



Executive Director Newsletter



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

April 2023



A Message from Kate Mattice

The arrival of cherry blossom season in the greater Washington region signals a time of renewal, one that draws tens of thousands of people from across the country and even the world. They come to see the world-famous trees and their captivating pink flowers. However, we've also seen the downside of the rush to see the short-lived blossoms--gridlock. We've heard the stories and seen the videos of the people stuck in their cars for hours and they tried to make their way around the Tidal Basin, National Mall and Hains Point. Fortunately, we live in a region that offers people many ways to get around. As Metro GM/CEO Randy Clarke [tweeted](#), Metro, bus, biking and walking "are not 'alternatives' but actually the primary way to go...sitting in joy draining traffic for hours is the alternative." In fact, Metrorail shattered an eight-year [Sunday](#) ridership record during peak bloom with 340,000 trips. Just two days later, the system recorded the [highest ridership](#) of the pandemic era with 414,000 trips.

While the cherry blossoms provide a big draw for riders, Metro and our Northern Virginia transit providers continue to see ridership records fall across the board. An analysis by NVTC's Transit Resource team found that all agencies experienced growing ridership in the last year and ridership on DASH, City of Fairfax-CUE and Fairfax Connector exceeded pre-pandemic levels. These successes tell me that the work we continued to do during the darkest days of the pandemic is paying off. We never stopped planning for public transit improvements and have continued to fund highly rated projects through our Commuter Choice program.

While all transit agencies continue to grapple with how to best serve riders as traditional commuter patterns continue to be disrupted, there's no doubt in my mind that public transit continues to be a vital resource that our region needs to function effectively.

Kate A. Mattice
Executive Director

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April 18-29
Commonwealth Transportation Board

April 19
WMATA Committee Meeting

April 20
Joint Commission Working Group/Program Advisory Committee

April 21
VRE Operations Board

May 4
Commission Meeting

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Commission submits letter on Metro's proposed budget



NVTC's Feedback on the Proposed Metro Budget

The Commission approved a letter submitted to Metro as part of the agency's public comment period for its proposed budget. The [letter](#), presented at the March [Commission meeting](#), represents Northern Virginia's priorities for Metro. Highlights include:

- Continue the safe return of the 7000-series railcars and deliver budgeted service and ensure Metro makes safety and security priorities for customers and Metro staff.
- Continue fare simplification efforts that balance ridership and revenue, while also reviewing ways to lower the per-mile rate with consideration for suburban commuters, including the cost of parking in those calculations.

- Open the Potomac Yard Metrorail Station for full revenue service.
- Support the policy goals and concept of the proposed low-income fare program with effective implementation, avoiding overlap with existing programs and fair cost allocation to jurisdictions.

Thank you to NVTC WMATA Committee Chair Walter Alcorn and Program Analyst Ronnetta Zack-Williams for their efforts in drafting this letter.

Virginia Public Hearing

Metro held a [public meeting](#) on its [proposed budget](#) at Meridian High School in Falls Church March 8, with Metro Board Chair Paul Smedberg representing the Board as it welcomed feedback from the public.

7000-Series Railcars

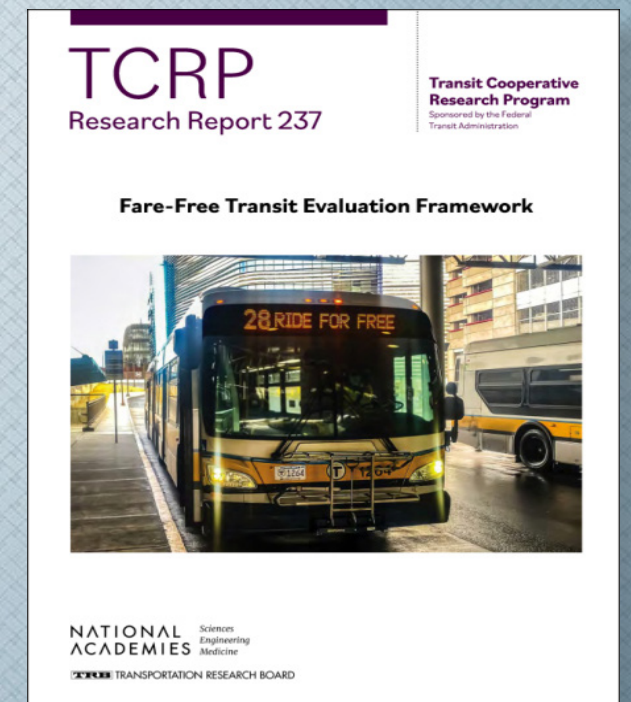
The Metro Board's Safety and Operations Committee received [an update](#) March 9 on the National Transportation Safety Board's (NTSB) investigation on the 7000-series railcars, the root cause of the October 2021 Blue Line derailment and the Return to Service Plan. The NTSB opened the [public](#) docket for its ongoing investigation into the 2021 derailment between Rosslyn and Arlington Cemetery stations last week. The documents released identified a potential cause of the derailment as a loss of contact pressure between the axle and wheel and a solution as increasing wheel interference fit and pressure tonnage. Metro is working with the Washington Metrorail Safety Commission (WMSC) to develop a wheelset replacement program to bring it wheelsets in alignment with industry standards. It will take about three years to replace every 7000-series wheelset and the \$55 million cost is a part of the FY 2024 Proposed Budget. Metro and the WMSC are working to develop the final version of the Return to Service Plan. Until then, Metro will continue to measure the wheels every several days as outlined in the current Return to Service Plan.

Automatic Train Control

The committee also heard the results of a [peer analysis](#) as the agency prepares to return to automatic train operations (ATO). Board documents note that the Metro system opened with ATO in 1976 and suspended it following the 2009 crash on the Red Line at Fort Totten. Metro says ATO provides enhanced safety, service reliability and on-time performance. Metro plans to begin mainline testing of ATO on the Red Line in November with system-wide integration in December.

NVTC program manager contributes to fare-free transit report

The Transportation Research Board (TRB) released a [research report](#) in March on fare-free transit. This report develops a decision framework to help transit agencies as they consider whether to go fully or partially fare-free. NVTC's Transit Resource Center Senior Program Manager Xavier Harmony served as an expert panel member, providing oversight to the research team and feedback on the technical work.





Fairfax Transportation Advisory Committee briefed on Envision Route 7

Xavier Harmony, Transit Resource Center Senior Program Manager, gave an update on the [Envision Route 7](#) Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) System to the Fairfax County Transportation Advisory Commission (TAC) on March 21. Xavier provided an overview of work to date, summarized ongoing work and described what work was still to be done. NVTC leads the planning for

Envision Route 7, which crosses four jurisdictions, connecting Tysons and Alexandria, by way of Seven Corners and Falls Church. Xavier also invited the TAC members to the upcoming Envision Route 7 public meeting to be held May 16 at Mary Riley Styles Public Library in Falls Church.



Who will lead Envision Route 7 BRT construction and governance?

NVTC staff hosted an [Envision Route 7](#) Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Strategic Implementation workshop in our Arlington office on Friday, February 24. NVTC leads the planning for the BRT system that would connect Tysons and Alexandria, by way of Seven Corners and Falls Church. The workshop explored options for implementing the project, including who will lead construction, what funding strategies might be used and what

future project governance might look like to help set up future project phases for success. This meeting was attended by senior staff from the the cities of Alexandria and Falls Church, Arlington and Fairfax counties, the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT) and Metro. The project team is now working on putting together the findings into a final report.





Metro Board tweaks proposed budget

Amendments to Metro's proposed budget

The Metro Board met March 23 to conduct a work session on the [FY 2024 budget](#). The board reviewed the FY 2024 Operating budget, FY2024–2029 Capital Improvement Program and survey data from the budget public comment period. Overall, the FY 2024 budget “seeks to expand service on Metrorail and Metrobus, provide more equitable fares, implement a low-income fare program, enhance public safety and maintain a safe and reliable system through capital investments.” The \$4.8 billion capital and operating budget is intended to grow ridership and includes measures to: increase service on Metrorail and Metrobus, launch Better Bus Network Redesign, open the new Potomac Yard station and simplify Metrorail pricing. The customer survey from the budget comment period received over 3,200 comments and revealed that respondents were mostly in agreement with the Metrorail and Metrobus service proposals, fare proposals and the capital budget proposal. However, there were mixed responses on increasing the maximum fare to \$6.50.

Board members raised several proposals and two were approved to move forward as budget amendments. The first was to lower the maximum fare rate from \$6.50 to \$6.00 and the second was to cap the MetroAccess fare at \$4. Both amendments will have a small impact on budget revenue; however, the Board has worked with staff to identify cost savings opportunities

to offset this impact. Following the budget work session, the Board will come back to approve the final FY 2024 Operating Budget and FY 2024–2029 Capital Improvement Program on April 14.

Metro accelerates zero-emission transition

The Metro Board’s [Safety and Operations Committee](#) received an [update](#) on the agency’s Zero-Emissions Bus (ZEB) Plan, which accelerates its timeline for reaching a 100% ZEB fleet by three years to 2042. Fully transitioning to ZEBs is estimated to cost approximately \$2.3 billion when accounting for new buses and facility upgrades. Of note to Northern Virginia, planning is currently underway to upgrade the Cinder Bed Road facility for electric buses, with Metro coordinating with Fairfax County on the work. Additionally, Metro staff emphasized the importance of regional coordination and learning from regional partners as the ZEB transition process progresses. NVTC is excited to work closely with Metro and coordinate with them as we advance the [Northern Virginia Regional ZEB Strategic Plan](#).

Metro to install new faregates

The Board also received [an update](#) on Metrorail ridership and Metrorail [fare evasion](#) mitigation efforts. Metro had its highest ridership day since the pandemic this past Wednesday with a total of 405,328 trips. As ridership numbers trend upwards Metro has continued testing retrofit faregates to address fare evasion on the system.

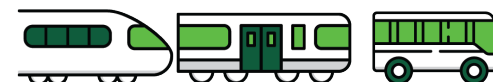


Photo courtesy of Metro

Metro’s newest faregates, which were installed systemwide as of December, offer improved customer experience and operation

improvements, although a major concern is that these faregates are easier to jump over. Metro has conducted faregate retrofit testing of single swing doors and two swing doors at the Fort. Totten station. Since these faregates have

been installed, there has been a reduction in fare invasion and jumping the fare gates at this station. The Metro team will continue installing Single Door Standard Gate at Fort Totten and the rest of the system. The total cost will be between \$35-40 million and will take about 15 months to complete systemwide.



BEHIND THE SCENES

Former NVTC Executive Director Rick Taube interviewed for 60th anniversary commemorations

Former NVTC Executive Director Rick Taube sat down with our communications team March 20 for an on-camera interview about his memories of leading the organization for nearly 30 years. The interview will be used in a planned documentary to be produced as part of NVTC's 60th anniversary commemorations in 2024. Rick served from 1984 to 2013 and was here during significant expansions of Metro,

the establishment of Virginia Railway Express and the addition of Loudoun County to NVTC's jurisdictions.

Meanwhile, staff have formed an internal committee to plan for the 60th anniversary and our communications team will be reaching out to other folks to talk about their involvement over the decades.



Marketing and Engagement Manager Monique Blyther records Rick Taube looking through a scrapbook containing news articles about NVTC.



Transit Fellow Nathan Varnell and Monique Blyther test the lighting and camera angles for the interview with Rick Taube.



NVTC hosts NoVa Regional Bus Analysis kickoff meeting

NVTC staff, led by Senior Program Manager Xavier Harmony, kicked off the Northern Virginia Regional Bus Analysis with their consulting team partners March 14. The analysis will provide a regional context to the region's transit services and will serve as a strategic planning resource

both for the Commission and its jurisdictional members. This work will identify transit service gaps, opportunities for new bus routes and sharing facilities, and provide an overview of existing and anticipated financial needs. The study is expected to be completed by April 2024.



Kate Mattice discusses 'better bus' with business groups

Executive Director Kate Mattice joined Metro GM/CEO Randy Clarke March 22 to talk about the future of bus service in Northern Virginia and across the greater Washington region. The [Federal City Council \(FC2\)](#) and [MetroNow Coalition](#) sponsored the webinar entitled "50 years of Metrobus: What's on the road ahead for better bus?" Anthony Williams, CEO and Executive Director of FC2 and Kathy Hollinger, CEO of the Greater Washington Partnership led the discussion about how we can build a better, more sustainable bus network for our region. Topics ranged from elevating the status

of bus service, creating a seamless experience for riders across multiple bus systems and the need to establish a sustainable funding model for Metro. Meanwhile, Metro plans to release preliminary maps as part of its [Better Bus](#) project next month and Metro staff will brief NVTC's WMATA Committee during its April 19 meeting.

Photo caption: Kate (top left), Randy Clarke, Metro GM/CEO (top right), Anthony Williams, Federal City Council CEO and Executive Director (bottom left), Kathy Hollinger Greater Washington Partnership CEO (bottom left).



Federal transportation policy in the spotlight

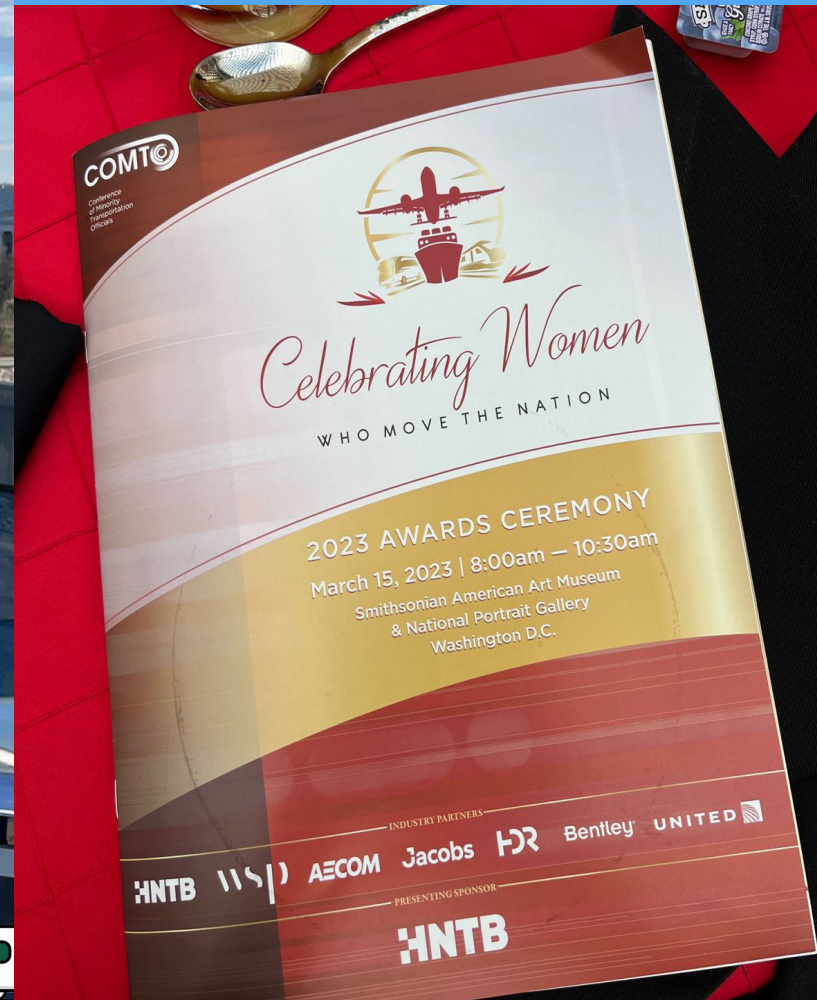
Executive Director Kate Mattice had a busy week of meetings and events that kicked off Sunday, March 12 with the [APTA Legislative Conference](#), which focused on important federal legislation and policy initiatives. On Wednesday, Kate attended a [breakfast](#) hosted by The Conference of Minority Transportation Officials (COMTO) which honored 10 women making outstanding contributions to the transportation industry. She

also took part in the [2023 WTS International Spring Policy Symposium](#) highlighting WTS's efforts to educate members, industry stakeholders and decision-makers, as well as advocate on behalf of women and transportation. In addition, Kate visited with new transportation staff in Rep. Don Beyer's office to brief them on NVTC's work and policy issues of importance.



Commissioner & Metro Board Chair Paul Smedberg, United States Deputy Secretary of Transportation Polly Trottenberg and Kate Mattice at the APTA Legislative Reception (top left);

Transportation and Infrastructure Peter DeFazio and Kate Mattice (top right); COMTO honoree Henrika Buchanan of HNTB and Kate Mattice (bottom right).





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