



Advancing transit in  
Northern Virginia  
since 1964



# March 2026

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## Executive Director Newsletter





## A Message From Kate Mattice

NVTC has the honor of formally welcoming Virginia Railway Express' new CEO, Katie Choe, at the March Commission meeting. As the first woman CEO of VRE, Choe takes on the leadership role of the commuter railroad at a pivotal time. Major construction projects are underway or will soon commence, enabling VRE to transform from a commuter model to one that serves passengers at more times of the day and every day of the week.

NVTC and VRE have been intertwined since before the first revenue trains began operating in 1992. Discussions surrounding a commuter rail system in Northern Virginia began soon after the General Assembly created NVTC and the associated transportation district in 1964.

Twenty years later, a feasibility study kicked off the formal planning stage, followed by the creation of the Potomac and Rappahannock Transportation Commission (PRTC), founded, in part, to join with NVTC in launching VRE. To this day, NVTC and PRTC support and appoint members to the VRE Operations Board. The two Commissions jointly own all the assets, including rolling stock and stations.

As for those major construction projects, the Long Bridge Project is one of the largest railroad construction projects undertaken in the Commonwealth in decades. And the project is not just the bridge over the Potomac River, the Long Bridge Project includes expanding to four tracks in Arlington and Alexandria, new railroad bridges and streetscape and station improvements in Alexandria; a third track from Franconia to Lorton and a Franconia-Springfield Bypass; and L'Enfant Plaza Station improvements. Once the entire project is complete, VRE will be in a position to realize its vision as a regional rail service in less than a decade.

NVTC's Commuter Choice program has also played a role in enhancing VRE with significant investments toward expanding VRE's Crystal City Station and contributing to the construction of the new parking garage at the Manassas Park Station, as well as supporting operational efforts such as Amtrak step-up tickets.

Former NVTC and VRE Operations Board Chair Sharon Bulova has called VRE the little engine that could. As we turn the page to this exciting new chapter, I am confident that under Ms. Choe's leadership, VRE will continue to prove itself—steadily climbing, growing stronger and delivering for the riders and communities who count on it every day.

  
Executive Director

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**March 17**  
Commonwealth  
Transportation Board

**March 20**  
VRE Operations Board

**April 16**  
Program Advisory  
Committee  
and  
Joint WMATA & Legislative  
and Policy Committees

**April 17**  
VRE Operations Board

**April 21-22**  
Commonwealth  
Transportation Board

**May 7**  
Commission Meeting

**May 21**  
Virginia Passenger Rail  
Authority

**\*REMINDER\***  
There is no April  
Commission Meeting

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## I-66 Commuter Choice public comment period opens

The Program Advisory Committee (PAC) received an [update](#) on the I-66 [Commuter Choice](#) FY 2027-2028 Call for Projects February 19 from Commuter Choice and Policy Program Manager Daniel Knickelbein. PAC members reviewed the scores of all eligible applications, which will be used to help develop a draft Program of Projects that the PAC will be asked to endorse at its April 16 meeting.


The public comment period for projects under consideration for I-66 Commuter Choice funding opened March 4 and closes on April 3. All public comments will be brought to the PAC at the April 16 meeting. The committee also heard an update on the I-66 Needs Assessment, a joint study between NVTC and DRPT to identify short- and long-term projects that could seek future funding through either the I-66 Commuter Choice or Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT) I-66 Outside the Beltway funding programs.



NVTC's Commuter Choice program would help create a new direct Loudoun County Transit route: Leesburg to Washington, D.C.



NVTC's Commuter Choice program would help create a new OmniRide route: Gainesville to Washington Union Station.

Comentario público para el financiamiento del programa de Commuter Choice de I-66 del año fiscal 2027-2028



## Legislative Reception promotes Value of Transit

NVTC and Commonwealth Strategy Group (CSG) hosted a legislative reception in Richmond February 5 to promote the [Value of Transit](#) in Virginia. Chair Sarah Bagley and a number of our Commissioners, along with Executive Director Kate Mattice and Director of Programs and Policy Ann McGrane, engaged with members of the General Assembly, elected officials and regional partners to help advance NVTC's legislative priorities. We're so grateful to everyone who was able to attend and to our legislative liaison Aimee Perron Seibert and her team at CSG for providing an incredible event space and seamlessly coordinating with our event team. Special thanks to NVTC's Tenley O'Hara as well as Sarah Godfrey, Rhonda Gilchrest and Colie Touzel for their work coordinating and executing this event.



Photos include images of the following: NVTC Commissioner Canek Aguirre, Williams Mullen Government Relations Attorney Dave Albo, NVTC Commissioner Walter Alcorn, NVTC Chair Sarah Bagley, NVTC Secretary-Treasurer Maureen Coffey, Sen. Adam Ebbin, DRPT Chief Deputy Director Allan Fye, NVTC Board Administrator Rhonda Gilchrest, City of Falls Church Mayor Letty Hardi, NVTC Executive Director Kate Mattice, NVTC Director of Programs and Policy Ann McGrane, NVTC Events and Administrative Coordinator Tenley O'Hara, VTA Executive Director Danny Plaugher, NVTC Legislative Liaison Aimee Perron Seibert, VRE Director of Government Community Affairs Joe Swartz, Del. Josh Thomas, NVTC Commissioner Justine Underhill and DRPT Director Mariia Zimmermann.

## Engineering community hears value of Northern Virginia transit

Executive Director Kate Mattice participated in a transportation panel organized by [ACEC of Metropolitan Washington](#) February 25 in McLean. She joined leaders from Loudoun County, the Virginia Department of Transportation and the Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority to answer the question: what's next for regional transportation in the DMV?

The luncheon gave Kate an opportunity to discuss the future funding landscape for bus and rail with Northern Virginia's engineering community. Kate shared the reasons why transit in Northern Virginia needs sustainable funding to support the 2.3 million people who ride each week and the powerful economic benefits of the transit network--generating \$28 billion in economic activity, contributing \$1.5 billion to Virginia's general fund each year and providing a 160% return on state investment.



Mac Cannon, ACEC/MW; Roger Natushara, MWAA; Kate Mattice; Sherene Dorazio, Loudoun County; Terry Yates, VDOT; Keith Autry, MWAA; David Hieber ACEC/MW (left to right)



## Highlighting priorities during Transit + Rail Advocacy Day in Richmond

Executive Director Kate Mattice and NVTC staff participated in the Virginia Transit Association (VTA) 2026 Transit + Rail Advocacy Day February 2. Each year during the Virginia General Assembly Session, VTA hosts this day of learning and advocacy focused on transit issues.

The day began with a briefing, where Kate joined VTA Executive Director Danny Plaucher and other Virginia policy leaders to update attendees on transit-related legislation and offer tips for their visits with legislators. Staff then went to the Virginia State Capitol Gallery for a formal recognition of VTA Day, while Kate attended several meetings with legislators, sharing information about the need for secure long-term, sustainable funding for transit in Virginia. Later in the day, NVTC staff attended a Department of Rail and Public Transportation open house and met their new leadership team: Director Mariia Zimmerman and Chief Deputy Director (and former NVTC staff member) Allan Fye. That afternoon, Kate also had the opportunity to brief the General Assembly's Northern Virginia delegation, along with Metro and NVTA, on transit funding efforts.



Metro GM/CEO Randy Clarke, Sen. Scott Surovell, Sen. Louise Lucas, Kate Mattice, Hampton Roads Transit President William E. Harrell



NVTC Executive Director Kate Mattice, NVTC Commissioner Dave Snyder, NVTC Commissioner Canek Aguirre, NVTC Commissioner Walter Alcorn, VRE CEO Katie Choe, VRE Director of Government and Community Affairs Joe Swartz





# Metro Board enhances U-Pass program for students, recognizes former Chair Paul Smedberg

The Metro Board approved an update to the [U-Pass](#) program February 26, expanding access for students in higher education across the region. U-Pass is a group-discounted transit pass offering unlimited rides to full-time students at accredited colleges and universities during the academic year. While the current model requires 100% student enrollment for \$1.00 per student per day, the new U-Pass opt-in model only requires 33% student enrollment for \$1.75 per student per day. This new model will allow schools to choose the model that works best for their students and increase access to transit service for the more than 200,000 students Metro serves. The new model will be available beginning the fall 2026 academic semester.

The Board also [recognized](#) the service of former chair and former NVTC Commissioner Paul Smedberg. Mr. Smedberg served on the Metro Board from January 2016 to January 2026, including a five-year stint as chair where he led the agency through the COVID-19 pandemic and the opening of the Silver Line Phase II and Potomac Yard Metrorail Station. As a credit to his leadership and dedicated service, Mr. Smedberg was honored as Board Member of the Year by the American Public Transportation Association in 2023.

There was also a [surprise](#) moment as DASH General Manager/CEO Josh Baker presented Metro GM/CEO Randy Clarke with an award recognizing Metro's support during January's winter storm. Metro crews cleared snow from 46 DASH bus stops to keep operations flowing.



Former Metro Board Chair and former NVTC Chair Paul Smedberg

# Virginia House and Senate committees advance budget proposals

The House Appropriations and Senate Finance & Appropriations Committees released their respective [budget proposals](#) for the 2026-28 biennium on "Budget Sunday." The two chambers take different approaches to transit funding and support for Metro.

The House proposal focuses primarily on near-term operating funding stabilization for our localities' payments to Metro. However, it only provides \$153 million for Metro operating across the two-year budget period, instead of \$153 million in FY 2027 and growing annually as identified through SJ 28, the General Assembly's Joint Subcommittee. It would also temporarily suspend the 3% statutory cap on annual operating growth. It does not include additional statewide transit operating assistance or additional Metro capital funding beyond existing programs.

The Senate proposal takes a more structural approach, advancing changes to the data center sales and use tax exemption that would increase deposits to the Commonwealth Transportation Fund and provide modest increases to statewide transit and Metro assistance through existing formulas.

It also directs additional regional revenues to the Metro Capital Fund, including an increase to the Northern Virginia transient occupancy tax, and provides a one-time statewide transit capital investment. In addition, the Senate version includes policy provisions related to Metro long-range capital planning and reporting, evaluation of cost efficiency efforts and a study of regional bus system integration. The budget proposals passed their respective

chambers on Thursday and now move to conference committee, where these differences will be negotiated. We will remain actively engaged throughout that process and continue advocating for solutions that address Northern Virginia's long-term transit funding needs.



## CTB receives transit funding updates, shifts MERIT decision to fall

The Commonwealth Transportation Board (CTB) held its first [meeting](#) of the new administration on February 17. The Board received updates on statewide revenue projections and the Commonwealth Transportation Fund (CTF) preliminary FY 2027-2032 Six-Year Financial Plan. The draft plan continues to prioritize maintenance, construction, regional investments and dedicated WMATA capital funding.

The Board also discussed Metro's capital needs in the context of the broader Northern Virginia transit funding conversation. Members noted that state-level funding discussions are ongoing and acknowledged that contingency planning may be necessary if additional resources are not identified by the General Assembly. CTB also received an update on Long Bridge financing and approved a revised timeline for the ongoing MERIT review, with final Board action now expected this fall to allow for additional public engagement and updated performance data.



## Introducing *Charting Transit*

We're excited to launch a new feature: Charting Transit. Each month, we'll spotlight a transit trend or data point, using data visuals to tell the story of public transportation in Northern Virginia.

This month, we're highlighting bus accessibility across our region using data from NVTC's [NoVaTransit Data Dashboard](#). The data reveal how critical bus service is to connecting diverse communities. Well over half of Northern Virginians live near a bus stop, and the numbers are even higher for people of color, households without a car and households with limited financial resources.

## CHARTING TRANSIT



**62%**

**of Northern Virginians live near a bus stop**

**81%** of zero-car households are near a bus stop

**65%** of people of color live near a bus stop

**72%** of low-income households are near a bus stop

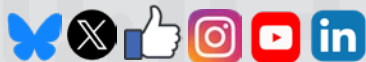


Note: "Near" is within a ¼ mile. "Low-income" is 200% or twice the annual income of the official poverty guideline.



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