



Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic more than a year ago, I've preached the need to keep looking forward and to plan for the time when people return to rails, buses and roads. It's a message heeded by our Commuter Choice team as they solicited and scored a Program of Projects for I-395/95. The Express Lanes have experienced a steady uptick in daily usage, reminding us of the importance of supporting other ways to move through this busy corridor.

Our regional transit partners have also been hard at work to make sure they meet the needs of returning passengers. The Metro Board of Directors recently approved a budget that provides a robust level of service and GM/CEO Paul J. Wiedefeld expects to ask the Board for additional service increases as the year goes on. Later this month, the third and final wave of the Platform Improvement Project impacting Northern Virginia Metrorail stations will wrap up. The multi-year project has improved platform safety and communications and added amenities for riders.

Meanwhile, VRE has experienced a surge in returning riders and is surveying passengers about their commuting plans. The system has been running on a reduced schedule for more than a year, but is considering returning to the full schedule by the end of the month.

We're not out of the pandemic woods, but the preparation done by our staff and at the region's transit agencies helps ease the road (and rails) to recovery.



Katherine A. Mathis
Executive Director

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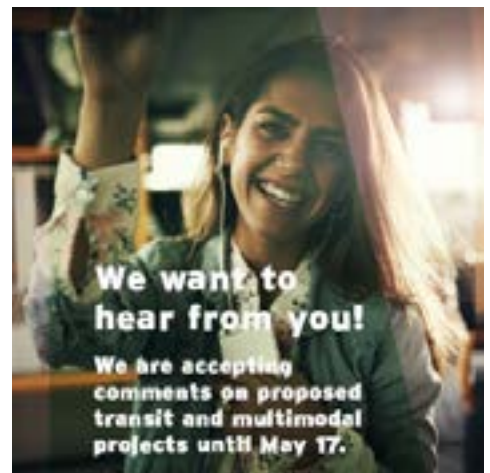
Key Dates

- May 18-19 - Commonwealth Transportation Board
- May 20 - NVTC WMATA Committee
- May 21 - VRE Operations Board
- June 3 - Commission Meeting
- June 25 - VRE Operations Board
- June 22-23 - Commonwealth Transportation Board

Northern Virginia Transportation Commission
2300 Wilson Blvd., Ste. 230
Arlington, VA 22201

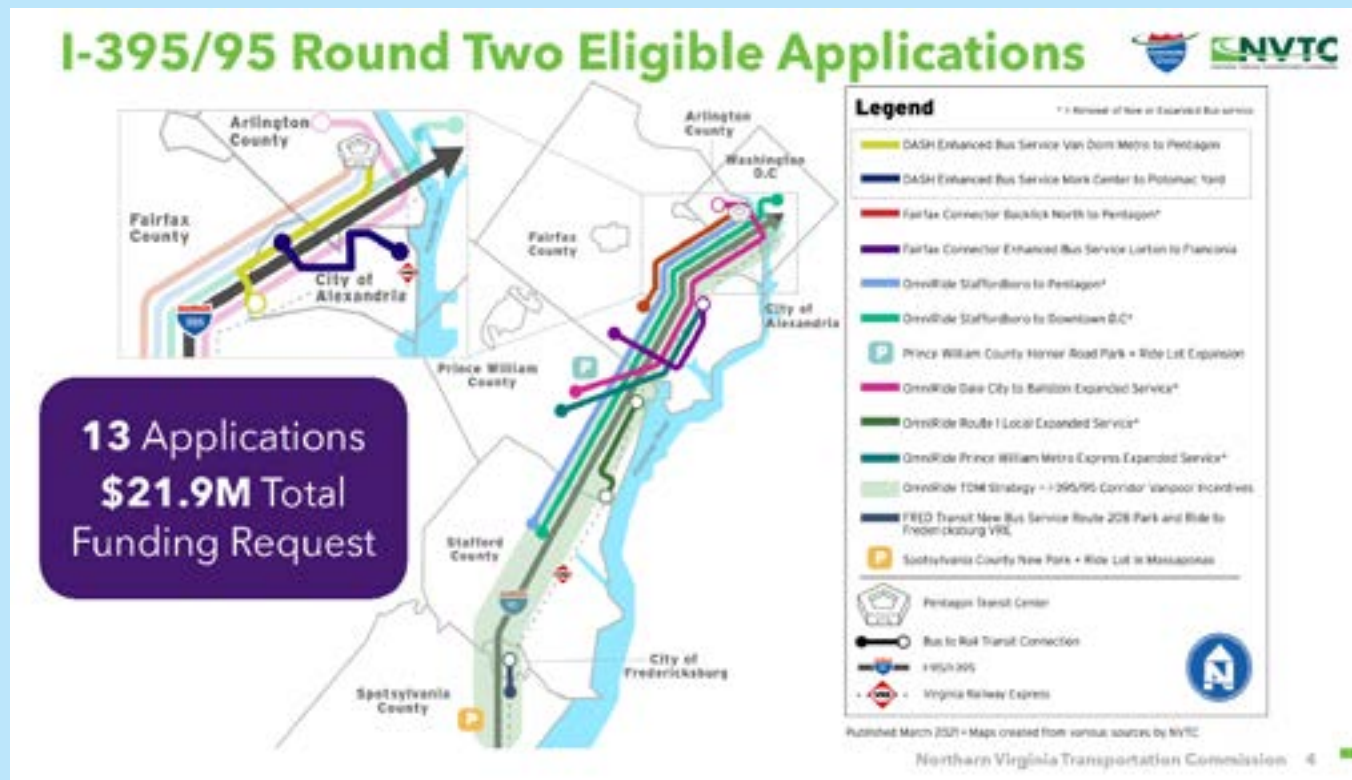


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Committees endorse next Commuter Choice funding steps for the I-395/95 and I-66 corridors

A joint [committee meeting](#) April 22 resulted in endorsements of the Commuter Choice team's recommendations for the next funding steps on both the I-395/95 and I-66 corridors. For the I-395/95 corridor program, the Joint Commission Working Group (JCWG) – which consists of three Commissioners each from NVTC and the Potomac and Rappahannock Transportation Commission (PRTC) – endorsed staff's recommendation to fund all 13 eligible proposals under consideration for Round Two (FY 2022-FY 2023) funding, subject to public comments received. JCWG members agreed that all 13 proposals, which have a total funding request of \$21.9 million, represent compelling efforts to move more people and expand transportation options in the I-395/95 corridor and that all merit funding support from the up to \$30 million expected to be available over the two fiscal year period. Staff will brief the full Commissions and Commonwealth Transportation Board on this approach in May. Approvals of a Round Two program of projects are expected in June.



NVTC held an interactive Virtual Town Hall meeting on our [YouTube](#) channel April 28 for members of the public to learn more about the proposals and Commuter Choice. To help spread the word about the Virtual Town Hall, [Public comment](#) on the 13 proposals is open through Monday, May 17.

The NVTC Program Advisory Committee supported the Commuter Choice team's plan to bring forward a Supplemental (FY 2022) Round Four Program of Projects for the I-66 corridor program for approvals this October, rather than this spring. While no new revenue is available to fund additional projects, staff expect to have at least \$5 million available this fall. Much of the funding will be from the I-66 Outside the Beltway Express Lanes concessionaire's initial payment to the Commonwealth for transit improvements in advance of the Express Lanes' opening next year. Portions of these regular, stipulated

payments are designated for Commuter Choice in the coming years. The [Supplemental Program](#) would be drawn from the total of five new bus services, new commuter incentives, and larger capital proposals submitted to the Round Four (FY 2021-FY 2022) call for projects in January 2020. Consideration for the Supplemental Program will be based on the proposals' technical scores, subject to funding availability and public comment, as previously adopted by the Commission.

Metro Board passes FY 2022 budget



Metro's Board of Directors approved a \$4.7 billion operating and capital budget April 22 for fiscal year 2022 that maintains current service levels and enhancements, while continuing to accelerate Metro's capital investment in safety-critical repairs and service reliability improvements.

Under the \$2.07 billion operating budget, Metro will maintain service at 80-85% percent of pre-pandemic levels to support expected ridership growth as the region resumes events, classroom learning and businesses reopen with increased capacity.

Metro GM/CEO Paul J. Wiedefeld [said](#) the agency is watching ridership demand as well as progress with the COVID-19 vaccines. He expects to return to the Board in May and September with recommendations to expand service.

The operating budget is supported by \$722.9 million in federal relief funding, including \$193.4 million through the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), enacted last month. The funding helped Metro close a budget gap that eliminated the need for drastic bus and rail service cuts, station closures and employee layoffs.

Board Chair Paul Smedberg [noted](#) the importance of the work done by the Congressional delegations in the Washington region, "Without it, we'd be having a very, very different conversation right now, so I really want to applaud our Congressional delegation for their work and continued support and everything they do on our region's behalf as it relates to transit."

The Board also approved a six-year capital funding agreement (CFA) with the jurisdictions that fund Metro: the counties of Arlington, Fairfax and Loudoun and the cities of Alexandria, Falls Church and Fairfax.

Finally, the Board [authorized](#) a public hearing on the construction of a second entrance for the Crystal City Metro station this summer. The Arlington-led project will be built at the corner of 18th Street South and Crystal Drive and enhance access to VRE and Metroway. It's expected to open in fall 2023.



Envision Route 7 to move forward this year

NVTC's work to help plan for a Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system between the Silver Line in Tysons and the Mark Center in Alexandria will move into the next phase in the coming months.

The next step for [Envision Route 7](#) will be the Phase IV Mobility Analysis. Under the leadership of Transit Resource Center Program Manager Dan Goldfarb, staff will evaluate and determine the mobility benefits and impacts resulting from the proposed BRT. The study will be divided into two steps and will build off the work recently completed by [Fairfax County](#) which was related to the alignment in [Tysons](#) and required roadway expansions. NVTC will use the data sets and model files from the Fairfax County work. The Phase IV-1 effort will focus on the segment from Tysons to Seven Corners and it will incorporate the work done in Tysons. The future Phase IV-2 will examine Seven Corners to Alexandria.

The goals for the Envision Route 7 Phase IV Mobility Analysis include:

- To quantify and document the mobility benefits of the BRT project
- To identify project impacts and develop reasonable and feasible mitigation solutions
- Previous study phases found BRT would benefit commuters with key connections to Mark Center, Tysons and Metro and serve other trip purposes including shopping and recreation

NVTC continues to coordinate with Arlington and Fairfax counties and the cities of Alexandria and Falls Church, as well as regional and state agencies. The project Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), comprised of members from the jurisdictions and other agencies, meets regularly. Staff expects to ask the Commission to approve a request for proposals this summer and bring a contractor on board this fall.



A rendering of what a BRT system on Route 7 could look like.

Virginia Passenger Rail Authority names first executive director

A longtime Amtrak executive will lead the Virginia Passenger Rail Authority (VPRA). Gov. Ralph Northam [announced](#) that Donald A. ("DJ") Stadtler, Jr. will serve as executive director of the authority charged with overseeing a \$3.7 billion dollar expansion of passenger rail service in the Commonwealth. Stadtler served as an executive vice president at Amtrak for the past 12 years and has extensive experience in the rail industry. "The Commonwealth welcomes DJ Stadtler to the Virginia Passenger Rail Authority as we transform the future of rail in our Commonwealth," said Governor Northam in a news release. "The work of the VPRA will be critical to expanding service, improving reliability, and enhancing mobility—and ensuring it happens in an equitable, environmentally sustainable way."

The General Assembly established the VPRA last year as part of the [Transforming Rail in Virginia](#) initiative. Key priorities include building a new Long Bridge over the Potomac River between Virginia and the District of Columbia and expanding VRE commuter service on the Fredericksburg line by 60%.



Donald A. ("DJ") Stadtler, Jr. Photo courtesy: Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation.

Metro phases out older SmarTrip Cards

Metro [announced](#) in April that it would phase out SmarTrip cards produced prior to 2012 as it invests in new faregates, fareboxes and fare payment systems. Chips in the older cards are not compatible with new technology. The agency estimates about 400,000 older SmarTrip cards were in use before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Additional information and instructions on how to transfer your balance to a new or existing SmarTrip card can be found at wmata.com/cardreplacement.



Photo by [thisbossi on Flickr](#). Licensed under Creative Commons.

DASH features winners of poetry contest

DASH and Alexandria's Office of the Arts selected the works of eight [poets](#) as part its annual DASHING Words in Motion contest. This year's competition drew 40 submissions. Winning poems are featured on buses in April and May.



USDOT announces \$1 billion in available infrastructure funding



The U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) [announced](#) a Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) to apply for \$1 billion in discretionary grant funding during the current fiscal year. The program first known as TIGER and then BUILD also has a new name: Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE). USDOT will hold a series of webinars on the grant application process, which closes July 12.

“In communities across the country, there is tremendous need for transportation projects that create high-quality jobs, improve safety, protect our environment, and generate equitable economic opportunity for all Americans,” said U.S. Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigieg in a news release.

Since 2009 USDOT has provided \$8.935 billion in grants to projects in all 50 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. [Previously awarded](#) grants went toward The Long Bridge National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) documentation and Metro's Platform Improvement project.

Amtrak: Biden infrastructure plan would provide new and improved service

Amtrak [says](#) President Joe Biden's proposal to provide \$80 billion for the railroad would provide new and improved train service to millions of additional passengers. As the president unveiled his infrastructure plans, Amtrak released a statement saying the proposals would also provide state of good repair and improve trip times for the Northeast Corridor, noting that it has dozens of bridges, stations and tunnels that are beyond their design lives and in need of immediate replacement or rehabilitation. Amtrak's 2035 vision includes new and enhanced service in Virginia.



Map courtesy Amtrak