

# Executive Director Newsletter

April 2020



Since my last report, the transit world has changed in ways many of us wouldn't have imagined a few months ago. The official and public reactions to COVID-19 have led to an unprecedented drop in public transit ridership in Northern Virginia and across the country. WMATA and several of our local agencies, including VRE, Arlington Transit and DASH have responded by sharply curtailing service as businesses close their doors and tell employees to work from home. Just this week, we got word from Gov. Ralph Northam that schools will remain closed through the end of the academic year.

Transit isn't a service you can turn on and off. Trains and buses provide a vital link for people to get to work, even in a time of crisis. Doctors, nurses, hospital workers, restaurant workers, grocery store employees and many others provide a vital service to society and they can't work from home. Our providers are trying to find a balance between providing essential service and protecting their workers from getting sick.

We don't know when the impact of the COVID-19 public health emergency will end, but we do know that we need transit ready to fully operational again once people are able to return to work and school. To that end, we've thanked the Commonwealth Transportation Board for providing a financial lifeline to Northern Virginia's transit agencies with an immediate infusion of \$11 million to local transit operators. We contacted our members of Congress to ask for federal money to support WMATA and VRE. We joined the American Public Transportation Association (APTA) and Transportation for America to ensure that transit agencies nationwide receive federal emergency funding. The money would go toward direct costs, such as additional cleaning of vehicles and facilities; farebox revenue losses; dedicated sales tax revenue losses; and costs to restart service once this emergency subsides. As of this writing, Congress was on the brink of passing legislation that provides \$25 billion for public transit nationwide.

The COVID-19 emergency has also changed the way we work at NVTC. Public health recommendations for containing the spread of the virus come in direct conflict with the very public nature of the work we do. That means we won't be holding our April Commission meeting. However, NVTC staff have been diligently furthering their work, despite the abrupt transition to working from home. In lieu of our usual meeting, staff members are providing updates to individual Commissioners and we are providing extensive reports about our work on our website, as we do each month. We'll also continue to work with our regional jurisdictions and transit providers to support their needs while we all work through this difficult time.

*Executive Director*

## Contents

Matt Letourneau sworn in as Principal Director of WMATA Board	2
General Assembly approves significant transportation bills . . .	2
WMATA releases summer 2020 shutdown plans . . . . .	3
NVTC annual report published . .	4
Transit Corridor Performance Report update . . . . .	4
NVTC in the news . . . . .	4
Presenting NVTC's bus rapid transit plans to WMATA. . . . .	5
CTB unanimously approves Commuter Choice MOA changes .	5
Regional bus ridership edges up .	5
Fairfax Connector Summer Shutdown. . . . .	6
Loudoun Transit Summer Shutdown . . . . .	6
DASH Proposed Changes. . . . .	6
Fairfax Connector Proposed Changes . . . . .	6

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



## Key Dates

- April 8 - 9 - CTB
- April 17 - VRE Operations Board
- April 23 - WMATA Board Meeting
- April 30 - NVTC WMATA Committee
- May 7 - Commission Meeting
- May 7 - Commuter Choice Public Hearing
- May 15 - VRE Operations Board
- May 19 - 20 - CTB

## Matt Letourneau sworn in as Principal Director of WMATA Board

Loudoun County Supervisor Matthew F. Letourneau formally became a Principal director of the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority in March. Fellow Commissioner and WMATA Board Chair Paul Smedberg swore Mr. Letourneau into office. Mr. Letourneau joined the board as an Alternate director in 2019 and was the first person from the county to serve on the panel.

In late February, Mr. Smedberg swore in fellow Commissioner Walter Alcorn as an Alternate Director for the WMATA Board. Alcorn was elected in November as Fairfax County Supervisor for the Hunter Mill District, replacing Cathy Hudgins, who retired at the end of her fifth term in office. Mr. Smedberg also read a resolution thanking Ms. Hudgins for her time on the WMATA Board, including serving as chair in 2011 and 2012. Hudgins also served 15 years on the Commission. City of Alexandria Council Member Canek Aguirre will be sworn in as an Alternate Director at a later time.



*Paul Smedberg with Matt Letourneau (left), Cathy Hudgins (bottom left), Walter Alcorn (bottom right)*



## General Assembly approves significant transportation bills

This was one of the most transformative General Assembly sessions for transportation in a generation. Members passed a transportation omnibus bill that will streamline Virginia's transportation funding allocation model and secure sustainable revenues for local transit operators, WMATA and VRE. NVTC outlined specific priorities before the legislative session began in the 2020 Legislative and Policy Agenda, including long-term, sustainable transit funding. Prior to the passage of these bills, the Commonwealth faced a \$208 million shortfall in transit funding over the next five years.



The omnibus bill increases the statewide gas tax by ten cents over the next two years, then indexes it to inflation. The bill also establishes a highway use fee for alternative fuel and fuel-efficient vehicles and allocates 23% of the Commonwealth Transportation Fund to transit. The omnibus bill also creates a discretionary transit ridership incentive program to provide funding for "transit routes of regional significance" and dedicates up to 25% of the program for fare reduction or free-fare programs for low-income riders.

The omnibus bill supports improvements to passenger and commuter rail by authorizing debt backed by I-66 toll revenues to support Long Bridge construction and establishes the Virginia Passenger Rail Authority to own and manage the real estate, as well as oversee and contract for passenger rail service. NVTC and PRTC successfully inserted language into the bill that would allow each commission to submit a

## Executive Director Newsletter

list of recommended members for the Board of Directors from either the NVTC or PRTC districts to the Governor. The passenger rail authority will be key to implementing the Governor's \$3.7 billion rail initiative that would create a new Virginia-owned Long Bridge and transfer ownership of 225 miles of track and 350 miles of rail right-of-way to the Commonwealth.

In Northern Virginia, the bill alters the regional gas tax by changing it from a percentage to a fixed rate of 7.6 cents. It will then be indexed to inflation. The bill redirects a portion of the gas tax revenue to the WMATA Capital Fund and guarantees \$50 million in Virginia's match to dedicated federal funding for WMATA. The legislation also provides nearly \$50 million annually to NVT, partially restoring the funds that were diverted to the WMATA Capital Fund.

The General Assembly also passed legislation that would regulate peer-to-peer vehicles, change the due date of NVTC's Annual Report on the Performance and Condition of WMATA and add an exception to the 3% operating cap on WMATA to allow service increases that are approved by the WMATA Board.

These bills await Gov. Ralph Northam's signatures. The General Assembly will reconvene for a one-day veto session on April 22nd to act on bills that are vetoed or amended by the governor.

### **WMATA releases summer 2020 shutdown plans**

WMATA recently released service alternatives and project information for customers affected by the Summer 2020 Orange Line Platform Improvement Project. WMATA will provide seven free shuttle services, including two rush-hour only shuttles to replace rail service at Vienna, Dunn Loring and East Falls Church stations. West Falls Church will remain open to rail service, however Orange Line Metrorail and all Silver Line trains will operate with 16 minute headways during the day and 20 minutes during late night hours. WMATA warned that prior to May 23, customers should expect weekend shutdowns, parking closures, bus stop relocation and other pre-construction

April 2020



activity in advance of the project.

NVTC continues its coordination with regional agencies, WMATA and the Commonwealth of Virginia to finalize Northern Virginia mitigation for the Orange Line Platform Improvement Project. To date, NVTC has held three regional coordination calls and participated in more than six separate interagency meetings on communications, traffic and transit operations as well as Transportation Demand Management. Along with facilitating the main NVTC regional stakeholder meetings and serving as a resource center for planning materials, NVTC will produce maps of available transit service during the shutdown and help disseminate information for local travel alternatives for riders. NVTC will also ask the Virginia Department of Department of Rail & Public Transportation for a grant to produce a second post-shutdown marketing campaign to encourage riders to return to transit once service resumes. More information about the Platform Improvement Project, including an alternate trip planner, can be found on WMATA's dedicated [website](#).

## NVTC annual report published

We recently published our 2019 annual report. Advancing Transit takes a look back at the incredible growth at NVTC. From our new office to our new staff and, perhaps most importantly, our new projects. 2019 saw the expansion of Commuter Choice to the I-395/95 corridor and our significant role in coordinating the regional response to the summer shutdown of six Metrorail stations. The report also provides an update on NVTC's financial position and reviews all major programs. You can also read the report [online](#).



## Transit Corridor Performance Report update

We published the [2019 Corridor Performance Report](#) for the I-66 Inside the Beltway and I-395 Corridors, which finds that since the start of I-66 tolling and funding for the I-66 Commuter Choice program began in 2017, about 700 more people are moving through the I-66 Inside the Beltway corridor each morning. They're doing so in 750 fewer vehicles, about a 2.7% reduction. About 65% of morning peak-period inbound trips are made by transit, carpool or vanpool, an increase of nearly 2% between 2015 and 2019. In addition, commuter bus ridership in the I-66 corridor increased by 26% between 2015 and 2019 supported by the new I-66 Commuter Choice-funded services. We have also received project applications submitted for consideration under the fourth round of I-66 Commuter Choice funding in anticipation of selection and award later this spring.

April 2020

## NVTC in the news

A number of high-profile news stories have featured NVTC in recent weeks. Executive Director Kate Mattice spoke with Dana Hedgpath of [The Washington Post](#) about our 2019 Corridor Performance Report for the I-66 Inside the Beltway and I-395 Corridors. Jae Watkins, Communications and Marketing Manager for Commuter Choice, provided graphics and background material for the story. Robert Puentes, President and CEO of the Eno Center for Transportation, tweeted his own "fix" for the headline, generating more than two dozen retweets and over 150 likes.



WTOP's Max Smith also wrote a [story](#) on the report.

An analysis piece by [Robert McCartney](#) looked into challenges facing the Bus Transformation Project. McCartney noted the Commission's letter to the WMATA board regarding fare evasion. McCartney also quoted Commissioner James Walkinshaw, who serves as Fairfax County Supervisor for the Braddock District.

ALXNow noted [NVTC's assistance](#) in efforts to upgrade DASH's mobile-ticketing app, while [Patch](#) and other news outlets reported on [Matt Letourneau's appointment](#) as a Principal Director of the WMATA Board.



## Presenting NVTC's bus rapid transit plans to WMATA

Kate Mattice recently joined a BRT (Bus Rapid Transit) panel as part of a meeting of the WMATA Safety and Operations Committee. It was an opportunity to talk about the plans NVTC and our Northern Virginia jurisdictions have for BRT. The other panelists and Kate started with the basics: explaining what makes BRT different from traditional bus service. Metroway serves as one example. It runs through Arlington and Alexandria and is the first of several planned BRT projects in the pipeline. Metroway itself has a planned expansion. NVTC is working on Envision Route 7, connecting Tysons with the Mark Center in Alexandria. The West End Transitway will link Van Dorn Metrorail station, Landmark Mall, Shirlington Transit Center, Beauregard residential area and the Pentagon. Separately, Fairfax County is working on the Richmond Highway BRT. Kate also highlighted Northern Virginia's expanding express bus network. Additionally, we are working with our jurisdictions to identify new BRT and bus lane opportunities beyond those in the development pipeline.

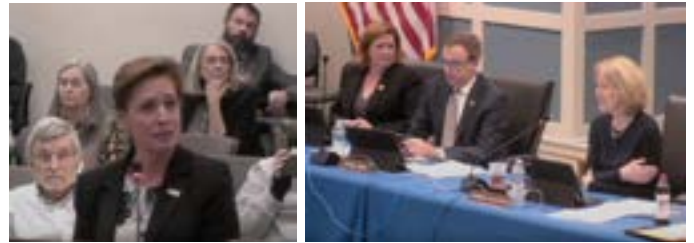


## CTB unanimously approves Commuter Choice MOA changes

Following testimony from Kate Mattice, the Commonwealth Transportation Board (CTB) unanimously approved the proposed changes to the I-66 Inside the Beltway Memorandum of Agreement with NVTC to use a portion of revenues that would go toward the I-66 Commuter Choice program to be used for pay-go and debt service

April 2020

for the Long Bridge. Future revenues could also be used for improvements to Rosslyn Metrorail Station. The agreement, first signed in 2015 and updated in 2017, has provided more than \$40 million in funding for transit and multimodal projects that are moving more than 8,000 people through the I-66 Inside the Beltway corridor each weekday morning. The Commission unanimously approved the updated MOA at its January meeting.



## Regional bus ridership edges up

NVTC staff attended a WMATA bus ridership workshop. Presenters discussed trends in ridership, including the fact that recent data show an uptick, despite drops from historic highs in the mid 2010s. WMATA provided an overview of its newly opened web portal which provides information on ridership data. Participants also spoke about steps being taken to boost local ridership, including new passes for students in hopes of making buses an active part of their transportation options. They also discuss studies that demonstrate mixed results on the impact of Transportation Network Companies (TNCs), such as Uber and Lyft, on bus ridership. Those present agreed that more studies are needed to better understand TNCs roles in the transportation network.



*WMATA's Jim Hamre speaks at the bus ridership workshop*

### Fairfax Connector

Fairfax Connector warns commuters about the upcoming shutdown of Orange Line stations in Fairfax County. Three stations on the Orange Line – Vienna, Dunn Loring and East Falls Church – will close from Saturday, May 23, 2020, to Monday, Sept. 7, 2020. The agency has also published a [website](#) detailing key shuttle, express bus, limited stop bus and local transit connections available during the shutdown. Commuters are urged to also consider other alternatives such as ridesharing and telework, whenever possible. There's also a [survey](#) commuters can complete to see if they qualify for \$50 in incentives.

### Loudoun Transit

Loudoun County Transit is temporarily moving Metro Connection Bus Routes 901 and 902 from the West Falls Church Metrorail Station to the Ballston Metrorail Station.

Metrorail's Platform Improvement Project at the West Falls Church Metrorail Station will include the closure of the regular bus stop used to provide service for bus routes 901 and 902.

Riders of bus routes 901 and 902 will continue to ride the Metro Connection bus to and from designated bus stops in Loudoun County at Broad Run Farms, Cascades, Lowes Island and Our Lady of Hope. However, the bus will no longer make a stop at the West Falls Church Metrorail Station, where riders typically connect with the Metrorail system. Service will be provided to and from bus stops near the Ballston Metrorail Station.



### DASH

As part of the FY2021 - FY2026 Alexandria Transit Company (ATC) Transit Development Plan (TDP), DASH proposes the following service changes: AT4 segment from Braddock Road Metro to City Hall may be discontinued; New Sunday service on Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Years Day. This change is consistent with other regional operators and will benefit DASH customers who still need to make bus trips on those days.



### Fairfax Connector

Fairfax County Department of Transportation (FCDOT) encourages public input on the preferred plan to provide enhanced Fairfax Connector bus service in the Reston and Herndon areas, including connections to the future Metrorail Silver Line Phase 2 stations. The preferred service plan was developed based on public input received through community engagement in 2019, stakeholder engagement and technical analysis. Previously-scheduled public meetings have been postponed indefinitely, but the agency is accepting comments [online](#) until further notice.

