



June 7, 2019

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**Executive Director**  
Katherine A. Mattice

Bus Transformation Project Team  
c/o NeoNiche Strategies  
4501 Ford Avenue, Suite #501  
Alexandria, Virginia 22302

Re: Comments on Draft Bus Transformation Project Recommendations

Dear Bus Transformation Project Team:

The Northern Virginia Transportation Commission (NVTC) appreciates the seriousness with which the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) has tasked the Bus Transformation Project Team to transform the region's bus system and create a strategic framework to combat declining ridership and slower bus speeds. With over 150,000 riders on Northern Virginia's buses every weekday, we cannot underscore the importance of a bus network to transportation in Northern Virginia. As a regional entity tasked with coordinating transit policy and funding in Northern Virginia, NVTC is supportive of the project's effort but does share some words of caution on the strategies prepared to date.

We strongly support the study elements that seek to **prioritize buses** to make the bus system more customer focused and welcome the opportunity to support **ongoing coordination** between WMATA and jurisdictions to improve bus service in Northern Virginia. We also recommend that the project team and WMATA consider the development of a Virginia-specific roadmap for the implementation of the study.

We broadly support the study elements that seek to make the bus system more **customer focused**, provide **convenient bus service**, **streamline back-office functions** and **sharing innovation**. Many of these elements are consistent with NVTC's [2018 Regional Fare Collection Strategic Plan](#) and policy recommendations contained in NVTC's [2018 Annual Report on the Performance and Condition of WMATA](#). In addition, NVTC and several Northern Virginia jurisdictions are already moving forward on components of these recommendations through such projects as [Envision Route 7](#), the [transitway extension to Pentagon City](#), [Richmond Highway BRT](#), and the [Alexandria Transit Vision Plan](#).

NVTC agrees that local transit operators are better equipped to respond to local needs when **balancing the responsibilities of local and regional providers**. However, we do not see a problem with the current balance of local and regional transit providers in Northern Virginia.

Local transit service across the region intentionally serves multiple purposes, whether it is to serve as a catalyst for economic development, to connect the most vulnerable to services and opportunities, or to efficiently move commuters to work every day. Essentially, bus service across the entire Washington, DC region is not a one-size-fits-all endeavor.

Northern Virginia localities have already voluntarily and gradually established bus services that reflect the priorities of their communities and rebalanced the responsibilities of local and regional providers over the last two decades. While we do respect the desire of individual jurisdictions to engage with WMATA on jurisdiction-specific delivery of service, given our experience, we do not see the need to significantly alter the policy framework around the role of Metrobus in Virginia.

We are also concerned that WMATA may see the rebalancing of local and regional provision of transit as a means to satisfy the three percent operating cap (imposed by the Virginia dedicated funding legislation) by simply moving the cost of service from one side of the ledger to the other instead of making fundamental changes to WMATA's unsustainable cost structure. We urge WMATA to engage with NVTC, the jurisdictions, and transit operators to ensure that any changes to how bus service is provided does no harm to our localities and ensures that jurisdictions' investment in WMATA-provided service is commensurate with the level of service being provided.

NVTC is the voice of transit in Northern Virginia and works closely with member jurisdictions and transit providers. We encourage the region's leaders to empower existing organizations and structures, including NVTC, in transforming or incorporating changes in bus service in the region and in Northern Virginia.

NVTC shares the goal of an affordable, reliable, equitable, and financially sustainable bus system that connects the region. Thank you for the opportunity to comment and we look forward to additional engagement in the study process.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Matt Letourneau".

Matthew F. Letourneau  
Chairman

cc: Shyam Kannan, WMATA  
Allison Davis, WMATA