

When we look back at 2020, we'll remember it as the year of the COVID-19 pandemic. While the coronavirus has dominated headlines and upended normal life on many levels, rest assured that important work to improve transit continues to roll on.

In this month's newsletter we highlight DASH's new electric buses and an automated shuttle carrying passengers between the Dunn Loring Metro Station and the Mosaic District in Fairfax County. These are exciting projects but represent just the tip of the iceberg of transportation innovation. Metro rolled out the SmarTrip app on iPhones in September and will soon introduce SmarTrip mobile on Android devices. The mobile rollout is the biggest thing to happen to SmarTrip since its introduction in 1999. VRE will launch its updated app soon, which will eventually include information like station parking availability and Amtrak arrival times.

Fare payments will get easier in other ways. Metro is beginning the process of acquiring new farebox technology that will include the ability pay for fares at the rear doors of buses—a way to get buses moving more quickly. Speaking of making buses faster, our region is also working on transit signal priority, technology that gives buses priority in passing through intersections.

In the coming years we'll see more Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) systems in Northern Virginia. These systems will include the ability to pay your fare before boarding and dedicated travel lanes, both tools to speed up buses. Other technologies improve the experience of riding transit. Ten NoVA Metrorail stations that were rebuilt over the last two years include upgrades like charging outlets on the platforms and passenger information displays that are bigger and easier to read.

Transit ridership may be down this year, but it's far from out. New technologies and new routes will improve and expand the transportation network that remains vital to economic strength and quality of life in Northern Virginia.



John A. Mathis
Executive Director

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Key Dates

- Nov. 20 - VRE Operations Board
- Dec. 3. - NVTC Executive Committee
- Dec. 3. - Commission Meeting
- Dec. 7 - NVTC-PRTC Joint Legislative Briefing
- Dec. 18 - VRE Operations Board
- Jan. 7 - NVTC Executive Committee
- Jan. 7 - Commission Meeting

Proposal process opens soon for Commuter Choice on the I-395/95 corridor



The Commuter Choice team kicked off the process to open the next Call for Projects in the I-395/95 corridor in early November with a virtual webinar and invited all eligible applicants - namely NVTC and PRTC member jurisdictions and transit agencies serving these jurisdictions - to participate in early October. Both existing recipients of I-395/95 corridor program funding who would like to continue their ongoing projects and applicants who may want to seek funding for new projects in the FY 2022-2023 period attended the event. We walked applicants through the

application process and timeline by reviewing program eligibility, project scoring, and upcoming steps in the Call for Projects process. Commuter Choice Senior Program Manager Ben Owen briefed the Commonwealth Transportation Board (CTB) on the proposed projects later in the month.

Following the webinar, NVTC will request conceptual summaries of the projects for which applicants may wish to pursue funding. NVTC will then hold one-on-one workshops with interested applicants in mid-November, after the application period is open, to review project ideas, the online application form and needed attachments. NVTC expects the application period to be open from November 9, 2020, until January 29, 2021. Our team is also working with our Commonwealth partners to identify the amount of funding that will likely be available for the FY 2022-2023 period, given COVID-19's impacts to toll-paying traffic in the region. Full funding for the two-year program would mean about \$30 million available.



Photo courtesy expresslanes.com

Board considers revised Metro budget due to pandemic

Metro's Board of Directors are expected to vote on an FY 2021 [budget](#) adjustments that reflect sharply lower fare revenue due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The agency says it faces an immediate FY 2021 budget shortfall of more than \$200 million and notes that September Metrobus and Metrorail ridership was down nearly 80% from a year ago. Metro says federal relief money from the CARES Act will run out by the end of 2020. Metro says it's preparing to resume fare collection on Metrobus and cut costs by limiting the use of contractors, furloughing employees and deferring some capital program expenses. Since the budget shortfall is so large, service cuts and layoffs will need to be in effect starting in January.

Under the proposed budget adjustments, Metrorail would operate less frequently and the system would close at 9 p.m. Sunday through Thursday and 11 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays. Metrobus would run the same level of service that it is currently running now, which represents a reduction and elimination of some service when compared to what was originally planned in the FY 2021 budget.

NVTC will continue to coordinate staff activities with the Virginia members of the WMATA board and relay information to the Commission as it becomes available.



Change in rail ridership average weekday September 2020 vs 2019

Cambio en el número de pasajeros en tren promedio de días entre semana septiembre de 2020 frente a 2019



-95% % difference -67%
% de diferencia



Commonwealth funding for Metro increases

The Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT) [presented](#) the draft FY 2021 Six-Year Improvement Program (SYIP) Tuesday. The draft SYIP utilizes updated state-wide revenue projections from August and includes an additional \$14.6 million (9%) in funding over the FY 2020 level to NVTC for Metro operating and capital needs. Also included is \$50 million to continue the Commonwealth's annual federal Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement (PRIIA) match for Metro and \$154.5 million to meet the Commonwealth's dedicated funding commitment. Other NVTC funding includes a slight increase in operating assistance for NVTC local systems and capital assistance for local prioritized projects which were reevaluated in October for readiness.

General Assembly passes budget that includes transportation funding flexibility

The General Assembly passed a revised 2020 - 2022 [budget](#) which provides flexibility for the Commonwealth Transportation Board (CTB) to redirect project funds to offset lower revenues. This addition to the revised budget would require Secretary of Transportation Shannon Valentine to report any anticipated changes in project funding to the General Assembly and no changes can be made at the same CTB meeting in which they are proposed, which would allow the General Assembly an opportunity to raise concerns. The revised budget would also allow the Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DPRT) to act for the Virginia Passenger Rail Authority (VPRA) for a limited period. Additionally, the revised spending plan gives NVTC and other agencies flexibility to hold a required joint public meeting virtually during a declared public health emergency.

Metro considers updating Metrobus Service Guidelines

The Metro Board of Directors Executive Committee received a briefing on Metro’s Framework for Transit Equity, which is a broader [initiative](#) to advance equitable policies and practices that support Metro’s mission. One area where Metro sees an opportunity to advance its commitment to equitable transportation is through the implementation of elements of the Bus Transformation Project Recommendations. As part of the strategies to reform bus service in the region, Metro staff propose Metrobus Service Guidelines, which were last revised in 2000. Metro staff also seek to use the Metrobus Service Guidelines to provide a framework for how service and budget decisions are made and would formalize Metro’s approach to evaluate equity and quality of Metrobus service in the region. NVTC staff will engage with jurisdictional staff to review the guidelines and provide comments and feedback to Metro and the Virginia members of the Metro Board. Metro staff will return to the Board to seek approval of the guidelines in December.



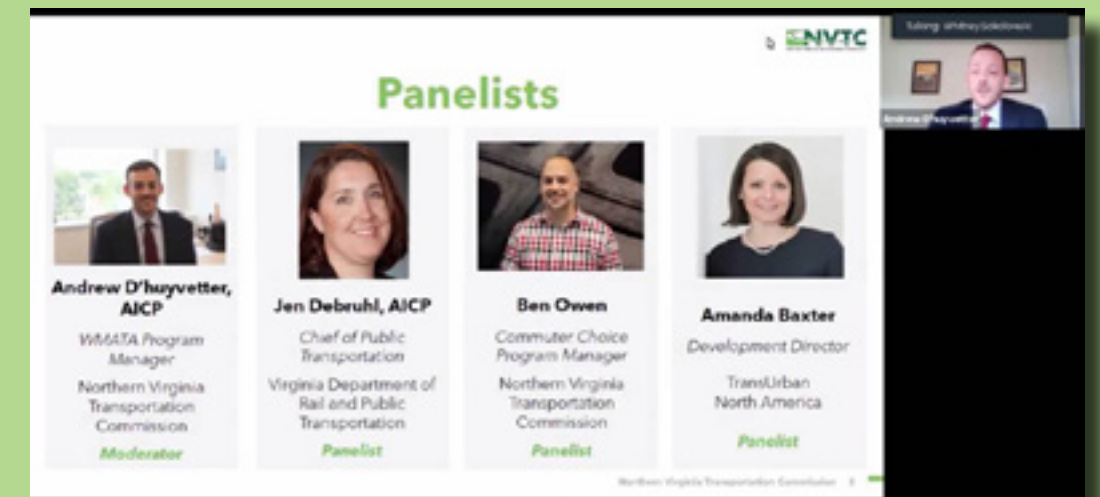
Photo courtesy Metro.

NVTC programs highlighted at statewide conference

A number of NVTC staff members presented at the American Planning Association Virginia Chapter Annual Conference. The four day virtual conference, with the theme “we’ll get you moving,” included discussions of our Commuter Choice and Envision Route 7 programs.

WMATA Program Manager Andrew D’huyvetter moderated a “HOT for Transit” panel which included our Commuter Choice Program Manager Ben Owen, Jennifer DeBruhl, Chief of Public Transportation for the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation and Amanda Baxter of TransUrban. The topics included the Commonwealth’s initiatives to improve transportation options through the expansion of high-occupancy toll (HOT) Express Lanes, focused on how the Commonwealth is ensuring that Express Lanes expansions bolster regional mobility; how NVTC developed Commuter Choice to invest HOT lane revenues in multimodal projects that move more people more efficiently and expand transportation choices for travelers in two major corridors; and how Transurban has worked with the Commonwealth to incorporate a dedicated revenue stream to support transit service along TransUrban-operated facilities.

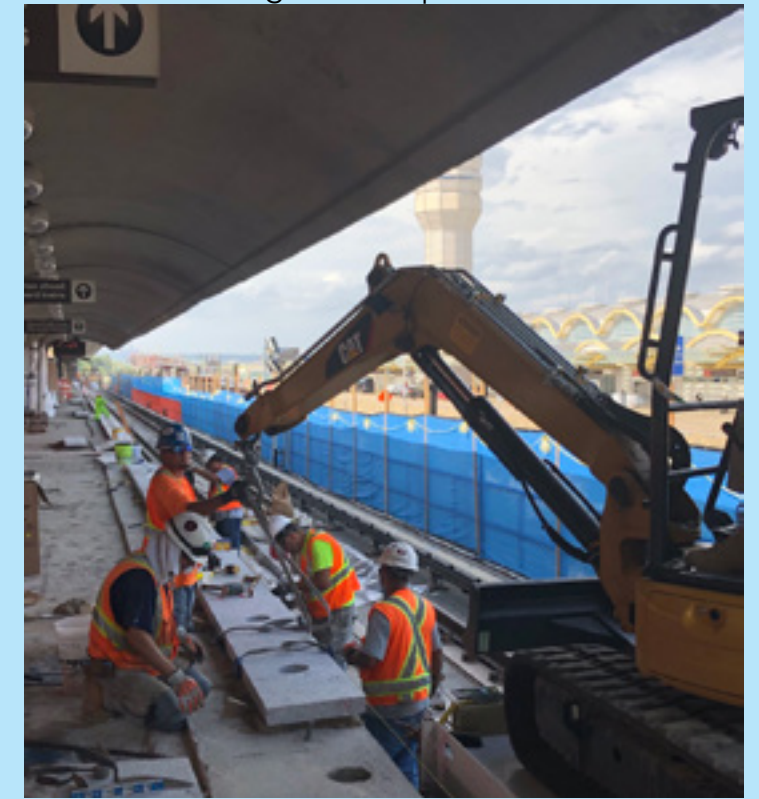
Transit Resource Center Program Manager Dan Goldfarb took part in a session titled, “Three Transformational Bus Priority Projects in the DMV.” He shared details on the Envision Route 7 Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) project, which is planned as a high performing BRT service that connects the Mark Center in Alexandria to Tysons through Bailey’s Crossroads, Seven Corners and Falls Church.



Arlington Cemetery next up for reconstruction

Metro says Reagan National Airport platform work progressing

Metro recently announced the schedule for the next phases of the Platform Improvement Project (PIP). Arlington Cemetery Station will [close](#) from mid-February through May 2021 for platform rebuilding. Metro says Yellow Line trains will service all stations south of Arlington Cemetery. The first two years of the PIP focused on ten Northern Virginia stations on the Blue/Yellow and Orange/Silver lines. Station improvements included slip-resistant tiles on the platforms and in the mezzanine areas; stainless-steel platform shelters with charging outlets/ports; additional Passenger Information Display (PIDS) screens; energy-efficient LED lighting throughout the stations; and improved speakers for clearer public announcements and emergency notifications. In 2021 and 2022, most of the work will be done on Green/Yellow and Orange Line stations in Maryland. NVTC's Matt Cheng will again coordinate shutdown mitigation efforts across regional agencies and jurisdictions, as he did in 2019 and 2020. Meanwhile, Metro says platform reconstruction at Reagan National Airport is well underway and making great progress. The station is one of few in the Metrorail system with three tracks for train movement, allowing Metro to maintain regular service during platform reconstruction with one track taken out of service at a time. Construction recently moved to the second location, the platform closest to the parking garage, which is a significant milestone in the overall progress of the station's reconstruction.



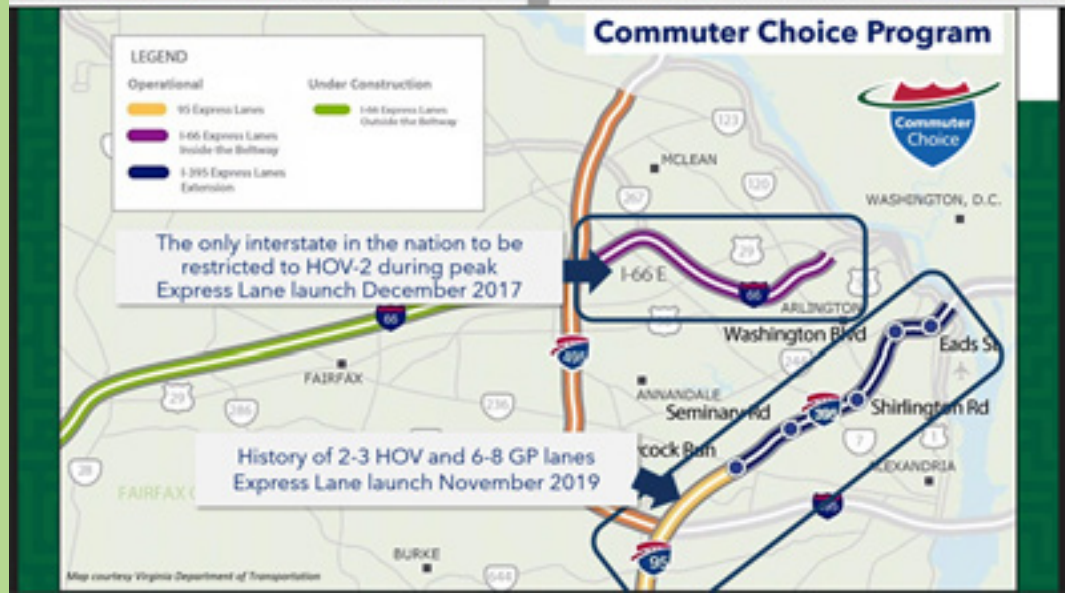
Arlington Cemetery by Ben Schuman. Licensed under Creative Commons.



Reagan National Airport Station. Courtesy Metro.

Commuter Choice lesson for Florida lawmakers

Executive Director Kate Mattice spoke to the Hillsborough Metropolitan Planning Organization Board, in the Tampa Bay region of Florida, as they grapple with whether to support the Florida DOT's proposed toll lanes along their nearby interstates. With concerns over equity of tolled-lanes, as well as the lack of investment in their local transit services, Ms. Mattice shared an overview of the NVTC Commuter Choice program and how the role of transit and multimodal options were integral to the implementation of our region's tolled corridors. The "Managing Lanes for Transportation Efficiency & Fairness" workshop was a part of the MPO Board's extensive examination of the issue as they work to negotiate a balanced approach to address their region's congestion.





NVTC-PRTC Joint Legislative Briefing

Monday, December 7
9 - 11 a.m.
Online Only

RSVP now. [Click here.](#)

Sharon Bulova receives APTA's Distinguished Service Award

NVTC's longest-serving Commissioner formally received the Distinguished Service Award from the American Public Transportation Association (APTA) October 22. VRE CEO Rich Dalton nominated Bulova for the award, noting her work in support of public transportation over 35 years, beginning in 1984 and ending with her retirement in 2019. Bulova's nomination was endorsed by four members of Northern Virginia's congressional delegation, Virginia's governor and the chairman of the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) Board of Directors. Calling her a "transit visionary," U.S. Sen. Tim Kaine (D-VA) noted that Bulova "foresaw that transit-oriented development could absorb traffic congestion, spur economic development and make for vibrant, pedestrian-friendly communities." The award was presented as part of APTA's TRANScend virtual conference.



Bulova reacts after receiving the award (top); VRE employees honor Bulova (below)



Potomac Yard Metro Station south entrance design revealed

New renderings reveal what the southern entrance of the future Potomac Yard Metro Station will look like. The images were submitted to the Alexandria Board of Architectural Review as part of the approval process for construction. The infill station, located between Reagan National Airport and Braddock Road Stations, is slated to open in 2022. The station will be adjacent to a reimagined Potomac Yard, which will feature the Virginia Tech Innovation Campus, new housing, retail and office development.



Riding into the Future in Fairfax County and Alexandria

Fairfax County formally launched an electric autonomous shuttle October 22, connecting the Mosaic District with the Dunn Loring Metro Station. County officials say it's the first publicly-funded shuttle of its type. The electric shuttle makes the approximately two-mile round trip Monday through Friday from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Dubbed "Relay," the shuttle has undergone extensive safety testing by VDOT, the National Highway Transportation Safety Administration (NHTSA), Fairfax County Department of Transportation (FCDOT) and Transdev, in coordination with EasyMile. A safety steward will always be on-board the shuttle to monitor operations. Dominion Energy supplied the shuttle.

DASH bus unveiled the first of six all-electric buses earlier the same week. Gov. Ralph Northam was on hand for the unveiling. The buses, along with rapid-charging stations, were purchased after DASH received \$5.1 million from Virginia through the Volkswagen Environmental Mitigation Trust, part of the Commonwealth's settlement after the German company violated the Clean Air Act. The city plans to switch to all zero-emissions buses by 2035.



Art on ART Bus features famous Arlingtonians

ART's newest rolling art exhibit features famous Arlingtonians including Sandra Bullock, Katie Couric, Roberta Flack, Ian MacKaye and Shirley MacLaine. The works are titled "Pop Arlington," created by artist Ryan Nelson. Buses featuring the artwork will be rotated through ART's bus routes.



Images courtesy ART and Arlington Arts

