

**MEETING SUMMARY**  
**JOINT NVTC-PRTC LEGISLATIVE BRIEFING**  
**DECEMBER 5, 2022**  
**Embassy Suites Hotel – Springfield, Virginia**  
**9:00 A.M.**

**NVTC Members Present**

Canek Aguirre  
Walter Alcorn  
Sarah Bagley  
Katie Cristol  
Matt de Ferranti  
Jennifer DeBruhl (Alternate, Commonwealth of Virginia)  
Libby Garvey  
Jeff McKay  
David Meyer  
Paul Smedberg  
Michael Turner  
James Walkinshaw

**NVTC Members Absent**

John Bell  
Nick Clemente  
Adam Ebbin  
John Foust  
Aimee Gilroy  
Matt Letourneau  
Dalia Palchik  
M. David Skiles  
David Snyder  
John C. Tuck III

**NVTC Staff Present**

Kate Mattice, Executive Director  
Monique Blyther  
Genoveva Cutrell  
Matt Friedman  
Allan Fye  
Rhonda Gilchrest  
Adam Hager  
Scott Kalkwarf  
Ann McGrane  
Becky Merriner  
Tenley O'Hara  
Ben Owen  
Aimee Perron Seibert  
Sophie Spiliotopoulos  
Brittany Sumpter  
Colethia Quarles  
Melissa Walker  
Ronnetta Zack-Williams

**PRTC Members Present**

Victor Angry  
George Barker  
Jennifer DeBruhl  
Monica Gary  
Todd Horsley (Alternate, Commonwealth of Virginia)  
Jeanette Rishell  
Kimberlee Short (Alternate, Prince William County)

**PRTC Members Absent**

Tinesha Allen  
Andrea Bailey  
Kenny Body  
Margaret Franklin  
Deborah Frazier  
Elizabeth Guzman  
Lori Hayes  
Matthew Kelly  
Jeanine Lawson  
Pamela Sebesky  
Yesli Vega

**PRTC Staff Present**

Bob Schneider, Executive Director  
Althea Evans  
Lakeshia Lewis  
Byren Lloyd  
Ben Matters  
Becky Merriner  
Holly Morello  
Philip Parella, Jr.  
Perrin Palistrant  
Cynthia Porter-Johnson  
Christine Rodrigo  
Joe Stainsby

### Opening Remarks: Northern Virginia Transportation Commission (NVTC) Executive Director Kate Mattice

NVTC Executive Director Kate Mattice welcomed everyone to the forum. She stated that the forum is being recorded and will be available for viewing on NVTC's website after the event.

Ms. Mattice kicked things off by reviewing some triumphs in the world of transit over the past year, including the opening of Metro's Silver Line Phase II, rebounding bus ridership numbers, and new I-66 Outside the Beltway express lanes. She also touched on upcoming hurdles: fiscal cliffs, staffing needs and the changing dynamics of how people move around the region following the COVID-19 pandemic.

Ms. Mattice then recognized NVTC and PRTC Commissioners, elected officials, and legislative staff in attendance.

Ms. Mattice introduced NVTC Chair Canek Aguirre.

### Introduction of Congressman Beyer: NVTC Chair Canek Aguirre

NVTC Chair Canek Aguirre remarked that over the past year things in the transit world have started to bounce back after some major setbacks due to the COVID-19 pandemic. NVTC Chair Aguirre noted that during his time as chair, NVTC has helped coordinate services during the Blue/Yellow Line shutdowns, kept a steady eye on the reintroduction of 7000-series trains at WMATA, welcomed the new WMATA General Manager Randy Clarke, and saw the completion of Silver Line Phase II – a project more than 60 years in the making. NVTC Chair Aguirre stated that under the leadership of Kate Mattice, NVTC's staff have been working on exciting projects, including the upcoming rollout of the new NoVaTransit Data Dashboard, the robust Commuter Choice program, and successful marketing campaigns and promotional media.

NVTC Chair Aguirre then introduced Congressman Don Beyer, from Virginia's 8<sup>th</sup> Congressional District.

### Welcoming Remarks: U.S. Congressman Don Beyer

Congressman Beyer welcomed those in attendance to the 8<sup>th</sup> District, noting that he is honored to serve and be in attendance this morning. Congressman Beyer reminded the audience that last November, Congress passed the bi-partisan infrastructure bill (Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, H.R. 3684), which set aside \$90 billion for transit. Congressman Beyer reviewed other regional transportation achievements such as rehabilitating the Memorial Bridge, authorizing the construction of Long Bridge which will relieve a major rail bottleneck, the opening of Silver Line Phase II, and fixing the George Washington Parkway to make it safer.

Ms. Mattice then introduced PRTC Chair Victor Angry to provide remarks and introduce keynote speaker, DRPT Director Jennifer DeBruhl.

### Introduction of Keynote Speaker: PRTC Chair Victor Angry

PRTC Chair Angry began his remarks by listing off some fun facts about DRPT Director Jennifer DeBruhl, and then transitioned into comparing the plot of her favorite movie, *Sliding Doors*, with a similar narrative about how the transit industry has had to navigate the COVID-19 pandemic. PRTC Chair Angry talked about successes in the transportation world and what needs to happen to keep things moving in the right direction. He observed a key factor upon which success depends is transit operators and staff and that he hopes forums like these will help inform how transit continues to improve. Like Director DeBruhl's favorite movie, PRTC Chair Angry expressed his hope that in the end, the story of transit overcoming challenges from the pandemic will be a success story.

### Keynote Address: Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT) Director Jennifer DeBruhl

DRPT Director DeBruhl began by stating that the story of transit is the story of overcoming hardships and growing from challenges. Director DeBruhl said that a key theme emerging from the pandemic is innovation and she specifically commended OmniRide for reorganizing their commuter-based model and meeting the new needs of transit by offering all-day localized service.

Director DeBruhl observed that DRPT celebrated their 30-year anniversary in June, and this is especially notable because Virginia is the only state in the nation that has a separate department focused solely on transit and rail. Over the past 30 years, DRPT's core objectives have remained the same: connecting people, businesses and communities in Virginia.

Director DeBruhl observed that there has been a lot to celebrate over the past year, including the opening of the Silver Line to Dulles, which will improve the quality of life for residents by reducing driving, solidifying the Dulles technology corridor, and diversifying the housing stock. Slowly but surely, across Northern Virginia, transit ridership is coming back. Director DeBruhl noted that transit ridership across Virginia has increased 56% from the previous fiscal year. Looking closer, ridership is up 29% in the first quarter of FY 2023 compared to the first quarter of FY 2022 so the trajectory is heading in the right direction. She also noted that Amtrak Virginia has also seen ridership growth.

Director DeBruhl continued, stating that those in the room have an opportunity to continue the current positive trend by applying for the funding in the Infrastructure Improvement and Jobs Act (IIJA), that Congress passed in 2021. She encouraged attendees to come forward with bold visions to meet the growing and changing mobility demands of Virginia communities. Director DeBruhl committed that DRPT would be a partner in this process.

Director DeBruhl turned her focus to the future. In 2023 DRPT will be supporting all the transit agencies throughout the Commonwealth with a marketing campaign to help inform people about the benefits of using transit. DRPT is also focused on growing the Transit Ridership Incentive Program, with more projects coming before the Commonwealth Transportation Board at their

December meeting. There will be further work and transition planning with zero-emission bus programs. DRPT just launched a new comprehensive state-wide low- or no-emissions vehicle study to investigate the challenges associated with low- or no-emission vehicle fleets and to provide guidance to service providers. Some of these programs are recommendations that came out of DRPT's award winning Transit Equity and Modernization Study, the first of its kind in the nation. Shelter improvement projects is another key focus of DRPT as they work with other state agencies. Statewide procurement for technology and innovation projects is also in the works.

Continuing this theme, Director DeBruhl wrapped up by stating that there are roughly 15,000 bus stops around the Commonwealth. As an outcome from the Transit Equity and Modernization Study, DRPT is working to streamline the process that goes into upgrading those bus facilities. The last few recommendations to come out of this study are condensing and organizing the procurement process and identifying the need for more robust public engagement. Director DeBruhl then announced that DRPT will take steps in 2023 to procure the construction of the new Long Bridge.

Following Director DeBruhl's remarks, there was a time for event attendees to ask questions. Mr. Rob Whitfield, with the Fairfax County Taxpayers Alliance, asked about a study to look at the potential for adding an Amtrak station in the Springfield vicinity. Ms. DeBruhl commented that she would pass on his concerns to the appropriate parties but that one thing to be mindful of is that adding more stops has the potential to reduce efficiency.

Transit Panel of Regional Transit Operators: Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) General Manager/CEO Randy Clarke, Virginia Railway Express (VRE) CEO Rich Dalton and Potomac and Rappahannock Transportation Commission (PRTC)/OmniRide Executive Director Bob Schneider

As moderator, Ms. Mattice began the transit panel by showing a brief video which was a compilation of regional transit news over the past year. Following the video, Ms. Mattice asked the first panel question: When it comes to public transit in our region, where is the media getting it right, and where are they getting it wrong?

Dr. Schneider responded that where they are getting it right is that these are real and identifiable issues, but where the media is getting it wrong is that these are systemic issues and need to be addressed as such. Dr. Schneider said a lot of the issues facing transit didn't develop overnight but have been results of long-term systemic issues. He pointed to workforce reductions and operators having trouble with staffing. Mr. Dalton stated that the media is getting it right by identifying opportunities for improvement. He stated that VRE currently has projects at all 19 of their stations. Mr. Clarke added that the media is getting a lot right by holding agencies accountable and transit agencies must build trust by being open and transparent. Mr. Clarke added that the media could improve by telling better stories about the people who work in transit and who are dedicated public servants. Mr. Clarke added that there is a narrative about safety that is not accurate and that as an industry, transit operators and advocates need to be able to tell that story better.

Ms. Mattice then asked the next question: What are your next steps as transit agencies to respond and pivot this coming year and beyond, keeping in mind we're coming out of pandemic and are aware of the uncertainty of how people are moving in the region?

Mr. Clarke responded that before long-term issues can be resolved, the first priority at WMATA is to get the system running well from a very basic level, meaning frequent and reliable service. Mr. Dalton answered that continuing to partner with the Commonwealth on capacity enhancement programs will allow VRE to come out of the traditional commuter rail model and respond to changes in ridership behavior moving forward. Mr. Dalton also built upon what Mr. Clarke said, reemphasizing that VRE will be focusing on getting back to basics and providing excellent service. Dr. Schneider added that OmniRide will be focusing on how they respond to patterns of travel now that traditional working and commuting hours have dramatically changed. Dr. Schneider emphasized that there aren't enough transportation options outside of the traditional 9-5 model and his agency will be looking at creating different service patterns to meet these new needs.

Ms. Mattice then followed up by asking the panelists to talk about some things that local, state and federal officials and legislators can do to help transit agencies meet their goals.

Dr. Schneider said that the best thing is to continue to let the technical professionals do their jobs to the best of their abilities. He pointed to quick pivots that technical professionals had to make when the COVID-19 pandemic hit in 2020. Dr. Schneider's take-away for elected officials and legislators is to keep letting the experts be great at what they do, to deliver the necessary resources and hold agencies accountable. Mr. Dalton added that he would like to see state and local governments continue to partner with VRE on innovation and technology. He gave the example of VRE modifying their on-board bicycle policy to accept bicycles on every train – this increased the numbers of commuters using bikes by nearly 10-fold. Mr. Clarke said that the number-one request from WMATA is for local, state and federal officials and legislators to see and experience the transit systems firsthand. Mr. Clarke added that his other request is for elected officials and legislators to have large, aspirational visions for how transit looks and how it can function in this region, while looking beyond jurisdictional boundaries.

Next, Ms. Mattice asked the panel to discuss major projects in the transit space that they would like to see happen in the region.

Dr. Schneider led off the discussion, stating he would like to see bi-directional I-95 express lanes and that consistent and unified technology across transit agencies would be a major project he would like to see in the future. Mr. Dalton agreed with Dr. Schneider and added that a major project he would like to see completed is the Union Station rehabilitation program. Beyond that, Mr. Dalton said that he'd like to see all points on the Northeast Corridor expansion program completed as part of a long-term objective to separate passenger and freight rail lines. Mr. Clarke added that he looks forward to the Potomac Yard Station opening in 2023 and beyond that the Better Bus Network Redesign is a big project that will make regional bus operations more efficient. Lastly, the next big project he would like to see addressed is the Rosslyn Tunnel bottleneck by expanding the capacity to move trains under the Potomac River. Mr. Clarke added

that addressing this soon will be critical and that it will need to fall within the time constraints of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act.

For her final question, Ms. Mattice asked the transit panel to share a piece of underreported good news happening at the panelist's respective agencies.

Mr. Dalton said that expanding VRE's capacity to accommodate bikes on trains has been a game changer. This changed the narrative from something negative – empty space on commuter rail – and turned it into a positive as a customer focused outcome which allowed more commuters to travel with their bikes. Mr. Clarke answered that something underreported has been all the good happening at WMATA and all the committed people who are devoted to collaboration between the WMATA Board and agency staff. Mr. Clarke added that his agency is committed to being more transparent and committed people are doing a lot of good for the community. Dr. Schneider added that an underreported news item from his agency is that OmniRide/PRTC won Best Places to work in Prince William County, and that his agency is attracting and keeping talented employees.

Ms. Mattice then invited the event attendees to ask questions.

NVTC Commissioner Libby Garvey, who is also a member of the Arlington County Board, asked the panelists to discuss a unifying and clear vision on transit for the region, one that could transcend politics and serve as a common goal. Mr. Clarke responded that he would very much like to see something like this in the future; however, the reality of conflicting political voices in the United States makes this a challenge. Rising above the jurisdictional constraints would be ideal to make something like this happen.

NVTC Commissioner Mike Turner, who is also a member of the Loudoun County Board of Supervisors, asked the panelists to comment on the issue of fare evasion and encouraged them to spend money on technology to help address this problem. Mr. Clarke said a big challenge has been the interjurisdictional nature of fare evasion enforcement across political boundaries and that there needs to be some type of regional decision on how to address this. Mr. Clarke also added that a bigger conversation needs to happen on how we treat transit as a public good and how we pay for this good. Dr. Schneider added that agencies need to ask questions and identify who is evading fares and why. Is it an income issue? Is it an access issue? Dr. Schneider stated that once these questions are answered one can achieve the desired results by harvesting the revenue the right way.

Mr. Jason Stanford, with the Northern Virginia Transportation Alliance, asked the panel to comment on how their agencies can grow ridership to keep pace with the growing population in the region. Mr. Clarke stated that WMATA must operate better and deliver more services and if they do that, more people will use the transit system. Mr. Dalton agreed and added that VRE needs to position itself to offer service during the times and frequencies that people demand. Dr. Schneider said that focusing on rider outreach and being recognizable and accessible will make transit competitive with the convenience of driving.

Mr. Rob Whitfield, with the Fairfax County Taxpayers Alliance, asked about WMATA's long range plan. Mr. Clarke said that he can't speak for the past administration but there is still a lot of work to be done around what WMATA can and is able to do. Mr. Clarke stated that the next step is moving the public process forward to decide as a region what transit operators are going to do.

Ms. Mattice then asked the panel to share with the audience a parting message. Dr. Schneider said that at the end of the day, the message is that local service matters, even in more suburban areas like Prince William County. Mr. Dalton shared that he is optimistic that within the transportation network, the best days are ahead, and he wished those in attendance a safe and happy holiday season. Mr. Clarke capped off the transit panel session by adding that the future for transit is incredibly bright so long as everyone comes together and agrees to make it bright and takes partnerships to a higher level.

#### Closing Remarks: NVTC Executive Director Kate Mattice

Ms. Mattice closed out the forum by recognizing NVTC Commissioner David Meyer, who did not seek reelection as mayor of the City of Fairfax and therefore will be retiring from his role as a NVTC Commissioner at the end of the year. Mr. Meyer has been involved with the Northern Virginia Transportation Commission since 2014 and has chaired the Legislative and Policy Committee for a number of those years. Ms. Mattice thanked Mr. Meyer for his service to NVTC, the City of Fairfax and the entire region.

Ms. Mattice then thanked speakers and attendees for participating in today's forum. NVTC Chair Canek Aguirre and PRTC Chair Victor Angry were thanked for participating as well as the leaders who serve on NVTC and PRTC. Ms. Mattice then thanked staff from NVTC and PRTC for helping put together the event. Ms. Mattice wished everyone a happy holiday season.

The 2022 Legislative and Policy Forum concluded at approximately 11:00 a.m.

Approved this 5th day of January 2023.

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Dalia Palchik  
Chair

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David F. Snyder  
Secretary-Treasurer