

Executive Director Newsletter



May
2022

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

NoVaTransit.org
NoVaRides.org



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A Message from Kate Mattice

We want to hear from you! That’s a refrain we repeat often these days as we ask the public for their [feedback](#) on the latest round of proposed projects for I-66 Commuter Choice. The projects have the potential to provide more options for people to ride VRE, Metro or the bus networks that serve Northern Virginia. Public feedback gives us a better sense of which proposals matter most to the people who could benefit from them. This year we’ve made it even easier to participate. We’ve streamlined our survey process, included Spanish-language outreach and are providing online and in-person opportunities to comment.

Those efforts include a [virtual town hall](#), led by Commuter Choice Senior Program Manager Ben Owen and the return of an [open house](#), designed to promote face-to-face interactions with staff who can answer questions and explain the goals of the program.

While Commuter Choice provides NVTC’s marquee opportunity to solicit comments from the public, it’s not the only one. Later this year we expect a new round of public engagement for the [Envision Route 7 Bus Rapid Transit system](#) as the planning process looks at the mobility impacts along the route.

Beyond our tentpole programs, we strive to provide other ways for people to tell us what they think. Since the start of the pandemic two years ago we’ve made it easy for people to let Commissioners know what they think of our work by providing online comment forms prior to Commission and committee meetings. We know that the people who live in Northern Virginia are invested in their communities and want to have a voice in how they grow and develop. That’s why we say, we want to hear from you!

Executive Director

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Save the Date

May 17 – 18
Commonwealth Transportation Board

May 20
Virginia Railway Express Operations Board

May 23
Virginia Passenger Rail Authority Board

May 25
NVTC Legislative and Policy Committee

June 1-2
Virginia Transit Association Conference

June 2
Commission Meeting

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WMATA Committee reviews bus priority, Metro funding in Virginia



NVTC's WMATA Committee [convened](#) to hear about Metro's efforts to make buses faster and more reliable through investments in bus priority and received a briefing from NVTC staff on Metro funding April 21.

Bus priority

Metro's Director of Bus Priority, Raka Choudhury, briefed the committee on the agency's efforts to advance bus priority, which aims to improve bus speeds and reliability, throughout the region and in Virginia. Potential strategies include Transit Signal Priority (TSP), which allows buses to move forward at signalized intersections ahead of other vehicles; queue jumps, which give buses a dedicated travel lane to move around vehicles; and camera enforcement, which helps enforce bus-only road lanes, similar to traffic cameras. The Commission previously [endorsed](#) the vision, goals and strategy of Metro's Bus Transformation Project, which included the advancement of bus priority across the region. Since local and state governments are typically the roadway owners where these improvements take place, advancing bus priority requires extensive coordination between Metro and state and local agencies. NVTC staff will continue to participate in Metro's regional bus priority coordination efforts and look for additional opportunities with our local and state partners.

Metro funding in Virginia

In light of Metro's looming FY 2024 operating budget gap, NVTC staff provided the committee with an overview of Metro's capital and operating budgets, as well as how funding that pays for the upkeep, maintenance and daily operations of Metro flows in Virginia. NVTC staff also provided an update on Metro's FY 2024 operating budget gap, which is anticipated at over \$300 million. The funding gap has been reduced through savings achieved in the Approved FY 2023 budget and an additional \$120 million in additional federal assistance funding that was awarded to Metro in March. As Metro recovers from the pandemic, committee members articulated the need for a new funding model. NVTC staff will work with Committee Chair Walter Alcorn to facilitate future work products and discussions with the committee throughout the year.

The committee also received an update from the Virginia members of the Metro Board, Paul Smedberg and Matt Letourneau. Mr. Letourneau informed the committee that Metro will solicit public input on alternatives presented in the Blue/Orange/Silver Line Capacity and Reliability [Study](#), which the committee was briefed on in October 2021. At the direction of the committee, NVTC staff will prepare a letter of comment for the May Commission meeting that articulates the Commission's priorities as the study advances further.



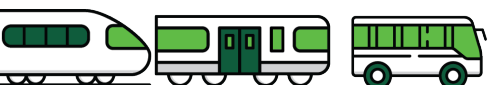
Virginia Senate halts Youngkin gas tax proposal

The General Assembly convened in Special Session in April to finish work on the state budget and outstanding bills. [The House Finance Committee](#) referred Gov. Glenn Youngkin's gas tax proposal to the House Appropriations Committee April 19, which means House Finance demurred on voting on the policy itself and the motion was instead purely procedural. The measure would have suspended the state gas tax for three months, phase it back in by 50% for two months and cap the CPI index at 2% moving forward. The Senate Finance Committee later rejected the measure by a 12-3 vote. The House Finance Committee also rejected a substitute bill, offered by Del. Vivian Watts, which would instead give a rebate of \$50 to Virginia residents with vehicles registered in the Commonwealth.

Meanwhile, Gov. Youngkin signed several other bills, including electronic meetings, transit bus

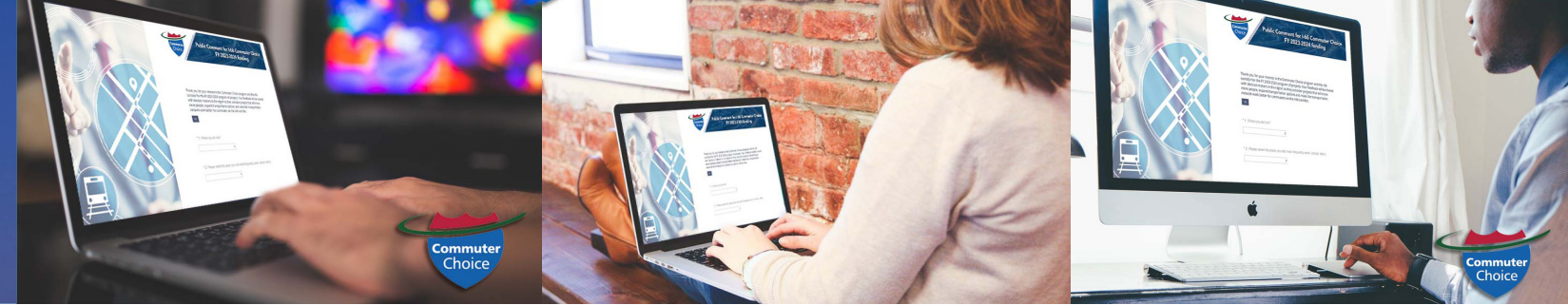
procurement and the Transit Ridership Incentive Program (TRIP). The elimination of the Grocery tax is still being considered as part of the Special Session and as part of the budget negotiations.

On the federal side, NVTC provided information to Rep. Don Beyer to support a FY 2023 Community Project Funding effort for a \$2 million grant to complete planning and environmental analysis for [Envision Route 7](#) Bus Rapid Transit (BRT). Funding for this study will bring the project one step closer to entering the Project Development phase of the Federal Transit Administration's Capital Investment Grants program, as well as make it eligible for Smart Scale, the Northern Virginia Transportation Authority and RAISE capital grant consideration. We appreciate support given thus far on this proposal, in addition to our submission, and we anticipate several letters of endorsement from our jurisdictions and regional stakeholder groups. Information on this request was also shared with Rep. Gerry Connolly, and Sen. Mark Warner.





Program Advisory Committee considers initial I-66 Commuter Choice funding recommendations



NVTC's Program Advisory Committee convened [April 14](#) to begin discussions around forming an I-66 Commuter Choice FY 2023-2024 [Program of Projects](#) and to receive updates on NVTC's Transit Technology Program and Envision Route 7 BRT project. Regarding Commuter Choice, committee members expressed general agreement with staff's recommended draft program of the six top-scoring projects – three transit services, two transit capital improvements and a commuter incentive program that together would support 4,000 weekday trips in the I-66 corridor and, relative to driving alone, reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 84% and save commuters \$2 million a year in fuel costs. The \$12.4 million total funding request for the six projects could be accommodated within the \$14 million conservatively expected to be available. A one-month [public comment](#) period on all nine

eligible proposals opened April 15. All input will be shared with the Commission prior to adoption of a Program of Projects.

The committee also received updates on NVTC's Regional Fare Collection Program and Zero-Emission Bus Program, including highlights from the first Zero-Emission Bus Working Group meeting that took place on March 31 and of regional strategic planning that NVTC is looking to conduct should an FY 2023 DRPT grant application be successful. Staff updated the committee on upcoming Envision Route 7 planning activities as well and noted that the Commission will be asked to approve issuance of a request for proposals in May for a Strategic Implementation Plan that would help to map out key steps and decisions toward project implementation.

Commuter Choice comment period opens with English and Spanish outreach

The public comment period for I-66 Commuter Choice opened April 15 and includes NVTC's first Spanish-language outreach effort. Led by Senior Program Manager Ben Owen and Senior Program Analyst Adam Hager, the public outreach for the FY 2023-24 Program of Projects includes social media graphics in English and Spanish. Marketing and Engagement Manager Monique Blyther also worked with Chair Canek Aguirre to produce videos in [English](#) and [Spanish](#) encouraging people to complete [surveys](#) in [both languages](#).

Ben hosted a virtual town hall April 27, which you can watch on [YouTube](#). The comment period remains open until Monday, May 16.



We want to hear from you!

We're accepting comments on proposed I-66 corridor transportation improvements through May 16, 2022



¡Queremos sus Comentarios!

Estamos aceptando comentarios sobre las mejoras de transporte del corredor propuesto de I-66 hasta el 16 de mayo de 2022.





joins coalition opposing Virginia gas tax suspension

NVTC [sent a letter](#) to members of the General Assembly April 1 on behalf of a unique coalition of chambers of commerce, trade groups, builders, realtors, labor organizations and transportation agencies opposing a [proposed suspension](#) of Virginia’s gasoline tax as well as a proposed cap on future increases, while reminding Gov. Glenn Youngkin and members that the money raised by the gas tax pays for critical transportation priorities.

The letter acknowledges the impacts of the rising cost of living for Virginians, adding, “We support the Commonwealth’s commitment to easing that burden and helping everyday Virginians make ends meet. However, the proposed suspension of the gasoline tax over a period of five months is not an effective way to provide needed relief to Virginia residents. Due to the lack of transparency and market fluctuations of gasoline prices, there is no way to guarantee that gasoline tax savings will be passed on to Virginia consumers.”

The gasoline tax is one of the top three dedicated sources of Virginia transportation funding. This user fee is directly reinvested into maintaining and improving our multimodal transportation system including roadways, bridges, ports, airports, rail, transit, bike, pedestrian and transportation technology infrastructure. Capping annual indexing means the revenue source will fail to keep up with the cost of materials and services supporting maintenance and operations of the system.



SYIP includes increases for Metro, VRE, NoVa transit systems

The Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT) [presented](#) the draft Six Year Improvement Program at the Commonwealth Transportation Board [workshop](#) April 19. The \$870 million FY 2023 Transit Program includes funding for operating and capital assistance for local systems and Metro, as well the transit ridership incentive program, commuter assistance and special programs.

What this means for NVTC is \$43.8 million in operating assistance for its local systems, an increase of 5.1% over the prior year and \$272.8 million in assistance for the jurisdictions’ share of Metro’s capital and operating commitments, a 2.9% increase. The program also funds all of the NVTC local capital requests for state of good repair and minor expansion. No major expansion projects were applied for this fiscal year. NVTC’s Regional Zero-Emission Bus Strategic Plan and the Regional Bus Transit Analysis receive technical assistance under the draft program. For Metro, the program also provides \$50 million to meet the Commonwealth’s share of the required match to federal PRIIA funding.

The draft program includes \$24.5 million in operating assistance for Virginia Railway Express (VRE), an increase of 20% over the prior year. The capital program provides funding for two VRE major expansion projects; Crystal City station improvements and rail car purchase. While both are high cost projects, the state ask was relatively small due to other funding available.



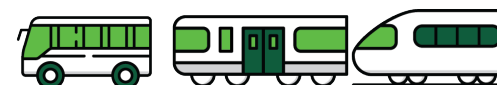
NVTC-led group starts strategizing on zero-emission buses

NVTC hosted the the first Zero-Emission Bus (ZEB) Working Group meeting March 31, led by Patricia Happ, Senior Manager for the [Transit Technology](#) program with Program Analyst Ronnetta Zack-Williams providing valuable assistance as the meeting facilitator. This group was formed to provide a regular forum for regional partner agency staff to discuss and share information on plans, procurement and funding; discuss opportunities to work together; and provide technical expertise from industry experts. In 2021, NVTC held a ZEB symposium and a Commissioner roundtable, which were both well-received and built on partner interest in developing regional capacity in ZEB.

At this meeting we had an engaging discussion with agency staff in the region as well as our partners at the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT) and Metro. The

majority of NVTC partners are in the planning or implementation stages for transitioning to full or partial ZEB fleets. There was a lot of discussion around the need for a regional forum, not only to share information and collaborate in Northern Virginia, but also hear from agencies across the country and support the development of guidelines and standards related to ZEB practices and infrastructure.

We look forward to continuing these discussions as agencies look to build capacity and realize economies of scale through regional ZEB coordination. In addition to this working group, NVTC has applied for a DRPT Technical Assistance grant to build a Northern Virginia Regional Zero-Emission Strategic Plan.



Conference focuses on transit fleet electrification

Senior Transit Technology Program Manager Patricia Happ participated in the Fleet Electrification US [Conference](#) in Washington April 20-21. The event provided an opportunity for thought leaders to explore zero-emission policies and technologies and to discuss strategies with fleet electrification specialists in innovation, funding and technical capacity. Climate change, funding opportunities and sustainability goals are fueling the tremendous scale and speed of electric fleet deployment at the federal, state and local government levels. The conference provided insights on utilizing the momentum and demand for new solutions and tools for charging, grid planning, workforce management and fleet maintenance.

Transit Programs and innovation experts from the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) were

among the presenters, discussing policies, regulations and programs to facilitate nationwide transit electrification. Another highlight was a session on the role of electric utilities in transit electrification, including specialists in vehicle facility electrification from Con Ed and PSEG discussing how transit agencies can partner with electric utilities for efficient and effective implementation. Transit agencies LA Metro, Utah Transit Authority, DDOT and the Central Ohio Transit Authority also presented their transit electrification strategy and fleet transition plans.

The information learned at the conference will assist NVTC's Transit Technology team with advancing the regional Zero-Emission Program and strategic planning process.



Employer outreach training features NoVa transit options

Communications and Public Affairs Manager Matt Friedman joined a panel of experts March 29 at a training hosted by the Metropolitan Washington Council of Government's [Commuter Connections](#) program. Matt joined representatives from Metro, the Maryland Transit Administration and National Capital Regional Transportation Planning Board to provide detailed information on transit and commuting options across the Washington region as part of a workshop for employer outreach workers. Those workers help educate employers about transit options and transit benefits they can offer for employees. Matt discussed the coverage areas and service available from Virginia Railway Express, ART, DASH, City of Fairfax-CUE, Fairfax Connector, Loudoun Transit and OmniRide. The training was timed to coincide with return to work efforts across the region. Matt also talked about the regional marketing campaign that will launch later this spring to encourage riders to come back to transit. The campaign is in partnership with Arlington, Fairfax and Loudoun counties, the cities of Alexandria, Falls Church and Fairfax, as well as VRE and OmniRide. It's made possible by a [grant](#) from the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation.

TSDAC reviews MERIT program changes

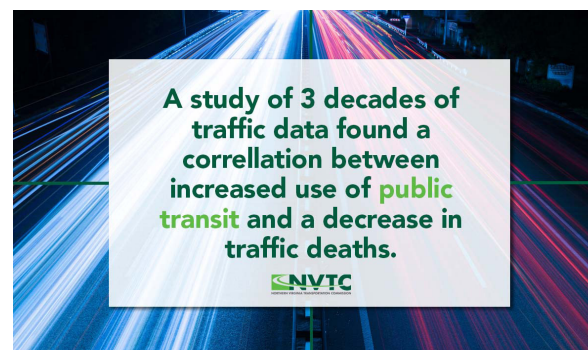
Director of Finance and Administration Scott Kalkwarf and Program Analyst Sophie Spiliotopoulos sat in for Kate Mattice April 8 at a meeting of the Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT) Transit Service Delivery Advisory Committee ([TSDAC](#)). Executive Director Kate serves as representative for the Virginia Transit Association. This month the committee received an overview of the [MERIT](#) Capital Assistance grant program and discussed several proposed policy changes. These monthly meetings will continue all year as we review transit funding allocations for the Commonwealth and provide our recommendations to DRPT. In the next few months, the committee will also cover the FY 2023 Budget and Six-Year Improvement Plan, Transit Strategic Plans, and the MERIT Operating Assistance grant program.



Patricia Happ with Perrin Palistrant (left) and Bob Schneider (right) from OmniRide

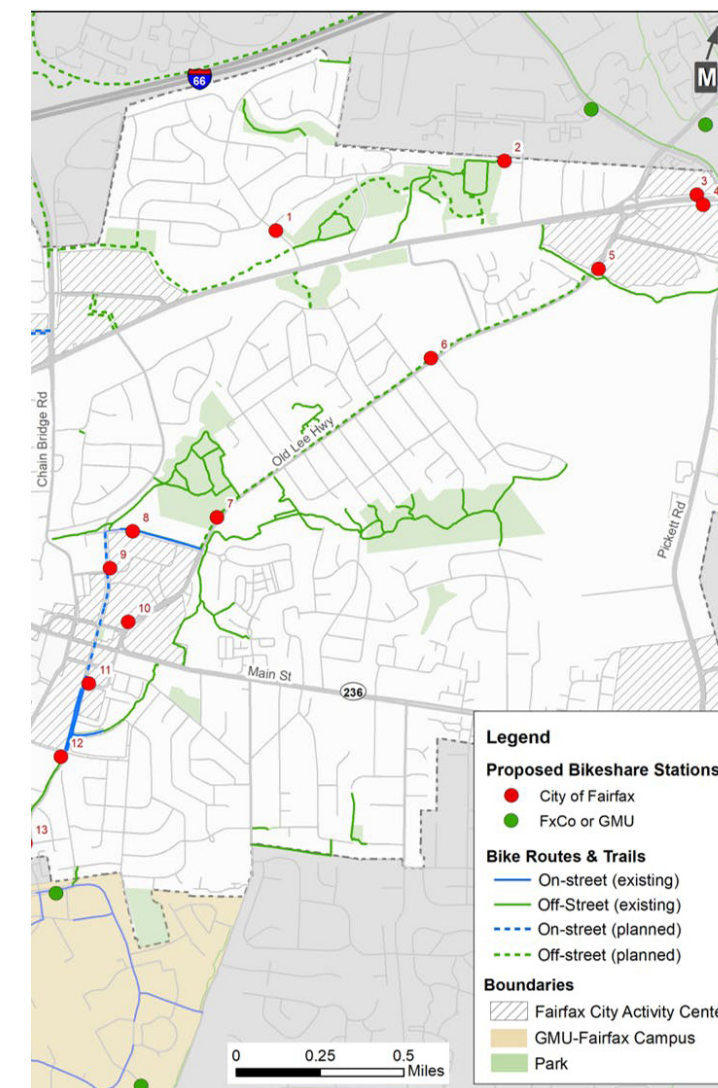
NVTC kicks off #TransitTuesday series

NVTC kicked off a new series of informational social media posts April 5 using the hashtag [#TransitTuesday](#). The inspiration came from WMATA Committee Chair Walter Alcorn who asked staff to research and communicate relevant information about the outstanding safety record for public transportation in America. Program Analyst Ronnetta Zack-Williams identified research documents from the American Public Transportation Association and others and worked with Communications and Public Affairs Manager Matt Friedman and Marketing and Engagement Manager Monique Blyther to write and create graphics to be posted on NVTC's [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#) and [LinkedIn](#) accounts. New posts will go live each Tuesday. In addition to safety messages, future posts will highlight transit providers serving Northern Virginia and the environmental benefits of riding transit.



City of Fairfax opens bikeshare location survey

NVTC's Commuter Choice program will fund four of 13 planned [Capital Bikeshare](#) stations in the City of Fairfax and city planners are asking for [public input](#) on the locations of those stations. The Commuter Choice-funded stations will be located within a two-mile "bike shed" of the Vienna Metrorail station. The stations will help residents and visitors connect to Metrorail, commuter buses and regional trails and add to the extensive Capital Bikeshare network. In addition to the stations planned in Fairfax City, stations are proposed in Fairfax County near the Vienna Metro station and on GMU's Fairfax campus. The city expects to announce final station locations this June and installation and system launch is expected in mid-2023.



USDOT compiles list of Bipartisan Infrastructure Law opportunities

The U.S. Department of Transportation recently published [a list](#) of upcoming Notice of Funding Opportunity Announcements tied to the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law enacted last year. The first opportunity covers the [Transit Oriented Development \(TOD\)](#) planning program, that provides funding for efforts associated with an eligible transit project for which the project sponsor will seek funding through FTA's Capital Investment Grants Program. Other programs that may be of particular note in Northern Virginia include the [Consolidated Rail Infrastructure & Safety Improvements](#) and the [All Stations Accessibility Program](#).

White House Infrastructure Implementation Coordinator Mitch Landrieu notes, "The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law is historic in its size largest ever investments in broadband, rail and transit, clean energy, and water, just to name a few the as well as the breadth of programs and sectors included in the law."

In addition, Executive Director Kate Mattice has been working with members of Virginia's Congressional delegation and our location jurisdictions to identify other opportunities to access federal funding for transportation and transit improvements.



NVTC helps region prepare for Yellow/Blue Line Construction

Regional coordination efforts are underway ahead of two major Metrorail [construction projects](#) scheduled for later this year. As part of its capital program project schedule for 2022, Metro is preparing for the Yellow Line Tunnel/Bridge Rehabilitation and integration of the new Potomac Yard Station, which will begin concurrently on September 10, 2022. The Yellow Line Bridge/Tunnel rehabilitation will require a closure between the Pentagon and L'Enfant Plaza stations for seven to eight months. The steel-lined tunnel near L'Enfant Plaza are in need of repair in order to prevent water intrusion and strengthen the tunnel's lining, while the bridge rehabilitation will require the removal and rewiring of essential communication cables. The Potomac Yard construction will require a shutdown of rail service south of the airport in order to integrate the new station into the existing Metrorail system. That work is set to take over six weeks, ending on October 22, 2022.

NVTC, is supporting Metro in coordinating travel alternatives and public communication and outreach efforts. The stakeholder group held a kickoff meeting on March 29, which included representatives from Northern Virginia as well as the District. The group, which includes NVTC Program Analyst Ronnetta Zack-Williams, will meet monthly to coordinate on mitigation efforts, report progress on planning and ensure coordination and information sharing on major construction projects like the current construction at the Pentagon. This coordination work builds on previous efforts that started with the 2019 Platform Improvement Project.

In addition, two additional groups have been formed for the fall 2022 work: (1) the bus planning group to focus on the bus shuttle and services plan and (2) the Public Information Officer (PIO) group to focus on communications to the general public on the alternative routes. Both of these groups will support and inform the stakeholder group coordinated by Metro and NVTC.





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