



**NVTC TRANSIT INNOVATION SUMMIT
MEETING SUMMARY
George Mason University Schar School
June 14, 2024
8:30 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.**

NVTC Commissioners Present

Canek Aguirre
James Bierman, Jr.
Matt de Ferranti
Adam Ebbin
Takis Karantonis
Paul Krizek
Dalia Palchik
Catherine Read
Saddam Azlan Salim
Justine Underhill (Alternate, City of Falls Church)

NVTC Commissioners Absent

Walter Alcorn
Sarah Bagley
Juli Briskman
Libby Garvey
Matt Letourneau
Alfonso Lopez
David Reid
Mark Sickles
Paul Smedberg
David Snyder
Daniel Storck
James Walkinshaw

NVTC Staff Present

Kate Mattice, Executive Director	Tenley O'Hara
Monique Blyther	Ben Owen
Genoveva Cutrell	Colethia Quarles
Andrew D'huyvetter	Robert Rudesill
Matt Friedman	Noman Sayed
Allan Fye	Vikram Sinha
Rhonda Gilchrest	Sophie Spiliotopoulos
Adam Hager	Colie Touzel
Will Heltzel	
Scott Kalkwarf	
Daniel Knickelbein	
Ann McGrane	

Opening Remarks

NVTC Executive Director Kate Mattice and NVTC Chair de Ferranti welcomed those in attendance at the Transit Innovation Summit, the first major event celebrating NVTC's 60th Anniversary. Chair de Ferranti noted that NVTC was created in 1964 to help represent Northern Virginia's interests during the establishment of WMATA. Since then, NVTC's role has transformed to become the premier transit organization in Northern Virginia. He shared more historical information about NVTC including involvement with Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) dating back to 1977 and efforts to reduce emissions. Chair de Ferranti acknowledged the NVTC Commissioners and other elected officials in attendance and recognized key partners with regional organizations and jurisdictions.

Panel: Scaling up the Zero-Emission Bus Fleet: Lessons Learned and Next Steps Following Initial Deployment

NVTC Senior Program Manager Ann McGrane moderated a panel on the lessons learned and next steps in deploying zero-emission buses (ZEBs) across the region. She was joined by the following panelists representing agencies at the forefront of the zero-emission transition in Northern Virginia:

- Amy Mesrobian – Director of Zero-Emission Vehicles, WMATA
- Raymond Mui – Chief Infrastructure and Development Officer, City of Alexandria DASH
- Thomas Reynolds – Maintenance Section Chief, Fairfax County Department of Transportation

Ms. McGrane began the conversation by providing an overview of the transit systems in Northern Virginia and discussing NVTC's role as a regional ZEB coordinator. She then asked each panelist to briefly discuss their agency's zero-emission fleet and high-level takeaways from operating the vehicles in the region. Ms. Mesrobian discussed WMATA's Board-adopted goals for transitioning to a zero-emission fleet, as well as how the three bus garages currently in design or construction will support a large fleet of battery electric buses (BEBs). WMATA has two BEBs in service, with more on the way. Mr. Mui discussed DASH's role as an early adopter of BEBs and how Alexandria decided to buy as many buses as their current facility could handle without electric infrastructure capacity upgrades. DASH is now developing a dedicated bus charging yard to allow its fleet to grow. Mr. Reynolds described Fairfax Connector's pilot of 12 BEBs and stressed how time and money are the key hurdles to the ZEB transition.

From there, the panelists covered a variety of topics. They discussed misconceptions about ZEBs, as well as considerations for ZEBs from an operations and maintenance perspective, including workforce considerations. They also touched on the role of hydrogen as a zero-emission fuel and how their agencies evaluate new technologies in this constantly evolving industry. Finally, they noted the external risks that might impact transition timelines and what challenges they expect to confront. The panel ended with questions from the audience.

Panel: Bus Priority in Northern Virginia: Opportunities and Challenges

NVTC Senior Program Manager Vikram Sinha moderated a panel on regional bus priority. He was joined by the following panelists:

- Raka Choudhury – Director, Bus Priority, WMATA
- Lee Farmer – Project Development Manager, VHB
- Jason Mumford – VP, Planning Director, STV

Mr. Sinha provided opening remarks that noted the goals of the panel discussion is to look at where the region is today and learn from the past on how to deliver improved bus service for the customer. He noted that bus service will help address climate change, the flexibility of the bus, and how transit agencies are striving to meet mobility needs for all potential riders, including paratransit. He observed that streets that work for transit also work better for everyone and bus priority projects help make the roadway safer for everyone, including pedestrians, and support economic development by increasing retail sales. He stated that the need for partnerships between transit agencies and local, regional and state jurisdictions that control the right of way are essential to the success of bus priority programs as well as the need for key staff from both bus service providers and street designers to work together to improve service. He highlighted regional Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) projects that are planned or operational and then provided the audience with an example of different tools available for BRT projects.

From there, the panelists each gave a brief presentation. Ms. Choudhury provided context on the need for bus priority and the risks for the operator without it, WMATA's bus priority program and bus priority treatments. As part of her presentation, she illustrated how both Washington, DC and Northern Virginia lag behind other national jurisdictions on bus priority projects.

Mr. Mumford discussed how collaboration can lead to regional success using Metroway and the Richmond Highway BRT as examples. He noted the critical role land use planning can play (including for acquiring right-of-way) and communication across jurisdictions.

Mr. Farmer then presented on planning for the Crystal City-Potomac Yard Transitway, specifically noting NEPA (National Environmental Policy Act) strategy, the 2010 TIGER grant, and getting to the opening day in 2014 along with Metroway branding.

There was then robust conversations around these four questions:

- 1) From the bus operator perspective, what are the challenges to improving bus service?
- 2) How do you build coordination and trust across different organizations? What should one do or not do?
- 3) Bus riders can have a difficult time advocating for better service. How do we ensure the discussion around improving bus service includes the customer's voice?
- 4) Last week, we were reminded that our work is a part of the political landscape (example: cancellation of the congestion pricing program in New York City). Do you have any suggestions or insights on how to keep momentum with policymakers?

The panel then took questions from the audience. NVTC Commissioner Dalia Palchik asked about working with VDOT as the owner of right-of-way and the panelists stressed the need for early conversations to ensure success. A representative from the Coalition for Smarter Growth asked a similar question around roadway widening and lane widths.

Keynote: Stuff They Didn't Teach in Planning School: Opportunities for Transit Excellence in a Post-Pandemic World

Dr. Bob Schneider, Executive Director of the Potomac and Rappahannock Transportation Commission/OmniRide, gave the keynote address. He began by outlining three big lessons learned: there is no playbook for the events that have shaped the transit industry; relationships matter; and innovation matters, although it usually takes 20 years and transit historically struggles with implementing innovations. He detailed events that reshaped the way transit functions and how the industry has pivoted to meet unforeseen challenges, including the terrorist attacks of September 11 (2001), Hurricane Katrina (2005) and the COVID-19 pandemic (beginning in 2020). Dr. Schneider asked the audience, what are we doing today, as experts in the industry, to be ready for the next big crisis? Being ready for whatever comes, Dr. Schneider stated, is an opportunity for excellence.

Dr. Schneider reiterated that in the transit industry, relationships matter. Building relationships on trust, ethics and ideas means that together the transit industry can tackle daunting issues as a team. Having organizations that pull everyone in the industry together is another opportunity for transit excellence.

Innovation was the last lesson learned. Dr. Schneider emphasized that thoughtful and well-tested technologies are more impactful over the long-term than rushed innovations that are first to market. Thoughtful technology innovations and thinking about decision-making are more opportunities for excellence.

In closing, Dr. Schneider stated that looking ahead and understanding funding limitations means that it is important to figure out different ways to prepare for the future and that is an opportunity for excellence.

Panel: Transit Looking Forward

NVTC Senior Program Manager Xavier Harmony moderated a panel on Transit Looking Forward, reflecting on the past by looking forward to the future of transit in Northern Virginia. Dr. Harmony was joined by the following panelists representing three different perspectives including a transit agency perspective, transit funding and policy perspective, and private consulting perspective.

- Allison Davis, Senior Vice President of Planning and Sustainability, WMATA
- Tiffany Dubinsky, Director of Transit Planning, Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT)
- Lora Byala, President & CEO, Foursquare ITP

Dr. Harmony asked questions that first focused on the past, asking what transit agencies do better today than they did in the past as well as what helped develop transit in the region. The panelists provided a variety of answers including noting the diversity in the transit work force, the ability to collect and use data, as well as the regional payment system, SmarTrip. The questions then pivoted to the future. On a question about telework, the panelists discussed how 80% of trips are not commute focused and there are opportunities to promote transit in a broader, less commute-oriented way. The panel concluded with the panelists' visions for transit in the region. The panel discussed increased transit use and transit options among a variety of other thoughts. Overall, the panel discussed a wide range of topics on how resilient transit in Northern Virginia is, and how the region's transit is both learning from its past while preparing for the future.

Ms. Mattice wrapped up the Summit by thanking the sponsors, speakers and participants for attending. She noted that a recording of the event will be published on NVTC's YouTube account.