Executive Director Newsletter

March 2019

NORTHERN VIRGINIA TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

"You will never see eye to eye if you never meet face to face." Having taken the words of Berkshire Hathaway CEO Warren Buffett to heart, I have embarked on an effort to introduce NVTC to individuals and organizations throughout the region. Instilling in them a sense of a shared mission is, I believe, key to developing successful partnerships, which allow us to reach new markets and gain access to additional resources and information.

My meeting earlier this month with Bob Lazaro, executive director of the Northern Virginia Regional Commission (NVRC), allowed us to identify areas where our interests and activities overlap. Chief among them is NVRC's relationship with the military community in the I-395/I-95 corridor. Over the past few years, NVRC has established commuter-resource information stations at military bases in the region. As we seek to fund new transit options in the corridor through our Commuter Choice program, this new relationship will give us entrée to an important segment of commuters, many of whom drive alone. A recent survey of commuters at Fort Myer-Henderson Hall in Arlington showed that 88 percent are solo drivers.

Recent meetings on Capitol Hill have allowed me to share the impact of our Commuter Choice program with staff in the offices of U.S. Senator Tim Kaine and Representative Gerry Connolly. The meetings gave me insight into their strategy to continue federal funding of Metro, which will soon expire. The partnerships that NVTC has previously developed with business, smart growth, and other transportation groups will serve us and Metro well as we work to ensure the federal government provides its fair share of Metro funding.

Commuter Choice will be the focus of three upcoming presentations. In March I will brief the Northern Virginia members of the Commonwealth Transportation Board on the program's progress. The following month I will speak at the American Public Transportation Association's recently resurrected Transit Tuesday event, which each month brings in an industry leader to discuss specific segments of the mobility landscape. Also in April I will update the Committee for Dulles on the I-66 component of Commuter Choice as well as NVTC's expanded role and responsibilities pertaining to Metro. Several other invitations are pending.

My ability to share NVTC's work with a variety of audiences is due to the addition of talented staff, whose efforts have allowed me to focus on external opportunities. It is my expectation, as we raise NVTC's profile in the region, that the new partnerships we are developing will pay dividends down the road.

Executive Director

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Key Dates

Mar 7	NVTC Monthly Meeting
Mar 13	NVTA Driven by Innovation
Mar 14	WMATA Board Meeting
Mar 20-21	CTB Monthly Meeting
Mar 20	TPB Monthly Meeting
Mar 15	VRE Operations Board Meeting
Mar 28	WMATA Board Meeting
Apr 4	NVTC Monthly Meeting

NVTC Coordinates Planning for Metrorail Station Summer Shutdown

NVTC, in partnership with WMATA, continues to coordinate the region's response to the summer closure of six Metrorail stations south of National Airport. The closures, which run from Memorial Day to Labor Day, are needed to fix crumbling platforms at the outdoor stations on the Blue and Yellow lines.

This crumbling platform at the Braddock Road Metrorail station will be reconstructed this summer along with those at five other stations.

Shutdown Travel Planner to Be Launched

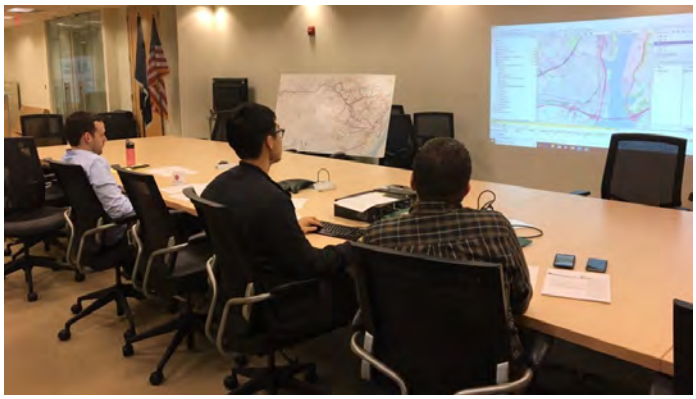
NVTC staff joined dozens of public information officers from across the region in February to learn about WMATA's plans to disseminate information about the shutdown. WMATA has developed an alternative trip planner that will alert riders to the various bus options that can get them to their destination or connect them to Metrorail north of the airport. The transit agency will launch the site and provide other communication materials in early March. NVTC will amplify WMATA's messaging through its website and social media.

Innovative Shutdown Solutions Explored

NVTC staff facilitated a meeting with Arlington, Alexandria, DRPT and WMATA to consider cutting-edge transit signal priority (TSP) software on Metroway to help mitigate impacts of the upcoming shutdown. The software is being used in New York City to increase bus speeds along Fifth Avenue. The optimized signals give buses and pedestrians priority. Also in attendance were John Porcari, a former Deputy Secretary of Transportation in the Obama administration and Maryland Secretary of Transportation, and Mark Joseph, former CEO of Transdev. Both are members of the TSP software developer's advisory board.

NVTC hosts a meeting to explore the use of transit signal prioritization to increase bus speeds during the summer shutdown.

NVTC staff, meanwhile, are using the Transit Boardings Estimation and Simulation Tool (TBEST) to explore transit route scenarios during the shutdown.



NVTC staff analyze potential bus routes for the summer shutdown.

General Assembly Approves Few Transit-Related Bills in 2019

The General Assembly adjourned February 24 after adopting a budget that includes an online sales tax. The budget also contains a provision to study the long-term viability of the motor fuels tax and identify a sustainable funding stream for transportation infrastructure projects. A bill that makes a total of $3 million available to provide supplemental operating funds in fiscal year 2020 to any transit provider incurring a loss in operating funds due to DRPT's new performance-based allocation process awaits the Governor's signature. Also clearing both the House and Senate was a resolution requiring the Commonwealth Transportation Board to study enhanced transit service, including improvements to Virginia Railway Express, in the I-95 corridor between exit 118 and the Springfield interchange.

Commonwealth May Fund Summer Shutdown Mitigation Strategies

The Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT) has received requests from several Northern Virginia jurisdictions and transit providers to fund strategies that would mitigate this summer's closure of six Metrorail stations south of National Airport. The Commonwealth plans to fund selected mitigation strategies at up to 80 percent of the cost associated with the additional service. DRPT will compile the proposals into a cohesive regional strategy, which it will present to the Commonwealth Transportation Board in March, with action on the funding requests in April.

The City of Alexandria, Fairfax County and OmniRide have submitted proposals for supplemental bus service and enhanced transportation demand management and marketing strategies during the shutdown. Alexandria also proposed transportation alternatives, such as enhanced water taxi service and improvements to encourage pedestrian and bicycle travel, and strategies to improve bus access and circulation in the city.

WMATA and VDOT coordinated on a proposal for temporary highway lane modifications to facilitate the operation of the Metrobus shuttles. DRPT's Rail Division coordinated with Amtrak and VRE on a proposal for temporary passenger rail incentives and enhancements.

NVTC has put forward a multi-pronged marketing effort for DRPT funding that would persuade former and potential riders to trade their keys for SmarTrip® cards once platforms have been returned to service. The campaign relies heavily on radio to reach drivers stuck in traffic. Geo-targeted social media ads, website banner ads, and on-screen cinema advertising will reinforce the drive-time messages throughout the day. Messaging will be developed in concert with staff from Alexandria, Arlington, Fairfax, and WMATA (and its consultants).

Commuter Choice Moving Full Steam Ahead

With two interstate corridors now part of the Commuter Choice program, NVTC staff have been working with stakeholders to identify projects that would move more people more efficiently and reliably through both the I-66 (inside the Beltway) and I-395/I-95 corridors.

Technical Review of I-66 Applications

NVTC staff is evaluating the 20 projects submitted for a third round of funding through the I-66 program. Combined, the funding requests total $32 million, though it is anticipated that only $20 million will be available. Project scores will be released prior to April 5, the start of the public comment period. NVTC staff, in consultation with the Program Advisory Committee, will present funding recommendations to the Commission in May. Following the Commission's vote in June, the slate of projects will be forwarded to the CTB for consideration.

Establishing I-395/I-95 Program Parameters

The Joint Commission Working Group met in mid-February to discuss the roll out of Commuter Choice in the I-395/I-95 corridor. As the program in this corridor is jointly administered by NVTC and PRTC, each has appointed three Commissioners to the panel. Representing NVTC are Jeff McKay, Libby Garvey and Elizabeth Bennett-Parker. Ruth Anderson, Frank Principi and Gary Skinner are PRTC's representatives. The working group agreed that for the first round of funding project readiness by toll day one, which could be as early as this October, should be a key consideration along with technical merit and cost effectiveness. Both Commissions will hear more about the proposed evaluation/scoring process and timeline at their March meeting.

NVTC Briefs Prospective I-395/I-95 Applicants

Members of the I-395/I-95 Staff Working Group, which includes NVTC and PRTC jurisdictions and transit service providers, reviewed the proposed Commuter Choice application process. Following the advice of NVTC's new Program Advisory Committee, staff introduced a streamlined, quantitative process that includes points for toll day one readiness and technical merits.

NVTC's director of programs and policy, Allan Fye, briefs jurisdictional staff on the I-395/I-95 Commuter Choice application process.

Jurisdictions Help Envision Bus Rapid Transit along Route 7

NVTC's Dan Goldfarb and staff from four jurisdictions - Arlington and Fairfax counties and the cities of Alexandria and Falls Church - met separately with NVTC, NVTA, VDOT and DRPT staff and consultants in early February to dive into details of the conceptual engineering study for Envision Route 7 bus rapid transit. The study will help refine the project cost, identify areas of concern, develop a potential staging strategy, and provide guidance on preserving the required rights-of-way. Jurisdictional staff worked through issues such as station location and runway operations that could be needed for the bus rapid transit route to guide jurisdictions in their subarea and sector planning. The study will continue through this year.

WMATA Improves Lighting at Three Northern Virginia Stations

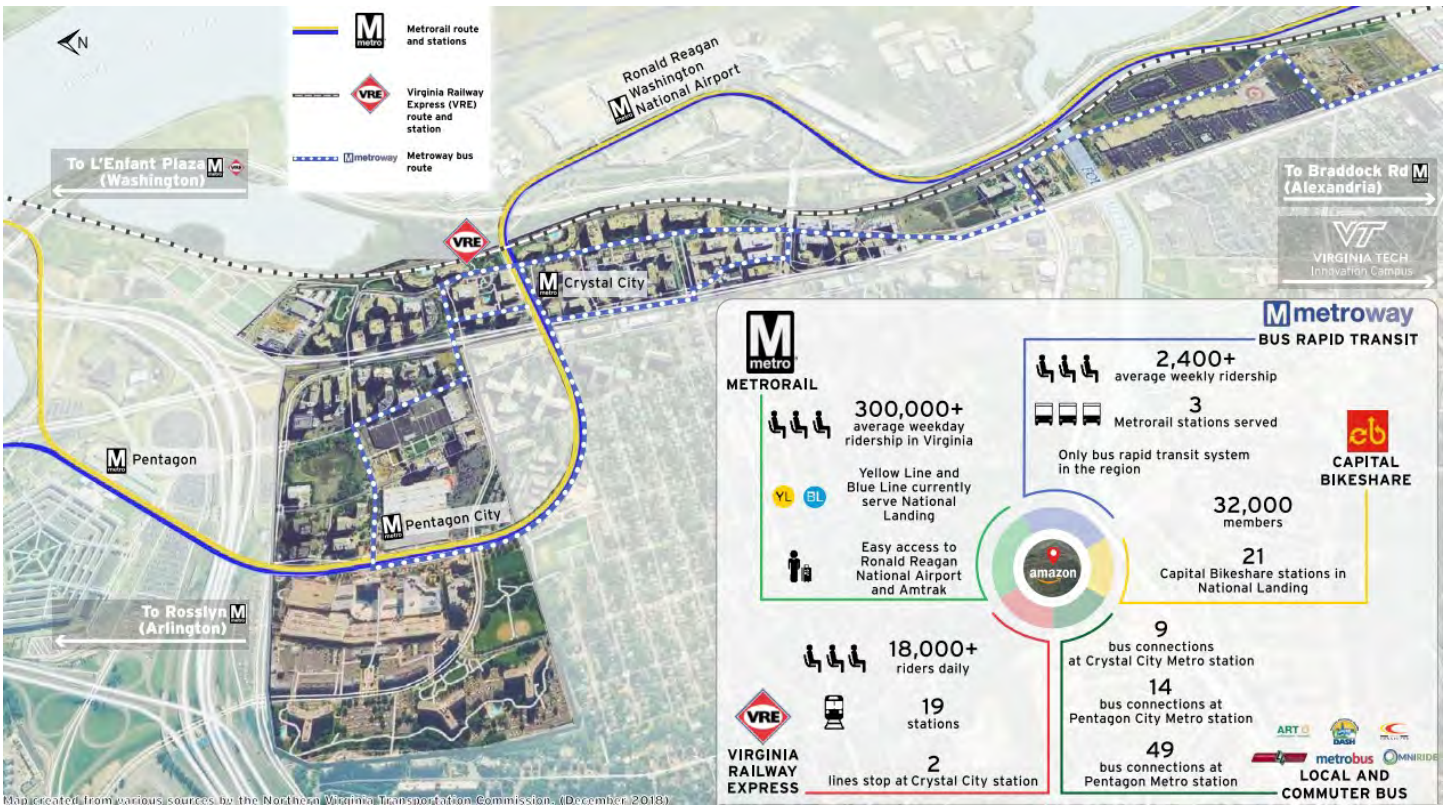
The Pentagon, Crystal City and Pentagon City Metrorail stations are brighter due to new LED track bed lighting. The lighting improvements are part of a $50 million capital investment to enhance visibility and safety while reducing energy use. To date, 15 stations have been completed making them six-times brighter on average. Due to the location of the light fixtures, in a narrow strip between the two tracks, Metro had to close the stations to complete the work. All of Metro's 48 underground stations will be upgraded to LED systems over the next 28 months.

A Regional Discussion with Amazon

NVTC's director of programs and policy, Allan Fye, recently attended a by-invitation-only event focused on Amazon's plans to locate its second headquarters in National Landing. The panel discussion, which was live streamed, featured executives from Amazon, JBG, Arlington Economic Development, Virginia Economic Development Partnership, and GMU's Stephen F. Fuller Institute. Great transit was one of the things that attracted the company to the region, said Amazon's Head of Worldwide Economic Development Holly Sullivan. "In Seattle, over 50 percent of our employees choose another mode of transportation than taking an automobile. We anticipate that to be even higher here. We are a biking company, so we design our parking garages so the autos and the bikes have different entrances," she said.

Amazon Pulls Out of Big Apple but National Landing Still a Go

Amazon's decision to bail on New York City does not change its HQ2 plans for National Landing, according to company and Arlington County officials. There is some speculation that Virginia might end up with more than the 25,000 jobs originally envisioned. That would place a premium on beefing up Northern Virginia's already strong transit network, something the Commonwealth has committed to fund. As depicted in NVTC's overview of National Landing, one of the reasons Amazon selected Northern Virginia as home to its second headquarters is the variety of commuting options available in the region.

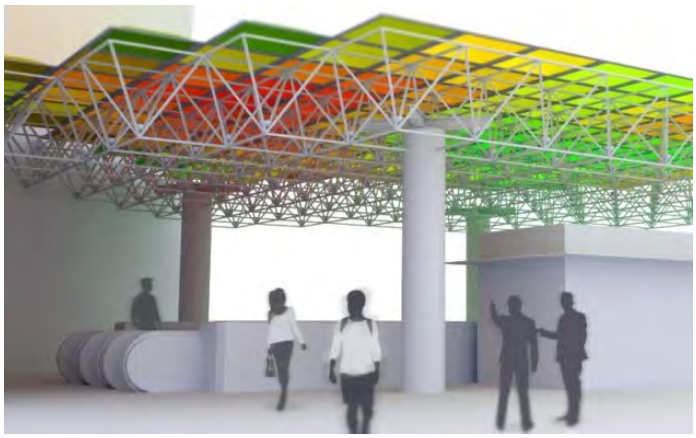


WMATA

WMATA's StationView takes customers on a virtual tour inside Metrorail stations. The new tool, the first of its kind for any U.S. rail provider, allows riders to better navigate the system. StationView, which can be accessed through WMATA's website or Google Maps, to move virtually from the street into the station by riding the escalator or elevator, passing through fare-gates onto the mezzanine and then the platform. Currently available for six stations, StationView should be online for all 91 stations by year's end.

Ballston Business Improvement District

A colorful, motion-activated, LED light display could be coming to the Ballston Metrorail station in 2020. The public art project will be funded by the Ballston BID, which is teaming up with a Dutch firm to design a canopy for the station's entrance. The idea, according to the BID, is to "create a dynamic, ever-changing feature that will turn an ordinary subway entrance into a place of surprise, wonder and delight." Once the BID receives WMATA's approval, it will need about 15 months for design and construction of the art installation.



Transportation Planning Board

Jurisdictions with small planning projects that promote mixed-use, walkable communities and support transportation options can apply for grants from the TPB's Transportation Land-Use Connections Program. The program provides consultant assistance of up to $60,000 for planning projects and $80,000 for conceptual design or preliminary engineering projects. Applications are due by April 2. Since 2007, the TPB has funded nearly 120 TLC projects throughout the region.

Best Workplaces for Commuters

More than 10 percent of this year's 300 Best Workplaces for Commuters (BWC) are in Northern Virginia. The designation means an employer is committed to providing employees with access to progressive commuter programs, like discounted transit passes, bicycle-friendly amenities, and rideshare solutions. Northern Virginia's 39 best workplaces are spread across 11 communities – Alexandria (1), Arlington (9), Ashburn (1), Chantilly (2), Fairfax (4), Herndon (2), McLean (7), Oak Hill (1), Reston (4), Tysons (5) and Vienna (3). To qualify for the national designation, workplaces must submit an online application annually to demonstrate they meet the BWC National Standard of Excellence.

2019 Best Workplaces for Commuters

These employers are changing how America commutes