

Most of us probably won't forget 2020, even though we might want to. As we turn the calendar page to another year, it's important to remember the real progress made in the last year. It started with one of the most transformative General Assembly sessions for transportation in a generation. Members passed a transportation omnibus bill aimed at streamlining Virginia's transportation funding allocation model and securing sustainable revenues for local transit operators, Metro and VRE.

Then came the COVID-19 pandemic, which forced changes in the way NVTC works, but it didn't stop us from moving forward on important priorities. We worked with our Northern Virginia jurisdictions to ensure financial relief in their required subsidies to Metro; spearheaded efforts to make sure NVTC and other government bodies could shift to virtual meetings, while ensuring transparency; and adapted our Commuter Choice program to changes in commuting patterns.

There were other bright spots. Along with our partners at PRTC, we hosted our most successful Legislative Briefing to date, featuring both of Virginia's U.S Senators and a record-setting audience. As of this writing, we are poring over Congress' second COVID relief bill to fully understand how it helps Metro and other public transit agencies in our region.

There's also reason for hope in the new year. Waves of COVID vaccinations may finally lead to the reopening of our workplaces, schools and the places we gather, boosting ridership on the trains and buses that literally make Northern Virginia's economy go. At NVTC we constantly have our eye on the future and making Northern Virginia's transportation network robust and reliable for everyone. Despite the hurdles that the pandemic presented, we keep our eyes on those goals. Here's to a brighter future and a happy new year!



*John A. Mathis*  
**Executive Director**

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### Key Dates

- Jan. 15 - VRE Operations Board
- Jan. 18 - Martin Luther King Day
- Jan. 20 - Inauguration Day
- Jan. 21 - NVTC WMATA Committee
- Feb. 4 - Commission meeting
- March 4 - Commission meeting



### Legislative Briefing moves smoothly into virtual era

This year's NVTC-PRTC Legislative Briefing looked a bit different from past years as it moved online for the first time, but the change to a [virtual event](#) brought in Sens. Mark Warner and Tim Kaine and the biggest audience in the event's history. Over 160 people watched the more than two-hour briefing. Both of Virginia's senators discussed efforts at the federal level to provide more emergency relief money for public transit, as well as aid for state and local governments.

Virginia Transportation Secretary Shannon Valentine gave the keynote address, discussing the Commonwealth's efforts to keep projects on track with the goals of keeping people employed and aiding recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. The briefing also included five panelists: Metro GM/CEO Paul Wiedefeld, VRE CEO Rich Dalton, PRTC Executive Director Bob Schneider, NVTA Executive Director Monica Backmon and NVTC Executive Director Kate Mattice. Each talked about the impact of the pandemic on our transit systems or organizations and legislative priorities. You can read more about NVTC's 2021 Legislative Agenda on our website.

If you missed the event, don't worry, you can watch it on [YouTube](#) anytime.



**2020 NVTC-PRTC Legislative Briefing**

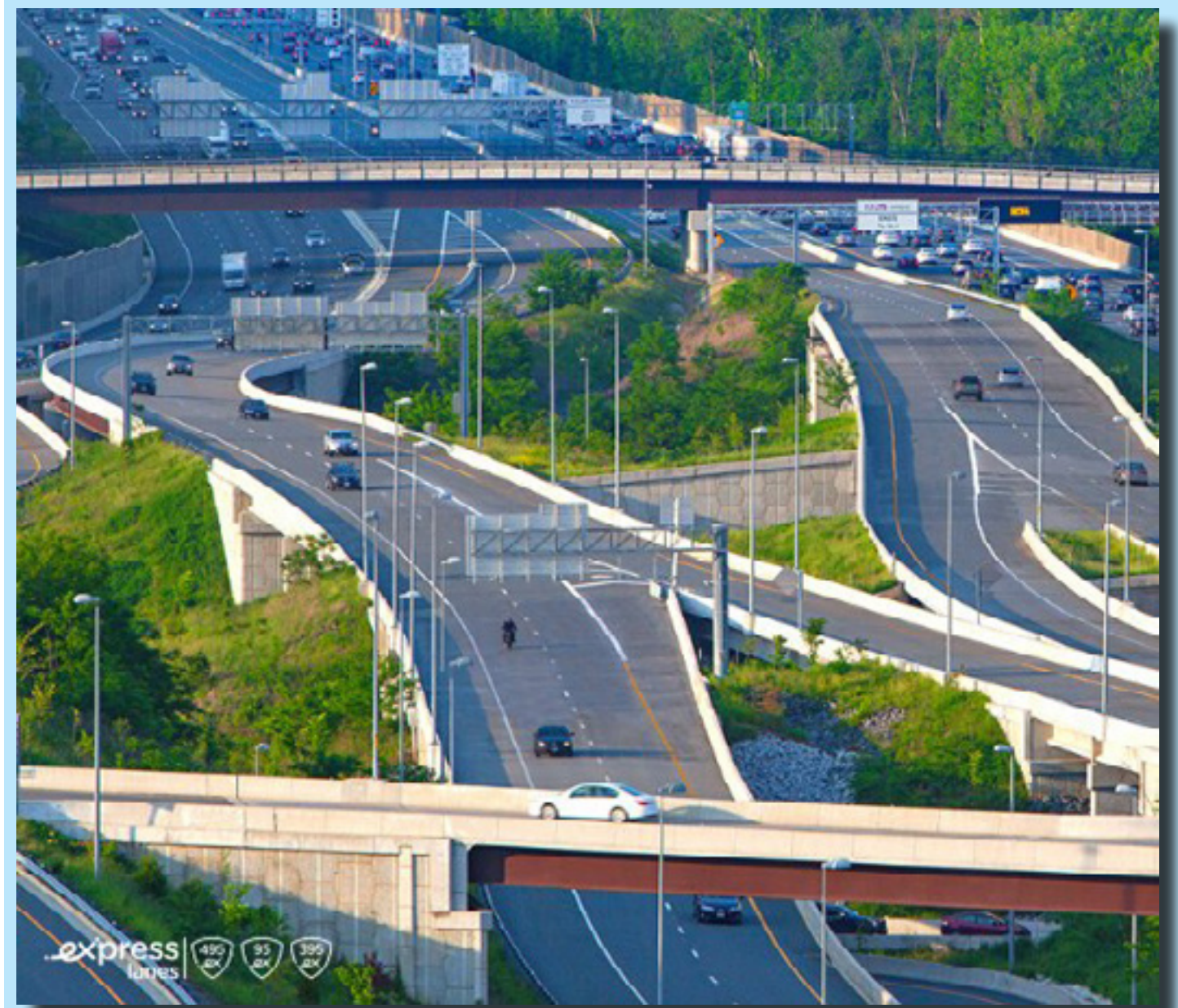
- Welcome by NVTC Chair Katie Cristol  
PRTC Chair Margaret Franklin
- Special Message from Senator Mark Warner
- Keynote Address by Secretary Shannon Valentine
- Perspectives from Regional Transit Operators
  - Paul Wiedefeld, WMATA
  - Rich Dalton, VRE
  - Bob Schneider, PRTC/Omniride
- Special Message from Senator Tim Kaine
- Perspectives from Regional Transportation Organizations
  - Monica Backmon, NVTA
  - Kate Mattice, NVTC
- Closing Remarks

#NoVaTransitBriefing @novatransit @prtctransit

### Commuter Choice I-395/95 call for projects closes this month

The Round Two (FY 2022-FY 2023) [call for projects](#) for Commuter Choice on the I-395/95 Corridor is open through Friday, January 29. Staff's new approach to engaging with prospective applicants - under which applicants provide conceptual, written project ideas so that the Commuter Choice team can provide targeted feedback on the ideas' alignment with program eligibility and goals - has been fruitful and should foster a diverse set of project proposals that align well with program requirements. The set of project applications will likely comprise a mixture of operations and capital projects, with anticipated toll payer benefits to be based on estimated performance in the opening year of the project or service. Given the COVID-19 public health emergency's lasting impacts to travel patterns in the region, anticipated benefits overall may be lower than in prior Commuter Choice funding rounds.

NVTC anticipates full funding of approximately \$30 million for the two-year program based on discussions with Transurban staff. The COVID-19 public health emergency has impacted overall traffic volumes and revenues in the 95 and 395 Express Lanes, where tolls are collected at all times, less than along I-66 Inside the Beltway where toll collection is peak-period, peak-direction.





### NVTC report presses Metro to encourage people to ride Metrorail and Metrobus

The Northern Virginia Transportation Commission (NVTC) [delivered](#) the 2020 *Report on the Performance and Condition of the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA)* to the governor and Virginia General Assembly in December, as required by law.

NVTC continues to press Metro to encourage riders to return to the system, align service to demand and work closely with our Northern Virginia transit operators to improve the efficiency of the bus transit network, all through the lens of the COVID-19 pandemic and the systemic challenges that will linger in the years ahead. The report also presents the last annual set of performance and condition data prior to the stay at home orders issued in the region and travel changes stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The General Assembly requires NVTC to recommend potential strategies to Metro to reduce the growth in operating costs and to improve the efficiency of operations. NVTC's 2020 Annual Report on WMATA includes recommended strategies for Metro to become more financially sustainable and a more effective transit system and mobility provider by rebuilding ridership. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Metro made significant progress in implementing several of NVTC's past recommendations and had seen promising signs that improvements in system reliability were rebuilding customer confidence and that rail and bus ridership were not just stable but increasing.



#### NVTC's 2020 recommendations to Metro

- **Communicate and encourage a safe return to transit** by highlighting and promoting enhanced safety efforts during the COVID-19 pandemic and developing a long-term, post-pandemic marketing and communications strategy to rebuild ridership.
- **Adapt rail service to meet changing demands during the COVID-19 pandemic** and the region's subsequent recovery period while maintaining an equitable, baseline level of service across all Metrorail lines.
- **Leverage regional expertise to improve Northern Virginia's bus network** by working with local and state partners to improve the efficiency of the bus network, support implementation of bus priority projects, improve bus speeds and optimize transit networks.
- **Continue focus on ongoing initiatives to reduce the growth in operating costs** and improve operational efficiencies using NVTC's previously recommended strategies in past annual reports on the performance and condition of WMATA.

Read the full report [here](#).



## 2020 REPORT ON THE Performance & Condition

*of the Washington Metropolitan  
Area Transit Authority*

Submitted to  
the Governor and  
General Assembly  
December 2020





### Initial slate of Commuter Choice on the I-66 Corridor Round Four projects approved

The Commonwealth Transportation Board unanimously approved the \$3.8 million Commuter Choice on the I-66 Corridor Initial (FY 2021) Round Four Program of Projects that the Commission adopted in October. The program includes six low-cost, low-risk projects that will provide robust benefits to I-66 Inside the Beltway toll payers and continuity for commuters - specifically continued operations of three existing OmniRide and Loudoun County Transit Commuter Choice-funded transit services as well as three small capital efforts to be carried out by Arlington County, the City of Fairfax and Fairfax County that will provide long-term benefits. While I-66 Inside the Beltway toll revenues remain well below budgeted levels, NVTC is able to support all but about \$60,000 of the program with available balances from carryover, projects completed under budget and interest earnings. NVTC will soon execute Standard Project Agreements with the five Initial Program funding recipients.

NVTC continues to work closely with Commonwealth partners to monitor trends in I-66 toll revenues. NVTC intends to advance a Supplemental (FY 2022) Round Four Program of Projects next spring that would draw from the five new transit services, new commuter incentives and larger capital efforts that were submitted to the Round Four call for projects and remain in consideration for funding. The Supplemental Program would be determined by the five proposals' application scores, based upon availability of funding and public comment.

### Metro budget public comment period opens soon

Metro will begin the public comment period for its FY 2022 budget January 16. The agency faces an unprecedented revenue shortfall due to the COVID-19 pandemic. When Metro GM/CEO Paul J. Wiedefeld introduced the budget proposal, he noted that the agency faces a nearly \$500 million budget gap. The budget, as presented, assumes no additional federal funding, constrained



jurisdictional subsidies and ridership projected at 34% of normal. The budget proposal closes the gap through significant reductions in Metrorail and Metrobus service.

The proposed budget calls for operating Metrorail from 5 a.m. to 9 p.m. Monday through Friday, with trains arriving every 30 minutes and no weekend service. The Silver Line Phase 2 is budgeted to open during FY 2022, but it would only run from Ashburn to Ballston. Metro would also close the same 19 stations that shuttered during the early months of the pandemic. Metrobus service would preserve the core of the network to support basic travel while operated approximately 45% of pre-pandemic service. The proposal includes retaining five Metrobus lines in Northern Virginia to serve key corridors and essential trips.

The late December Congressional relief bill could mitigate some of the budget challenges, but requires additional analysis. NVTC's WMATA Committee will convene on January 21 and will discuss a draft letter of comments to WMATA on the FY 22 budget. The Commission will take action on the letter at its February meeting.

### NVTC asks Congressional delegation for more transit aid

NVTC sent a [letter](#) to members of the Northern Virginia Congressional delegation asking for \$32 billion dollars in aid for transit agencies nationwide. While this years CARES Act provided a lifeline to Metro, VRE and other agencies, that money is running out. Metro officials regularly note that the agency relies on passenger fare revenue, which remains sharply down from normal levels. Metro Board members, including Virginia appointees Paul Smedberg and Matt Letourneau, are wrestling with a budget gap of nearly \$500 million for FY 2022. The letter also notes the importance of Metro and VRE to the economic health of Northern Virginia.





### Metro releases alternate travel plan for Arlington Cemetery Station, Blue Line closures

Arlington Cemetery Station and the entire Blue Line will shut down in February for the next phase of Metro's Platform Improvement Project.

Metro will offer free shuttle bus service and other travel alternatives. Addison Road on the eastern side of the Blue and Silver Lines will also close from Saturday, February 13 through Sunday, May 23, to allow for construction. The around-the-clock closures allow Metro to minimize service impacts across the regional network and restore normal service faster than would otherwise be possible.

A shuttle bus will operate between Rosslyn, Arlington Cemetery and Pentagon Stations as part of the alternate travel plans. Full service details, shuttle bus information and other travel alternatives are available at [wmata.com/platforms](http://wmata.com/platforms).



To minimize the impact of construction at other stations, Metro is altering rail service patterns during construction February through May. Blue Line trains will not operate. Instead, additional Yellow Line trains will be provided between Franconia-Springfield and Mt. Vernon Square via the Potomac River bridge. Customers who normally take the Blue Line should allow additional travel time or consider bus alternatives.

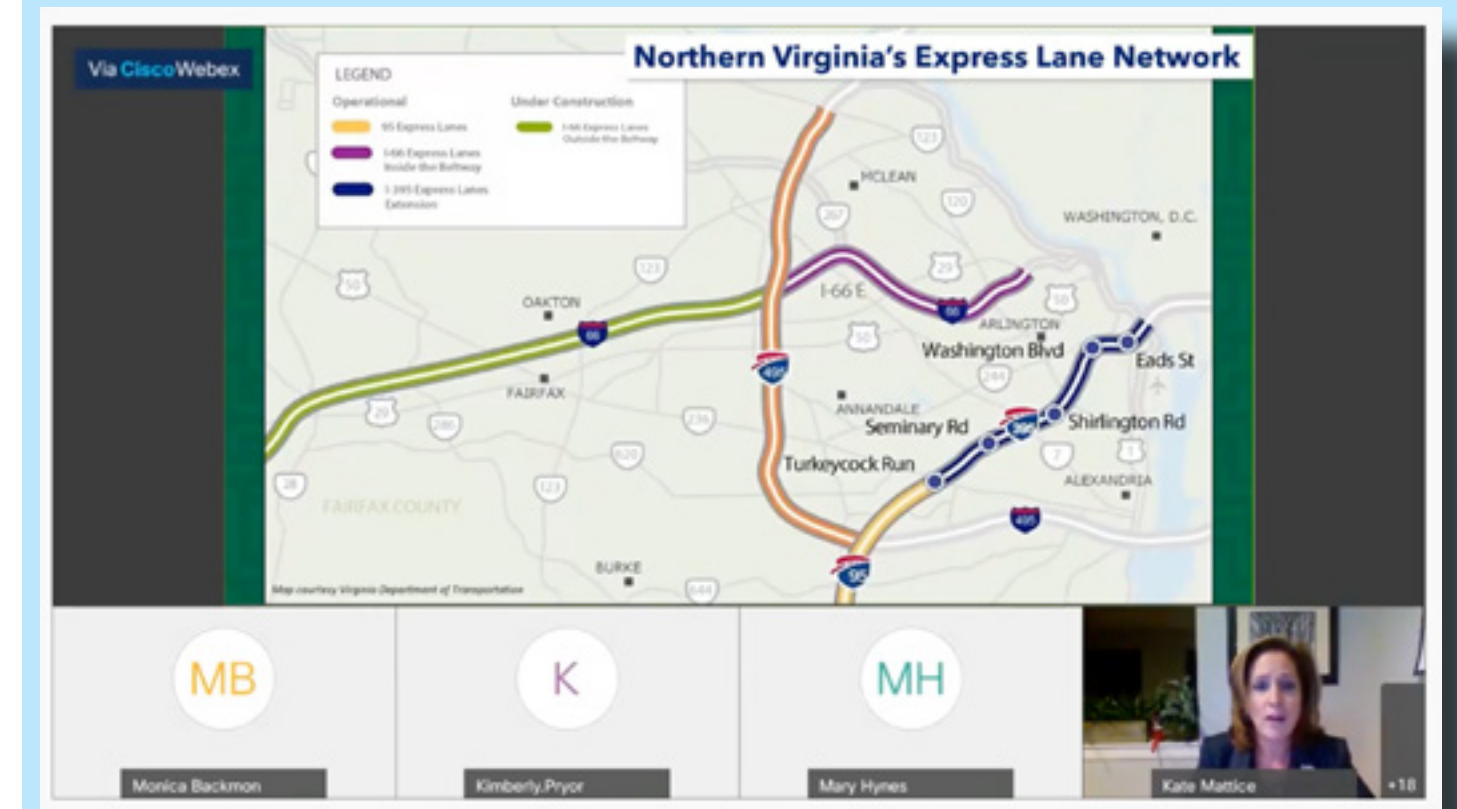
The work is part of Metro's multi-year Platform Improvement Project to reconstruct deteriorating platforms at 20 outdoor stations. The project is more than halfway complete, with platforms at the eleventh station, Reagan National Airport, now fully available for customer use as of December 13. Previously, six stations were completed the Blue and Yellow lines in 2019, and four stations were reconstructed on the Orange Line in 2020.

In addition to free shuttles that will operate between rail stations, Metro, in collaboration with regional officials and transportation agencies, is encouraging customers to consider regular-route bus service offered by Metrobus, Arlington Transit, and Fairfax Connector.

After two years of conducting shutdown calls and coordination, NVTC's Matt Cheng is supporting coordination efforts during the last platform project in Virginia.

### NVTC joins regional agencies for annual public meeting

Executive Director Kate Mattice shared updates on our Commuter Choice program as part of a five-agency public meeting, as required by Virginia law. Nearly a hundred people watched the two-hour [meeting online](#). It included VDOT, DRPT, VRE, NVTA and NVTC. The once-a-year event moved online due to the pandemic and was authorized by a budget amendment signed by Gov. Ralph Northam in November. The law gives members of the public a one-stop place to hear about projects managed by each of the participants. The public also had the opportunity to provide comments by voicemail, web form or live during the meeting.





**Commission approves key VRE resolutions**

In its role as co-owner of Virginia Railway Express (VRE), the Commission approved two key resolutions in December regarding the newly established Virginia Passenger Rail Authority (VPRRA).

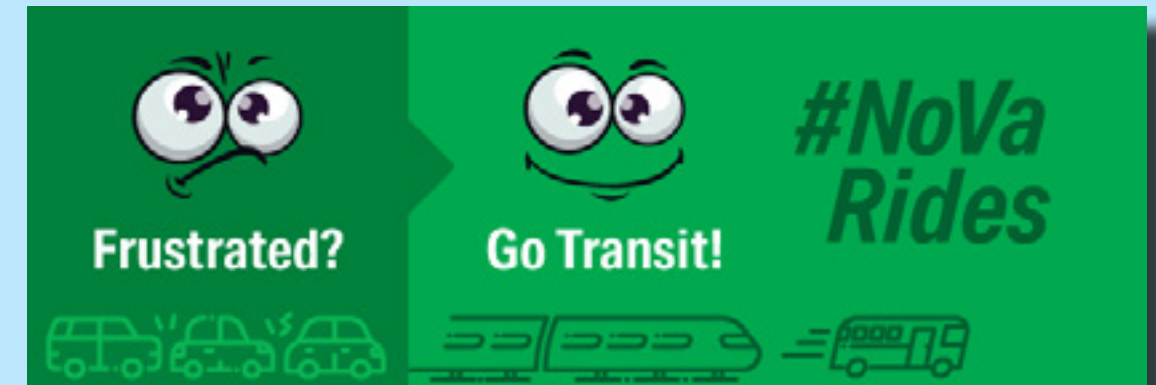
The VPRRA will be responsible for promoting, sustaining, and expanding the availability of passenger and commuter rail service in the Commonwealth. Once fully operational, the new authority will assume all administrative and fiduciary responsibilities for Virginia’s state-supported passenger rail services, including the current six daily roundtrip Amtrak Northeast Regional services originating in Roanoke, Norfolk, Newport News, and Richmond. The VPRRA will also provide funding to Virginia Railway Express (VRE), which will continue to operate commuter rail service in northern Virginia. Moving forward, the VPRRA will also administer all capital expansion projects, infrastructure and land acquisitions related to Gov. Ralph Northam’s \$3.7 billion Transforming Rail in Virginia initiative, which will double Amtrak and VRE service in Virginia over the next decade.

- The Passenger Rail Operations and Access Agreement includes provisions to enable VRE trains to operate on right-of-way acquired by the Commonwealth of Virginia from CSX Transportation (CSXT); to provide the right for VRE to manage VRE station facilities located in the right-of-way; and to increase VRE service once planned improvements within the railroad corridor are completed.
- The Passenger Rail Improvements and Funding Agreement includes provisions for the two Commissions (NVTC and PRTC) to fund a portion of the planned improvements and the purchase of real property for right-of-way acquired by the Commonwealth from CSXT. The Commissions will utilize Commuter Rail Operating and Capital (CROC) funds for both a debt issuance and on a pay-as-you-go (PAYGO) basis as the source of the funding commitment. Once complete, the planned improvements will allow a significant increase in VRE service.



**NVTC-led marketing campaign wins Virginia Transit Association award**

The Virginia Transit Association presented NVTC with the award for Outstanding Marketing Campaign during a virtual ceremony in December. NVTC partnered with local bus and rail systems for the first-ever joint transit marketing campaign in Northern Virginia in 2019. The campaign, known as NoVaRides, launched following the first summer-long shutdown of six Metrorail stations and encouraged commuters to ride public transportation. The NoVaRides campaign overperformed in multiple metrics.



**Regional Rail Vision imagines improved Baltimore - Richmond connections**

The Greater Washington Partnerships released the [Capital Region Rail Vision](#) in December. The Vision presents a 25-year strategy to remove key physical and operating barriers to provide residents a more coordinated, integrated, and competitive rail service. In achieving the Vision, the region’s rail operators, elected officials, unions, employers, and riders will realize increased access to jobs, education and our rich natural and cultural assets.

While the Capital Region’s rail network is superior to many domestic peer regions, the ability to realize its full potential is out of reach because many of our rail assets are far beyond their useful life and the operations are not organized to meet the travel needs of the region’s families and employers. This leaves too many areas of the region underserved and without access to rail service outside of peak weekday commuting periods. The Vision’s key goals and outcomes include:





**Goals**

- Enhance Regional Economic Competitiveness and Collaboration
- Ensure Inclusive Growth
- Expand Access to Moderate and Affordable Housing

**Outcomes**

- Bi-directional run-through service on all MARC & VRE lines
- Expand service to provide all-day service on all MARC & VRE lines; 15-minutes or more frequent peak period weekday service at core stations; 1-hour or less midday and weekend service
- Seamless ridership experience through a unified fare policy and brand
- Superior operational coordination across rail providers

NVTC Executive Director Kate Mattice sits on the advisory committee for the project.