

In this month's newsletter you'll read about the roundtable discussion Sen. Mark Warner convened at NVTC's offices in Arlington. I often share how NVTC serves as an important venue for regional coordination and cooperation; our event with Senator Warner provides a perfect example. Seated (COVID-safely) around the conference table were the leaders of Metro, VRE, regional bodies, Northern Virginia's major airports and Virginia's Department of Transportation. Conversations like this one encourage everyone involved to look at issues from a regional perspective, acknowledging how the work we all do interconnects.

NVTC has been at the heart of regional discussions for over 50 years, from our founding to support Virginia's role in starting Metrorail through the establishment of the Virginia Railway Express and now our Commuter Choice program. Through NVTC's committee structure and strong staff collaboration efforts, we develop a unified approach to Northern Virginia's public transportation policy and funding as well as help our jurisdictions optimize their own system operations. This single voice becomes even more important as Metrorail expands operation into Loudoun County this year, serving all NVTC jurisdictions.

Cooperation among jurisdictions served by Metro has also been evidenced in the shutdown coordination efforts that have been in place since 2018. NVTC staff led meetings regarding the 2019 and 2020 shutdowns of Metrorail stations in Northern Virginia. Those meetings involved officials from Metro, the federal government, local governments and others impacted by the station closures. NVTC staff continue to take part in coordination efforts during the 2021 shutdown that includes the ongoing closure of the Blue Line. The NVTC-led regional marketing campaigns tied to these shutdowns also embody this spirit of working together.

We also continue to make progress on transit efforts that cross jurisdictions, like our Envision Route 7 bus rapid transit which will continue analytical work later this year and NVTC's Regional Fare Collection Program, which works to make paying transit fares easier and faster and promotes unified fare payment systems across multiple agencies. In both of these efforts, NVTC is working make public transit more attractive to riders across the region.

Whether around the large NVTC conference table or on WebEx video calls, NVTC's spirit of cooperation benefits us all, from making it easier to travel around our region to making Northern Virginia an attractive place to conduct business, live and thrive.



John A. Mathis
Executive Director

Inside This Issue

Sen. Mark Warner leads transportation discussion at NVTC	2
NVTC prepares comments on Metro's proposed FY 2022 budget	4
NVTC-led fare payment group discusses regional efforts	4
Commuter Choice on the I-395/95 Corridor program moving ahead	5
Virginia General Assembly, Congress take up NVTC priorities	6
Region's transit agencies amplify mask mandate message	7
Report finds sustained remote work could impact transit revenues	7
VRE CEO, crew shine in Twitter moment	9
Wireless service now active in all Metro tunnels	9
Surveys review Richmond Highway Bus Rapid Transit branding, station design	10
New platform track part of Amtrak Northeast Corridor upgrades	10

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Key Dates

- March 16 - CTB
- March 19 - VRE Operations Board
- March 4 - Commission meeting
- April 1 - Commission meeting
CANCELED
- April 22 - NTVC/PRTC Joint Commission Working Group
- April 22 - Program Advisory Committee

Sen. Mark Warner leads transportation discussion at NVTC

Sen. Mark Warner [convened](#) transportation leaders from across the Commonwealth and Washington region at NVTC's offices to discuss priorities for the next COVID-19 pandemic relief bill and make an announcement about future federal funding for Metro. Executive Director Kate Mattice worked with Sen. Warner's staff to conduct the meeting while limiting the number people in the room and ensuring universal mask-wearing.

During the meeting, Sen. Warner [announced](#) a bill to renew federal funding for Metro at \$150 million a year for ten years.

"It also includes another \$50 million for preventative maintenance, safety and oversight because I think we want you to be successful, but we need to be ever vigilant on these safety issues," said Warner, adding, "We as the federal partners, need not only put up our \$150 million a year but if we're really going to do this preventive maintenance and workforce development, we've got to pony up some more."

Meeting attendees included Metro General Manager Paul J. Wiedefeld, VRE CEO Rich Dalton, Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority President & CEO Jack Potter, and Virginia Secretary of Transportation Shannon Valentine.

"I think it's time to reinvent transit, not just in this region but across the country not just serving peak periods," said Wiedefeld, "it's about, much larger things such as equity. It's about environmental quality. It's about economic development."

Mattice thanked Warner for his support of transit, calling it "remarkable."



Sen. Mark Warner speaks with Kate Mattice, Metro General Manager Paul J. Wiedefeld, VRE CEO Rich Dalton and others at NVTC's offices.



NVTC prepares comments on Metro's proposed FY 2022 budget

NVTC staff are working with Commissioners to develop and refine Commissioner comments on Metro's proposed budget for FY 2022. The proposal includes additional federal aid from the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplement Appropriations Act, but Metro anticipates the money will be exhausted by January 2022, necessitating service cuts and layoffs later in the fiscal year.

Reflecting the Commission's direction at its February meeting and anticipated discussions at its March meeting, NVTC staff are refining comments to submit in March that encourage Metro to:

- Continue to seek additional federal support to avoid layoffs and support our region in recovering from the economic fallout of the pandemic
- Maintain a dependable and sufficient level of service throughout FY 2022 by avoiding significant service reductions in the second half of FY 2022 that would adversely impact essential workers' much-needed access to transit and curtail our region's recovery efforts
- Open Silver Line Phase 2 as soon as possible with service to all stations
- Engage regional employers and educational institutions to develop innovative solutions to increase ridership as the region recovers while implementing strategies to demonstrate that it is safe to return to transit
- Minimize, to the greatest extent possible, shifting operating expenses to the capital program for preventive maintenance to maintain a state of good repair for the capital program and preserve dedicated funding debt capacity.

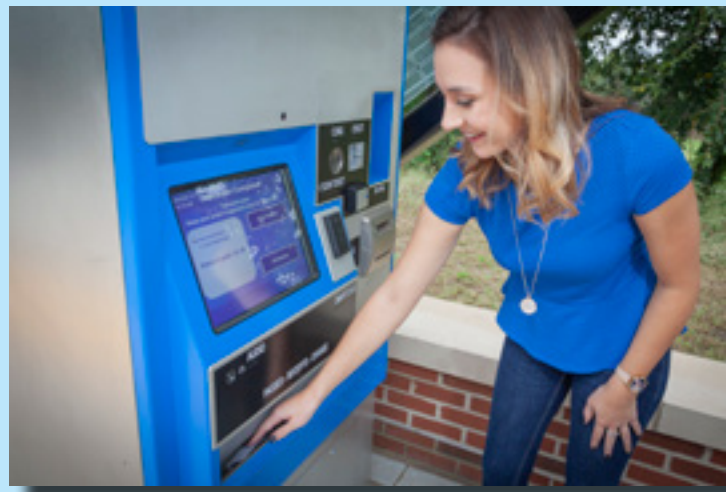
Metro's public comment period on the proposed FY 2022 Budget opened February 20 and closes March 16. Metro has a dedicated [budget website](#) that includes details on the proposal and how to provide feedback to the board.

NVTC-led fare payment group discusses regional efforts

Program Manager Patricia Happ held the first 2021 meeting of the Regional Fare Collection Off Board and All Door Fare Collection Working Group February 18. The group works to exchange information and coordinate future plans between regional partners that are planning or operating off-board fare collection systems and all-door boarding systems. NVTC provided an overview of how the [2021 Northern Virginia Fare Collection Strategic Plan](#), approved in January, will be implemented for the working group.

The Maryland Transit Administration (MTA) presented an overview and status of their Future Fare

System project to make paying for transit easier and more convenient for customers in Baltimore and surrounding areas. The new fare system will make travel on transit more convenient by providing a next-generation, account-based fare collection system where customers can pay with contactless credit cards, mobile phones or cash. Equipment to be procured includes ticket vending machines, mobile fare inspection devices and fare payment validators.



An offboard payment vending machine for Richmond's Pulse (right). Courtesy: GRTC

Commuter Choice on the I-395/95 Corridor Round Two (FY 2022-FY 2023) program moving ahead

NVTC's application period for Commuter Choice on the [I-395/95 Corridor](#) Round Two (FY 2022-FY 2023) funding closed on January 29. Eight applicants submitted 18 applications seeking a total of \$26.2 million from the program. The Commuter Choice team, led by Senior Program Manager Ben Owen, will present the results to the Commissions (NVTC and the Potomac and Rappahannock Transportation Commission, which have joint approval authority over the program) in March after ending the review of the eligibility of each application. The team will score the eligible proposals in March, followed by a fully online public comment period from April 16 to May 17. In April, the Joint Commission Working Group (JCWG) will review the scored projects and recommend a programming approach for both PRTC and NVTC to consider. The two Commissions and the Commonwealth Transportation Board will review the JCWG's recommendations and adopt selected projects this June.

The Commuter Choice team anticipates full funding of approximately \$30 million for the two-year program through the annual transit investment payments to the Commonwealth by Transurban, the concessionaire for the 95 and 395 Express Lanes. The Express Lanes' length and full-time tolling have provided relatively resilient revenues despite decreased peak-period commute traffic due to the continuing COVID-19 public health emergency. Peak period, peak direction express routes have been the focus of previous funding rounds, however, continued diminished demand for new transit services likely contributed to the modest request for Round Two funds. Proposals to this round focused on the continuation of Commuter Choice-supported transit enhancements funded in Round One, significant enhancements to local bus routes in Alexandria and Fairfax County, expansions of park-and-ride capacity in the southern portion of the corridor, and incentives and promotions to increase vanpooling and carpooling in the corridor.



I-395-95 Express Lanes. Courtesy: Transurban.

Virginia General Assembly, Congress take up NVTC priorities

Virginia General Assembly

Landmark legislation to abolish the death penalty, legalize marijuana and address the continued impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Commonwealth were key priorities in both the regular and Special Sessions of the 2021 Virginia General Assembly.

The regular Session began in the same way as last fall's Special Session to observe social distancing with the Senate meeting in the Science Museum and the House convening virtually. One notable procedural change this Session was the limit on the number of bills that legislators could introduce, requiring members to be more selective about their legislative priorities.

Initially, the 2021 Session was scheduled to last 30 days. However, Governor Ralph Northam called the members of the General Assembly into 16-day Special Session on February 10 to complete their work. While transportation-related legislation was not on the top of the list this Session, members did consider bills that reflect NVTC's priorities including bills expanding the eligibility of a members of a public body or joint meeting to convene electronically ([HB 1931](#) and [SB 1271](#)) and a bill directing the Joint Legislative Audit & Review Commission to work with DRPT to complete a study of transit equity and modernization in the Commonwealth ([HJ 542](#)).

The House and Senate offered different [amendments](#) to the Commonwealth's budget during the regular Session. The approved amendments include measures to fund the revenue gap in the Commonwealth's portion of the \$500 million annual commitment to the WMATA Capital program, support transit incentives focused on fare and congestion reduction programs and expand and improve passenger rail in Southwest Virginia. The General Assembly's proposed budget amendments did not include an NVTC-requested budget amendment to allocate \$30 million to support Northern Virginia's FY 2022 operating and capital obligation. However, budget conferees from both the House and Senate were still negotiating their spending priorities and how to apply an additional \$730.2 million (\$410.1 million in FY 2021 and \$320.1 million in FY 2022) to the budget after receiving a favorable revenue forecast.

Congress and Federal Government

Federal legislative activities appear to be starting to move. Sen. Mark Warner announced the [Metro Safety, Accountability and Investment Act of 2021](#) to a group of regional transportation leaders at a meeting at NVTC. The bill, co-sponsored by Tim Kaine (both D-VA) along with Sens. Ben Cardin and Chris Van Hollen of Maryland would provide dedicated state of good repair funding to Metro as well as reforms to the Office of Inspector General.

On the Administration side, USDOT announced its latest INFRA Multimodal [grant application](#) process, which will prioritize projects that address climate change and environmental justice. The INFRA announcement also announces the creation of the "INFRA Extra" Program, which will identify competitive INFRA applicants who do not receive an INFRA award and authorize them to seek a Transportation Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act of 1998 (TIFIA) loan up to 49% of their project cost.

The Federal Transit Administration rescinded Trump administration policy on [Capital Investment Grant](#) (CIG) applications that rewarded greater local financial commitment to a project beyond what is required in statute.

Region's transit agencies amplify mask mandate message

New signs and [social media](#) messages remind passengers that masks are now required on all of the region's trains and buses. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention issued [an order](#) that requires face masks to be worn by all travelers while on public transportation. People must wear masks that completely cover both the mouth and nose while awaiting, boarding, disembarking or traveling on airplanes, ships, ferries, trains, subways, buses, taxis and ride-share vehicles as they are traveling into, within or out of the United States and U.S. territories. They must also wear masks while at transportation hubs, including bus terminals, train and subway stations where people board public transportation in the United States and U.S. territories. As part of his meeting with Metro and VRE leaders at Union Station February 5, Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg expressed his support for mask wearing.



Report finds sustained remote work could impact transit revenues

A [survey](#) from the [Greater Washington Partnership](#) found that employers expected fewer than 30% of their employees to be physically at worksites during the first quarter of this year with a jump to 75% by the fall. This study of the Baltimore-Washington-Richmond corridor sought to understand the impacts of different remote work scenarios, including a moderate and substantial shift to elevated levels of remote work, which NVTC has long supported as a way to reduce the region's traffic congestion. Any shift to long-term remote work may have large implications. Further, many employers are planning to deploy a hybrid strategy regarding remote work post-pandemic. Scenarios including having employees work some days on-site and other days at home or in a non-worksites location.

While remote capable workers may benefit from a more flexible work environment and time saved on their commute, the study found that the benefits will not be felt evenly across the region or its residents. Public transit, smaller businesses in central business districts, and frontline and essential workers - especially minorities and those with lower educational attainment levels - may be severely impacted.

The report, in part, looks at transportation demand and mobility changes, finding:

- Trips taken for non-work purposes represent a large majority of trips taken in the region. These are unlikely to change significantly under a future remote work scenario.
- A shift toward remote work may have a disproportionate impact on some modes - particularly transit - that are used more frequently for commuting than they are for non-commute trips. Without changes to service patterns or farebox revenue strategies, the region's subway, rail and bus systems could see reductions of up to 5% in overall operating revenues.



VRE CEO, crew shine in Twitter moment

Newly-confirmed Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg posed in front of a VRE train at Union Station February 5. The moment went viral on [Twitter](#) after the official Department of Transportation account tweeted "name this band" with the image. To the left of Buttigieg, you can see VRE CEO Rich Dalton. Crew members stand behind both men. Buttigieg was there to discuss legislative priorities with VRE, Amtrak and MARC officials and the Biden administration's support for public transit.



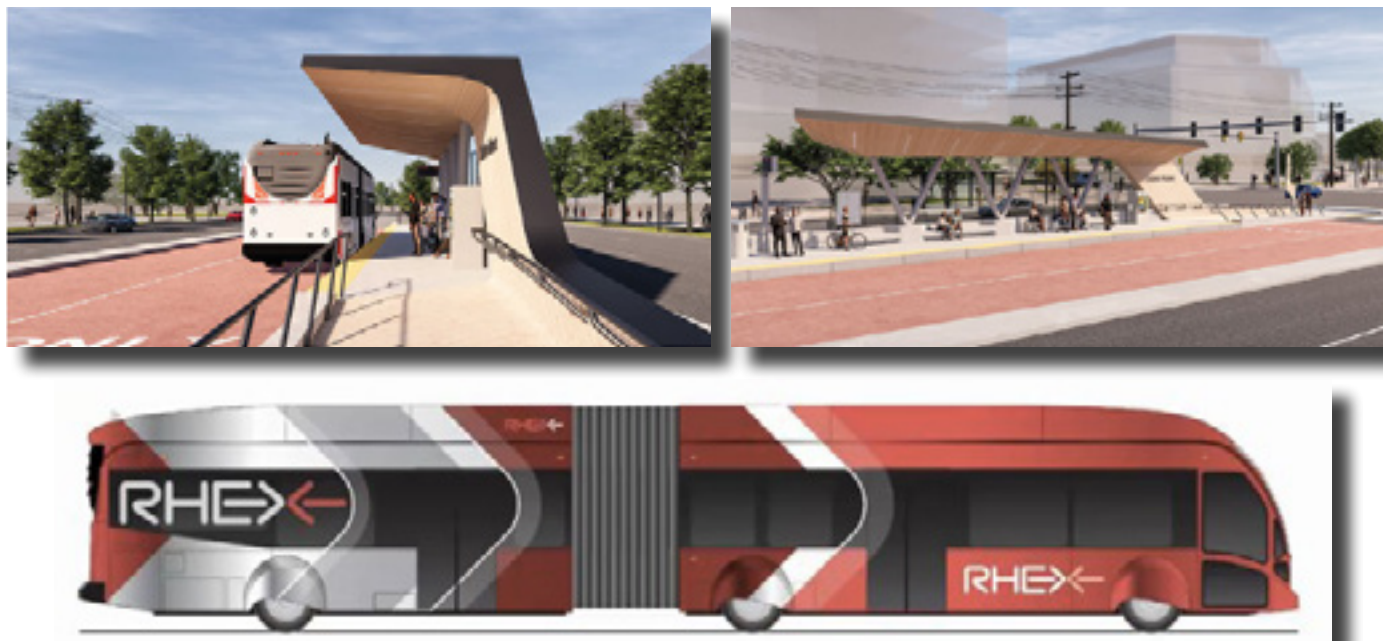
Wireless service now active in all Metro tunnels

That call or text no longer has to wait until you're off Metro. The transit agency [announced](#) that wireless service for AT&T, T-Mobile and Verizon now works in all 100 miles of train tunnels. The latest activation brings the final three segments online between Dupont Circle in Downtown DC and White Flint in Maryland, the Yellow Line from L'Enfant Plaza to the Pentagon and the Silver Line in Tysons Corner.

Metro notes that the agency and the wireless carriers worked closely with the region's Congressional delegation on the project, including Sen. Mark Warner. "This is something we've been working with Metro and the carriers on for years, because it will improve safety for Metro riders and workers," said Sen. Warner, "The federal government and the region have made substantial investments in making this system safer and more reliable, from rebuilding tracks to introducing new rail cars, and now passengers will be able to use their cellphones underground throughout the system."

Surveys review Richmond Highway Bus Rapid Transit branding, station design

The Fairfax County Department of Transportation wrapped up two surveys March 1 that asked people their opinions about potential branding and station designs for the future Bus Rapid Transit System (BRT) that will serve Richmond Highway. The BRT would run in a dedicated transitway along Route 1 from the Huntington Metro Station to Fort Belvoir. FCDOT also held a [virtual meeting](#) to explain the proposed concepts.



Renderings: FCDOT

New platform track part of Amtrak Northeast Corridor upgrades

Amtrak recently solicited [Letters of Interest](#) for construction work associated with building a third platform track at New Carrollton Station. The railroad plans [improvements](#) between Washington and Baltimore aimed at reducing congestion and delays. That includes upgrading its lower speed track to high-speed standards. The New Carrollton Station serves Amtrak and MARC and connects with Metrorail, Metrobus and other regional bus providers.



Photo: Amtrak