



Changes to Northern Virginia Transit through the Pandemic

Xavier Harmony
*Senior Program Manager,
Transit Resource Center*

Sophie Spiliotopoulos
Program Analyst

Overview

Transit is an important aspect of Northern Virginia life. 11% of Northern Virginia residents use public transit for commuting, more than double the national average.

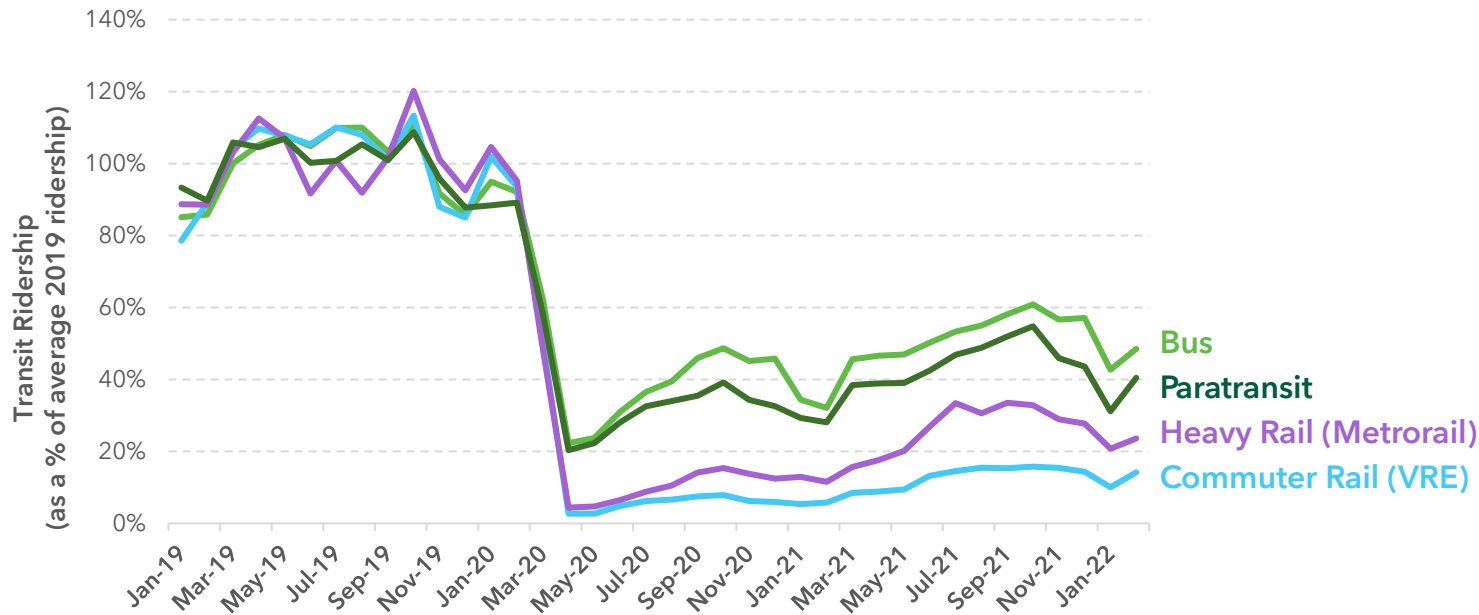
- NVTC recently conducted an analysis of ridership and service trends from 2019 to 2022
- There were four goals of this analysis:
 - a. Provide an overview of the major transit trends in Northern Virginia for the past three years
 - b. Explore how Northern Virginia travel patterns or habits might have changed
 - c. Explore how Northern Virginia transit services have changed
 - d. Summarize the analysis and findings to provide transit takeaways for the region



Ridership Trends

How people travel has changed.

- **Bus** and **Paratransit** have nearly reached **50%** of pre-pandemic levels
- **Heavy Rail** and **Commuter Rail** are below **25%** of pre-pandemic levels
- Pre-pandemic, rail had twice the ridership of bus, today they have nearly an even share of ridership
- Differing recovery rates may reflect which transit populations have more access to alternative travel options, like telework or cars

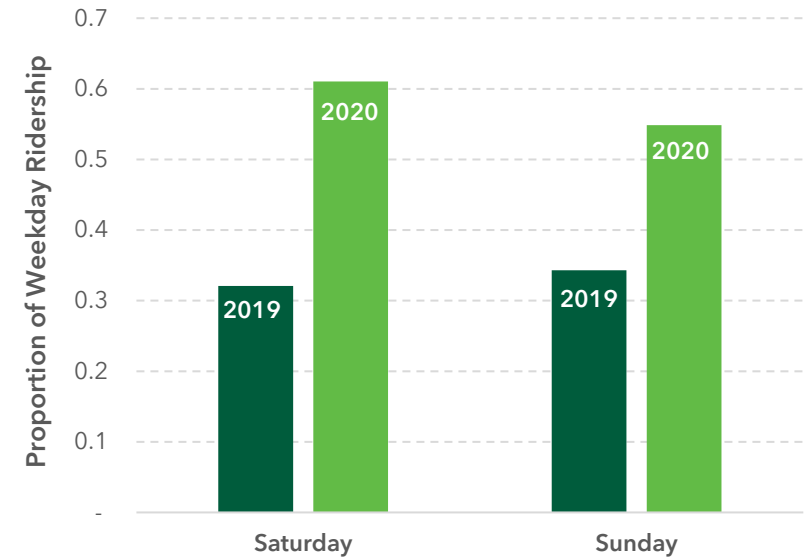


Source: DRPT OLGA data

Riders are moving away from classic weekday travel.

Pre-pandemic, weekend trips were **35%** of weekday trips.

As of December 2020, weekend trips are now **58%** of weekday trips.

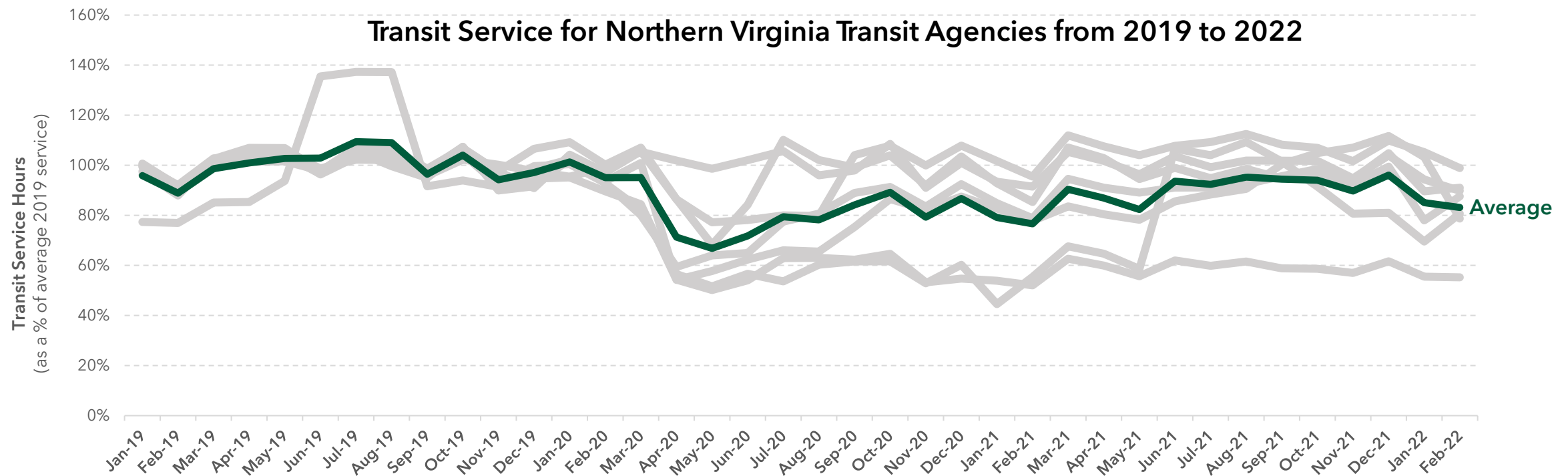


Source: Northern Virginia bus operator data

Service Trends

Transit service in the region still largely reflects the same type of service patterns as pre-pandemic.

- Most transit in Northern Virginia has returned to pre-pandemic service levels
- Service patterns still mostly focus on weekday and peak period travel, though there is variability among specific agencies
- Transit agencies offering commuter-focused services have generally seen the biggest and most prolonged changes to their services



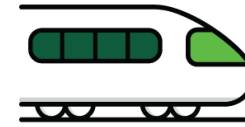
Source: DRPT OLGA data

Key points

What can this analysis tell us?

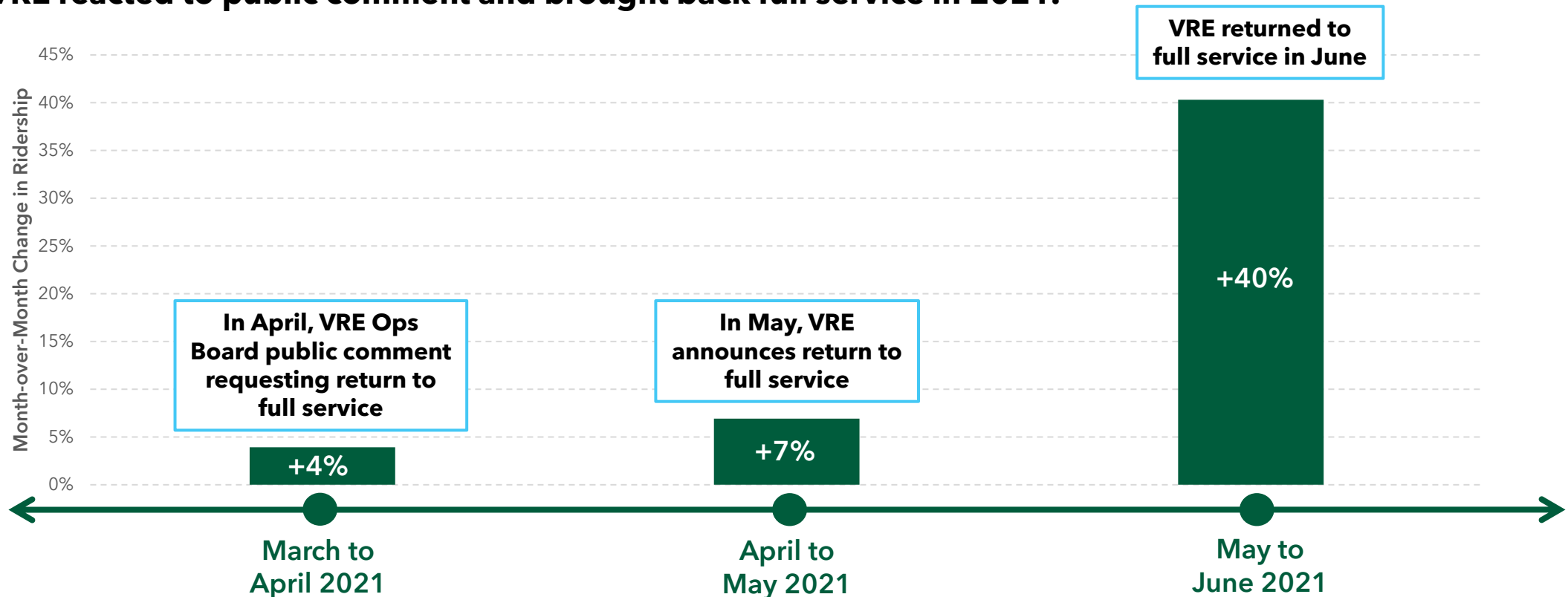
- Returning service has been correlated with ridership recovery
- One size doesn't fit all
- There is an opportunity for the region to re-evaluate what transit ridership looks like today
- There is also an opportunity for the region to redesign transit services for how people use transit today

Change in the Region



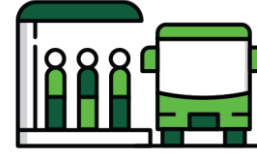
This is a moment to reevaluate and effect real change to better serve Northern Virginia. And not all transit modes are going to recover the same way. VRE and DASH both made changes to their service to meet rider's needs.

VRE reacted to public comment and brought back full service in 2021.



Source: DRPT OLGA data

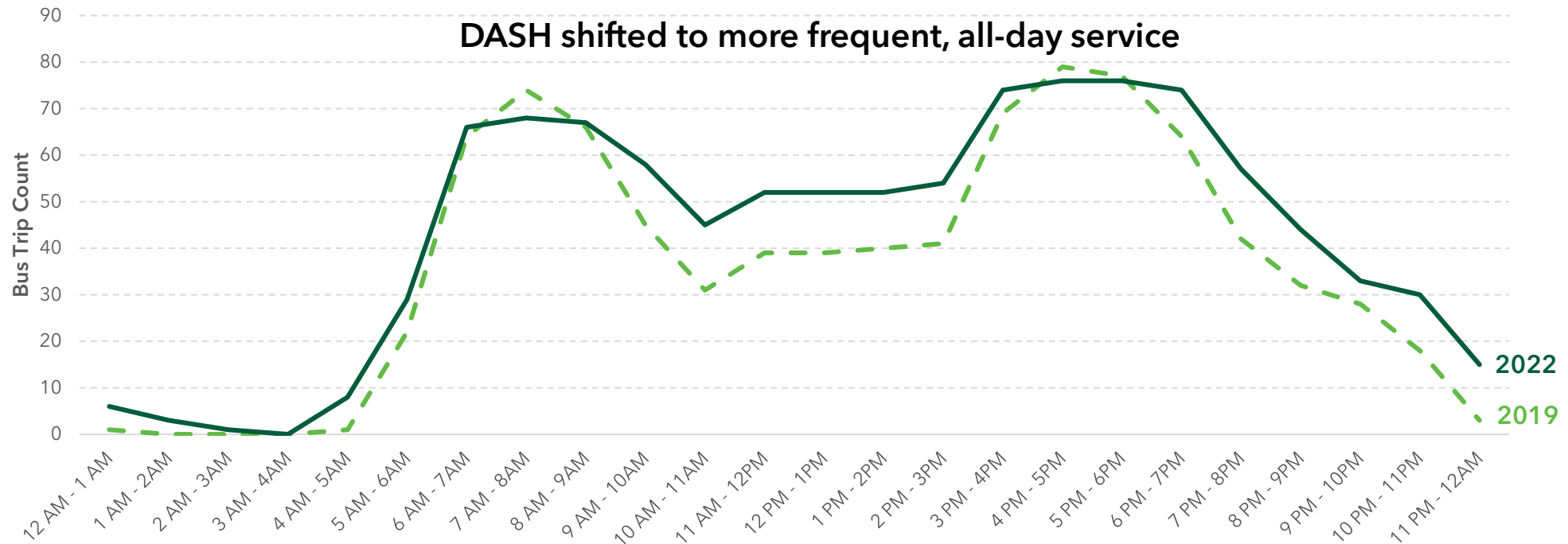
Change in the Region



DASH launched a complete bus network redesign in September 2021.

- Renewed focus on frequent (15-minute or less), all-day service, seven days a week
- Approximately 89% of low-income residents now have access to frequent, all-day transit (vs. 29% before the redesign)*
- Service changes reflect some of the ridership changes we saw in the region

After the redesign and elimination of fares, DASH ridership grew from less than 50% of average pre-pandemic levels, one of the lowest levels in the region, to more than 70% of average pre-pandemic level, one of the highest recovery rates in the region.



Source: DASH GTFS data

*Alexandria Transit Vision Plan <https://www.alexandriava.gov/transportation-planning/program/alexandria-transit-vision-plan>

What do we do with this?

- Some of the negative impacts of COVID to transit will resolve themselves as more employers return to the office
- Bus is a flexible transit mode and can adapt to the changing travel patterns of the region
 - **Regional partners have already begun analyzing and adapting**
 - DASH has completed their redesign
 - Fairfax Connector is in the process of reviewing their bus service
 - WMATA Bus Network Redesign is underway
 - **NVTC's Regional Bus Plan**
 - Purpose is to connecting individual transit agency strategic plans with a regional plan
 - Identify regional transit gaps, potential cross-jurisdictional transit corridors, and opportunities to share infrastructure and resources between agencies
 - **Transit Marketing**
 - NVTC and other regional transit organizations are implementing marketing campaigns to further encourage ridership

Thank You.

Xavier Harmony

*Senior Program Manager,
Northern Virginia Transportation Commission*

xavierharmony@novatransit.org

703.967.8908

Sophie Spiliotopoulos

*Program Analyst,
Northern Virginia Transportation Commission*

sophiespilio@novatransit.org

571.483.3236

