

It might feel like we've all heard the word "unprecedented" too many times in the past few months, but it accurately reflects the reality for the transit systems that serve Northern Virginia in this time of the COVID-19 pandemic. Metrorail and VRE ridership have dropped to about 5% of normal. Ridership has also tumbled for Metrobus and other bus providers. Many of the transit providers will receive federal or state emergency relief money, though it may not be enough if the pandemic keeps schools and businesses closed for months to come. We're also mindful of the significant drop off in toll collection as many people stay home. Meanwhile, the work of NVTC moves forward, as we plan for the eventual return of commuters.

While we had to cancel our April Commission meeting, Gov. Ralph Northam and the General Assembly agreed to budget amendments that allow NVTC and similar bodies across the commonwealth to hold virtual meetings when the governor has declared an emergency. We thank our longtime Commissioner, Sen. Adam Ebbin, for his leadership in guiding this proposal through the legislative process. The change means we will hold our May Commission meeting, as scheduled. We've also taken steps to ensure that members of the public will be able to join our online meeting, as required by law.

We have major projects to tackle: revisiting the revenue available for proposed projects under Commuter Choice, coordinating expanded efforts for the summer shutdown of Metrorail stations in Northern Virginia and reexamining the role of regional fare collection technologies, among them. We will work with our partners in the General Assembly and local cities and counties to adapt to the significant budget pressures created by the pandemic. We will also continue to manage our financial obligations, assist our jurisdictions in their relationships with WMATA and continue moving our other projects forward. Through it all, I can assure you that NVTC will adapt to the unprecedented challenges presented by this pandemic.



John A. Mathici
Executive Director

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Key Dates

- May 15 - VRE Operations Board
- May 19-20 - Commonwealth Transportation Board
- June 4 - Commission Meeting

CARES Act provides \$25 billion for U.S. public transit

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a swift and devastating impact on public transit agencies across the country. Metrorail ridership alone has dropped by over 90% from a year ago as many people started working from home and others no longer had a job to go to. While WMATA and other transit agencies receive federal, state and local money, passenger fares make up a significant portion of revenues. With skeletal ridership, much of that fare revenue has evaporated. WMATA alone estimates it's losing \$2.5 million dollars a day due to the pandemic.

This pandemic won't last forever and Congress recognized that public transit must be preserved so it can operate again once some level of normalcy returns. Congress included \$25 billion for [public transit](#) in the \$2.2 trillion emergency relief bill known as the CARES Act. President Donald Trump quickly signed the bill after it passed the House and Senate. The money covers additional operating costs and impact of lost revenues as a result of the COVID-19 public health emergency.



The Washington, D.C. urbanized area formula program allocation will receive a total of \$1.02 billion. That allocation funds WMATA, VRE, PRTC, FRED, and MTA. All of the money comes from the federal government and there's no local match required for this funding. The money will support capital, operating and other expenses to prevent, prepare for and respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. It can also go toward replacing lost

income due to the sharp falloff of ridership. There's also about \$1 billion for Amtrak, which includes \$492 million for the Northeast Corridor.

There's also been action at the state level. The Commonwealth Transportation Board (CTB) authorized an additional \$11 million in statewide public transportation operating funding. The money will help all Virginia public transportation agencies suffering major ridership losses and additional operating expenses due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the Commonwealth of Virginia's related public health response. The \$11 million is equivalent to one-month of statewide operating revenues currently allocated to the Commonwealth Mass Transit Fund.

Looking ahead, the American Public Transportation Association says losses may exceed \$25 billion. Future stimulus bills may need to include additional money for public transit in order to sustain the transit services that provide a transportation lifeline for thousands of people in Northern Virginia and across the country.

Transit agencies adjust service and practices due to COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to unprecedented changes in the way transit agencies that serve Northern Virginia operate. Most have significantly cut service hours and made day-to-day operational changes. For most providers, the changes came in stages.

WMATA, the region's largest transit agency, reported Metrorail ridership down more than 90% from a year ago. Metrobus ridership fell about 75% year-to-year. In response, WMATA [reduced hours](#), closed less-used train stations and significantly reduced train and bus frequency. WMATA also switched to all 8-car trains, while closing the first and last cars to maintain distance between train operators and passengers. Metrobus asked passengers to board through the rear door and suspended fare payments. WMATA also led the region in asking all riders to wear cloth masks in the system, a move quickly adopted by the other providers.



VRE quickly changed to an “S” schedule, running half the normal number of trains. ART, DASH and Fairfax Connector also reduced schedules and adopted rear-door boarding.

Loudoun County Transit’s commuter buses stopped running and the county reduced Metro Connection and local service. City of Fairfax-CUE was the only regional provider continuing to offer full service. Virginia Breeze, operated by the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation, stopped all service. The bus line connects Washington Union Station and Blacksburg, with stops in Arlington and at Dulles International Airport.



WMATA budget includes priorities championed by NVTC

The WMATA Board recently approved the Fiscal Year 2021 [budget](#) which includes priorities championed by the Northern Virginia Transportation Commission. However, members of the board unanimously agreed to review the approved budget before it goes into effect July 1, 2020. The board acknowledged significant uncertainties due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The FY 2021 WMATA Budget, as passed, effectively addresses key NVTC priorities, such as maintaining critical bus routes serving Northern Virginia and limiting the fare increase on long-distance Metrorail riders. Other new initiatives include reducing the cost of transferring between Metrorail and Metrobus and between local bus operators and Metrorail.



NVTC also notes additional budget provisions that will benefit Northern Virginia’s transit riders:

- Limiting the Metrorail base fare increase to 10 cents
- Adding a weekend flat fare
- Increasing Metrorail and Metrobus service on Sundays
- Increasing service on Metro Extra bus routes
- Retaining rush hour peak reserve trains used to reduce crowding on the Orange Line
- Does **not** include a proposed surcharge for using cash for Metrobus fares or SmarTrip reloading on buses
- Does **not** include a proposed \$1 surcharge for passengers entering or exiting at the future Dulles International Airport Station

NVTC and the NVTC WMATA Committee will continue to work with the WMATA Board as it amends the budget, prior to its July 1 implementation.

NVTC in the news

NVTC Executive Director Kate Mattice spoke with television news outlet localdvm.com about the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on public transit. The story aired as public transit agencies were asking Congress for federal aid. “Just our transit services that we provide in Northern Virginia every year provide an additional \$600 million in state revenues, so think about the contribution and the losses of those revenues, because people are moving and getting to jobs, and really what that means,” Mattice told the station.



May 2020

Pause proposed for the Round Four (FY 2021-2022) program for Commuter Choice on the I-66 corridor

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in an uncertain revenue picture for the [Commuter Choice](#) program on the I-66 corridor in Fiscal Year 2021 due to sharply reduced I-66 Inside the Beltway toll collections since mid-March. NVTC staff will seek Commission authorization in May to notify the Commonwealth Transportation Board of a delay until this fall for action on Round Four (FY 2021-2022) Program of Projects. We hope to have a clearer idea by late summer of the funding that will be available for new projects beginning in FY 2021.

NVTC recognizes that many Virginia residents and employers are facing challenging situations due to the pandemic. We therefore intend to suspend the public comment period for the Round Four program until late summer. Once the period reopens, we will provide opportunities for interested parties to comment on projects and engage with us virtually to learn more about the 14 projects under consideration for funding,



WMATA expands Metrorail summer shutdown plans

WMATA announced a significant expansion of its summer 2020 station [shutdown](#) plans, citing low ridership due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The agency will close nine Metrorail stations, beginning May 23. They include four Orange Line stations-- East Falls Church, West Falls Church, Dunn Loring and Vienna, as well as all Silver Line stations in Northern Virginia. Previous plans called for shutting three Orange Line stations. WMATA says the closures will allow contractors to demolish and rebuild the four Orange Line stations, as planned. Separately, the closure of the Silver Line stations will give contractors time to continue the work needed to open Phase 2 of the line.

“Closing the stations to get the work done while ridership is historically low allows us to limit the exposure of our frontline staff and contractors, mitigate delays to our capital program, and minimize inconvenience to the public,” said WMATA General Manager and Chief Executive Officer Paul J. Wiedefeld in a news release.

WMATA has not released a reopening date for the stations. The agency says it will do so once it has a better idea of how worker safety protocols impact the pace of construction. WMATA also released its alternative shuttle plan.. NVTC continues its coordination work with WMATA and other agencies and jurisdictions to mitigate the impacts of the shutdown.



Free Shuttle Service

Effective: Saturday, May 23, 2020

Orange Line Local

Service between Vienna, Dunn Loring, West Falls Church & Ballston-MU

Orange Line Express

Direct service between Vienna & Ballston-MU (no intermediate stops)

Silver Line Local

Service between Wiehle-Reston East, Spring Hill, Tysons Corner & Ballston-MU

ADA shuttles provided upon request between impacted stations



NVTC staff transition to working from home

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the nature of work for millions of Americans. While NVTC has long championed working from home as a way to reduce traffic congestion and enacted policies designed to support staff members who wanted to utilize regular work from home days, we never envisioned a time that the entire staff would need to work from home for an extended time. Once it became clear that it was no longer prudent to have staff members commuting back and forth to the office each day, Executive Director Kate Mattice directed staff members to work with their supervisors make sure everyone had the technical capabilities needed to do their jobs from home.

Staff quickly adapted and instant messaging and video conference calls became a mainstay of the work day. While we made the difficult decision to cancel the April meeting of the Commission NVTC staff continued their work and we posted to the NVTC website April 2020 staff reports, providing updates on many of the agenda items usually discussed at NVTC's monthly meeting.

While the pandemic has forced changes in the way we work, NVTC staff continue to support the Commission's needs and plan for a future where Northern Virginia retains a robust and reliable transit and transportation network.

COVID-19 MITIGATION

VRE

- 1 SOCIAL DISTANCING**
Maintain a distance of at least 6 feet from other passengers and the conductors when possible.
- 2 FACE COVERINGS**
Follow CDC guidance on wearing a cloth face covering that includes multiple layers of fabric.
- 3 HAND WASHING**
Continue to wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
- 4 COUGHS AND SNEEZES**
If you have to cough or sneeze, cover your mouth and nose. **STAY HOME** if you are sick.
- 5 CDC GUIDELINES**
Follow any new guidance from the CDC.
- 6 TRAIN TALKS**
Follow VRE Train Talk emails or SMS alerts for updates.

The infographic features an illustration of a train car interior with passengers wearing masks. In the foreground, a woman is adjusting her mask, and a man is sitting at a desk with a computer monitor displaying 'CDC.GOV'.