

MINUTES
NVTC COMMISSION MEETING – JULY 1, 2021
FIRST FLOOR LARGE CONFERENCE ROOM – 2300 WILSON BLVD.
ARLINGTON, VIRGINIA

The meeting of the Northern Virginia Transportation Commission was called to order by Chair Cristol at 7:00 p.m.

Members Present

Canek Aguirre
Walter Alcorn
John J. Bell (*via electronic participation*)
Elizabeth Bennett-Parker
Katie Cristol
Matt de Ferranti
Adam Ebbin
Eileen Filler-Corn
Jeff McKay
David Meyer
Jennifer Mitchell, Commonwealth Alternate
David Reid
Paul Smedberg (*via electronic participation*)
David Snyder
Mike Turner
James Walkinshaw

Members Not Present

John Foust
Libby Garvey
Paul Krizek
Matt Letourneau
Dalia Palchik
Richard Sullivan

Staff Present

Kate Mattice, Executive Director
Andrew D’huyvetter
Allan Fye
Matt Friedman
Rhonda Gilchrest
Melissa Walker

Staff Present via Electronic Participation

Scott Kalkwarf
Zachary Smith
Aimee Perron Siebert
Steve MacIsaac (legal counsel)
Rich Dalton (VRE)
Greg Potts (WMATA)
Josh Baker (DASH)
Jennifer DeBruhl (DRPT)
U.S. Rep. Don Beyer, Guest Speaker

Opening Remarks

Chair Cristol welcomed everyone to the July 1, 2021 NVTC meeting. She noted it was good to be returning to in-person meetings. She also gave a special welcome to several special guest speakers – U.S. Rep. Don Beyer, DASH General Manager/CEO Josh Baker and DRPT Chief of Public Transportation Jen DeBruhl.

Commission Secretary Rhonda Gilchrest confirmed a quorum was present.

Chair Cristol reviewed several procedural modifications now that the Commission is back to in-person meetings. The meeting is still being shown on YouTube livestream for the public. She explained that with the updated NVTC Electronic Participation Policy it is now easier for Commissioners to participate virtually for specific reasons as long as there is an in-person quorum. She noted that for this meeting Mr. Bell is participating electronically for a medical reason and Mr. Smedberg is participating electronically for a personal reason. Regarding votes, NVTC will use a hybrid approach when Commissioners are participating electronically. For those in the room, the Commission will follow its past practice of calling for a motion and second, followed by a voice vote. Commissioners participating electronically will have their votes confirmed verbally after the Commission Secretary has recorded the votes of those in-person.

Chair Cristol also stated that although the state emergency declaration has expired, NVTC will continue to receive written public comments prior to each meeting. Ms. Mattice reported that NVTC did not receive any comments this month.

Remarks by U.S. Congressman Don Beyer

Chair Cristol stated that NVTC is pleased to have Congressman Don Beyer join NVTC's meeting. Congressman Beyer is serving his fourth term as the U.S. Representative from Virginia's 8th District, representing Arlington County, City of Alexandria, City of Falls Church and parts of Fairfax County.

On behalf of the Commission, Chair Cristol thanked Congressman Beyer for his work to secure federal COVID-19 relief funding for transit and Northern Virginia's local communities and Commissioners greatly appreciate the work that he and the other members of the Northern Virginia Delegation have done – and continue to do – to bolster transit in this region and support its ongoing economic recovery. She stated that today's passage of a new five-year surface transportation reauthorization bill in the House is also welcome news because the legislation reflects many of NVTC's federal legislative priorities, in particular the reauthorization of federal funding for WMATA. She highlighted a few of the projects that Congressman Beyer included in the INVEST in America Act, including \$2 million for multi-modal transportation improvements in the City of Falls Church; \$5 million for the Richmond Highway BRT Project in Fairfax County; and \$9 million for improvements to the Arlington Ridge Road/Mount Vernon Avenue Bridge Renovation in Arlington County and the City of Alexandria. Beyond the transit and state of good

repair investments, Congressman Beyer has also been instrumental in galvanizing support for the Long Bridge Project in Congress and with the Biden Administration and requested \$4 million for the Long Bridge in the Invest in America Act.

Congressman Beyer gave more details about the recent INVEST in America Act and the projects funded that will impact this region, as well as updating the Commission on several legislative initiatives underway. He explained some of the differences between the House and Senate versions of the Infrastructure legislation and stated that he expects the legislation to be completed by the end of November.

In response to a question from Mr. Snyder, Congressman Beyer explained that the House version of the Infrastructure legislation has a big policy emphasis with a commitment to low-emission/zero-emission vehicles and electrification of automobiles. He is a lead co-sponsor of a bill that would provide subsidies to local governments to replace bus fleets with new electric buses.

Chair Cristol stated that the region is watching return to work and what commuting patterns will look like post-pandemic. She asked Congressman Beyer what he has heard in regard to the federal government returning to in-person work. Congressman Beyer stated that the country will be looking at a different work structure in the coming years, which is not just limited to the federal government. Currently the federal government has very liberal telework policies in place. It is unrealistic to assume the federal government will return anytime soon to pre-pandemic levels of in-person work.

Mr. de Ferranti stated that he is pleased to hear about the proposal to provide federal funding for electric buses and asked what happens if the local government piece does not go through. Congressman Beyer stated that there is no current "Plan B," but he is hopeful that some amount of funding will be approved if not the entire amount being requested.

Mr. Alcorn stated that charging infrastructure for electric vehicles is very important. Congressman Beyer agreed and stated that the legislation includes charging infrastructure.

Mr. Bell asked for Congressman Beyer's help to encourage federal employees, especially at the Pentagon, to choose to use transit when they return to in-person work. There is not enough parking available for everyone to drive to work, let alone the traffic congestion that would be created. Congressman Beyer offered to reach out to leadership to encourage their staff to use transit and their transit benefit.

Mr. McKay observed that this might be a strategic time to enhance the transit benefit to encourage transit usage. He also stated that for local governments their employees are watching what's happening with federal and state employees and their ability to continue teleworking. He noted that local governments are having difficulties getting their employees to come back to in-person work. Congressman Beyer stated that he didn't realize that there is a "symbolic effect" that is impacting local government employees not wanting to go back to work since federal

government employees are continuing to telework. He also noted that if the transit benefit is enhanced, it would be important to not enhance the parking subsidy. He can work with Congressman Connolly on this issue.

Mr. Turner stated that as an electric vehicle user, he emphasized the importance of charging infrastructure, which is key. He hopes the legislation includes significant sustainment and maintenance costs for charging. Congressman Beyer stated that this is a good point and that it doesn't make sense to have charging stations if they do not work.

Chair Cristol sincerely thanked Congressman Beyer for taking time to speak with Commissioners about these important legislative issues.

Minutes of the June 3, 2021 NVTC Commission Meeting

Mr. Ebbin moved, with a second by Ms. Filler-Corn, to approve the minutes of the June 3, 2021 meeting. The vote in favor was cast by Commissioners Aguirre, Alcorn, Cristol, de Ferranti, Ebbin, Filler-Corn, McKay, Meyer, Reid, Snyder, Turner and Walkinshaw. Ms. Bennett-Parker abstained. A roll call vote followed for those Commissioners participating electronically. Mr. Bell and Mr. Smedberg cast affirmative votes. The motion passed.

Letter of Endorsement for Fairfax County RAISE Application

Ms. Mattice stated that the Commission is being asked to authorize the chair to send a letter of endorsement for a Fairfax County grant application to the U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) for funding consideration for the Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) transportation discretionary grant program. Fairfax County is seeking \$25 million in RAISE funding to support the overall \$730 million funding package for Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) along Richmond Highway, a vital corridor connecting residents and commuters to major transportation hubs and employment centers. The project directly responds to Northern Virginia's transportation goals by making improvements to the existing transportation network, enhancing connectivity to job opportunities throughout the region and enabling more sustainable, mixed-use development along the corridor.

Mr. McKay expressed his appreciation for Commission endorsement of this project, which is part of a bigger \$1 billion infrastructure investment to this corridor. This is important to Fairfax County as Richmond Highway is the gateway to Fort Belvoir, which is critical to the nation's defense and the county's largest employer. It is also a Regional Corridor of Significance. From an economic development standpoint, this will provide direct BRT access to Metro which will impact tens of thousands of people.

Mr. McKay moved, with a second by Mr. Ebbin, to authorize the chair to send the letter of endorsement for the Fairfax County RAISE application.

Chair Cristol asked if this BRT would connect with the BRT in Alexandria and Arlington. Mr. McKay stated that it is a vision of his that it will connect with BRT in the City of Alexandria. Mr. Aguirre stated that there is an open line of communication between the two jurisdictions.

The Commission then voted on the motion. The vote in favor was cast by Commissioners Aguirre, Alcorn, Bennett-Parker, Cristol, de Ferranti, Ebbin, Filler-Corn, McKay, Meyer, Reid, Snyder, Turner and Walkinshaw. A roll call vote followed for those Commissioners participating electronically. Mr. Bell and Mr. Smedberg cast affirmative votes. The motion passed.

Zero-Fare and Reduced-Fare Transit Roundtable

Chair Cristol stated that it is a timely topic to discuss zero-fare and reduced-fare programs for public transportation. During the pandemic, all the region's local transit systems went zero-fare to keep the transit systems (and transit operators) safe and highlighted the vital role transit plays in keeping frontline workers and essential workers moving. Although the pandemic had a devastating impact on transit, the concept of zero-fare transit unexpectedly presented an opportunity to not only help transit recover, but also a tool to address equity issue in transit.

Chair Cristol explained that there are three presentations that will help educate Commissioners on the multitude of zero-fare and reduced-fare options to consider, to learn about the zero-fare efforts underway in Alexandria, and to hear about an exciting DRPT program that funds these types of initiatives. She introduced Director of Programs and Policy Allan Fye, who will serve as the moderator for this roundtable discussion of Zero-Fare and Reduced-Fare Transit.

Mr. Fye stated that with an increased focus on equity, NVTC staff started looking at what role the transit industry has and opportunities to improve access for everyone and especially the transit dependent. Zero-fare and reduced-fare programs have a real impact. As an example, in Boston they found that low-income residents took 30% more trips when given a 50% subsidy on fares. These types of programs help reduce barriers to jobs, services and other essential trips. As the region's transit industry was forced to quickly adapt to the COVID-19 pandemic recovery and is now looking for ways to get riders back, zero-fares and reduced-fare programs are opportunities to get people back and fundamentally change how transit is seen – not just a service, but a vital and equitable service.

Mr. Fye explained that the focus of this presentation is the “what” as in “what are the options for consideration.” The focus is on local bus service. As with any major policy decision, there are opportunities and challenges to address, and multiple options including who is the target (income-based, seniors, students); routes (to a major employer, Metro/VRE connection); zones (predefined geography (downtown, redevelopment area); time of day; and mode. He reviewed some of the questions and issues that need to be addressed as the region looks at fare changes (i.e., goals, financial impacts, operational challenges, data collection, SmartBenefits, and scalability).

Mr. Fye stated that there are a variety of paths forward after this initial analysis. Staff is hoping to receive general guidance from Commissioners on how to proceed. If there is an interest in continuing, staff can explore what that would look like and update the Commission at a later date. The White Paper Report is scheduled to be published in fall 2021.

Mr. Fye introduced DASH CEO/General Manager Josh Baker. Mr. Baker gave an overview of the City of Alexandria's fare-free program with DASH. After providing free fares during the pandemic, the city completed a Free/Reduced Fare Study in Spring 2021. The city's FY 2022 budget was amended to include free fares on DASH beginning September 2021 to coincide with the launch of the new DASH Network, an entire redesign on the transit system. He reviewed some of the lessons learned, DASH's fare-free framework, and challenges they are facing. As the city now will have to fund the loss of revenue, it is excited for the opportunities the new Transit Ridership Incentive Program offers to hopefully bridge some of the financial gap.

Mr. Fye introduced DRPT Chief of Public Transportation Jennifer DeBruhl. Ms. DeBruhl gave an overview of the Commonwealth's Transit Ridership Incentive Program (TRIP), which was established in the 2020 General Assembly Session. It was created to promote increased ridership of large urban transit systems and reduce the barriers to transit use for low-income individuals. The program implementation was delayed to the COVID-19 pandemic. She reviewed the zero-fare/reduced-fare aspect of the program for low-income individuals. For FY 2022, \$10 million in 2021 Transportation Initiative Funding is also dedicated for zero-fare pilots and beyond that, up to 25% annually can be utilized for zero-fare/low-income projects on a statewide basis. Key themes for projection evaluation include well planned projects which are collaborative and quickly implemented.

Mr. Reid asked about environmental benefits such as cost savings of not building roads. Mr. Fye stated these are the types of policy decisions that local governments will need to consider. Mr. Turner stated that there are first, second and third orders of effects. The first will be less revenue but on the other hand, less costs and there is an immediate impact on equity. For the second order, operational costs would go up due to ridership increases but tax revenues should go up. The third effect is on greenhouse gases. There is also an unknown factor with this cultural change. He stated that it seems that the decision to go zero-fares needs to be for a specific number of years rather than shifting quickly back. Just need to dive in and do it and give it time for evaluation.

Ms. Mattice stated that the federal transit benefit is the way the federal government effectively supports transit and for this area that is a big deal (89% of VRE riders use the transit benefit). Mr. McKay stated that Fairfax County has an initiative to provide zero-fares for students. Since the gateway to future transit usage in through the youth, he asked if there are state or federal initiatives to provide this type of subsidy benefit to students. Access to transit gives them their freedom as well as access to jobs and activities. Ms. Mitchell thanked the General Assembly members for creating the TRIP program to fund some of these types of pilot programs. She

agreed that getting young people on transit is a good thing and can help shape their transit behavior.

Mr. de Ferranti stated that it would be important to know what percentage of operating costs is currently recouped. In his opinion, it may be helpful to look at how European transit systems work. He also noted that there is a social policy discussion whether if you can pay, you should pay.

Mr. Walkinshaw noted that with the high percentage (89%) of VRE riders who use the transit benefit, it would not seem to make sense to switch to zero-fare or reduced-fare. Mr. Fye noted that each transit system is different. Mr. Alcorn stated that ultimately it would be nice to have a strategic initiative as well as addressing the equity issue. Mr. Snyder stated that setting goals are fundamental and can change from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. He also noted that long-term sustainability is important. Chair Cristol stated that a progressive fare structure may make more sense than a zero-fare structure. However, the equity issue is an important component of the discussion. Mr. Turner stated that any attempt to target specific demographics will result in an underlying presumption of entitlement, which stigmatizes low-income individuals. It will end up having a reverse equity effect. In his opinion, if the region is interested in equity, then it needs to be zero-fare. Mr. Aguirre stated that the potential for zero-fares opens up so much more than just the equity issue, since there would be environmental benefits, benefits for a person's disposable income, increasing where you can go, making transit a more viable commuting option, etc. It would also open the entire transportation network between bus, Metrorail, and VRE. He is excited to see where this goes with DASH.

Chair Cristol stated that the consensus of the Commission is for staff to continue to study this and bring it back at a later meeting. There were no objections. She also summed up the key take-aways from this discussion, which include:

- Measuring the second and third order impacts
- Differentiating the analysis of different systems' farebox recovery
- SmartBenefits role
- Long-term sustainability
- Other examples of systems that have done this by population
- Emerging mobility technology
- Data collection and integration
- Goals (macro and micro)
- Marketability of a community

Ms. Filler-Corn stated that this is an interesting discussion. It is important to identify the goals. First and foremost, it must be equitable. Mr. Alcorn stated that a regional dedicated funding source is needed.

Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority

Chair Cristol congratulated Mr. Smedberg on his reappointment as WMATA Board Chair.

Report from Virginia WMATA Board Members. Mr. Smedberg reported that in June the WMATA Board approved service improvements and fare changes to support the region's economic recovery from COVID-19 and encourage a return to transit. The Board approved several changes, which were made possible with federal aid which was mentioned by Congressman Beyer earlier in the meeting. For Metrorail, these changes include more frequent all-day service, including on weekends; better peak service; and improved late-night service and hours of service. For Metrobus, these changes include a frequent service network consisting of lines that run every 12 or 20 minutes for most of the day; and restored and improve service on additional routes. He also reviewed the changes to fares. WMATA staff are coordinating with jurisdictional staff on the fare changes since local jurisdictions that run their own bus service may choose to match the \$2 transfer discount between bus and rail and, if interested, may also wish to be included in WMATA's pass products. Most of these service and fare changes will be in place on or around Labor Day, and the WMATA Board will continue to discuss WMATA's fare structure and other fare initiatives.

Mr. Smedberg stated that WMATA staff will continued to monitor ridership and revenue recovery and are currently projecting an operating budget gap in FY 2024, when federal aid is anticipated to be exhausted. The WMATA Board also approved a sustainability vision and principles to provide a framework for WMATA's policy and investment decisions. The Board also adopted three zero-emission fleet goals to guide WMATA's Metrobus fleet strategy, which include purchasing only lower-emission and electric buses in the next bus vehicle procurement, transitioning to 100% zero-emission bus purchases by 2030, and having a 100% zero-emission bus fleet by 2045. WMATA staff will continue to monitor the reliability and performance of electric vehicles and evaluate the facility requirements to support electric buses. Capital costs associated with a zero-emission fleet would require additional funding and be in addition to the current capital program, where state of good repair needs alone are anticipated to completely exhaust dedicated capital funding capacity by FY 2027.

Mr. Smedberg stated that the WMATA Board also approved the allocation of subsidy credits from the American Rescue Plan Act. These subsidy credits total approximately \$70 million for Northern Virginia jurisdictions. He also announced that Mr. Letourneau was appointed to serve as the chair of the Safety and Operations Committee.

Mr. Snyder stated that there was a news article about Metro Police not following up on complaints. Mr. Smedberg stated that he doesn't have any details, but there have been a lot of improvements since the new chief took over.

Report from the Chair of the NVTC WMATA Committee. WMATA Committee Chair Aguirre stated that the previously scheduled June 30 WMATA Committee meeting was canceled. The WMATA Committee will reconvene this fall to continue discussions on the 2021 annual report,

get an update from the 3% cap working group, as well as updates from Virginia's WMATA Board members.

Chair Cristol suggested a change in the Agenda to move up the DRPT Report so that DRPT Director Mitchell can depart back to Richmond due to bad weather moving into the area. There were no objections.

Department of Rail and Public Transportation

DRPT Director Mitchell reported that the Commonwealth Transportation Board (CTB) met on June 22-23 and approved the DRPT FY2022 budget and FY 2022-2027 Six Year Improvement Program (SYIP). The total six-year public transit allocation in the SYIP is \$4.2 billion, and FY 2022 state funding for the Northern Virginia District is \$449.0 million. The SYIP fully funds the \$154.5 million WMATA dedicated funding obligation and the \$50 million WMATA PRIIA match for FY 2022. WMATA capital and operating funding to NVTC will be \$177.1 million in FY 2022. DRPT will take the Transit Ridership Incentive Program (TRIP) policy to the CTB for approval in July. She also reported that all the DRPT and CSXT agreements are being assigned over to the Virginia Passenger Rail Authority (VPRA). There is a meeting on the Franconia/Springfield Study scheduled for July 26, 2021.

Ms. Mitchell left the meeting at 8:55 p.m.

Virginia Railway Express

VRE CEO Report. Mr. Dalton reported that on June 1 VRE returned to a full schedule. Ridership continues to increase and for June, average daily ridership reached 2,300. Systemwide on-time performance for the month of June was in the low 80% range. Most of the delays were due to congestion, signal issues and weather.

Authorization to Submit L'Enfant Station and Fourth Track Project to USDOT for FY2021 RAISE Funding Consideration. Ms. Bennett-Parker stated that the Commission is asked to approve Resolution #2453, which would authorize the VRE Chief Executive Officer to submit, on behalf of the Commissions, an application for the L'Enfant Station and Fourth Track project under the U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) transportation discretionary grant program, to make any necessary corrections to the project amount or descriptions in the application and execute all project funding agreements that may result from consideration of the project. The L'Enfant Station and Fourth Track project is identified in the VRE Capital Improvement Program and System Plan 2040. The project includes a relocated and expanded station with longer platform that can be serviced by full-length trains from two tracks, and the addition of related fourth track through the station.

Ms. Bennett-Parker moved, with a second by Mr. Walkinshaw, to approve Resolution #2453 (copy attached). The vote in favor was cast by Commissioners Aguirre, Alcorn, Bennett-Parker, Cristol, de Ferranti, Filler-Corn, McKay, Meyer, Reid, Snyder, Turner and Walkinshaw. (Mr. Ebbin was not in the room for the vote.) A roll call vote followed for those Commissioners participating electronically. Mr. Bell and Mr. Smedberg cast affirmative votes. The motion passed.

Executive Director Report

Ms. Mattice encouraged Commissioners to read her Executive Director Newsletter. She reviewed upcoming meetings and noted that there is no August Commission meeting so the next Commission meeting will be September 2. She announced that NVTC welcomed two transit fellows last month who will spend time over the summer learning about NVTC's programs and projects while working alongside NVTC's professional staff. Nneoma Ugwu is finishing her Master's in Civil Engineering with a focus on Transportation Policy and Planning at the University of Maryland and will continue on to a Ph.D. program in the fall. Marco Viola is working on his Master's in Urban and Regional Planning with a concentration in transportation at Virginia Tech. NVTC's Transit Fellow program is supported by the Department of Rail and Public Transportation.

Ms. Mattice also stated that the bulk of NVTC's regional marketing campaign wrapped up in June. The social media element was very successful and the video ads on YouTube and streaming services were seen over 700,000 times. Even though the marketing campaign is over, the website – which includes a trip planning site powered by the Moovit app - will continue.

Ms. Mattice noted that the Financial Report for May 2021 was provided to Commissioners in their meeting materials. There were no questions from Commissioners.

The meeting abruptly adjourned due to a weather emergency advisory.

Adjournment

Without objection, Chair Cristol adjourned the meeting at 9:00 p.m.

Approved this 2nd day of September 2021.

Katie Cristol
Chair

Dalia Palchik
Secretary-Treasurer



RESOLUTION #2453

SUBJECT: Authorize the VRE CEO to Submit L'Enfant Station and Fourth Track Project to USDOT for FY 2021 RAISE Funding Consideration

WHEREAS: On April 19, 2021 the U.S. Department of Transportation issued a Notice of Funding Opportunity to solicit applications for the Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) transportation discretionary grant program;

WHEREAS: The VRE L'Enfant Station and Fourth Track project includes a relocated and expanded station with longer platform that can be serviced by full-length trains from two tracks, and addition of related fourth track through the station from Virginia interlocking to L'Enfant interlocking;

WHEREAS: VRE staff considers the development and final design phases of the L'Enfant Station and Fourth Track project a strong candidate for planning grant funding under the Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) program;

WHEREAS: The Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) transportation program funds may be used for up to 80% of the project cost with the balance of the project coming from non-Federal sources;

WHEREAS: To be more competitive, a non-federal overmatch, a match greater than the 20% minimum, may be required and therefore the VRE matching funds could be up to 50% of the total cost, but may be as little as 20%; and

WHEREAS: The VRE Operations Board recommends the following Commission action.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Northern Virginia Transportation Commission hereby authorizes the VRE Chief Executive Officer to submit, on behalf of the Commissions, a planning grant application for the L'Enfant Station and Fourth Track project under the U.S. Department of Transportation's Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) transportation discretionary grant program, to make any necessary corrections to the project amount or descriptions in the application and execute all project funding agreements that may result from consideration of the project.

Approved this 1st day of July 2021.

A handwritten signature in purple ink that reads "Dalia Palchik".

Dalia Palchik
Secretary-Treasurer

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Katie Cristol".

Katie Cristol
Chair