



The COVID-19 pandemic has forced all of us to rethink how do things: at home, work, school, travel, going out. The list goes on. As we all know, that includes public transit. The dramatic shift to working from home has transformed commutes. With delayed return-to-office plans, it's nearly impossible to predict when or if travel patterns will return to normal. The pandemic, however, presents an opportunity for innovation. Metro and our regional transit systems are rethinking how their networks serve riders and coming up with ways to encourage people to return to trains and buses. At [Metro](#) that includes free bus transfers to and from rail, \$2 weekend rides, increased service on popular routes and for the first time ever, a [sale](#) on fare passes. Additionally, GM/CEO Paul J. Wiedefeld has publicly spoken about the need to rethink transit schedules in a post-pandemic time.

In Alexandria, DASH implemented a sweeping redesign of its [bus network](#) and implemented the first zero-fare policy in Virginia. While planning for the new network had been underway for years, the launch happened at a time when we are all taking another look at transit.

At NVTC we are working on another topic that's of great interest – zero-emission buses. Staff will host a symposium in October to review the current state of infrastructure and implementation, as well as the opportunities and technical and operational challenges transit systems must consider as they work to move beyond traditional fossil-fueled buses.

These are just a few examples of the of the work being done across our region to adapt our transit systems for near and long-term success.

Executive Director

Key Dates

- Oct. 15 - VRE Operations Board
- Oct. 19-20 - Commonwealth Transportation Board
- Oct. 21 - NVTC WMATA Committee
- Nov. 4 - Commission meeting
- Nov. 19 - VRE Operations Board
- Dec. 6 - NVTC-PRTC Legislative Briefing

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DASH commemorates new network

The Alexandria Transit Company, a/k/a DASH, and the City of Alexandria commemorated the launch of the [New DASH Network](#) and the introduction of free fares on all DASH buses September 23. The new network is a complete redesign of Alexandria’s bus network intended to meet current and future transit ridership demand, while the removal of fares makes DASH the first bus system in Northern Virginia to go 100% fare-free. The New DASH Network also includes the introduction of major service increases in West Alexandria, which are made possible by NVTC’s I-395/95 Commuter Choice grant program.



Through our Commuter choice program, NVTC has been able to make focused investments that are integral to the reimagined DASH system, including funding the DASH 35 bus route from Van Dorn to the Pentagon and the DASH 25 bus route from Mark Center to Potomac Yard. These bus routes are some of the strongest performing in the system and we are proud to be a part of making that happen.

NVTC is also proud to help our local systems, like DASH, to thrive in our regional transit network, through collaboration on technology, planning and policy. This relationship is important and allows all of our local bus systems to learn from and lead each other in our integrated network. Investments that DASH and the City are making are part of a larger vision of accessibility, equity and mobility for our community and we applaud the city and DASH for their vision. NVTC Vice-Chair Canek Aguirre was also on hand to mark the occasion.



Warner, Kaine talk infrastructure at Reagan National

NVTC Vice-Chair Canek Aguirre, VRE Operations Board Chair Elizabeth Bennett-Parker and Executive Director Kate Mattice had the honor of being invited by Sens. Mark Warner and Tim Kaine to join a roundtable discussion about recently completed infrastructure projects at Reagan National Airport and how the surrounding region will benefit from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act on September 24.

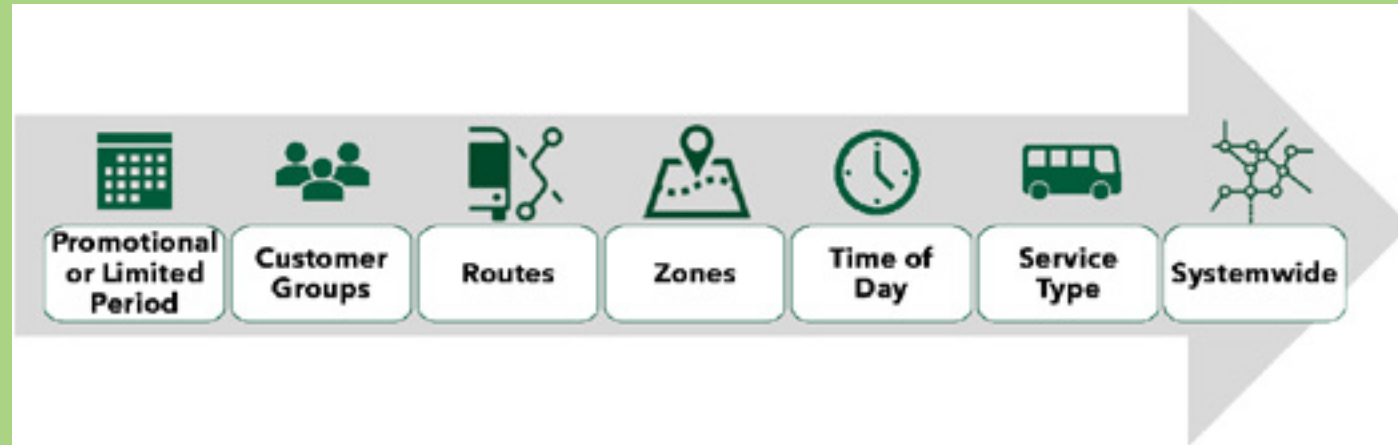


This infrastructure package includes an estimated \$1.2 billion investment over five years to improve public transportation in Virginia, \$25 billion to improve airports across the country like DCA and a federal funding reauthorization for Metro through fiscal year 2030 at current annual levels. The Metro reauthorization is based on Sens. Warner and Kaine’s Metro Safety, Accountability and Investment Act of 2021.

Ms. Mattice spoke about the need for transit workforce training and potential constraints on the U.S. Department of Transportation that may slow the distribution of needed money for transit and transportation. The senators also toured the Metro station at the airport and held a news conference.

NVTC examines benefits and challenges of zero and reduced-fares for public transit

An [analysis](#) undertaken by the Northern Virginia Transportation Commission (NVTC) finds that eliminating or reducing fares for public transit users can improve access, increase ridership and produce other community benefits. However, there are key considerations that transit providers need to make when designing and implementing reduced or zero-fare structures. The publication of the report comes as transit systems across the nation are weighing the advantages and considerations of zero and reduced fares and serves as policy guide for transit decision makers in Northern Virginia. Alexandria’s DASH moved to zero-fare starting Sunday, the first in Virginia and the DC metro area.



Key Findings:

- Northern Virginia’s unique transit environment provides both opportunities and challenges for new fare programs.
- Eliminating fares can grow ridership.
- Reduced-fare programs may result in a net cost increase.
- Full systemwide zero-fare options may reduce fare collection costs, but other expenses may increase.
- Funding is available to help establish these types of fare programs, but long-term sustainable revenue replacement sources are needed.
- Zero and reduced-fare programs are already underway in Virginia.
- Northern Virginia transit operators have expressed desire to consider eliminating or reducing fares for improved accessibility, increased ridership and other community benefits.

Commuter Choice helps fund Spotsylvania park & ride

Executive Director Kate Mattice and Commuter Choice Program Manager Ben Owen grabbed shovels and helped break ground for a new [park and ride commuter lot](#) in Spotsylvania on August 24. Commuter Choice money will be used to support the cost of building the \$16.5 million project close to Route 1 and Exit 126 off I-95. Kate also made remarks to the assembled crowd.

When parking opens for use in May 2023, the lot will provide a dedicated area for transit arrivals and departures with a passenger shelter. Carpools and vanpools will have a separate pickup and drop-off lane. The lane is designed to also accommodate slugging, which is an informal, instant carpooling practice where three or more people rideshare to use high-

occupancy road facilities.

While the Commuter Choice program for the I-95/395 corridor supports numerous existing transit and commuter services available to residents in the Fredericksburg region, this is the first program-supported construction project physically located in Spotsylvania County.



Program Advisory Committee discusses I-66 Commuter Choice, Envision Route 7

NVTC’s Program Advisory Committee (PAC) met September 13 for thorough and lively discussions of NVTC staff’s recommended Supplemental Round Four (FY 2022) program of projects for Commuter Choice on the I-66 Corridor and the upcoming mobility study for NVTC’s bus rapid transit (BRT) planning efforts in the Route 7 corridor. The meeting was the PAC’s first in-person meeting since August 2019.

COMMUTER CHOICE

For Commuter Choice, Senior Program Manager Ben Owen outlined staff’s recommended \$5.8 million Supplemental Round Four (FY 2022) [program of projects](#). Ben discussed improving revenue trends in the I-66 corridor that will hopefully also enable a modest Round Five (FY 2023-FY 2024) program of projects, for which the call for projects will open later this fall. PAC members expressed strong interest in shifting from diesel to zero and

low-emission bus purchases under Commuter Choice and tasked staff with identifying ways to foster the shift as part of program policy. NVTC recognizes that Northern Virginia's transit operators are in different stages of exploring and adopting such technologies and, in order to support those efforts. NVTC will host a zero-emission bus symposium for the region's transit operators later in October.

Staff will also seek Supplemental Round Four (FY 2022) program approval from the Commission on October 7 along with authorization to refer the approved program to the Commonwealth Transportation Board for final action later in the next month.

ENVISION ROUTE 7

A status briefing on [Envision Route 7](#) included a review of activities to date as well as next steps. The next phase of the project will be the Phase IV-1 Mobility Analysis Study.

The goal of Phase IV will be to determine the mobility impacts and benefits resulting from the proposed BRT connecting Tysons, Falls Church, Arlington and Alexandria. The overall study objectives for this effort are:

- Determine the mobility benefits of BRT along Route 7
- Gain a better appreciation of the traffic impacts of BRT along Route 7
- Gain an understanding of the traffic operational issues with a BRT operating along Route 7
- Facilitate the public understanding of how a BRT would operate along Route 7

NVTC is reviewing proposals for consultant services and the Commission will take action on a contract award at its October 7 meeting.

Metro Board considers future of fares

The Metro Board's Finance Capital Committee met to review performance statistics for Metro, discussed the next Metrobus Fleet Plan and conducted a work session on fare policy and fare strategy September 23. At the [fare policy](#) work session, staff briefed the Board on a number of potential fare concepts that the Board could choose to pursue in the FY 2023 budget. These concepts included \$1 Metrobus fares, cheaper parking, discounted fares for low-income riders, a MetroAccess Flat Fare, \$2 late night rail fares, consolidation of peak and off-peak rail fares and updated pass offerings to reflect ridership patterns.

Board member Matt Letourneau asked members not to overlook a key source of revenue for Metro, "One theme that sort of has come up with us is ensuring that our fare policy recognizes and captures riders using transit benefits especially federal benefits, which is a huge part of our overall base."

In addition to fare policy, staff reviewed planned investments in fare technology upgrades that could enable Metro to have new capabilities and meet evolving customer demands well into the future. Board Chair Paul Smedberg urged fellow Board members to take a leadership role and "look beyond" Metro and consider broader SmarTrip adoption, "Making sure we're integrated with VRE and MARC down the road as the region grows and people

are moving a little further out and still want to use Metro or use VRE and MARC." The Board will continue to discuss fare policy and NVTC staff will facilitate opportunities for feedback from the Commission and NVTC's WMATA Committee.

WMATA Committee tackles fare policy, annual report

NVTC's WMATA Committee met in person September 16 for the first time since February 2020. Commissioners discussed a number of topics, most notably Metro's fare structure and the 2021 update to NVTC's Annual Report on the Performance and Condition of WMATA. Committee members discussed a variety of fare structure concepts and noted the uncertainty surrounding the delta variant's impacts on future travel patterns, plans for return to office and fare revenue. The committee members also discussed their initial impressions of Metro's Blue/Orange/Silver Line Capacity and Reliability Study and committee Chair Caneck Aguirre invited Metro staff to brief the committee on the study at their October 21 meeting.



NoVa Chamber talks transportation & transit issues

Executive Director Kate Mattice served as a panelist for the Northern Virginia Chamber of Commerce's annual [State of Transportation](#) event September 23. It was an opportunity to remind business leaders about the importance of transit in Northern Virginia. Nick Donohue, Virginia Deputy Secretary of Transportation, and Monica Backmon, CEO of the Northern Virginia Transportation Authority, joined Kate on the panel, which was moderated by Bob McCartney, former Washington Post writer and editor. Much of the discussion centered around what transit and transportation as a whole look like as the region continues to recover from the pandemic. Nick Donohue made the case that NoVa is expected to grow as much as 25% in the coming years, adding that a robust transit network will be vital to keeping people moving. Kate made several key points including the finding that ridership on routes to military and intelligence communities has rebounded and is staying strong; traffic and tolls on I-395/95 are already at or above pre-pandemic

levels and parallel bus routes are strong; and local bus ridership has rebounded and is actually higher on weekends, showing that there remains a need to provide essential transportation services in our community



Metro offers first ever pass sale

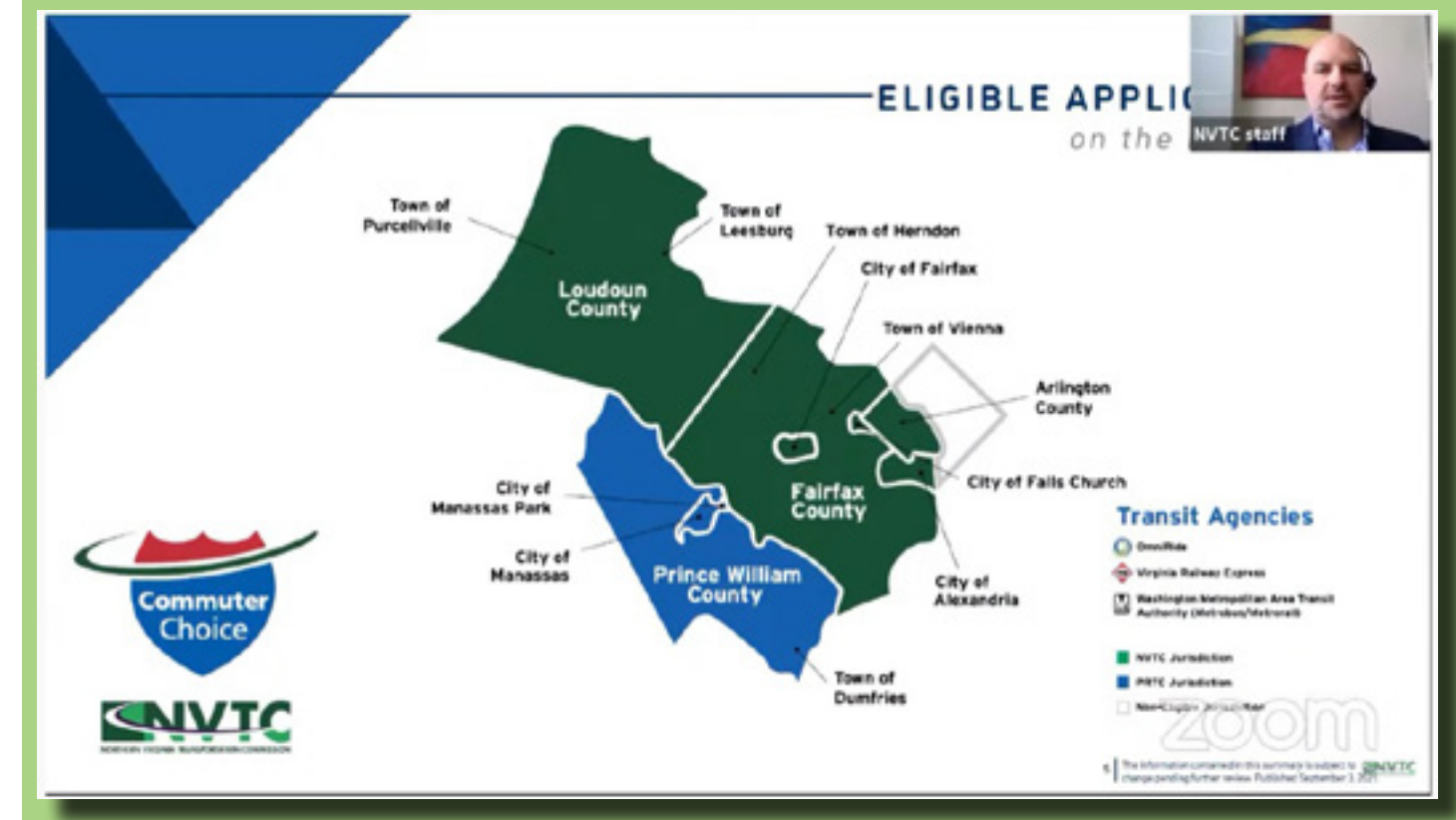
Metro recently kicked off its first ever sales event, which lasts until October 15. It's an opportunity for riders to save up to 50% on selected Metro passes and enjoy unlimited rides on Metrorail and Metrobus. Sale prices range from a one day unlimited pass for \$6.50 to a monthly unlimited pass, starting at \$44. The promotion was created to encourage people to come back to the system. For more information, visit wmata.com/sale.

Commuter Choice on the I-66 corridor comment period ends

September 17 was the last day for the public to weigh in on proposed projects for Supplemental Round Four funding under Commuter Choice on the I-66 corridor. The two week comment period included a virtual town hall hosted by Senior Program Manager Ben Owen. People were also able to comment online and by submitting an email or voicemail. Ben also provided a digital toolkit to give jurisdictions an easy way to spread the word about the proposals and the comment period.

The proposed projects include new transit services, new commuter incentives and larger capital efforts that were submitted to NVTC's Round Four call for projects in January 2020. Travel pattern changes and toll revenue decreases in the corridor following the outbreak of the COVID-19 public health emergency had precluded NVTC from advancing a significant program of projects last year as originally planned.

Staff anticipate starting the proposal process for Round Five this fall.



Blue/Orange/Silver Line Capacity and Reliability Study

The Metro Board Finance and Capital Committee, newly chaired by principal Board Member Matt Letourneau, received a status update on the Blue/Orange/Silver (BOS) Line Capacity and Reliability Study September 9. Running three lines through one tunnel and set of tracks under the Potomac River creates challenges for the BOS corridor. The BOS Capacity and Reliability Study was launched in 2019 and aims to identify a project or package of projects to address capacity constraints and crowding, reliability concerns, a lack of operational flexibility and threats to long-term sustainability in the corridor. Since the region may decide to pursue federal funding for this project or package of projects (a "locally-preferred alternative" or LPA), the study was designed according to federal requirements and guidance.

The Board was presented with an overview and cost-benefit analysis of six alternatives:

- A No-Build Scenario
- A Lower Cost Capital Alternative
- Four Metrorail realignments or extensions
 - » Blue Line to Greenbelt
 - » Blue Line to National Harbor
 - » Silver Line Express in Northern Virginia
 - » Silver Line to New Carrollton

Metro staff will conduct additional outreach and begin scheduling briefings with elected officials to review the current status of the study and gather feedback on the alternatives. This feedback will inform the Board's future consideration and selection of a locally-preferred alternative. NVTC staff are working with Metro staff to facilitate a Commission and/or NVTC WMATA Committee briefing.

Save the Date!
NVTC-PRTC Annual Legislative Briefing
Monday, December 6
8:30 a.m.
Embassy Suites by Hilton Springfield



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Welcome to our new program analysts

Two new program analysts joined NVTC in September. Sophie Spiliotopoulos received her Masters of Geographic Information Sciences from Clark University. Prior to joining NVTC, she worked as a GIS Planning Intern at the Downtown Worcester Business Improvement District in Worcester, Massachusetts. Her technical background and experience with GIS and data analysis will support NVTC's ability to effectively visualize and communicate data and support NVTC's ongoing programs.



Sophie (left) and Ronnetta (right)

Ronnetta Zack-Williams recently received her Masters of Community Planning with a specialization in transportation from the University of Maryland. Prior to joining NVTC, she worked as a Graduate Assistant at the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission in Upper Marlboro, Maryland. Her background in GIS, research and analysis, project management, and community outreach will support NVTC's ongoing programs.

We're excited to have Sophie and Ronnetta on staff.

Labor Day brings service increases, fare changes



Service and fare changes took effect around Labor Day at Metro, Arlington Transit, DASH and Fairfax Connector. Metrorail will operate with longer hours and improved train frequencies. [Metro](#) has also eliminated the charge to transfer between buses and trains, except for when transferring to express buses. [Fairfax Connector](#) joined Metro this week in providing free transfers. Bus rides will now be free for all routes except Fairfax Connector Express Service, which will be discounted \$2 from the

total fare when using a SmarTrip card or the SmarTrip App. [ART](#) returned to full service this week while reinstating four routes that stopped running during the pandemic.

Changes at [DASH](#) in Alexandria are even more dramatic. DASH implemented its new route network. This complete redesign of Alexandria's bus network is intended to meet current and future transit ridership demand and to encourage more people to use transit for more trips at more times of day. DASH also became the first transit system in our region to eliminate all fares.

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