

Welcome to fall. At this time of year, we are normally sending our kids back to school and settling back into our routines after summer breaks. But there's nothing routine about 2020. Kids across Northern Virginia are learning from home and that has a direct impact on transit in the region. If you have school-age children, you know the challenges. If your kids are home, you likely need to be a home as well. And that means not going to work in person, if possible, and not riding Metro, VRE or one of the buses that serve our region. That means transit ridership will likely lag until schools reopen. While COVID-19 has been disruptive to transit, we have to remember that we measure transit performance in years and even decades.

That's why the work of NVTC continues in earnest. We'll pass two milestones for our Commuter Choice program in the coming months - selection of the next round of projects for the I-66 inside the Beltway corridor and call for projects for the I-395/95 corridor. Those projects will help reduce traffic congestion that we know will return as the pandemic eases. Our Commuter Choice team will also publish its annual report in the fall, detailing the successful projects currently operating in both corridors.

Speaking of reports, NVTC will produce a new report this year analyzing the impact of Virginia's 3% cap in the growth of operating costs at WMATA. Chair Katie Cristol has led a series of meetings examining the effectiveness of the cap and making recommendations to the General Assembly. At the same time staff is working on the annual Report on the Condition and Performance of WMATA, due to the General Assembly in December. We will also present an update to our regional fare collection strategic plan, reflecting the major technological and operational changes to transit systems since 2018. Finally, we'll publish our 2020 annual report highlighting the work of NVTC during this tumultuous year.

We wrap up our fall activities with our annual Joint NVTC/PRTC Legislative and Policy Briefing in early December. While we don't know if this will be an in person or virtual event, we do look forward to hearing from invited guest Virginia Transportation Secretary Shannon Valentine and local transit leaders about their policy priorities for the coming year. While the pandemic has changed the way we work at NVTC, as you can see, it hasn't slowed us down as we enter another busy season.



Executive Director

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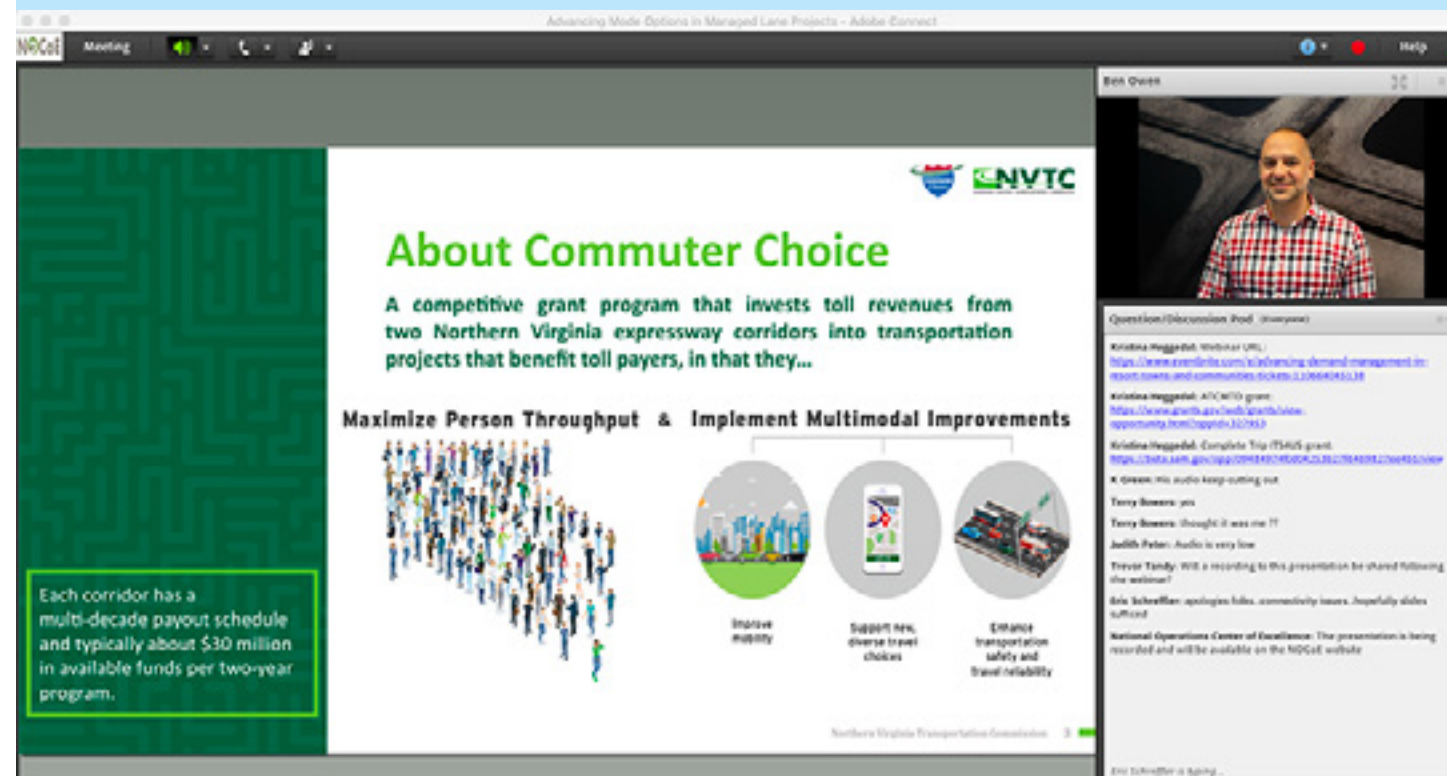
Key Dates

- Sept. 10 - Legislative and Policy Committee
- Sept. 15 - 16 CTB
- Sept. 17 - PAC Committee
- Sept. 17 - WMATA Committee
- Sept. 18 - VRE Operations Board
- Oct. 1 - Commission Meeting

Commuter Choice team briefs potential applicants

NVTC's [Commuter Choice](#) team has been busy developing program policy changes that will be brought forward for Commission consideration this fall as part of opening the next call for projects in the I-395/95 corridor. The proposed changes build on NVTC's lessons learned with the program to improve our administration as well as predictability for applicants and recipients. Ben Owen, Commuter Choice program manager, led a webinar for eligible program applicants to review the proposed changes and obtain staff's feedback on them. Ben also briefed our program partners in the I-395/95 corridor, the Potomac and Rappahannock Transportation Commission, on the upcoming steps to prepare for the call for projects. The Commuter Choice team also briefed members of NVTC's Program Advisory Committee and the NVTC/PRTC Joint Commission Working Group on a one-on-one basis in August.

Ben also highlighted the Commuter Choice program as part of a Federal Highway Administration-sponsored webinar on strategies to encourage the use of transit and other alternative modes as part of expressway tolling projects.



Fare Collection Strategic Plan Update in the home stretch

Efforts to update NVTC's [regional fare collection](#) strategic plan are nearing completion as NVTC's Technology Program Manager Patricia Happ wrapped up discussions with local transit providers on their current and future priorities for fare collection activities, including the impact of COVID-19 on fare collection. The Regional Fare Collection Strategic Plan, initially adopted in 2018, outlines NVTC's coordination and support of regional partners on fare collection upgrades and initiatives.

While most Northern Virginia's regional bus systems suspended fare collection as a precaution during the COVID-19 public health emergency, installation of barriers to protect bus operators as well as the resumption of schools and employees returning to workplaces will prompt resumption of fare collection. Despite the near-term change in fare collection activities, transit providers shared that

they continue to look to regional approaches, coordinated by NVTC, to help facilitate bus farebox upgrades, off board fare payment options, and implementation of next generation fare technologies with a specific focus on Metro's fare payment strategy initiatives.

The Commission will be asked to adopt the updated Regional Fare Collection Strategic Plan this fall.

Sen. John Bell joins Commission

Chair Katie Cristol [swore in](#) Sen. John Bell as NVTC's newest Commissioner at the July Commission meeting. Sen. Bell's district covers parts of Loudoun and Prince William Counties. He was elected last year after previously serving two terms in the House of Delegates. Sen. Bell's appointment brings the Commission to full strength and he's the tenth new Commissioner this year, reflecting a significant change in the make up of the 21-member body. We also welcomed one new alternates this year.



Reports on WMATA due to the General Assembly this fall

NVTC's WMATA Committee will review and transmit two reports on WMATA to the Commission this fall. The General Assembly mandates both reports, which focus on Virginia's 3% growth cap on WMATA's operating assistance payments and WMATA's performance metrics.

The 3% cap working group will meet in September to complete the report on the impact of Virginia's 3% cap on WMATA. The working group met over the summer and sought guidance from the WMATA Committee. The group members found that the cap is useful in managing the growth of Virginia's subsidy payments to WMATA and that the legislature does not need to exclude additional items from the cap. The working group acknowledges that it is too soon to make any legislative changes to the cap, given the legislation's recent enactment. However, the working group has encouraged NVTC staff to continue to evaluate the legislative cap, WMATA's implementation of the cap, and any unintended consequences of the cap and report any additional findings to the Commission in the future.

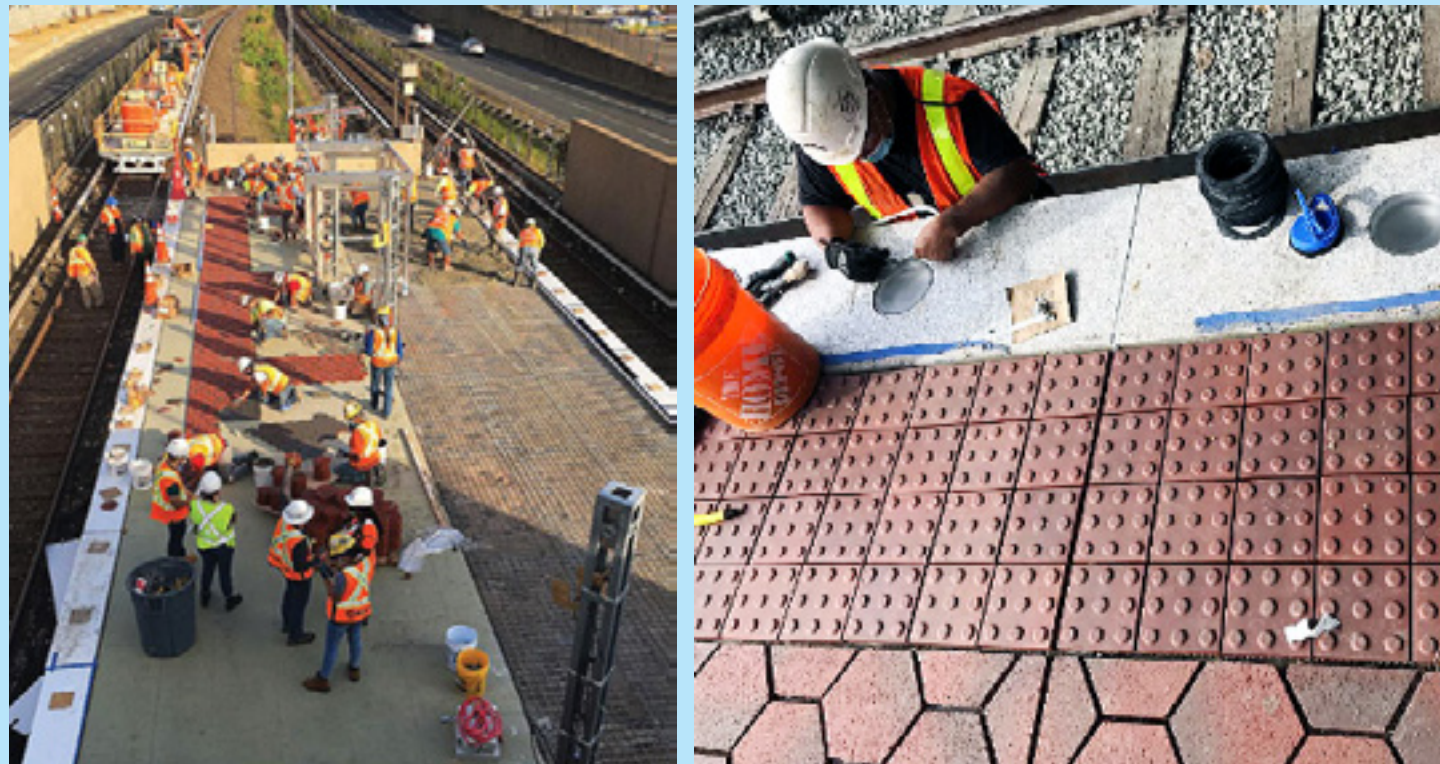
The WMATA Committee will meet in September to review the working group's report. The Commission will receive and approve the report on the 3% cap before the report's November 10 due date to the chairs of the House Appropriations and Senate Finance and Appropriations Committees.

The WMATA Committee has added a meeting to its calendar this year to conclude the update to the Annual Report on the Performance and Condition of WMATA. This year's report on WMATA will reflect the impact of the COVID-19 public health emergency on WMATA's performance metrics. That report will be submitted in December, reflecting a later due date approved by the General Assembly this year.

Metro summer rebuilding program adds projects to take advantage of historically-low ridership

Platform Improvement Project

Metro’s summer 2020 [Platform Improvement Project](#) remains on track, despite earlier uncertainty over the pace of construction due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The four Orange Line and five Silver Line stations west of Ballston closed Memorial Day weekend. Construction contractors have spent the summer rebuilding the platforms, installing enhanced lighting and upgrading public-address systems, passenger information displays and shelters at Vienna, Dunn Loring and East and West Falls Church Stations. At the same time, crews completed work to connect Phases 1 and 2 of the Silver Line. The five Silver Line Stations – McLean, Tysons Corner, Greensboro, Spring Hill, and Wiehle-Reston East – reopened August 16, as did West Falls Church. The three remaining Orange Line stations are scheduled to reopen by September 8.

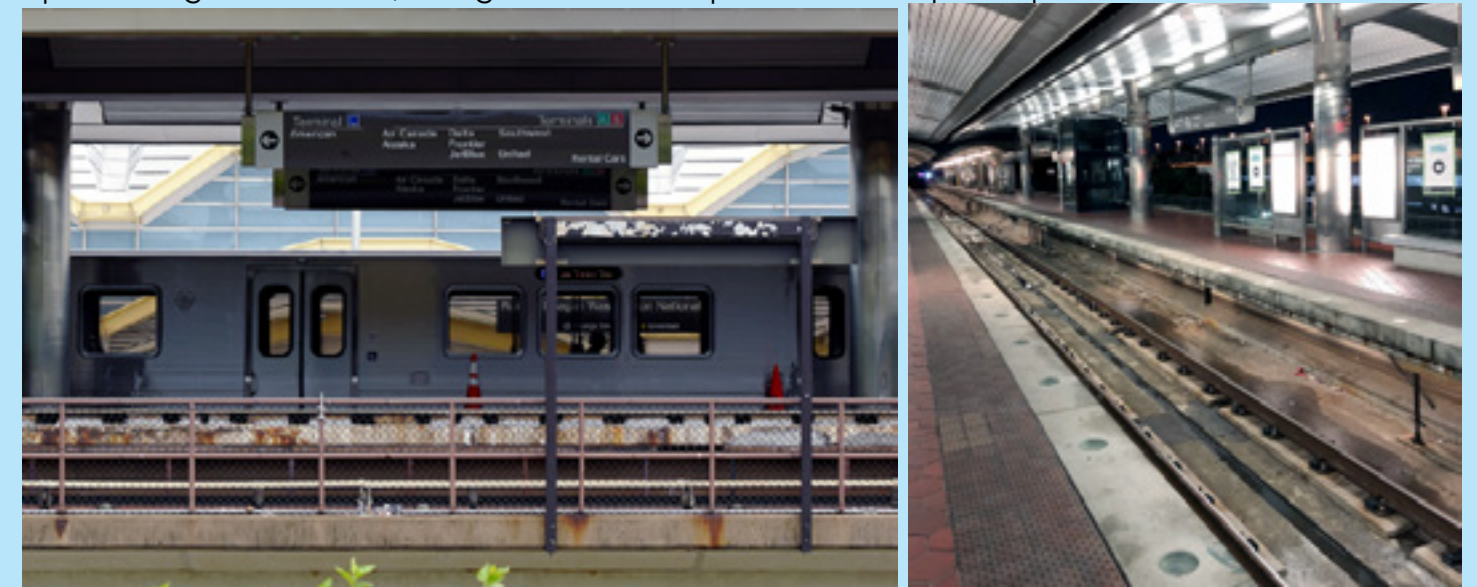


East Falls Church (top right and left); West Falls Church (bottom left); Dunn Loring (bottom right). Courtesy: Metro



Reagan National Airport platform

Metro started rebuilding the platforms at the Ronald Reagan National Airport station August 7. The work had been planned for fall 2022 to spring 2023, to coincide with the construction of a new terminal at the airport. Metro started the work early, saying it needs “to address critical structural issues presented by crumbling concrete in need of immediate repair.” Contractors will reconstruct the concrete and granite platform edges and install new slip-resistant tiles. The station will remain open during construction, though there will be periodic full or partial platform closures.



Photos courtesy Metro

Huntington escalators

Metro started work to replace escalators at the Huntington Metro Station on August 19. The agency says it taking advantage of low ridership due to the COVID-19 pandemic to do the work a year earlier than previously planned. The station’s south entrance will be closed for approximately five months. Passengers are encouraged to park in the north garage, as the station’s north entrance remains open during construction. Metro also operates a free, ADA-accessible shuttle between the south and north entrances. The work includes the removal of one standard-width escalator and two narrow-width escalators. They will be replaced with two standard-width escalators, which Metro explains will help alleviate platform crowding. Metro says the current escalators are 37-years-old and beyond their useful lives.



Photo courtesy Metro

Region's transit providers ramp up service following historic rollback

Metro, VRE and other transit providers that serve Northern Virginia have begun restoring transit service that they slashed as schools and businesses shuttered in response to the growing COVID-19 pandemic. Ridership that had dropped more than 90% in some cases, slowly grew over the summer as Virginia, D.C. and Maryland moved to a state of managed reopening.

Metro

On June 28, Metrorail reopened 15 stations that had been shuttered, including Clarendon, Virginia Square, Eisenhower Avenue and Van Dorn Street. Nine station entrances that had been temporarily closed also reopened. On August 16, Metrorail put more trains in service and expanded hours. That same day, Metrorail reopened six Silver Line Stations west of Ballston, which had been closed for the Platform Improvement Project. East Falls Church and Arlington Cemetery reopened August 23, with the remaining stations, Dunn Loring and Vienna, scheduled to reopen September 8.



On August 23, Metrobus added service with near-normal weekday service on 174 routes while operating 109 routes Saturdays and 99 Sundays.

DASH

DASH will increase service levels in Alexandria to approximately 80% of pre-COVID service on September 13. Weekday service will be restored on several routes and limited service will resume on most routes that were discontinued in March.

Fairfax Connector

Fairfax Connector returned to full service August 29 and added new service supported by NVTC's Commuter Choice program. The weekday express service connects the Stringfellow Road Park and Ride Lot with stop in Washington near L'Enfant Plaza. Fairfax Connector also added four daily round trips between the Fairfax County Government Center and Foggy Bottom, also supported by Commuter Choice.



Loudoun County Transit

Loudoun County Transit resumed Metro Connection buses, with reduced schedules, to Wiehle-Reston East on July 6. Commuter bus service returned, with reduced schedules, on July 13, with buses connecting Loudoun County to downtown Washington, The Pentagon, Rosslyn and Crystal City.

OmniRide

OmniRide resumed all service June 22, while operating on a Friday schedule, which is a step down from full service.



VRE

After running on a reduced "S" schedule, with four round trips on both the Fredericksburg and Manassas lines, VRE added one round trip starting July 27. "We have seen enough of an increase on our Fredericksburg Line to warrant an additional round trip," VRE Acting CEO Rich Dalton said in a news release. VRE maintains a Train Utilization Trends webpage to give people a sense of how much space they'll have while riding.



ART

ART resumed the majority of its bus service to pre-pandemic levels starting August 23. Ten routes returned to full service, while two routes continued on a modified weekday schedule. Four routes remain out of service.



Virginia Breeze

Virginia Breeze resumed bus service between Washington and Blacksburg July 24. The bus line makes stops at the West Falls Church Metro Station and Dulles International Airport, traveling the I-66 and I-81 corridors. The Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation also announced that it has renamed the service the "Valley Flyer." Two additional routes went into service a week later. The Piedmont Express will connect Washington and Danville and the Capital Connector will run between Washington, Richmond and Martinsville.



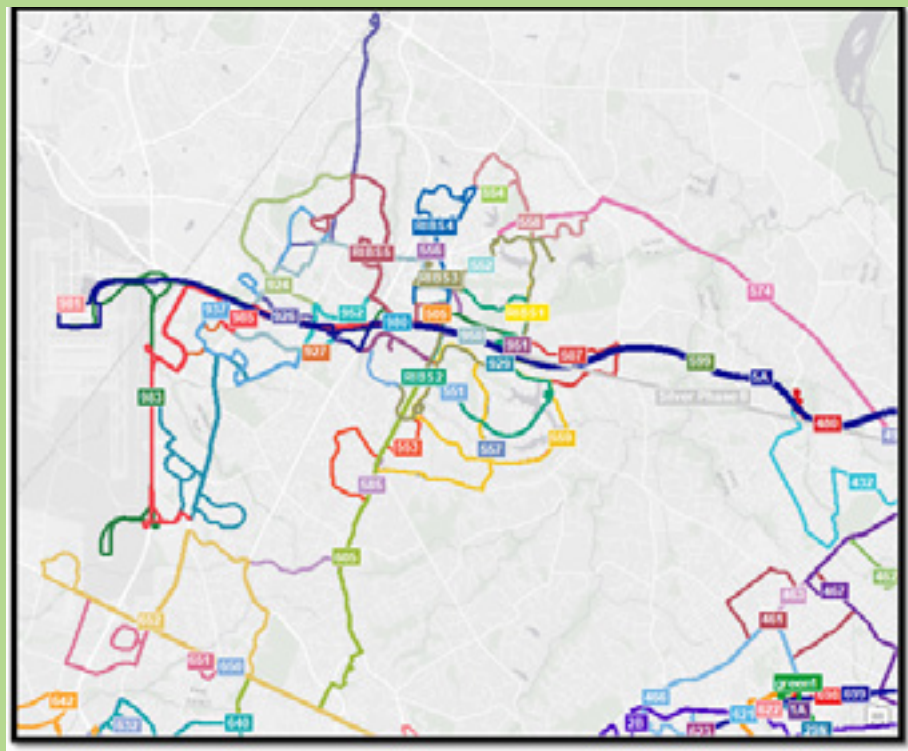
NVTC's Mattice to NOVA Chamber: Transit key to region's reopening

NVTC Executive Director Kate Mattice shared the impact and opportunities of COVID-19 on our area transit systems at the NOVA Chamber's annual State of Transportation Event, joining Virginia Secretary of Transportation Shannon Valentine, NVTA's Monica Backmon and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's Ed Mortimer. Kate reminded the audience of the key role public transit plays in supporting Northern Virginia's economy and in moving essential workers. Kate answered questions on the opportunities for contactless fare payment technologies and on how our transit agencies are already mobilizing to support workers returning to their jobs.



NVTC demonstrates innovative planning tool to regional transit planners

Program Analyst Matt Cheng presented NVTC's Transit Boardings Estimation and Simulation Tool (TBEST) at TPB's Travel Forecasting Subcommittee. Matt detailed the development of source data and transit database for TBEST as well as the technical capabilities of the software, including stop-level ridership projections, equity and accessibility analysis, and operational planning workflows. He then answered questions regarding challenges and objectives associated with TBEST and future uses by NVTC. Matt will present an overview of TBEST to the Commission at the September meeting and brief Management Advisory Committee members about the jurisdictional technical assistance available to them through NVTC's TBEST analysis.



An example of the TBEST model used to plan Fairfax Connector routes

Study process begins for American Legion Bridge replacement

NVTC staff participated in the I-495 American Legion Bridge (ALB) Transit/Transportation Demand Management Study First Stakeholder Meeting in July. The study follows the joint announcement last year by Virginia Gov. Ralph Northam and Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan that the two states would work together to replace the heavily-congested bridge that carries the northern part of the Capital Beltway over the Potomac River. The study is being conducted jointly by the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT) and Maryland Department of Transportation Maryland Transit Administration (MDOT MTA) to identify a range of current and potential multimodal solutions that could be implemented to reduce congestion, improve trip reliability and regional connections, and enhance existing and planned multimodal mobility and connectivity. During this meeting staff had the opportunity to listen to presentations on study purpose, timeline, and scope of work. NVTC staff then participated in breakout sessions in which stakeholders from Virginia, Maryland and DC were able to brainstorm potential strategies/recommendations to address transit and TDM needs. Feedback from the breakout sessions will help guide the development of the I-495 ALB Transit/TDM Study and ensure that the final outcomes have the potential to address the needs of commuters in the region.



Photo Courtesy VDOT

Telling the story of transit during a pandemic

NVTC Communications and Outreach Manager Matt Friedman served as a panelist for an online discussion on the topic of "Communications in a Time of Pandemics." DC Family Communicators, a group for LGBTQ professionals working in communications, sponsored the event. As the only panelist from a government body, Matt talked about the challenges the COVID-19 pandemic presented to NVTC and our ability to hold public meetings and how we moved to online meetings, while ensuring that members of the public are able to watch and provide comments to Commissioners. Matt also touched on how the pandemic changed the way we talk about transit, including the need for transit to provide transportation for essential workers.

Business group reaches out to NVTC on regional rail study

NVTC Executive Director Kate Mattice participated in the inaugural meeting of the advisory committee for the Greater Washington Partnership's Capital Region Rail Network Visioning Study. The [goal](#) of this seven-month effort is to develop an integrated commuter rail vision and supporting technical report for the greater Washington region, (Baltimore through to Richmond) focused on alleviating infrastructure constraints, continuing the growth in business and equity opportunities, and leveraging the momentum of recent regional efforts to enhance rail service. Advisory committee members included regional government entities, business groups, and current and former local officials from Baltimore, Montgomery and Prince George's Counties in Maryland, the District of Columbia, and Northern Virginia. The effort will also involve technical discussions with staff from VRE, Amtrak and other rail experts in the region. The final Vision Report and Technical Report are expected to be published in October and January, respectively.

