

MINUTES
NVTC COMMISSION MEETING – JULY 6, 2023
FIRST FLOOR LARGE CONFERENCE ROOM – 2300 WILSON BLVD.
ARLINGTON, VIRGINIA

The meeting of the Northern Virginia Transportation Commission was called to order by Chair Palchik at 7:01 p.m.

Members Present

Canek Aguirre
Walter Alcorn
Jennifer DeBruhl (Alternate, Commonwealth of Virginia)
Nick Clemente (*via electronic participation*)
Matt de Ferranti
Adam Ebbin
John Foust
Libby Garvey
Aimee Gilroy
Takis Karantonis
Matt Letourneau
Jeff McKay
Kirk McPike (Alternate, City of Alexandria)
Dalia Palchik
Catherine Read
Paul Smedberg (*via electronic participation*)
David Snyder
John C. Tuck III
Mike Turner
James Walkinshaw

Members Not Present

Sarah Bagley
John J. Bell
M. David Skiles

Staff Present

Kate Mattice, Executive Director	Aimee Perron Siebert
Monique Blyther	Noman Sayed
Genoveva Cutrell	Sophie Spiliotopoulos
Matt Friedman	Brittany Sumpter
Allan Fye	Melissa Walker
Rhonda Gilchrest	Ronnetta Zack-Williams
Scott Kalkwarf	Rich Dalton (VRE)
Xavier Harmony	Steve MacIsaac (VRE)
Rachel Inman	Joe Swartz (VRE)
Ann McGrane	Randy Clarke (WMATA)
Tenley O'Hara	Josh Baker (DASH)

Opening Remarks

Chair Palchik welcomed everyone to the July 6, 2023 NVTC meeting and noted that the meeting is being livestreamed for the public on YouTube.

Chair Palchik welcomed WMATA General Manager/CEO Randy Clarke. She also welcomed Kirk McPike, who is an NVTC alternate for the City of Alexandria and is serving as Ms. Bagley's alternate since she is on travel.

Chair Palchik stated that Mr. Smedberg and Mr. Clemente are participating electronically for personal reasons as both are out of town on travel. Commission Secretary Rhonda Gilchrest confirmed an in-person quorum was present.

Chair Palchik congratulated the City of Alexandria and DASH, as well as WMATA and Loudoun County, for being awarded Federal Transit Administration grants under the Low- and No-Emission Grant Program, which will help them transition their bus fleets to zero-emissions. She also announced that the Alexandria City Council voted to move forward on the Duke Street Transitway BRT project, which will be a great connection to the West End Transitway and the future Route 7 BRT creating a wonderful BRT network. Fairfax County also voted to support redevelopment at the West Falls Church Metro Station, which is also in alignment with the Route 7 BRT.

Chair Palchik noted that it has been an exciting couple of weeks as the NVTC team has launched the regional "Ride with Us" campaign with focused marketing along the Yellow and Blue Line corridors this past month and throughout Northern Virginia for the rest of the summer.

Chair Palchik shared the good news that the metropolitan Washington region has had the strongest transit ridership rebounds in the country. According to the American Public Transportation Association (APTA), WMATA's Metrorail ridership grew faster this past year than any other heavy rail system in the United States. Also, VRE led all US commuter rail systems, up 114%. CUE, Fairfax Connector and the other local transit system also led the way in terms of ridership growth.

In response to a question from Chair Palchik, Ms. Mattice stated that NVTC received two public comments this month, which were provided to Commissioners prior to the meeting. The Coalition for Smarter Growth provided comments that failure in supporting WMATA's financial issues is not an option. Rob Whitfield, from the Fairfax County Taxpayers Alliance, submitted his concerns over the Virginia Passenger Rail Authority's Transforming Rail in Virginia capital program.

Minutes of the June 1, 2023 NVTC Meeting

Ms. Garvey moved, with a second by Mr. Karantonis, to approve the Minutes of the June 1, 2023 NVTC meeting. The vote in favor was cast by Commissioners Aguirre, Alcorn, de Ferranti, Ebbin, Foust, Garvey, Gilroy, Karantonis, Letourneau, McKay, Palchik, Read, Snyder, Tuck, Turner and Walkinshaw. Mr. McPike abstained. A roll call vote followed for Commissioners participating electronically and Mr. Smedberg voted in the affirmative. (Mr. Clemente did not participate in the vote as he was having technical difficulties.) The motion passed.

Consent Agenda

Chair Palchik stated that the Consent Agenda includes four action items:

- A. Authorize the Chair to Sign and Send a Letter of Endorsement of Virginia Passenger Rail Authority's (VPRA) Franconia-Springfield Bypass Project Application Submitted under the Federal Railroad Administration's (FRA) FY 2022 Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements (CRISI) Grant Program
- B. Authorize the Chair to Sign and Send a Letter of Endorsement of Virginia Passenger Rail Authority's (VPRA) Transforming Rail in Virginia Phase 2 Project Application under the US Department of Transportation's Federal-State Partnership for Intercity Passenger Rail Grant Program
- C. Approve Updates to the NVTC Electronic Participation Policy
- D. Authorize the Executive Director to Issue a Request for Proposals for a NVTC Strategic Policy Research Roadmap

Mr. de Ferranti moved, with a second by Mr. Letourneau, to approve the Consent Agenda. The vote in favor was cast by Commissioners Aguirre, Alcorn, de Ferranti, Ebbin, Foust, Garvey, Gilroy, Karantonis, Letourneau, McKay, McPike, Palchik, Read, Snyder, Tuck, Turner and Walkinshaw. A roll call vote followed for Commissioners participating electronically and Mr. Smedberg voted in the affirmative. (Mr. Clemente did not participate in the vote.) The motion passed.

Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA)

Chair Palchik thanked WMATA General Manager/CEO Randy Clarke for joining the Commission. She stated that the health and stability of the Metro network is vital to the region. NVTC's recent value of transit study found that the transit network in Northern Virginia – of which the Metrorail system is the backbone – generates \$1.5 billion in statewide sales and income taxes to the Commonwealth of Virginia and these are funds that can be used throughout the entire state to support things like schools and human services. Without a strong transit network, traffic would come to a complete standstill in Northern Virginia – and moving people to and from the District of Columbia and Maryland would require new lanes on every bridge that crosses the Potomac River. She stated that NVTC is concerned about the financial health of Metro and knows that it is important to find collective solutions to create a dependable and growing revenue model. She also observed the importance of working collectively to identify ways to fix Metro's financial model – and that needs to come from both within WMATA as well as from external sources. Virginia's local governments are going through the same financial challenges with growing costs of labor. She then asked WMATA Board Members Paul Smedberg and Matt Letourneau to introduce Mr. Clarke.

Mr. Letourneau stated that the changes at WMATA have been remarkable under General Manager Randy Clarke's leadership over the past 11 months, especially in the areas of safety and operations. Mr. Smedberg stated that WMATA is facing challenges, but the WMATA Board is ready to face those challenges with the help of its regional partners.

Presentation by WMATA General Manager/CEO. Mr. Clarke thanked the Commission for inviting him to participate in this meeting. He thanked Mr. Smedberg for his leadership as chair of the WMATA Board and for Mr. Letourneau's leadership as chair of the Finance and Capital Committee. He noted that they represent Virginia well on the WMATA Board. He then reviewed some of the highlights of the work WMATA has been doing, including the rehabilitation work on the Orange Line, which should be completed by July 16. He stated that Mr. Alcorn and Fairfax County staff provided helpful feedback regarding bus shuttles to help mitigation. He is proud that the Metro team embraced the comments from its partners and made changes, which culturally is a big shift. He also thanked Metro's regional partners for supporting the \$104 million zero-emissions grant from the Federal Transit Administration, which will be done in partnership with Fairfax County at the Cinder Bed facility.

Mr. Clarke observed that this time last year, WMATA was not running service well. Since then, the Metro team has dug out of the hole and have completed those "must achieve" objectives. He stated that it is important to create plans and then stay laser focused and work those plans. Examples include the opening of the Potomac Yard Metrorail Station and Silver Line Phase 2, bringing 7000 series trains back in service, hiring 1300 employees, and closing a \$180 million budget deficit for FY 2024. As an outcome of all that work, WMATA is seeing historic high customer satisfaction survey results. As of June 2023, customer satisfaction on rail increased to 84% (from 68% last year).

Mr. Clarke also reviewed WMATA's Strategic Transformation Plan. He stated that the goal is to be as transparent as possible. He then gave an overview of major accomplishments pertaining to operations, ridership, equipment, growth and development. Mr. Letourneau noted that WMATA's joint development program is the best in the country. In response to a question from Mr. Turner, Mr. Clarke gave some examples of joint development concepts.

Mr. Clarke then focused on the path forward, especially as it relates to the FY 2025 budget, which currently has a \$750 million budget gap. He reviewed the deficit drivers, inflation, decreased revenues, etc. He stated that WMATA does not really have the ability to cut costs without cutting service. Cutting substantial service would have an economic impact and could create a death spiral. Fixing the funding problem once and for all is important as the funding deficit will continue into future budget cycles. It is a structural issue that needs to be addressed. He also addressed the capital side, which funding will be exhausted in FY 2029 at the current schedule. He stated that both operating and capital issues need to be addressed and it is important to not lose the capital component in the discussion. Mr. Letourneau pointed out that there would be no correlating reduction in jurisdictional subsidy if there were service reductions.

Mr. Clarke concluded by inviting Commissioners to a Metro tour of the bus and/or rail systems. He asked for Commissioners' help to inform their constituents that Metro is back.

Chair Palchik thanked Mr. Clarke, as well as the Metro team and WMATA Board members, for their hard work. She thanked him for the high-level look at the challenges of the FY 2025 budget and beyond and asked about the other options between the two extremes of full service and a doomsday scenario of major service cuts. Mr. Clarke responded that Metro will not be releasing alternative budget scenarios. It's either running service or cutting service. Metro staff will

continue to look for cost savings, but there is a limit to how much more can be squeezed out of the budget. This will not solve the funding issue.

Mr. McKay stated that the funding issue is a massive regional challenge and asked about the breakdown of jurisdictional shares of the \$750 million budget gap. Mr. Clarke stated that this information will be provided after WMATA closes the FY 2023 books, sometime after Labor Day. Mr. McKay stated that the earlier Northern Virginia knows this information the better, since there may be a need for General Assembly action. In response to another question from Mr. McKay, Mr. Clarke gave an update on the status of the automatic train operation (ATO).

Ms. Garvey stated that it will be important to educate the public on marginal costs versus fixed costs. She observed that the Metro system is the only system in the country that does not have a dedicated funding stream. Mr. Clarke stated that Metro staff can follow up and provide more information about industry standards of how other transit systems fund their systems.

Commissioners continued to ask Mr. Clarke questions about the budget, cost savings and funding solutions. Mr. Clarke observed that there needs to be a regional conversation on how to solve the funding problem. Several Commissioners gave examples on how the jurisdiction's local transit service can run service at less cost. Mr. Aguirre stated that Alexandria has its own bus and paratransit system that complements and supplements Metrobus and MetroAccess service. Alexandria is receiving less and less Metrobus service as its bill continues to increase. This is a major issue and he asked how the region can start to remedy this issue. Mr. Clarke stated that this probably merits a deeper dive discussion and how to better integrate a better regional transit network. The goal is to get as many people using transit as possible.

Mr. Walkinshaw observed that it is important to start discussions directly with Governor Youngkin, since Metro's funding problem will not get solved without his help. The last two successes in Metro funding in Virginia in 2013 and 2018 were the result of those governors taking action. Mr. Clarke stated that WMATA is having conversations with members of the Youngkin administration, as well as senior leadership including the Commonwealth Transportation Board. Mr. McPike also stated that it is important to speak to the Biden administration at the federal level. Ms. DeBruhl expressed her appreciation for the time Mr. Clarke has spent meeting with the Secretary of Transportation's office. She observed that Virginia is a different landscape than the District and Maryland. Virginia has the largest transit program in its history as well as the largest transportation program. Virginia already has many efficiencies through legislation and partnerships, such as buying buses and bus shelters together, so the same messaging may not resonate the same way in Virginia. Acknowledging the different landscape between Virginia and the other two jurisdictions (Maryland and the District) will go a long way. She stated that the road ahead will not be easy.

Mr. de Ferranti stated that much has happened over the last year, but many still think the Metro system is broken. He suggested WMATA provide more examples of cost savings, such as the call center consolidation, which will help quantify and show the examples of fiscal responsibility Metro is taking. He stated that it is important to lay out the entire situation of the operating and capital sides of the funding issue, but in his opinion the short-term strategy should be focused on an operating funding solution. Mr. Clarke stated that WMATA is working on a series of white papers that will answer some of these types of questions. Commissioners continued to discuss

different approaches and challenges on how to solve short and long-term funding goals, as well as engaging the business community. Mr. Snyder asked WMATA not to forget the impact to the smaller jurisdictions.

Chair Palchik thanked Mr. Clarke for his time with the Commission and for his time meeting with all the stakeholders. On behalf of NVTC, she stated that the Commission wants Metro to be successful.

Chair Palchik reminded Commissioners that the next WMATA Committee is scheduled to meet on July 20 at 6:00 p.m. at the NVTC offices.

Mr. Smedberg dropped off the electronic link and did not return to the meeting.

Zero- and Reduced-Fare Policy: A Northern Virginia and National Perspective

Chair Palchik stated that several years ago many of the regional transit systems were struggling to address equity and access to their systems, which resulted in them exploring zero- and reduced-fares. This presentation will report on the status of those zero- and reduced-fare efforts. She introduced NVTC Executive Director Kate Mattice and DASH's General Manager/CEO Josh Baker.

Ms. Mattice observed that Northern Virginia is a microcosm for the fare policy discussions happening nationwide. She reminded Commissioners that two years ago NVTC created a policy paper on areas to consider when a jurisdiction decides to reduce or eliminate transit fares. At that time, there were two local bus systems contemplating going fare free and many others were weighing the pros and cons of different fare structures and payment approaches. Since then, DASH and CUE have eliminated fares post COVID. The remaining systems have various fare policies to significantly reduce fares for specific riders like students, seniors or people with disabilities. By retaining fares, these agencies can continue to capture transit benefits from riders whose employers cover all or part of their fares, which is a key consideration in this area due to the federal workforce. A big part of what is making these flexible approaches to fare structure is the availability of funding from the state – via the Transit Ridership Incentive Program (TRIP) program – which is providing funding for three of the agencies' fare programs.

Ms. Mattice reviewed the considerations for fare policy which are centered around key themes of access and equity; operations, including operator safety; finances; and community impacts. For those transit agencies that implemented zero fares within the past few years, questions remain about the long-term viability. Fare box revenues are only a small amount of the revenue that funds local bus systems – that is normal and expected in all bus systems across the country. However, there is the need to make up for those lost revenues to ensure that bus service does not suffer because of lower revenues. The fear of long-term financial viability is often due to either a lack of dedicated funding for zero fares or the perception that the money could be better spent on improving service.

Ms. Mattice gave an overview of what is happening across the country regarding fare policies. The experiences and approaches of Northern Virginia in this space are not unlike the rest of the

country and truly reflect the local goals and priorities. She observed that one of the most untapped opportunities for reducing fares is in partnership with businesses to provide transit passes to all employees. She then introduced Josh Baker, Alexandria DASH's General Manager and CEO, who is back to share how the fare free experience is working for the city.

Mr. Baker stated that DASH eliminated fares about a year ago. DASH received a TRIP grant that helped them get over the hump. DASH established a framework that sets up the process for the future and its long-term viability. He reviewed the successes and challenges of DASH's fare-free program. Hands down, this has been incredibly successful as DASH is celebrating its highest annual ridership in its history with 4.5 million rides. Other positives include elimination of fare disputes, reduced dwell times and all door boardings. Some of the challenges include overcrowding, loitering, driver assaults, trash and vandalism. He provided some of the results of the customer survey. Next steps include tracking who is using the system, removing fare box equipment, and finding new ways to partner with the Alexandria school system.

Mr. Baker stated that back in February the Seirra Club selected DASH to celebrate Transit Equity Day and produced a video showing the impact of DASH service to the community. Commissioners watched the video. Chair Palchik thanked Mr. Baker and encouraged him to continue to share survey results and other helpful information to the other bus system looking at fare-free. Mr. Turner stated he would be interested to see if fare-free bus service equates to a bump in rail ridership.

Commissioners Gilroy, Aguirre, Garvey and Tuck left the meeting around 9:20 p.m. and did not return.

NVTC Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) Goal-Setting Methodology

Chair Palchik introduced NVTC's Senior Grants and Procurement Manager and DBE Liaison Officer Brittany Sumpter to present the requested action to authorize the executive director to submit NVTC's Disadvantaged Business Enterprise Goal Setting Methodology to the Federal Transit Administration. She explained that Disadvantaged Business Enterprises ("DBEs") are small businesses that are owned and controlled by socially and economically disadvantaged individuals and have been certified as such by the state where they wish to operate as a DBE Objective of the DBE Program. The program seeks to remove barriers to the participation of DBEs in federal funded contracts; level the playing field on which DBE's can compete fairly for federal funded contracts; and develop firms that can compete successfully in the marketplace outside the DBE program. She then reviewed NVTC's methodology and how the overall DBE goal of 16% for FY 2024-2026 was calculated. NVTC also provides technical assistance to jurisdictional staff, public outreach to DBE firms, and highly encourages Small, Women-owned, and Minority-owned Business (SWaM) and Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Business utilization in non-federal procurements. Also, NVTC recently held a Northern Virginia DBE Roundtable.

Ms. Mattice noted that NVTC is more in the federal space now since NVTC has received a federal earmark for the Envision Route 7 BRT project. Chair Palchik thanked staff for being proactive in their engagement and she hopes staff are coordinating with jurisdictional staff to learn from each

other. Mr. de Ferranti thanked staff for this awesome work and for hosting the roundtable discussion.

Mr. McKay moved, with a second by Mr. McPike, to authorize the executive director to submit the NVTC Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) Goal-Setting Methodology for FFY 2024-2026 to the Federal Transit Administration. The vote in favor was cast by Commissioners Alcorn, de Ferranti, DeBruhl, Ebbin, Foust, Karantonis, Letourneau, McKay, McPike, Palchik, Read, Snyder, Turner and Walkinshaw. A roll call vote followed for Commissioners participating electronically and Mr. Clemente voted in the affirmative. The motion passed. (Since Mr. Smedberg left the meeting, Ms. DeBruhl began voting as his alternate for the rest of the votes.)

Virginia Railway Express (VRE)

Chair Palchik welcomed VRE CEO Rich Dalton and asked him to give his report, to be followed by Mr. Walkinshaw presenting the action item.

VRE CEO Report. Mr. Dalton reported that VRE is seeing increases in ridership over the last month, which is significant because ridership historically drops in the summer. Overall, on-time performance for the month of June was 90% for the Fredericksburg Line and 88% for the Manassas Line. Starting June 2, VRE began offering free fares on Fridays through September 1.

Mr. Snyder asked for current ridership numbers compared to pre-pandemic levels. Mr. Dalton responded that ridership is still about 35% of June 2019 pre-pandemic levels. Mr. Walkinshaw added that this is consistent with other commuter rail systems. For 2022 and 2023, VRE had the fastest ridership growth compared to other commuter rail systems across the country.

VRE Submission to the Northern Virginia Transportation Authority for Program Funding Consideration. Mr. Walkinshaw stated that the VRE Operations Board recommends Commission approval of Resolution #2504, which will approve and authorize the VRE CEO to submit four VRE projects to the Northern Virginia Transportation Authority (NVTA) for evaluation and funding consideration in its Fiscal Year 2024-2029 Six-Year Program. The four capital improvement projects include the Alexandria Station Improvements, Backlick Road Station Improvements, Franconia-Springfield Station Improvements, and the Broad Run Expansion project.

Mr. Snyder asked for more information about VRE's Strategic Retreat and the rationale for putting projects forward for funding consideration when there is only 35% ridership. Mr. Walkinshaw gave a summary of the discussion at the recent VRE Strategic Retreat, which focused on the long-range 2050 System Plan. Based on rider surveys, there is real interest in express service and weekend service. He stated that the reason why VRE ridership growth will continue to grow steadily in the future even with strong telework continuing, is that population growth in the region is going to happen where VRE lines are located, such as western Prince William County, City of Fredericksburg and Stafford County. Metro does not serve these areas. Coming out of the Strategic Retreat, the Operations Board wants to do more research and analysis for express service options and weekend service. The projects to be submitted to NVTA are projects that have been in the works for a long time and will improve service to plan for 2050. Mr. Dalton added that these projects, in combination of the Commonwealth's projects as part of the

Transforming Rail in Virginia program, will help be more responsive to the changes in travel patterns. There is still a capacity issue on the tracks with freight trains, and these projects will help. Mr. Walkinshaw stated that he personally would like to see VRE move to a more flexible fare structure.

Mr. Snyder expressed his appreciation for this conversation, which helps explain the value of VRE service. Mr. Walkinshaw stated that it is important to convey the economic importance of VRE. Mr. Alcorn stated that the role of federal employees, who traditionally were the core of VRE ridership pre-pandemic, has changed, but ridership is coming back.

Mr. Walkinshaw moved, with a second by Mr. de Ferranti, to approve Resolution #2504. The vote in favor was cast by Commissioners Alcorn, de Ferranti, DeBruhl, Ebbin, Foust, Karantonis, Letourneau, McKay, McPike, Palchik, Read, Snyder, Turner and Walkinshaw. A roll call vote followed for Commissioners participating electronically and Mr. Clemente voted in the affirmative. The motion passed. (A copy of Resolution #2504 is attached.)

Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT)

DRPT Director DeBruhl encouraged Commissioners to read the written DRPT Report. She stated that DRPT has received all the WMATA certifications and following DRPT's review, they will be presented to the Commonwealth Transportation Board (CTB) in September. She also announced that the CTB will be meeting in Northern Virginia in October in conjunction with the Governor's Transportation Conference and WMATA General Manager Randy Clarke and WMATA Board Chair Paul Smedberg will be on that CTB agenda. The CTB is expected to take action on the certification at that meeting.

Executive Director Report

Ms. Mattice encouraged Commissioners to read her Executive Director Newsletter, which highlights some of NVTC's recent efforts and events. She then reviewed upcoming in-person committee meetings: WMATA Committee on July 20, Program Advisory Committee on July 26, and Legislative and Policy Committee on August 31. There is no August Commission meeting so the next meeting is September 5.

The May Financial Report was provided in the written meeting materials. There were no questions from Commissioners.

Adjournment

Without objection, Chair Palchik adjourned the meeting at 9:46 p.m.

Approved this 7th day of September 2023.

Dalia Palchik
Chair

David F. Snyder
Secretary-Treasurer



RESOLUTION #2504

SUBJECT: Approve and Authorize the VRE CEO to Submit VRE Projects to the Northern Virginia Transportation Authority (NVTA) for FY 2024-2029 Six-Year Program Funding Consideration

WHEREAS: On May 1, 2023, the Northern Virginia Transportation Authority (NVTA) opened a call for projects for the NVTA Fiscal Year (FY) 2024-2029 Six-Year Program (SYP);

WHEREAS: VRE staff have identified a group of capital improvements, including \$6.29 million for the Alexandria Station Improvements, \$6.55 million for the Backlick Road Station Improvements, \$7.1 million for the Franconia-Springfield Station Improvements, and \$39.5 million for the Broad Run Expansion, that support and implement current and planned VRE service enhancements;

WHEREAS: Each of the projects are included in the TransAction long-range regional transportation plan (TransAction Project ID 300, VRE Manassas Line Rail Capacity Enhancements and TransAction Project ID 301, Fredericksburg Line Service Expansion);

WHEREAS: The requested funding fills a shortfall in the construction budget for each project and will enable construction of the proposed improvements to move forward on schedule; and

WHEREAS: The VRE Operations Board recommends the following action.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Northern Virginia Transportation Commission hereby approves submission of the Alexandria Station, Backlick Road Station, and Franconia-Springfield Station Improvements, and Broad Run Expansion projects to the Northern Virginia Transportation Authority for evaluation and funding consideration in its FY 2024-2029 Six-Year Program.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that NVTC authorizes the VRE Chief Executive Officer to submit the approved projects for funding, make any necessary corrections to project amounts or descriptions in the applications, and execute all project funding agreements, in a form approved by legal counsel, that may result from consideration of the projects.

Approved this 6th day of July 2023.

Dalia Palchik
Chair

David F. Snyder
Secretary-Treasurer