

NVTC PROGRAM ADVISORY COMMITTEE
MEETING SUMMARY
NVTC Suite #230 Conference Room
2300 Wilson Blvd., Arlington, Virginia
Public Streaming via YouTube
July 26, 2023

NVTC Program Advisory Committee Members Present:

Sarah Bagley, Chair
John Foust
Libby Garvey
David Snyder (*via electronic participation*)

NVTC Program Advisory Committee Members Absent:

Mike Turner

Other Commissioners Present:

Takis Karantonis

Staff and Others Present:

Allan Fye
Rhonda Gilchrest
Adam Hager
Xavier Harmony
Tenley O'Hara
Melissa Walker

Program Advisory Committee Chair Bagley called the meeting to order at 4:05 p.m. She noted that the meeting is being streamed live via NVTC's YouTube page and that a quorum is present. She noted that Mr. Snyder requested to participate electronically from out of state due to travel and that the committee would need to take action to approve members participating electronically under NVTC's updated Electronic Participation Policy.

Ms. Garvey made a motion to approve Mr. Snyder's participation by electronic means. Mr. Foust seconded the motion. The vote in favor was cast by Ms. Bagley, Mr. Foust and Ms. Garvey and the motion passed.

Chair Bagley asked for any changes to the summary of the April 20, 2023 Program Advisory Committee meeting. Committee members accepted the summary with no changes. Chair Bagley then asked Mr. Hager for an update on the I-66 Commuter Choice FY 2025-2026 Call for Projects.

Commuter Choice – Overview of I-66 (FY 2025-2026) Call for Projects and Schedule

Mr. Hager provided an update on the upcoming I-66 Commuter Choice FY 2025-2026 call for projects. He highlighted a few key points about the Commuter Choice program as a whole as well as details for the I-66 FY 2025-2026 funding round. He stated that staff anticipate at least \$40 million would be available and up to 50% of that amount could be used for transit operations costs. Mr. Hager noted that staff are not proposing any major policy changes this year but are proposing to move the program schedule up by one month and open the call for projects in October rather than the usual November. He covered the schedule for the call for projects this fall and the program development process next spring.

Chair Bagley asked about ridership trends and their impacts on toll usage. Mr. Hager responded that traffic volumes and toll revenues are up across the region and Commuter Choice-supported projects have seen record ridership as well. Chair Bagley noted a concern that toll revenues could go down and asked whether previously awarded projects have been defunded or otherwise not implemented. Mr. Hager shared that this has not been an issue, noting the tight timeframes in which funds must be obligated and expended in addition to a cautious programming approach the Commission took during the pandemic. Chair Bagley asked whether Commuter Choice could support projects that provide benefits in ways other than moving more people. Mr. Hager responded that the program has a pretty narrow framework in terms of the types of projects it can support which is based on Virginia legal precedent. Mr. Fye added that the agreements NVTC has with the Commonwealth and other partners is built off of the Virginia Supreme Court ruling that stated uses of toll revenues must directly benefit toll payers, but Commuter Choice does highlight the many benefits afforded to the region beyond moving more people, such as increased safety and reduced greenhouse gas emissions.

In response to Ms. Garvey's question about the general state of travel in the region, Mr. Hager stated that an effort will soon be underway this fall that collects and analyzes actual travel counts in the I-66 and I-395 corridors. Mr. Karantonis offered a few high-level changes that have taken place with commuting, such as less travel during the peak periods.

Mr. Foust asked whether staff has toll revenues on an annual basis, noting that \$40 million is a large amount. Mr. Hager noted that staff is working with VDOT on toll revenue budgets and projections. Mr. Fye explained the payment schedules provided in the agreement with the Commonwealth and added that staff will present a figure to the Commission before it opens a call for projects in October.

Chair Bagley asked whether applicant staff were concerned about the change in the program schedule. Mr. Hager stated that no concerns had been raised and that the application window itself is still roughly the same amount of time as it was previously. Chair Bagley asked whether the technical evaluation process was changing. Mr. Hager said the scoring changes approved by the Commission last fall will remain in effect this year and no further changes are being sought.

Mr. Snyder noted the importance of maintaining variation in the sizes and types of projects supported by Commuter Choice.

Envision Route 7 Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) -- Overview of Phase 4-1 Analysis (Falls Church to Seven Corners Segment) and the Recommendations from the Strategic Implementation Plan

Mr. Harmony highlighted progress on two Envision Route 7 Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) studies. He first provided an overview on the mobility analysis focused on the Falls Church section of the future BRT corridor, noting that three scenarios had been developed and shared with the public. He also covered preliminary recommendations for the Strategic Implementation Plan, a guiding document that will address project governance and implementation. He added that staff and consultants are developing a suite of potential funding sources for the remaining project phases and continuing to develop a schedule for the completion of the overall project. Mr. Harmony said the Commission would be asked to accept the findings of the mobility study this fall, followed shortly thereafter by the Strategic Implementation Plan.

Mr. Karantonis asked about the rationale behind the option of not putting the BRT lanes in the middle of the roadway and whether modeling had been conducted exploring center-running lanes. Mr. Harmony noted the constrained right-of-way in the Falls Church area as the primary reason why center-running lanes are not being proposed in that section but added that other areas within the project corridor will have center-running BRT lanes such as some areas within Fairfax County. Mr. Karantonis and Mr. Harmony then discussed the pros and cons of diverting traffic depending on the type of infrastructure constructed.

Mr. Snyder thanked staff for their efforts in soliciting public input over the past several months. He stated that the operating context in the City of Falls Church is much different than elsewhere in the corridor, indicating that flexibility in design and transit signal priority are fundamental. He asked whether staff or other Commissioners had comments on the design preferences in the city. Mr. Harmony stated that this study effort is a fact-finding exercise that will eventually inform the City of Falls Church's refinement of the preferred alternative within the city limits.

Ms. Garvey and Mr. Harmony discussed the differences between traffic volumes in the morning and evening periods within the corridor. Mr. Harmony stated that traffic volumes in the evening tend to be more spread out across a longer period.

Mr. Foust asked whether it is possible to have a successful BRT from Tysons to Alexandria if the middle of the corridor operates like a more traditional bus service, and whether there might be examples of successful service models elsewhere. Mr. Harmony stated that the Greater Richmond Transit Company's (GRTC) The Pulse BRT has been extremely successful and operates different service models throughout its corridor, adding that GRTC has seen dramatic ridership increases and is looking to expand service. Mr. Harmony also stated that the Metroway in Alexandria and Arlington operates in different contexts and has been successful as well.

In response to a question from Mr. Foust regarding anticipated running time from Tysons to Alexandria, Mr. Harmony stated that the current Metrobus 28A service is approximately 90 minutes and that a complete analysis of the future BRT corridor has not yet been completed since the southern portion of the corridor needs further analysis. Mr. Foust asked whether current planning efforts are constrained by the amount of funding expected to be available. Mr. Harmony

responded that future funding is not a limitation, and that community feedback and modeling are the two primary drivers behind the study.

Chair Bagley noted the importance of tying efforts like these with other research around congestion and operating costs that NVTC is conducting.

Mr. Foust asked what planning efforts are underway from Falls Church to Alexandria. Mr. Harmony stated that the mobility study exercise, similar to what is soon being completed for the Falls Church section, is included in the Strategic Implementation Plan. Mr. Foust asked whether each of the remaining steps need to happen sequentially. Mr. Fye stated that NVTC is actively recruiting a full-time staff member to manage the Envision Route 7 BRT effort moving forward, and that many of the remaining steps need to fall sequentially to save time and resources in later stages.

Ms. Garvey asked whether there was an overall plan to develop an integrated BRT system in the region, whether the Route 7 BRT could run on the Metroway and which agency might operate the Route 7 BRT. Mr. Fye said staff would provide a map that illustrates the planned BRT corridors in the region and how they intersect with one another. Mr. Harmony stated that a couple of agencies are interested in running the service including WMATA and Fairfax Connector.

Mr. Snyder suggested renaming the proposed timeline in the slide deck to a possible timeline, noting his preference to complete the project as soon as possible. He added that he would like to see the agency who could run the service most efficiently and effectively chosen as the operator.

Chair Bagley asked whether electric buses and fleet composition had been considered with this study. Mr. Harmony shared that those factors had been considered and that diesel buses may not be around in ten years. Mr. Snyder suggested incorporating some technology elements into presentation graphics in the future.

Other Business

Chair Bagley asked for any other topics for discussion from committee members and they had none.

Future Meetings

Chair Bagley asked members to stay tuned for emails from staff with details for the next Program Advisory Committee meeting in September. She adjourned the meeting at 5:17 p.m.