secretary Buttigieg, Gov. Northam finalize key rail agreement in Alexandria

U.S. Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigieg joined [Gov. Ralph Northam](#) in Alexandria March 30 to finalize agreements with Virginia Railway Express, Amtrak and CSX as part of the sweeping [Transforming Rail in Virginia project](#).

The partnering agreements support the construction of a new \$1.9 billion Long Bridge over the Potomac River dedicated to passenger rail, acquisition of 386 miles of railroad right-of-way and 223 miles of track from CSX, and an investment of more than \$1 billion in additional infrastructure improvements by the Commonwealth. These investments will allow Virginia to expand Amtrak and VRE services, create a pathway for the separation of freight and passenger rail in Virginia, and preserve future rail corridors.



Over the next ten years, this unique partnership will:

- Double Virginia-supported Amtrak trains providing nearly hourly service
- Increase VRE commuter service by 60%
- Lay the foundation for a Southeast High Speed Rail Corridor
- Preserve an existing freight corridor between Doswell and Clifton Forge for future east-west passenger service
- Create the potential to expand rail to all parts of the Commonwealth



Secretary Buttigieg highlighted the \$43.2 billion for transportation included in the recently-enacted COVID relief bill.

“Funds from the American Rescue Plan will allow VRE to continue to serve front line workers and as offices reopen all of those who depend on us to provide a safe and reliable commute,” said VRE Operations Board Chair Elizabeth Bennett-Parker. Chair Bennett-Parker represents Alexandria on NVTC and noted the post-pandemic importance of expanded commuter rail service. “Given the burgeoning populations in Northern and Central Virginia, these improvements and increased VRE service cannot come too soon.”

Photos courtesy VDOT

Engagement process begins in April for Commuter Choice on the I-395/95 Corridor funding proposals

The Commuter Choice team is developing technical evaluation scores for the 13 eligible proposals under consideration for [Commuter Choice on the I-395/95 Corridor Round Two](#) (FY 2022-FY 2023) funding. The proposals, which have a total funding request of \$21.9 million, represent multimodal strategies put forward by a total of six jurisdictions and transit providers. Each will endeavor to move more people and expand transportation options in the I-395/95 corridor between the Virginia-D.C. line and Spotsylvania County. The proposals focus on continuing previously-funded bus service improvements, expanding local bus routes that have continued to serve essential trips during the COVID-19 public health emergency, increasing park-and-ride capacity to meet long-term demand and rebuilding vanpool ridership in the corridor.

NVTC will open a monthlong, fully online public comment period on the proposals on April 16. The Commuter Choice team will facilitate an interactive virtual town hall meeting over YouTube April 28. Participants will be able to provide feedback and receive answers to questions about the proposed projects and the Commuter Choice program. At the start of the public comment period, NVTC will publish and post a set of project profiles online, including summaries of the proposals and their scores. NVTC will accept comments on the proposals through May 17 via online survey form, email and voicemail.

On April 22, the NVTC-PRTC Joint Commission Working Group (JCWG) will meet to identify and endorse a programming approach for the Round Two program, subject to the proposals’ public comments. The expected available funding of \$30 million over the two fiscal years exceeds the demand in this round. However, the JCWG and full Commissions will consider each proposal’s ability to support the corridor’s improvement goals and consistency with program policy. The Round Two program of projects is slated for adoption by the Commissions and Commonwealth Transportation Board in June. Any remaining funding will be applied to the next Commuter Choice on the I-395/95 Corridor call for projects for FY 2024-FY 2025 in the fall of 2022.



Express Lanes in Springfield. Photo by Famartin, licensed under Creative Commons.

Massive COVID relief bill provides new aid for transit

The third major COVID relief bill passed by Congress in March and signed into law by President Joe Biden gives public transit agencies a lifeline to carry them through 2022, according to [Transportation For America](#) (T4A). The [American Rescue Plan Act](#) (ARPA) includes \$30.5 billion for transit. T4A says transit agencies need another \$9.3 billion to prevent job losses and service cuts through 2023. The American Public Transportation Association (APTA) said in a news release that the legislation, “ensures that all public transit agencies can continue to be a lifeline for our essential workers, ensure Americans can get to vaccine distribution sites, and advance our communities’ efforts to rebuild from the economic fallout of the pandemic.” The previous relief bills, passed in March and December 2020, allocated about \$39 billion for public transit.

The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) [announced](#) in late March that just over \$1.4 billion will be allocated to the Washington region for Metro, VRE, OmniRide and the Maryland Transit Administration. That’s in addition to the combined \$1.85 billion provided in last year’s bills. There’s also help for Amtrak in the ARPA. The bill provides \$1.7 billion, with \$970 million designated for the Northeast Corridor.

“Congress has once again stepped up to address the needs of Metro and the regional transit systems that will be critical to our region’s economic recovery,” said Metro Board of Directors Chair Paul C. Smedberg in a news release.

Virginia budget agreement includes money for Metro, NVTC, rail improvements

The Virginia House and Senate budget negotiators reached an [agreement](#) at the end of it’s Special Session on the two-year state budget amendments that would provide one-time funding to improve passenger rail service, study transit equity in the Commonwealth and establish pilot programs for fare-free transit with urban and rural transit providers. The General Assembly’s budget allocates \$32.4 million to the Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT) to ensure the Commonwealth can provide its share of the dedicated regional funding to the WMATA Capital Fund for FY 2022, and any remaining funds would be sent to NVTC to support Northern Virginia’s FY 2022 operating obligation to Metro. In addition, the budget conference includes up to \$83,500,000 in additional Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT) funding “to improve commuter rail service on the Virginia Railway Express Manassas Line.” The budget awaits Gov. Ralph Northam’s potential amendments and signature.



Virginia Capitol Building. Photo by Karl Martin, licensed under Creative Commons.

NVTC urges Metro to provide dependable, sufficient service

NVTC submitted a [letter](#) in March as part of Metro’s public comment period for its proposed FY 2022 budget. The letter outlines four priorities while recognizing the major funding relief made possible by the American Rescue Plan Act. The Commission presses Metro to:

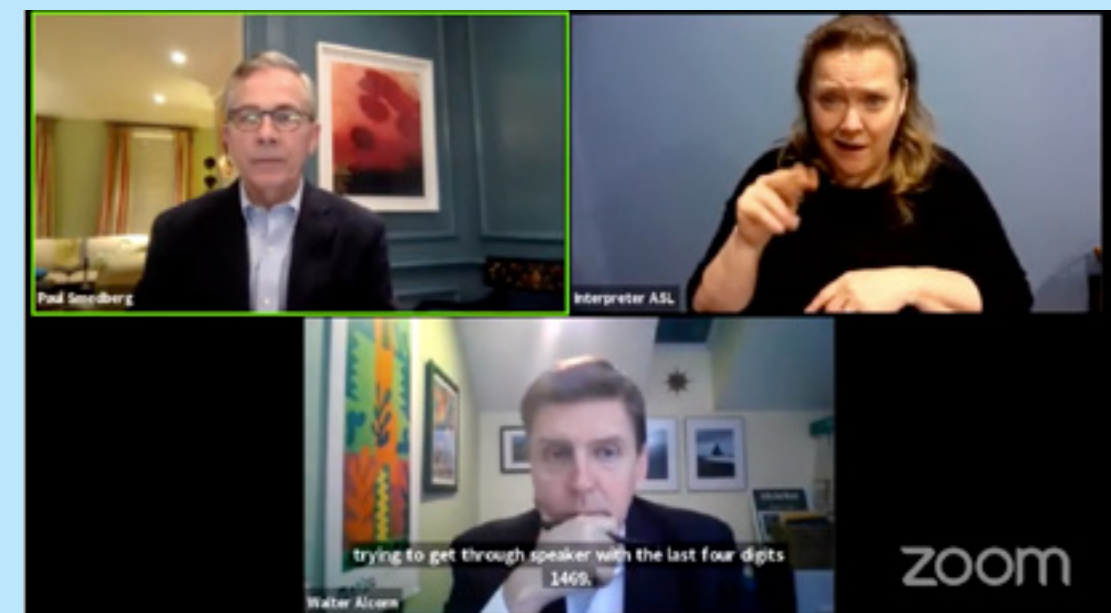
- Maintain a dependable and sufficient level of rail and bus service throughout FY 2022
- Open Silver Line Phase 2 as soon as possible
- Rebuild ridership
- Minimize shifting operating expenses to the capital program

NVTC staff, including WMATA Program Manager Andrew D’huyvetter and Program Analyst Zach Smith, worked with NVTC WMATA Committee Chair Canek Aguirre to develop the letter, ensuring that it reflects the goals of Northern Virginia’s jurisdictions and the Commission’s feedback over the last few months.

Metro says it expects to avert service cuts and layoffs that had been proposed in the budget. The Metro Board expects to vote on a revised FY 2022 budget that takes into consideration this new federal relief in April.

Metro hosts Virginia-focused budget hearing

Metro Board members and NVTC Commissioners Paul Smedberg and Walter Alcorn hosted a Virginia focused [public hearing](#) to take comments on Metro’s Proposed FY 2022 Budget in March. Fellow Commissioner David Snyder provided comments opposing the severe service cuts, and Loudoun County Board Chair Phyllis Randall also provided testimony in support of opening the Silver Line Phase 2 as soon as possible. Commenters representing several community and business groups from Fairfax and Loudoun Counties also expressed their support for a timely opening of the Silver Line Phase 2.



The proposed FY 2022 budget contained severe service cuts which Metro expects to avert with federal relief provided by the recently signed American Recovery Plan. The Board anticipates voting on a revised FY 2022 budget in April that takes into consideration the new federal relief.

NVTC-led marketing campaign discussed at COG meeting

Video ads on [YouTube](#) and video streaming services rolled out in March as part of the NVTC-led regional marketing campaign. The ads encourage viewers to visit [NoVaRides.org](#), where they can find trip planning resources as well as information about transit and the COVID-19 pandemic. While YouTube performed exceptionally well as part of the 2019 marketing campaign, this will be our first foray into television advertising. The ads play on services like CBS, TNT and the History Channel and on devices including Apple TV, Amazon Fire Stick and Roku. The video ads will run through the spring as part of Phase 2 of the campaign. Phase 1 launched in January with radio, online and social media advertising.



Also in March, Communications and Outreach Manager Matt Friedman presented the campaign to transportation demand management and marketing staff from across the region at a meeting of the Transportation Demand Management Group, part of the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments. Matt discussed the campaign's key message, "Moving Forward Together," its ad placements and financial backing.

Participants also heard updates on a future Commuter Connections marketing campaign which, like the NVTC-led effort, is designed to encourage people to return to transit.



The NVTC-led marketing campaign is made possible by a grant from the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation with local matches from VRE, OmniRide, Arlington and Fairfax Counties and the cities of Falls Church and Fairfax.



Staff to study benefits and impacts of free and reduced-fare transit

While the COVID-19 pandemic required transit agencies to quickly adapt their day-to-day fare collection practices, it also created an opportunity to fundamentally re-examine fare collection policy and practices. Following several comments and questions presented by NVTC Commissioners, NVTC staff, led by Transit Technology Program Manager Patricia Happ, has commenced work on a white paper examining a wide variety of fare-free or reduced-fare transit options. There are many potential benefits to either reducing or eliminating transit fares, such as enabling more equitable access to public transit, increasing ridership, reducing operating costs and enticing riders to return to transit in a post-COVID world. However, there are many other factors that must be taken into consideration, such as cost and operational challenges. The white paper will serve as both a policy and technical resource for decision makers regarding the feasibility, costs, benefits and challenges related to fare-free or reduced-fare transit.



Reconstructed Arlington Cemetery platforms taking shape

Metro [says](#) rebuilding work at Arlington Cemetery Station has reached a significant milestone with the complete demolition of the original concrete platforms and and installation of nearly all new granite edges. Work on the station began in February and is scheduled to wrap up in May as part of the 2021 phase of the Platform Improvement Project. Crews are pouring the topping slabs on the platforms to get ready to install slip-resistant tiles. Those tiles are already in place in the mezzanine. Work is concurrently underway at Addison Road Station and the Blue Line remains shut down until this phase of rebuilding is complete and shuttle buses connect passengers traveling between Rosslyn and the Pentagon. Metro also shared historical photos of the station.



Arlington Cemetery Station reconstruction (above); Original station construction (below). Photos courtesy: Metro



Metro makes #NewTrain announcement

Metro [announced](#) in March that it has awarded a contract worth up to \$2.2 billion to build the next generation of rail cars. The contract calls for Hitachi Rail to build a base order of 256 rail cars with an option to build up to 800.

Metro notes that the procurement process included measures to ensure investment in local vendors. In its own [news release](#), the contractor said, "Hitachi Rail will manufacture the carbody structure, perform the equipment installation and will do the final assembly of the 8000-series cars in the Metro region."

Board of Directors Chair Paul C. Smedberg said in a news release, "The capital investments we are making in our transit system also support our businesses, our environment, and our quality of life in the national capital region."

Metro says The 8000-series will further improve customers' on-board experience with more digital screens and real-time information, dynamic maps, electrical outlets for charging personal devices, and additional hand-holds throughout the interior. Hitachi says the initial pilot vehicles are expected to be delivered in 2024.



Image courtesy: Metro

DASH seeks input as it sets fall debut of new bus network



DASH plans more frequent, all-day service along major transit corridors in Alexandria. The [new network](#), set to roll out in the fall, will provide every 15-minutes or better service on key routes, seven days a week. The network will preserve 99.5% of existing network coverage while increasing access for low-income, minority and senior residents. DASH will conduct a [virtual public hearing](#) on the changes during its Board of Directors meeting April 14.

Fairfax County soliciting feedback on Tysons-area Bus Rapid Transit

Residents have until April 14 to fill out a [survey](#) on Fairfax County’s route 7 Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) study. The county also held two virtual meetings in March to review details on how a BRT system would function in Tysons from Spring Hill Metrorail Station to the I-66 interchange. The study is based on NVTC’s Envision Route 7 Corridor Transit Study, which identified BRT as the preferred transit alternative for Route 7 from the Mark Center in Alexandria to Tysons. To complement NVTC’s study and to effectively plan for the future, FCDOT is conducting a more detailed study of the BRT within Tysons.



Amtrak adds room options for Northeast Corridor overnight trains

Amtrak will add private rooms to overnight trains traveling between Washington Union Station, New York and Boston starting April 5. The railroad [says](#) that will give passengers the “added benefit of more comfort, space and privacy.” Amtrak offers, [roomettes, private bedrooms and accessible bedrooms](#). The overnight upgrade also comes with premium lounge access at Union Station and Boston’s South Station, plus one drink upon boarding and continental breakfast. Northbound trains depart at 10 p.m. and arrive in New York at 1:55 a.m. and in Boston at 7:58 a.m.

Photo courtesy Amtrak

