

**MEETING SUMMARY**  
**JOINT NVTC-PRTC LEGISLATIVE BRIEFING**  
**DECEMBER 7, 2020**  
**Virtual**  
**9:00 A.M.**

**NVTC Members Present**

Canek Aguirre  
Walter Alcorn  
Elizabeth Bennett-Parker  
Katie Cristol  
Matt de Ferranti  
Adam Ebbin  
Libby Garvey  
Paul Krizek  
David Meyer  
Jeff McKay  
Jennifer Mitchell (Alternate, Commonwealth of Virginia)  
Dalia Palchik  
David Reid  
Paul Smedberg  
David Snyder  
Rip Sullivan  
Michael Turner  
James Walkinshaw

**NVTC Members Absent**

John Bell  
Eileen Filler-Corn  
John Foust  
Matt Letourneau

**NVTC Staff Present**

Kate Mattice, Executive Director  
Matt Cheng  
Andrew D'huyvetter  
Allan Fye  
Dinah Girma  
Dan Goldfarb  
Patricia Happ  
Scott Kalkwarf  
Becky Merriner  
Tenley O'Hara  
Ben Owen  
Aimee Perron Seibert  
Zachary Smith  
Brittany Sumpter  
Colethia Quarles  
Alex Thorup  
Melissa Walker  
Jae Watkins

**PRTC Members Present**

Kenny Boddye  
Jennifer DeBruhl (Alternate, Commonwealth of Virginia)  
Margaret Franklin  
Jennifer Mitchell  
Jeanette Rishell  
Pamela Sebesky  
Ann Wheeler (Alternate, Prince William County)

**PRTC Members Absent**

Tinesha Allen  
Victor Angry  
Andrea Bailey  
George Barker  
Lee Carter  
Deborah Frazier  
Elizabeth Guzman  
Matthew Kelly  
Jeanine Lawson  
Cindy Shelton  
Gary Skinner  
Yesli Vega

**PRTC Staff Present**

Bob Schneider, Executive Director  
Althea Evans  
Alyssa Ludwiczak  
Betsy Massie  
Becky Merriner  
Holly Morello  
Perrin Palistrant  
Christine Rodrigo  
Joe Stainsby

### Opening Remarks

Katie Cristol, Chair of the Northern Virginia Transportation Commission (NVTC) and member of the Arlington County Board, and Margaret Franklin, Chair of the Potomac and Rappahannock Transportation Commission (PRTC) and member of the Prince William County Board of Supervisors, welcomed presenters and attendees to the virtual NVTC-PRTC Joint Legislative Briefing.

NVTC Commuter Choice Marketing and Outreach Manager Jae Watkins, host and moderator for the event, welcomed elected officials and their staff in attendance. She also welcomed NVTC and PRTC Commissioners and members of the Commonwealth Transportation Board.

Ms. Watkins presented an overview of the event's agenda including the order of presenters and instructions to the audience on how to ask questions and submit comments to the presenters.

### Special Guest Speaker: Senator Mark Warner (Video)

Ms. Watkins introduced United States Senator Mark Warner of Virginia as the first special guest speaker. Senator Warner provided a video message with his remarks prior to the event. In the video, Senator Warner discussed the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the region's transportation network, in particular, the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA). He noted the service changes, management actions, and WMATA Board actions that are proposed in WMATA's FY 2022 budget and their potential impact on the region.

Senator Warner also discussed his work with a bipartisan group of senators to develop a \$908 billion COVID-19 relief bill. The final details of the bill are being negotiated in the Senate, but it could potentially include funding for education, state and local governments, airports, and public transit agencies.

### Keynote Speaker: Shannon Valentine, Virginia Secretary of Transportation

Ms. Watkins introduced Shannon Valentine, Virginia Secretary of Transportation. Secretary Valentine stated that transit has a vital role in maintaining the Commonwealth's economic growth and competitiveness and that the pandemic has also highlighted transit's fundamental role as a lifeline to essential workers, economic recovery, and to our values of equity, diversity and inclusion across the Commonwealth.

Secretary Valentine also discussed the economic forecast that Aubrey Layne, Virginia's Secretary of Finance, provided to the General Assembly's money committees in August. Within that presentation, transportation revenues would be reduced by \$870 million through FY 2022, which illustrates the shortfall the Commonwealth is facing. She stated that since the onset of the pandemic, the Commonwealth has been focused on maintaining its pipeline of transportation projects and commitments to infrastructure. To support those priorities, the General Assembly passed a budget amendment to provide the Commonwealth Transportation Board (CTB) with the

flexibility to reallocate certain revenues manage the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT) worked with CTB to provide \$11 million in operating assistance to transit agencies after the shortly after the pandemic began. She also discussed other legislative decisions that the General Assembly made over the past few years including dedicated state funding for WMATA's state of good repair and capital needs, providing additional funding to the Northern Virginia Transportation Authority (NVTA) with revenues from I-81 and the transportation omnibus bill that restructures transportation funding.

Secretary Valentine highlighted the launch of Virginia's \$3.7 billion passenger rail initiative, the inaugural meeting of the Virginia Passenger Rail Authority in October, and significant investments being made to improve the Long Bridge Corridor. She concluded her remarks by discussing the forthcoming Commonwealth budget reforecast in December and the 2021 General Assembly Session.

NVTC Chair Cristol asked Secretary Valentine about how bus can promote equity and an update on the reduced fare pilot program that was included in the omnibus transportation bill this past spring. Secretary Valentine responded that removing barriers to transit remains a priority and that DRPT's Transit Ridership Incentive Program (TRIP) is in place and just one part of the solution to improving transit's accessibility to riders. PRTC Chair Franklin thanked Secretary Valentine for her work to help secure funds and resources for transportation and infrastructure projects in Northern Virginia.

Secretary Valentine responded to a question from the audience about the Commonwealth's commitment to reducing greenhouse gas emissions through transportation by saying that integrating environmental stewardship into transportation within the Commonwealth is a huge priority and the greenhouse gas emissions are projected to be reduced by 43,000 metric tons per year due to measures included in the omnibus transportation bill.

A second audience member asked Secretary Valentine about the future of rail and transit in Virginia. She responded that from a congestion perspective, a mobility perspective or reliability perspective a multimodal platform is going to position Northern Virginia, the Greater Washington area and the Commonwealth of Virginia as a leader in the world.

#### Perspectives from Regional Transit Operators: Paul Wiedefeld (WMATA), Rich Dalton (VRE) and Bob Schneider (PRTC)

Ms. Watkins introduced the regional transit operators panel members including Paul Wiedefeld, CEO and General Manager of WMATA; Rich Dalton, CEO of Virginia Railway Express (VRE) and Bob Schneider, Executive Director of PRTC, which operates OmniRide.

Mr. Wiedefeld, CEO and General Manager of WMATA, began by stating that the safety of riders and employees remains WMATA's top priority, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. He stated that the pandemic had a significant impact on Metrorail and Metrobus ridership, which resulted in lower fare revenue. Because of this, the WMATA Board took action to offset the operating budget gap in the FY 2021 budget, and the WMATA Board will consider significant cuts

to Metrobus and Metrorail service and other actions to adapt service to reflect the impact of the pandemic and reduce the projected budget gap in the FY 2022 budget.

Mr. Wiedefeld also expressed WMATA's appreciation for the COVID-19 relief provided to WMATA and local transit operators in the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act and the support from the local governments and the Commonwealth. He acknowledged the fiscal strain that local and state governments are under and that additional COVID-19 relief from the federal government would lessen the need for significant cuts in the FY 2022 budget.

Mr. Dalton, CEO of VRE, presented on VRE's efforts to respond and recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. He stated that in the beginning of the pandemic, VRE had to adjust service to respond to a 95% decrease in demand and immediately embarked on measures to keep staff, onboard train crews and passengers safe through social distancing, wearing face coverings and enhanced and more frequent cleanings. With assistance from DRPT, the CARES Act, and VRE-held operating reserves, VRE can continue to maintain operations through FY 2022. In addition, the total capital improvement program is nearly \$817 million with approximately 85% of that program funded.

Mr. Dalton stated that prior to the pandemic, the VRE Operations Board and staff developed plans and key initiatives in collaboration with VRE's regional partners to improve safety, increase the reliability and mitigate congestion. A major component of those plans is Governor Northam's Transforming Rail in Virginia Initiative which continues to advance with the launch of the Virginia Passenger Rail Authority and agreements with key stakeholders to improve Long Bridge.

Mr. Schneider, Executive Director of PRTC, gave an overview of PRTC/OmniRide and the agency's role in providing transit service in the region. PRTC co-owns VRE along with NVTC. PRTC/OmniRide services include local and express buses and vanpools. He stated that prior to the pandemic, PRTC/OmniRide services took nearly 18,000 car trips per day off the road and that PRTC/OmniRide has remained one of the region's most cost-effective systems.

Mr. Schneider also discussed PRTC/OmniRide's accomplishments in the past year and upcoming initiatives. The agency won the gold standard award from the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) for a fantastic performance on a TSA-based assessment. In April 2021, PRTC/OmniRide anticipates opening its Western Maintenance Facility.

PRTC Chair Franklin asked about the potential of expanding Metrorail into Prince William County. Mr. Wiedefeld responded that expansions on various lines have been studied or considered, but the region may need to look at all expansions as a long-term prospect given current challenges.

NVTC Chair Cristol asked about the impact of the WMATA FY 2022 budget on efforts to return riders to the system. Mr. Wiedefeld responded that through its marketing campaign WMATA is letting riders know that the system is safe, and they can stay healthy on transit. In addition, circumstances could change with the distribution of a vaccine or a federal stimulus that would readjust WMATA's projections on ridership.

Delegate Danica Roem asked about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on expanding PRTC/OmniRide service to the Dulles Corridor or other areas outside of the Beltway and

purchasing double decker buses. Mr. Schneider responded that the pandemic has impacted toll revenues that pay for a lot of operational services and there are challenges with multi-jurisdictional partnerships that need to be overcome. In terms of expansion with double decker buses, there may be potential to purchase expansion vehicles in the long-term.

#### Special Guest Speaker: Senator Tim Kaine

Ms. Watkins introduced United States Senator Tim Kaine of Virginia. Senator Kaine discussed the previous COVID-19 relief bills that were passed in Congress that signal hope for another relief bill. He stated that he was aware of the American Public Transportation Association's projection that transit agencies need \$30-\$32 billion to remain solvent. However, Senator Kaine stated that the proposed \$908 COVID-19 relief bill that Senator Warner mentioned in his remarks includes funding for transit agencies at a lower level and should be considered a bridge to offset a funding gap through the end of the first quarter of FY 2021. He also stated that there are strong indications that a new COVID-19 relief bill would be passed by Congress before the holiday recess. Senator Kaine also discussed prospects for infrastructure funding with the President-Elect's Administration.

NVTC Chair Cristol asked how COVID-19 relief for transit agencies would be disbursed if it is authorized by Congress. Senator Kaine responded that it most likely would be distributed using the same formulas that were applied to the CARES Act funding. PRTC Chair Franklin thanked Senator Kaine for his work to provide additional COVID-19 relief and discussed the need for relief for state and local governments in particular.

An audience member asked the Senator what those in Northern Virginia can do to make the case for transit in the current and future COVID-19 relief bills. Senator Kaine responded that a continued dialogue with the federal delegation about the issues facing transit riders in Northern Virginia is important.

Delegate Roem asked if there would be any more Better Utilizing Investments to Leverage Development (BUILD) grants to improve traffic congestion with multimodal solutions. Senator Kaine responded that plans for discretionary grants will most likely emerge when a Secretary of Transportation is named, and the incoming Administration looks favorably at improving infrastructure.

#### Perspectives from Regional Transportation Organizations: Monica Backmon, Executive Director of NVTA; Kate Mattice, Executive Director of NVTC

Ms. Watkins introduced the regional transportation organizations panel members including Monica Backmon, Executive Director of the Northern Virginia Transportation Authority (NVTA), and Kate Mattice, Executive Director of NVTC.

Ms. Backmon discussed the adoption of NVTA's six-year funding program, which provided \$539 million to 21 multimodal transportation projects across the region. She also discussed recent

legislative actions to restore funding to NVTA in the 2020 General Assembly and that NVTA is appreciative of those efforts. She discussed NVTA's legislative priorities which include support for additional COVID-19 relief funding for transit agencies, adding flexibility for public bodies to meet remotely and the need to fully restore funding to NVTA.

Ms. Mattice provided background on NVTC and introduced NVTC's legislative initiatives. Ms. Mattice discussed the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on WMATA and local transit operator ridership in the beginning of the pandemic and currently. For NVTC's 2021 Legislative and Policy Agenda, NVTC supports preserving existing streams of funding sources at the state and federal levels as well as the need for additional COVID-19 relief funding for transit.

NVTC Chair Cristol and PRTC Chair Franklin thanked Ms. Backmon and Ms. Mattice for their efforts to promote and improve transportation in the region.

An audience member asked both panelists if they were optimistic about transit in the future to which Ms. Mattice and Ms. Backmon both responded that they remain very optimistic and know that the transit network is rebounding.

An audience member asked both panelists what those in Northern Virginia can do to support the legislative priorities of their respective organizations. Ms. Backmon responded asking attendees to continue to support fully restoring funding for NVTA. Ms. Mattice responded that continuing to engage state and federal legislators about the importance of transit in our region will benefit transit.

### Closing Remarks

NVTC Chair Cristol and PRTC Chair Franklin thanked all the speakers and event staff. Ms. Watkins introduced the Virginia Transit Association's "Faces of Transit" video.

Approved this 7<sup>th</sup> day of January 2021.

---

Katie Cristol  
Chair

---

Dalia Palchik  
Secretary-Treasurer