

In the nearly three months since states and cities first issued stay at home orders due to the COVID-19 public health emergency, the world of public transit has been turned upside down. We've seen ridership drop to about 30% of normal on our region's buses and just 10% for Metrorail and VRE. Congress allocated billions of dollars in emergency relief for transit and the Commonwealth of Virginia has provided additional millions to keep essential operations moving.

What comes next? No one can say for certain. But we do have a clearer picture about the questions we need to ask. What will commuting look like as businesses slowly reopen? Telework and staggered work times have been touted for years as congestion-fighting tools. Will they finally gain widespread adoption in the wake of the pandemic?

How many people will return to transit? A recently analysis by Metro predicts that it would take a year for ridership to return to pre-pandemic levels. Social distancing measures could impose capacity limits on trains and buses for months to come. In the meantime, will that lead more people to drive to work, exacerbating the kind of gridlock we've been working for years to reduce?

And what about the money needed to sustain public transit systems? Metro and our regional providers depend on fares paid by riders, as well as support from the federal government, states and local municipalities. The American Public Transportation Association recently began lobbying for second round of federal spending, warning that the financial hit to transit agencies could be long-lasting.

As we try to answer these questions, I can assure you that NVTC will continue to work closely with our jurisdictions and transit providers to support them and we'll continue to plan for the future, knowing that Northern Virginia will continue to be a vibrant and growing region that needs an effective transportation network.



*John A. Mathis*  
**Executive Director**

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

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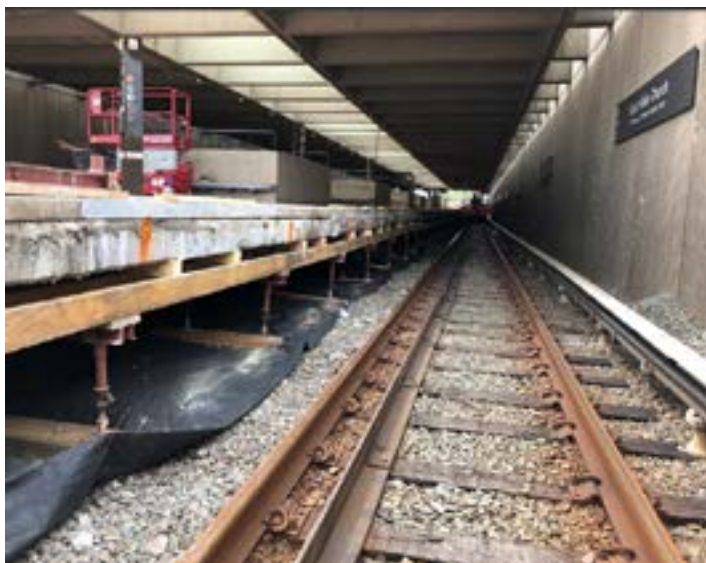
- | Key Dates  |  |
|--|--|
| · June 11 - WMATA Board                            |  |
| · June 16 & 17 - Commonwealth Transportation Board |  |
| · June 19 - VRE Operations Board                   |  |
| · June 25 - WMATA Board                            |  |
| · July 2 - NVTC Commission                         |  |

## Virginia Orange and Silver Line stations closed for summer construction

Four Orange Line stations and five Silver Line stations closed Memorial Day weekend as part of Metro's Platform Improvement Project. In April, Metro announced that it was dramatically expanding the number of stations it planned to close this summer. The agency said it was taking advantage of historically-low ridership, driven by the COVID-19 public health emergency, to complete needed tie-in work for Phase 2 of the Silver Line. That's in addition to the rebuilding work that had previously been announced for the Orange Line stations west of Ballston. Some demolition work at those stations started in April. Metro published photos showing workers removing tiles, concrete and ceiling tiles. The summertime closures mark the second year of rebuilding efforts. Last summer, Metro rebuilt six Blue and Yellow Line stations in Northern Virginia.



West Falls Church Station (above); East Falls Church Station (below). Photos: WMATA

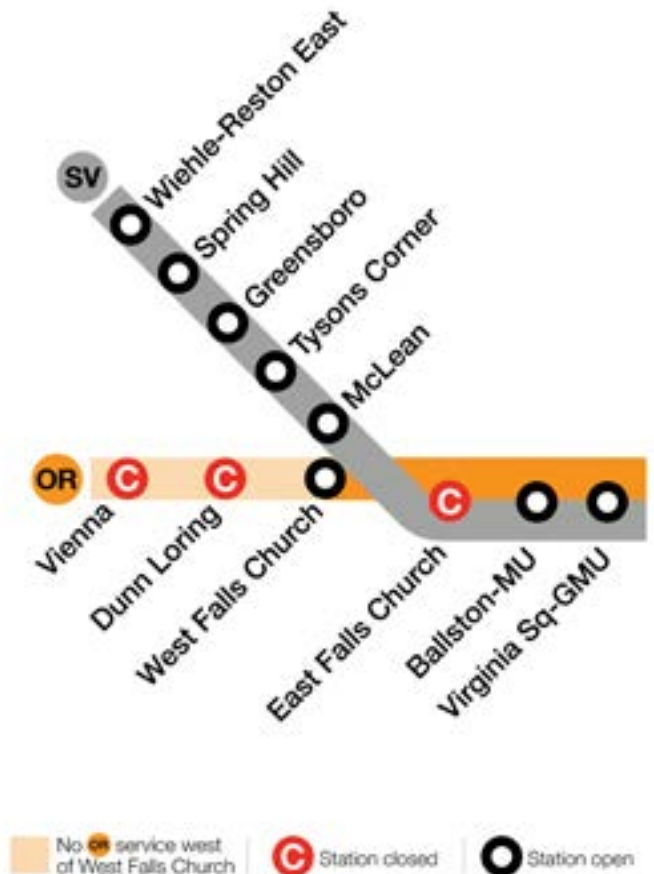


June 2020

Metro has established free shuttle service for passengers who still need to use transit during the shutdown. The agency also promises to add buses if ridership rises during the course of the summer. At the same time, Fairfax Connector is urging riders to utilize its express buses.

Metro has not set a reopening date for the stations. While last year's closures ended just after Labor Day, the agency says social distancing requirements for construction workers could impact the amount of time it takes to rebuild the stations. Information and regular updates about station closures, shuttle buses and construction progress can be found on the Platform Improvement Project [website](#).

Separately, Metro will close the Yellow Line bridge over the Potomac River from June 7 to June 27. That means riders heading to Washington will have to switch to the Blue Line.



## Metro introduces revised budget proposal

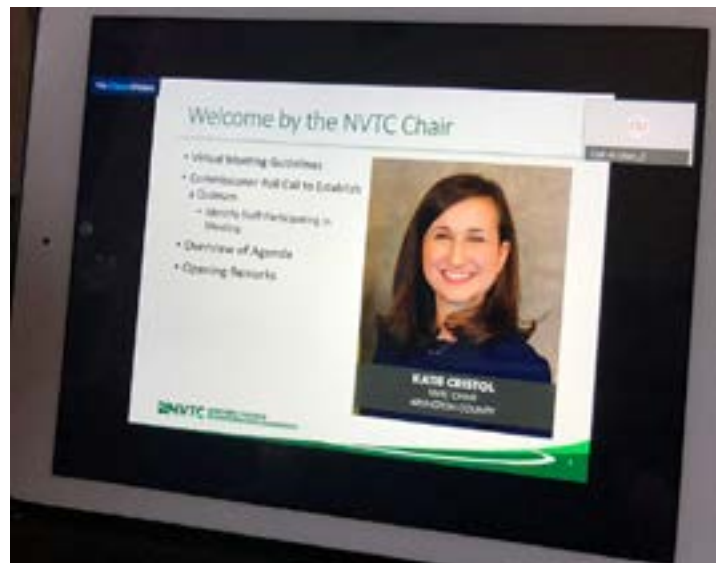
Metro unveiled a new FY 2021 budget proposal that takes into account the sharp falloff in revenue resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. This proposal replaces the budget previously approved by the Metro Board of Directors. It includes \$45 million in cuts and also delays some measures already approved by the Board. Metro anticipates using \$438 million from the emergency relief bill known as the CARES Act to replace money lost to the rapid decline in the number of passengers using Metrorail and Metrobus. Metro Board Chair Paul Smedberg recently told [ALXNow](#) that the federal relief month has helped stabilize the system, adding “We’re very sensitive to how jurisdictions are having to deal with things financially. They, ultimately for the most part, are the ones paying the bill.” NVTC will continue to work closely with Virginia’s representatives on the Metro Board as budget discussions move forward.

Meanwhile, the American Public Transportation Association (APTA) [urges Congress](#) and the administration to provide another \$23.8 billion in emergency relief for public transit, on top of the \$25 billion included in the CARES Act. “Without significant additional emergency funding, we will not be able to serve our essential riders, as well as help our communities recover both economically and socially,” said APTA President and CEO Paul P. Skoutelas in a news release. A bill introduced in the U.S. House provides \$15.75 billion for transit. The Senate has not indicated when it might consider the bill.

## Smooth launch for virtual Commission meeting

In May, NVTC conducted the first-ever virtual Commission meeting in the organization’s more than half-century history. After canceling the April meeting due to concerns about COVID-19, we were able to resume the important policy-making work of the Commission. A state budget amendment, signed by Gov. Ralph Northam in April, allows NVTC and similar bodies to conduct remote meetings during a declared emergency. IT

June 2020

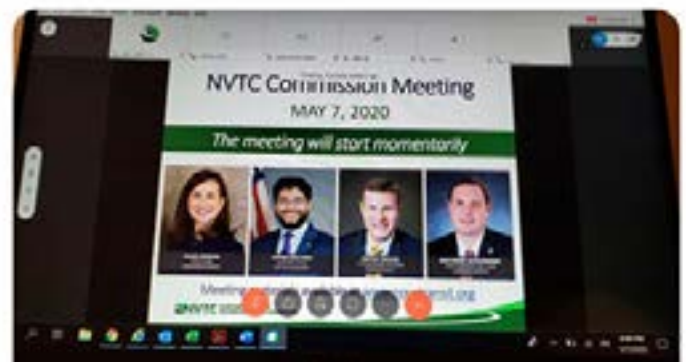


Manager Melissa Walker led the charge in finding the right platform to accommodate the large number of Commissioners and staff members who needed to take part in the meeting. She settled on WebEx, a web-based conferencing system that provides security for meetings and allows us to broadcast them on YouTube, satisfying Virginia’s public meetings requirements. An NVTC WMATA Committee meeting the previous week provided a kind of test run for the technology, proving that it would be effective for the Commission meeting.



Canek Aguirre   
@CanekForCouncil

Tune in: first virtual  
[@NoVaTransit](#) meeting has  
started  
[youtu.be/J7mwkY-Caxk](https://youtu.be/J7mwkY-Caxk) #NVTC





## Executive Director Newsletter

Board Secretary Rhonda Gilcrest and others put an enormous amount of work into making sure Commissioners were prepared for this new medium and that the meeting moved as smoothly as possible. NVTC staff produced detailed slides for each item on the meeting agenda, which were shown on the screen to allow Commissioners and the public to follow along with the discussion.

Chair Katie Cristol tweeted after the meeting, "Chairing a 28-person virtual meeting via YouTube-streamed phone call, made considerably less daunting by the terrific, adaptive work of the @NoVaTransit staff team to transition this Commission online, with no loss in transparency. TY!"

NVTC expects to use the same technology for the June 4, 2020 Commission meeting.

### Transit agencies adopt mandatory mask policies

Face coverings are now mandatory while riding trains and buses that serve Northern Virginia. In mid-May Metro said General Manager Paul J. Wiedefeld accepted a recommendation of the transit authority's Pandemic Task Force that face coverings or masks be required when traveling on Metro. Metro started "strongly recommending"



riders wear face coverings in April. "Every person who wears a face covering on Metro is helping to keep others safe, and this is especially important for Metro's frontline employees. In the age of COVID-19, we all share a responsibility for frontline worker safety, and that's what this is all about," Wiedefeld said in a news release. Metro said it was following CDC guidelines in strengthening the

guidance to require masks. Fairfax Connector, ART, DASH and other providers quickly followed suit in adding the face covering requirement.



### NVTC swears in new Commissioner from Arlington

Chair Katie Cristol swore in fellow Arlington County Board Member Matt de Ferranti as NVTC's newest Commissioner during the May Commission Meeting. Mr. de Ferranti was elected to the Arlington Board in 2018. He previously served on Arlington Public Schools Budget Advisory Council and in other community positions.

