

**MINUTES**  
**NVTC COMMISSION MEETING –MARCH 2, 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 7:06 p.m.

Members Present

Canek Aguirre  
Walter Alcorn  
Sarah Bagley  
Nick Clemente  
Katie Cristol  
Jennifer DeBruhl (Alternate, Commonwealth of Virginia) (*via electronic participation*)  
Adam Ebbin  
John Foust  
Libby Garvey  
Matt Letourneau  
Jeff McKay  
Dalia Palchik  
Catherine Read  
Paul Smedberg  
David Snyder  
Mike Turner  
James Walkinshaw

Members Not Present

Matt de Ferranti  
John J. Bell  
Aimee S. Gilroy  
M. David Skiles  
John C. Tuck III

Staff Present

Kate Mattice, Executive Director  
Monique Blyther  
Genoveva Cutrell  
Allan Fye  
Rhonda Gilchrest  
Adam Hager  
Scott Kalkwarf  
Xavier Harmony  
Ann McGrane  
Tenley O'Hara  
Ben Owen  
Sophie Spiliotopoulos

Melissa Walker  
Ronnetta Zack-Williams  
Aimee Perron Siebert (*via electronic participation*)  
Rich Dalton (VRE)  
Steve MacIsaac (VRE)  
Joe Swartz (VRE)

### Opening Remarks

Chair Palchik welcomed everyone to the March 2, 2023 NVTC meeting and noted that the meeting is being livestreamed for the public on YouTube.

Chair Palchik stated that Ms. DeBruhl is participating electronically from Richmond under the provision of a member living 60 or more miles away from the meeting location. Commission Secretary Rhonda Gilchrest confirmed an in-person quorum was present.

Mr. Letourneau stated that Commissioners may have already heard the announcement earlier in the day that fellow Commissioner Senator John Bell will not be seeking re-election due to health issues. Mr. Letourneau stated that he has worked with Senator Bell on many initiatives and wishes him well.

In response to a question from Chair Palchik, Ms. Mattice stated that NVTC did not receive any public comments this month.

### Minutes of the February 2, 2023 NVTC Meeting

Mr. McKay moved, with a second by Ms. Cristol, to approve the Minutes of the February 2, 2023 NVTC meeting. The vote in favor was cast by Commissioners Aguirre, Alcorn, Bagley, Clemente, Cristol, Garvey, Foust, Garvey, McKay, Letourneau, Palchik, Read, Smedberg, Snyder and Walkinshaw. Mr. Ebbin abstained. The motion passed.

### Consent Agenda

Chair Palchik stated that there are three action items on the Consent Agenda:

- A. Authorize Additional Contract Funding for NVTC's WMATA Operating Funding and Reform Working Group
- B. Authorize the Chair to Send a Letter of Endorsement for the City of Alexandria's Application for the Federal Transit Administration's Low or No Emission Vehicle and Bus and Bus Facilities Discretionary Grant Programs
- C. Authorize the Chair to Send a Letter of Endorsement for a Dominion Energy Virginia Application to the U.S. Department of Energy's Grid Resilience and Innovation Partnership (GRIP) Discretionary Grant Program

Mr. Aguirre moved, with a second by Mr. Smedberg, to approve the Consent Agenda. The vote in favor was cast by Commissioners Aguirre, Alcorn, Bagley, Clemente, Cristol, Ebbin, Garvey, Foust, Garvey, McKay, Letourneau, Palchik, Read, Smedberg, Snyder and Walkinshaw. The motion passed.

Mr. Turner arrived at 7:08 p.m.

Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA)

Chair Palchik asked the WMATA Board members to give their report.

Report from the WMATA Board Members. Mr. Letourneau stated that WMATA has opened the public comment period for the Proposed FY 2024 Operating and Capital Budget and FY 2024-2029 Capital Improvement Program (CIP) and associated fare and service changes. The \$4.8 billion capital and operating budget is intended to grow ridership and includes measures to increase service on bus and rail, launch the better bus network redesign, open the Potomac Yard Station, simplify Metrorail pricing, increase law enforcement support, and support a zero-emission bus transition. He stated that there are challenges related to the fare simplification. The budget proposes a max fare of \$6.50. Currently, about 3% of riders pay max fare off-peak rates. He noted that the WMATA Board is contemplating reducing the proposed max of \$6.50 to \$6.00. Mr. Letourneau stated that there will be an in-person public hearing at Meridian High School in Falls Church on March 7 at 6:00 p.m. WMATA staff will be available to answer questions starting at 5:00 p.m.

Mr. Letourneau also reported that the WMATA Board adopted the “Your Metro, The Way Forward,” Strategic Transformation Plan (STP). This plan is a long-term strategy to direct Metro’s day-to-day decision making over the next five years as Metro adapts to changing mobility patterns and the evolving needs of its customers and employees. He also noted that in early February, the WMATA Board approved the 2023A Dedicated Revenue Supplemental Bond Resolution and authorized the issuance of Series 2023A Dedicated Revenue Bonds. Additionally, WMATA staff is looking at additional future CIP funding options, including a Transportation Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (TIFIA) loan. TIFIA has a lengthy 8-12-month application period but could be a favorable financing mechanism for Metro’s capital program.

Mr. Letourneau stated that the WMATA Board also received a presentation on the FY 2023, Quarter 2 performance report. Metro ridership has been steadily increasing in FY 2023 and is above the budgeted forecast. In the first six months of FY 2023, customers made 91 million trips on all modes. On the new Silver Line extension, 330,000 passengers entered or exited the six new stations between November 15 to December 31, 2022 and 40% of Silver Line ridership was attributed to new trips. Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday are the highest ridership days, with 10 to 20% more daily trips when compared to Mondays and Fridays.

Mr. Letourneau noted that crime continues to be a problem. On February 8, Metro announced a partnership between the Metro Transit Police Department and the DC Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) to enhance public safety and security on the system. This partnership began the week of February 13 and will go through June. Metro Transit officers will partner on patrols at stations with police officers working on assignment from MPD. These joint patrols will begin with five stations in the District of Columbia and allow transit police to ride more buses and trains. The extra patrols will be funded by Metro. Metro is expected to finalize agreements with additional police departments in other jurisdictions served by Metro.

Mr. Letourneau also announced that the WMATA Board marked the 50th anniversary of Metrobus and honored three original employees who still work at WMATA.

Mr. Smedberg reported that he and the general manager participated in oversight hearings in Washington, DC and Annapolis. He also noted that the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) opened the public docket for its ongoing investigation into the 2021 derailment at Rosslyn Station. This is not a final report and the documents provided do not state the root cause of the derailment. At a later date, NTSB will release a final report which will include findings, recommendations and determinations related to the derailment. While a root cause has not been formally announced by the NTSB, the documents released identified a technical issue -- microslip due to reduction in contact pressure. Based on the technical data, WMATA is planning to change the way it presses wheels on 7000-series rail cars, which will be addressed in a revised Return to Service Plan (version 4). The current return to service plan marks a move to measuring the wheels every seven days instead of every four days and will remain in effect until WMATA receives concurrence from the Washington Metrorail Safety Commission (WMSC) on the revised plan. Metro will continue its rigorous inspections of wheels with measurements for every 7000-series rail car until its wheels are reassembled at the new, higher standard. As a preliminary estimate, it will take up to 36 months at a cost of approximately \$55 million to repress all 7000-series wheels. Mr. Smedberg stated that this is all good news as WMATA has a path forward. In response to a question from Mr. Turner, both Mr. Smedberg and Mr. Letourneau provided more information about the safety inspection process.

In response to another question by Mr. Turner, Mr. Letourneau explained that there is no amount of ridership increase that would solve the upcoming budget gap problem. There is a structural budget issue at Metro that has been growing over time, which was probably accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Basically, expenditures are exceeding revenue. WMATA will balance its budget, either through service reductions if needed, but before that point, a funding solution needs to be identified for a lasting solution. Mr. Smedberg noted that WMATA is the only major transit system in the country that does not have a dedicated funding source. This is not sustainable.

Mr. Snyder thanked the WMATA Board members for their focus on safety.

Report from the Chair of the WMATA Committee. Mr. Alcorn reported that since the February Commission meeting, he has worked with Chair Palchik and staff to refine NVTC's letter to WMATA on the FY 2024 Operating Budget and FY 2024 - 2029 CIP. The letter outlines the following NVTC priorities related to the budget:

- Continue the safe return of the 7000-series railcars and deliver budgeted service and ensure Metro makes safety and security priorities for customers and Metro staff.
- Continue fare simplification efforts that balance ridership and revenue, while also reviewing ways to lower the per-mile rate with consideration for suburban commuters, including the cost of parking in those calculations.
- Open the Potomac Yard Metrorail Station for full revenue service.
- Support the policy goals and concept of the proposed low-income fare program with effective implementation, avoiding overlap with existing programs and fair cost allocation to jurisdictions.
- Concern over flexing such a large amount of maintenance funding to the operating budget and starting a trend of over reliance on this budget tool.

- Continue progress on reducing the state of good repair backlog.
- Ensure close coordination with NVTC and jurisdictions for Summer 2023 maintenance work.
- Continue active engagement with NVTC and its jurisdictions on developing long-term solutions to address WMATA's future operational funding shortfall.

Mr. Alcorn moved, with a second by Mr. Snyder, to authorize the chair to send the letter to WMATA. The vote in favor was cast by Commissioners Aguirre, Alcorn, Bagley, Clemente, Cristol, Ebbin, Garvey, Foust, Garvey, McKay, Letourneau, Palchik, Read, Smedberg, Snyder, Turner and Walkinshaw. The motion passed.

Mr. Alcorn also announced that the next WMATA Committee meeting will be held on April 19 at 6:00 pm in NVTC's Suite #230 Conference Room. The topics for the meeting include an update by Metro staff on the Better Bus Redesign, an introduction to the scope of the NVTC Metro Operating Funding and Reform Working Group, and the schedule for the 2023 WMATA Annual Report. As always, all Commissioners are encouraged to participate.

Mr. Smedberg left the meeting at 7:34 p.m.

### Legislative Update

Chair Palchik asked NVTC's Legislative Liaison Aimee Perron Siebert to give a General Assembly update followed by a federal update by the executive director.

General Assembly Update. Ms. Perron Siebert reported that the General Assembly Session concluded last Saturday, although there is still work being done on the budget. She noted that with redistricting and 18 announced retirements, there could be 40-50 new General Assembly members next session. She then reviewed transportation-related legislation that passed, including bills pertaining to WMATA and VRE.

Federal Update. Ms. Mattice reported that additional competitive grant opportunities under that Bipartisan Infrastructure Law were announced this month – many of which have deadlines this spring. She reviewed the different opportunities and eligible projects. The deadline for applications is April 13, 2023 and it is expected this will be an annual call for projects for this low and no-emission bus capital program over the next four years. Ms. Mattice also stated that NVTC recently launched its regional strategic plan for zero-emission bus implementation in Northern Virginia. It is possible that the outcome of this work could serve as a building block for the jurisdictions to seek this federal funding either alone or through a regional application.

### Commuter Choice Program

Chair Palchik stated that Commuter Choice Senior Program Manager Ben Owen will give an update on the I-395/95 Commuter Choice program and the eligibility results from the FY 2024 – FY 2025 program. She noted that for this round, there is an estimated \$45-\$48 million available

and the funding requests far exceeds the funding and demonstrates a continuing need for transit investment in the I-395/95 corridor.

Mr. Owen stated that staff presented a list of submitted applications at the February meeting, which included 18 total applications from seven applicants totaling \$110 million – by far the largest overall funding request in the Commuter Choice program’s history in either corridor. NVTC advertised \$45-48 million in funding available for this round, a larger amount than usual due to carryover from the last two programs.

Mr. Owen stated that four of the applications are for more complex construction projects. Therefore, staff are conducting additional readiness reviews of these in terms of their ability to meet the program’s short funding obligation and expenditure deadlines. Staff will make final eligibility determinations on these four once the reviews are complete. On the service side, nine applications are for bus service improvements, all but one of which are continuations of service improvements funded in prior rounds (5 OmniRide, 2 DASH, 1 Fairfax Connector) and one for expansion of Metrobus service on Columbia Pike. Finally, one application is for a rail service improvement (an additional round-trip on the VRE Fredericksburg Line). On the capital side, three are rail capital expansions (improvements to the Crystal City, Alexandria and Franconia-Springfield VRE stations) and two are bus capital improvements (support for Fairfax County’s Richmond Highway BRT and purchase of articulated buses for use on DASH’s busiest route). There is one application for a transportation demand strategy (allowing VRE pass holders to use certain Amtrak trains serving the Fredericksburg Line to expand travel options).

Mr. Owen explained that 16 of the 18 applications, with a total funding request of \$89.5 million, were deemed eligible and will be carried into the technical evaluation process and public comment. NVTC and DRPT staff looked at each proposed project’s anticipated benefits to toll payers as well as consistency with established program policy.

Mr. Owen then reviewed next steps. The timing of the overall process is focused on getting the funded projects into the coming fiscal year’s Six-Year Improvement Program (SYIP) which is approved by the Commonwealth Transportation Board in June. Following the technical evaluation of the 16 eligible applications, staff will share the results with the Joint Commission Working Group (JCWG) at its April 20 meeting and seek endorsement of a draft Program of Projects at that time. The recommendation will come back to the Commission for action.

Mr. Owen explained that this funding round is going to be more competitive and complex than any to date. Besides that there is about \$90 million in requests for about half that much funding, several other issues need to be addressed. For operations, the Memorandum of Agreement allows for the allocation of no more than half of the funds transferred to NVTC over any nine years can be used for transit operations. Staff have estimated that \$16 million of the \$45-48 million is the most that can be put to transit operations in this round that would allow for growth in future funding rounds. Staff is taking a conservative approach so that operations support won’t have to be curtailed in future rounds to stay within the cap. For capital, the program policy allows for a split in funding commitments for larger construction projects over two consecutive two-year periods. These second funding installments would be the top programming priority in the next round. There may be a few such projects that may be in contention for funding for the first time.

Mr. Owen stated that these policy issues will be discussed at the April 20 JCWG meeting and staff is scheduling pre-brief meetings for those members. The public comment period will open in mid-April, with both English and Spanish versions of all materials available online. There will also be a modest amount of paid locally targeted advertising on social media. The jurisdictions and applicants will also help amplify the word about the comment opportunity through their channels, to help get as broad a base of input from communities along the corridor as possible. The Commissions will be briefed on the committee-endorsed draft Program of Projects and approvals will be requested in June. It will also go before the CTB in June. Thereafter distribution of project agreements and implementation of funded projects with the start of the new fiscal year.

In response to a question from Ms. Bagley, Mr. Owen explained that each applicant ranks their applications in priority order.

### Transit Resource Center

Chair Palchik stated the Transit Resource Center team will be giving updates on the Envision Route 7 Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) project, followed by a presentation on analysis staff have been doing using NVTC's NoVATransit Data Dashboard.

Envision Route 7 BRT Project. Mr. Fye gave the update on the Envision Route 7 BRT project, including a project overview and timeline. Since its inception, NVTC has led the Envision Route 7 BRT project that when completed will provide high-quality, high-capacity transit service between Tysons and Mark Center in Alexandria, via Seven Corners, Falls Church and the East Falls Church Metrorail Station. There are currently two ongoing efforts for Envision Route 7, including a mobility study focusing on Falls Church and a strategic implementation plan that helps guide the project through to construction and operations. The mobility study includes an intense amount of data modeling and staff have been working with jurisdictional staff on different future year scenarios. Mr. Fye reviewed the next round of public outreach, which will have pop-up events and bus stop chats in April. Commissioners and jurisdictional staff will be provided with dates/times and communication materials to share the information with their constituents.

Mr. Fye stated that staff conducted a workshop last week with the four jurisdictions along the corridor (Fairfax County, City of Falls Church, City of Alexandria and Arlington County) on the strategic implementation plan, diving into what it looks like at the implementation phase. Other attendees included representatives from WMATA, Federal Transit Administration and Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT), among others. He stated that at the workshop they discussed the four big questions moving forward: who is best suited to lead the design and construction of the project; who has the capacity and ability to be the operator; what's the best scenario for ownership and maintenance of the stations and right-of-way; and how might the lead agency advance the project to insure its timely and successful completion. Just as important will be key decisions in setting a timeline for when to start applying for different funding sources. He provided a high-level look at the different phases of the project, as well as milestones.

In response to a question from Ms. Garvey about options for who would operate the system, Mr. Fye stated that two options being considered are Metrobus and Fairfax Connector. Mr. Aguirre asked about when potentially service could begin. Mr. Fye stated that all the stakeholders are working as fast as they can, but it would be premature to estimate a starting date. Mr. Foust asked if there are scenarios being considered for the BRT system to open in phases. Mr. Fye stated that it is being considered as an option. Mr. Snyder thanked all the parties involved in this project and encouraged speedy implementation.

NoVATransit Data Dashboard. Ms. Mattice stated that last December staff debuted NVTC's NoVATransit Data Dashboard, an interactive tool that allows staff to visualize, compare and analyze the immense amount of transit data that is collected from DRPT, WMATA, VRE and each of the transit agencies. Now that the data is all in one place, staff can start to tell the stories and trends that they see emerging from the data. Tonight's presentation will look at bus stops through the lens of the types of service a rider can access at bus stops and what that means for mobility across the region. The NVTC team has created some great visuals that illustrate this, and they will explain it in more detail as well as dive into how Northern Virginia bus service compares to other peers across the greater DC metro area. She encouraged Commissioners to keep in mind that there are some really important bus planning efforts going on across the region:

- NVTC's Northern Virginia Regional Bus Analysis will pull together all of the strategic plans from local bus systems and look at the bus network from a regional perspective. The goal is to identify any gaps in the regional bus network and identify opportunities for partnerships to fill those gaps. NVTC is also looking for opportunities for regional collaboration when it comes to facilities as well as the projected financial needs to ensure the region maintains a robust bus transit network in Northern Virginia.
- WMATA's Better Bus Redesign effort kicked off last fall. Both NVTC and jurisdictional staff are closely engaged in this study with the focus on defining what Metrobus should look like in Northern Virginia.

Ms. Mattice stated that NVTC staff are working closely with their WMATA colleagues to make sure both of these efforts are complementary. She asked Mr. Harmony and Ms. Spiliotopoulos to give their presentation.

Mr. Harmony provided an overview of how the NoVATransit Data Dashboard has evolved since the last Commission presentation in December. He stated that the region has more access to late-night and weekend service than high frequency bus service. Zero-car households have the most access to all types of bus service. Non-white populations have less bus access than all population groups except the total population. In Northern Virginia, 19% of non-white populations have access to high frequency bus service. He noted that due to data limitations, City of Fairfax and CUE were excluded from the analysis.

Ms. Spiliotopoulos stated that as expected, staff found that not all bus access is created equal. The region as a whole has more access to late-night and weekend service than high frequency service. In fact, Northern Virginia's population has about three times more access to any bus than a frequent bus. High frequency access is the lowest at 18%, compared to 62% of the region's



residents having access to any kind of bus service. However, looking at specific demographic groups, the trends shift. Zero car households have the highest access to transit – that includes high frequency, late night and weekend service. This shows that those without cars have the ability to get around with transit outside of traditional peak periods. On the other hand, non-white populations have less access to bus service of the population subgroups.

Ms. Spiliotopoulos then looked at the data by zooming into a specific jurisdiction, where there is a much different story of bus access. Non-white populations in Alexandria have the most access to high frequency bus service compared to other Alexandria populations. The city's access to high frequency bus service in general is much higher. She stated that 93% of zero-car households in the city have access to late night and weekend service. DASH's recent network redesign focused on an increase in service to low-income, minority and senior residents.

Ms. Spiliotopoulos stated that there is a lot to absorb from this data and staff identified four main takeaways of this research. First, access must consider how people use the bus, beyond if there's a bus stop close. Second, goals and values that shape planning can have real impacts on the region. Third, there is good bus access in Northern Virginia, but there is more work to be done. The 2019 Bus Transformation Project produced similar data for the entire Washington DC region and found that 81% of the region's population has access to a bus stop and 48% of the region has access to high frequency bus service. This can be compared to the 62% of Northern Virginia with access to a bus and 18% with access to high frequency bus. With these stats, it's important to consider the differing land use between these two regions. Finally, the results are building blocks for the future regional bus planning work and will help us identify where there are network gaps and opportunities for improving the region's bus system. Ms. Spiliotopoulos then provided a demonstration of how this analysis was integrated into the dashboard itself.

### Virginia Railway Express (VRE)

Chair Palchik welcomed VRE CEO Rich Dalton and asked him to give his report. There are no VRE action items this month.

VRE CEO Report. Mr. Dalton encouraged Commissioners to read the VRE 2022 Annual Report. He reported that for the month of February overall on-time performance was 85%. Average daily ridership jumped another 300 trips. He also noted that the CEO Report now tracks data on how many riders are carrying bicycles on the trains.

### Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT)

DRPT Director DeBruhl encouraged Commissioners to read the written DRPT Report. She announced some staff changes: Clinton Edwards has left DRPT and taken a position at Arlington County; Tim Roseboom has relocated back to Michigan but will continue to work remotely for DRPT through the summer; and Amy Garbarini has been promoted as the new Northern Virginia Transit Planning Manager. Ms. DeBruhl also proudly announced that DRPT received a marketing award from the American Public Transportation Association (APTA) for growing ridership of Virginia Breeze intercity bus service.

Mr. Snyder commended DRPT for the Virginia Breeze service, which is a great way to get to Richmond.

### Executive Director Report

Ms. Mattice encouraged Commissioners to read her Executive Director Newsletter, which highlights some of NVTC's recent efforts and events including Black History Month social media posts that include highlights of five of NVTC's previous Commissioners, highlights of the recent staff development and training day, preview of the regional collaboration and the transit marketing campaign, and information on NVTC's recent transit technology working group.

Ms. Mattice announced that the Transit Service Delivery Advisory Board (TSDAC) is reconvening on March 3 for a first look at the proposed allocations for FY 2024 capital and operating funds. She also reviewed upcoming NVTC meetings. She reminded Commissioners that NVTC does not meet in April, so the next meeting is 7:00 p.m. on May 4, 2023, with the Executive Committee meeting at 6:15 p.m. The next WMATA Committee meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, April 19 at 6:00 p.m. in Suite #230. The Joint Commission Working Group and the Program Advisory Committee are holding an all-virtual meeting on Thursday, April 20 at 4:00 p.m. Staff are currently scheduling a meeting of the Legislative and Policy Committee in mid-May to dive into the Value of Transit Study findings and talk strategy for next year's legislative agenda. WMATA General Manager/CEO Randy Clarke will join the Commission at the June 1, 2023 meeting.

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

### Adjournment

Without objection, Chair Palchik adjourned the meeting at 8:36 p.m.

Approved this 4<sup>th</sup> day of May 2023.

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Dalia Palchik  
Chair

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David F. Snyder  
Secretary-Treasurer