

Commonwealth Connector

The place for your VA transit and rail news

Natalie Loeffler | Editor



Fall 2025



Save the Date!



With 2025 quickly rolling by, we are thrilled to welcome you to the first joint **Virginians for High Speed Rail** and **Virginia Transit Association** newsletter. Here, you will find a collection of rail and transit related news, legislative reports, and company updates covering all corners of the Commonwealth.

VTA and VHSR are dedicated to advocating for, and educating about, the important role that transit and passenger rail play in our economy, our environment, and the day-to-day lives of Virginians. Whether you are commuting to work, catching a ride to the store, or traveling across the Commonwealth, we want to ensure there is a safe and reliable option for all.

A Quick Look: Ridership Report

FY 2024 saw over **129 million** trips across public transit, Amtrak, and our Virginia Breeze intercity bus services.

Initial FY 2025 estimates a **12%** growth on public transportation, **14%** on Virginia Breeze, and **9%** across Virginia's Amtrak trains

August 21, 2025:

VHSR Virtual Town Hall
Register at vhsr.com/townhall

October 24, 2025:

DRPT/VTA Lunch & Learn
Register at vatransit.com/lunchandlearn

November 2025:

VHSR Virtual Town Hall

December 2025:

DRPT/VTA Lunch & Learn

January 26, 2026:

Transit and Rail Advocacy Day

May 19-20, 2026:

VTA Annual Conference & Bus Expo

A Look Inside

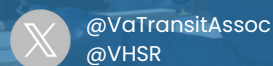
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This newsletter is made possible by all of our members and contributors. Thank you to all who support VTA, VHSR, and public transportation in Virginia.

VTA Transit and Rail Advocacy Day

On January 18th, VTA hosted our Annual Transit and Rail Advocacy Day and Reception. We invited our members and VTLI fellows to join us as we took on Richmond to advocate for transit and rail legislation in Virginia.

Our fellows had the chance to meet with Del. Karrie Delaney, Chair of the House Transportation Committee. Later that morning, Del. Delaney and Sen. Hashmi recognized VTA during the daily General Assembly session from their respective chamber floors. We closed off a hard day's work of advocacy and education with a BBQ reception at Main Street Station later that evening.

We want to thank everyone who came out and made our Transit and Rail Advocacy Day a huge success! All our advocates did an amazing job discussing the positive impact that transit and passenger rail has on Virginia. We would also like to give a special thank you to our evening speaker, VTA president, and Mayor of Harrisonburg the Honorable Deanna Reed. Mark your calendars for our January 26th, 2026 Advocacy Day!



Hon. Deanna Reed, City of Harrisonburg



A BBQ Bash to Remember

That evening, we ended our Advocacy Day with a BBQ reception at Main Street Station attended by over 400 guests, including legislators and VTA members who had the opportunity to network, create new connections, and enjoy some delicious BBQ courtesy of Oak & Apple BBQ in Richmond. We thank our wonderful sponsors for making this event possible.



VTA's 48th Annual Conference & Expo

VTA's 48th Annual Conference & Expo was our most successful conference yet! On May 28th, VTA kicked off its Annual Conference at the Richmond Marriott Downtown. Over 400 guests gathered to hear from our three dozen amazing speakers who discussed a variety of session topics, including transit funding challenges, new marketing tactics, and transit leadership. We also held our sold-out Expo portion of the conference. 50 great vendors came to network. Our guests then enjoyed *An Evening on Broad Street.*, finishing a great day with a game night at Bingo Beer Co.

We completed our final day of the conference with several more sessions followed by our Awards Luncheon. Congratulations to all of the agencies and individuals chosen by a committee of your colleagues! It was an honor to celebrate all the great work that occurs throughout Virginia. We also had the pleasure to present our Virginia Transit Leadership Institute fellows with their graduation plaques celebrating their completion of the program.

We would like to give a huge thank you to all of our sponsors and exhibitors who made this event possible. Your contributions continue to support VTA's mission and help us put such great events together.

Award Nomination and Call for Sessions for the 49th Annual Conference & Bus Expo will open January 2026!

Congratulations to our incredible 2025 Public Transportation Award Winners!

Outstanding Contribution by an Individual:
August Bullock, Hampton Roads Transit | Public Official

Outstanding Contribution by a Partner:
U.S. Navy | On behalf of Hampton Roads Transit

The Helen Poore Transit Professional Distinguished Service Award:
Myron Deberry, Valley Metro
Lynn Rivers, Arlington Transit
Evelyn Trice, Charlottesville Area Transit
Janice Woodson, Charlottesville Area Transit

Outstanding Community Program Award:
DASH | Fare Free Program

Exceptional Safety Award:
GRTC | GRTC De-Escalation Initiative

Outstanding Transit Marketing Award:
Blacksburg Transit | The Loops Marketing Campaign | Network Redesign
CAT | Catch a Career with CAT | Small Agency
GRTC | Route 1A Extension | Large Agency
Hampton Roads Transit | VB Wave Trolley | Tourism
WMATA | Metro Rewind | Technology

Transit Employee Unsung Hero Award:
Roymone Harris, GRTC



Train Station and Community Alliance

Virginians for High Speed Rail hosted their first Train Station and Community Alliance (TSCA) meeting in June, with 40 representatives from 24 localities across the Commonwealth who came to be a part of this coalition. The goal of the TSCA is to assist localities who want to take advantage of the tremendous opportunities that a passenger rail station or connection can provide to their community including offering transportation alternatives to their citizens, community development, tourism, economic development, and much more.

TSCA brought together key partners to share and learn how to improve their local stations and surrounding communities, hearing from Patrick Kidd from Amtrak who discussed Amtrak's Great American Station project, Haley Glen from Virginia Passenger Rail Authority (VPRA) who talked about VPRA's marketing efforts, and Jeremy Latimer from VPRA who discussed the state's station development plan. It created a venue that allowed for greater collaboration, marketing and tourism opportunities, and information distribution.

"We want [TSAC] to be an opportunity and resource for you to network with your peer localities, connect with key stakeholders, and learn from the experts." – Barry Bishop, VHSR President

With the significant federal and state investment and planning currently underway, there is a tremendous opportunity to leverage these investments on the local level to turn Virginia's passenger rail stations into premier gateways into our communities and regions. VHSR, through TSCA, looks forward to helping our local government parties take advantage of these opportunities.



Patrick Kidd, Amtrak



Jeremy Latimer, VPRA



Haley Glynn, VPRA

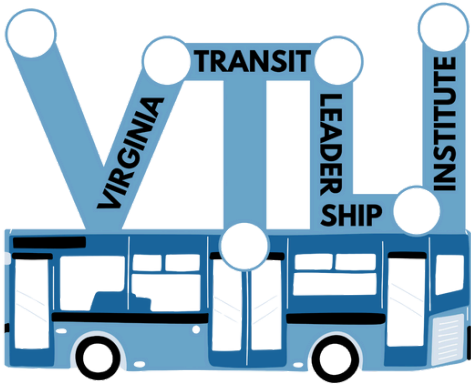
A Look at Long Bridge

On October 15th, 2024, US Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigieg and several state representatives joined Virginia Passenger Rail Authority, the Federal Railroad Administration, Virginia Railway Express, the Department of Transportation, and Virginians for High Speed Rail for the Long Bridge groundbreaking ceremony. Construction officially began in November 2024, to be completed by 2030. This new infrastructure, a 1.8-mile-long rail bridge connecting Arlington, VA and D.C., aims to reduce congestion along the corridor and reduce conflict between passenger and freight rail traveling along this route. In addition, the project proposal included a new bike and pedestrian

bridge that connects Long Bridge Park and Potomac Parks. Through the summer of 2025, the joint-venture construction with Skanska design and Flatiron began the early stages of the northern phase of the project, which included testing the ground foundations, creating the borings in the river, and crash wall installations. We look forward to keeping up with the progress of Long Bridge as the project progresses.



Photo provided by VPRA



By: Diana Hall

The Commonwealth of Virginia has no shortage of individuals passionate to make a difference. Whether it's a career in public service, volunteering, or helping out their neighbor, Virginians are driven to better communities everywhere. Through a special partnership with the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation, Virginia Transit Association has curated a program to elevate the careers of transit professionals eager to make that difference. This is where the Virginia Transit Leadership Institute (VTLI) comes in; a program whose mission is dedicated to crafting leadership skills and fostering connections with emerging leaders. The first two classes have boasted thirty-one of the brightest and committed transit professionals across the Commonwealth. Whether they have experience in operations, planning, engineering, finance, marketing, or maintenance, VTA welcomes all.

VTLI spans from September through May, culminating in a graduation ceremony at Virginia Transit Conference. Each of the five sessions welcome

industry expert guest speakers, prompt to share their knowledge with each cohort. The program covers a range of topics aspiring transit CEOs, directors, and general managers would benefit to know. An emphasis is placed on working with stakeholders—from colleagues, city councils, the Virginia General Assembly, and the Federal Transit Administration—to navigating various perspectives in their own organization.

Additionally, VTLI deepens connections between the Fellows themselves. While visiting a new agency each month, there are networking opportunities with professionals they otherwise wouldn't have met. In January, VTA hosts the Annual Transit and Rail Advocacy Day at the State Capitol, an occasion for Fellows to meet their state legislators in person.



Facility tour, CAT

The success of the program is measured through inter-agency partnerships, promoting the "next-steps" in the careers of VTLI alumni, and the exchange of ideas from one part of the Commonwealth to another. Previous Fellows have gone on to create cooperations between their agencies, collaborating on shared service planning and connectivity across communities, received promotions, and have integrated new ideas at their home organization. Regardless of their background, the passion, care, and forethought of the future of public transit brings like-minded Virginians together.



Stephanie Salzone, DASH



Laney Butt, Blacksburg Transit



Mike Norvell, Bay Transit



Facility Tour, Bay Transit



Transit System Planning, WATA

Congratulations VTLI Class II Graduates!



Katie Fenimore, HRT
 J'riah Guerrero
 Adam Hager, NVTC
 Karen Hall, UVA UTS
 William Higdon, WMATA
 Gladys Hurwitz, Loudoun County
 Bryan Johnson, RideSource
 Paige Lazar, DRPT

Michael Mayo, Blacksburg Transit
 Phillip Miller, CAT
 Dan Motta, PlanRVA
 Perrin Palistrant, OmniRide
 Brent Reutter, DASH
 Dagmawie Shikurye, VRE
 Levern Sydnor, Bay Transit

Class II Graduates Reviews 2024-2025

"I highly recommend it to anyone looking to grow their impact and connect with transit professionals."



"A fantastic program that provides fellows with a look "behind-the-curtain" at public transit initiatives across the state."



"VTLI empowers future leaders by learning from transit executives at agencies of all sizes."



"VTLI has been a rewarding experience that's broadened my perspective on public transit across Virginia."



Media.Amtrak.com

New River Valley Rail

After four years, the \$265 million the New River Valley Rail project finally broke ground in April 2025. VPRA and Amtrak began preliminary work on upgrading the main line that will connect Christiansburg to Roanoke. In addition to the design and construction of a layover facility in Radford, there will also be a pocket track and a new station platform built. Other renovations include a new station canopy, upgraded tracks, and an upgraded signaling system. As part of the updated agreement with Norfolk Southern, VPRA also purchased the Manassas to Broad Run corridor bringing an additional 24 rail miles and 48 track miles into public ownership. The extension will bring service to Christiansburg from Roanoke by 2027.

WATA Transfer Center

Williamsburg Area Transit Authority (WATA) officially started construction on their new northern transfer center in April. Thanks to the partnerships between WATA, DRPT, York County, James County, and the City of Williamsburg, this center is set to open in August 2026. The goal of this transfer station is to provide riders and operators with a safe and comfortable place to wait for their buses or, in the operator's case, take a well-deserved break. WATA has collected name suggestions from the public and will be unveiling it upon their decision.



Photo Credit: Christopher Six/WYDaily

Virginians Returning to Public Transit and Passenger Rail!

Since ridership across the Commonwealth’s mass transit modes hit rock bottom during the pandemic, we have seen a steady increase in trips across the Commonwealth’s mass transit systems as Virginians continue to flock back to public transit and passenger rail. FY 2024 saw over 129 million trips across public transit, Amtrak, and our Virginia Breeze intercity bus services. This was a 20% increase from FY 2023’s combined ridership.

Preliminary estimates for FY 2025 have public transportation handling 142.7 million trips, our Amtrak trains handling 2.5 million trips, and our intercity bus service -Virginia Breeze- handling over 70,000 trips.

These estimates project year-over-year ridership growth across public transportation of 12%, 14% on Virginia Breeze, and 9% across Virginia’s Amtrak trains.

The following transit agencies are on-pace to see their ridership more than double since their pandemic lows including Blacksburg Transit (+528%), Virginia Railway Express

(+400%), Harrisonburg Transit (+313%), WMATA (+289%), Alexandria DASH (+252%), Fairfax City CUE (+182%), Charlottesville Area Transit (+151%), Williamsburg Area Transit (+150%), Fredericksburg FXBGo! (+126%), Loudoun County Transit (+121%), and Fairfax Connector (+108%). Additionally, the following transit agencies are anticipated to exceed their pre-pandemic ridership during FY 2025 including Fairfax

Mode	2021 (Low)	2024	FY 2025 (est.)
Public Transit	50,124,730	126,647,885	142,714,179
Amtrak	908,075	2,344,558	2,567,507
Virginia Breeze	14,972	61,812	70,830
Total	51,047,777	129,517,965	145,352,516

City Cue, Alexandria DASH, Richmond’s GRTC, Petersburg Area Transit, Fairfax County Connector, Blacksburg Transit, and FXBGo!. Virginia’s Amtrak trains and our Virginia Breeze buses have both exceeded their pre-pandemic ridership levels. Among our Amtrak

stations, the following stations have exceeded their pre-pandemic ridership during FY 2024 including Ashland, Petersburg, Richmond- Main Street Station, Richmond – Staples Mill Station, Williamsburg, Alexandria, Burke Centre, Manassas, Woodbridge, Charlottesville, Culpeper, and Roanoke.

D.C.: Nation’s Worst Traffic?

Anyone who commutes in the DMV area will tell you that the roads are constantly congested with unpleasant commute times. However, a recent study reveals that it may be far worse than we thought. A Consumer Affairs report reveals that the D.C. region has the worst traffic in the country, with an average commute of 33.2 minutes and weekday congestion lasting over six hours.

This new ranking further highlights the importance of our efforts at VTA and VHSR. Improving our public transportation systems can greatly decrease the need for driving in the metro area, thus relieving the congestion. In FY 2024, Virginia transit took over 654 million passenger miles off of the roads and saved over 78 thousand metric tons of CO². Whether you commute by subway, bus, or train, those options fair far better for your health, the environment, and overall quality of life.

Waymap comes to the DMV!

In February, Metro entered a bright new phase of accessibility. Metro partnered with the Waymap app to create an entirely new way to navigate the city. The app is designed for those who are vision impaired to safely and confidently make their way around the city using any metro bus or train, giving the rider an audio step-by-step guide on their route.



GRTC Unveils New Articulated Bus

On July 8th, GRTC unveiled their new 60 ft. articulated buses as part of their Transit Access Partnership (TAP) of the new bus initiative. After the ribbon cutting, guests were invited on the maiden voyage around the city. These brand-new buses allow higher occupancy of the current Pulse buses for a more efficient and enjoyable ride. The buses will officially be launched into service soon.



Photo Credit: @say_rahh__

Microtransit is Going North

Far up in the northwest corner of Arlington, there lived a community too small to warrant a whole new bus route. However, Arlington Transit wanted to increase accessibility to public transportation in this community. Thus, came microtransit. This past spring, Arlington County proposed a microtransit service that would provide a transit option reaching from N. Glebe St. to Langston Blvd. This area improves access to schools, libraries, healthcare, and metro. The proposal would allow Arlington to run a pilot program for one year.

Microtransit is making its way into other parts of Northern Virginia as well. In July 2025, Loudoun County launched their own microtransit service in Leesburg, and Fairfax County is considering introducing it into its own system.



Photo Provided by Loudoun County Transit

HRT Gets Smart

In June 2025, Hampton Roads Transit (HRT) officially completed the installation of over two and a half thousand "Smart Stop" bus signs. This technology allows riders to find more accurate bus arrivals, report stop/bus cleanliness, buy HRT passes, and so much more. These signs were built to withstand bending, breaking, and even graffiti, saving HRT thousands in maintenance costs. By scanning the QR code on the sign, riders can worry less and enjoy more.



WAVY.com

Catching up with BRITE

By: The BRITE Team

Transit staff at the Central Shenandoah Planning District (CSPDC) recently completed a Microtransit Feasibility Study for the BRITE transit system. The study analyzed the viability of microtransit services in the BRITE service area and outlined recommendations for potential future implementation. Additionally, BRITE recently increased their paratransit service hours to better serve ADA riders in the Staunton, Augusta, and Waynesboro areas.

A Better Bus Network

By: Diana Hall

The Washington Metro System (WMATA) is one of the most recognizable pieces of transit infrastructure in the United States. From the iconic brutalist architecture of its metro stations, to the array of color-coded lines painting DC’s landmarks on the map, it’s no surprise that WMATA won American Public Transit Association’s awards year after year—including Outstanding Transportation System in 2025.

Though Metrorail’s main dominion lies under our toes, the bus system is the hallmark of above-ground transit. For the first time since its inception fifty years ago, WMATA has taken a step forward to change the landscape of DC, Maryland, and Virginia with their Better Bus Network Redesign. The system overhaul is the product of three years of community outreach, data collection, and planning, boasting feedback from over 45,000 people across 200+ events.



kimley-horn.com

The Better Bus Network Redesign has reinvented the region’s connectivity by overhauling all existing names, routes, and schedules, creating a brand new system. The public engagement process was the cornerstone of all decision-making—garnering international attention and winning the IAP2’s Core Values: General Project and Project of the Year Award in 2024—through strategic partnerships between Virginia Transit Association members WMATA and Kimley-Horn. The Draft Visionary Network was introduced to the public in Spring 2023 and received feedback from riders of all backgrounds across three jurisdictions. By elevating the voices of community members, the Proposed Better Bus Network was unveiled in 2025 for final feedback to include more efficient bus stop spacing, improved service on evenings and weekends, and new route names. After its approval from the Metro Board of Directors, new routes hit the streets on June 29, 2025.

Whether you’re a seasoned or first-time rider, it’s undeniable that there will be social, sustainable, and economic benefits for everyone in the region.

Get to Know Your New Bus Stop Signs

All of Metro’s bus routes will have updated names, routes, and schedules.



Old Bus Routes
The box at the top shows bus routes that end on June 28.

New Bus Routes
This area shows the bus routes that start on June 29.

New Route Destination
Check where the bus is going to make sure you’re heading in the right location.

202-GO-METRO STOP# 6000651

Call For More Info

Visit wmata.com/betterbus for maps and service information.

wmata.com

— The Future of GLTC —

By: The GLTC Team

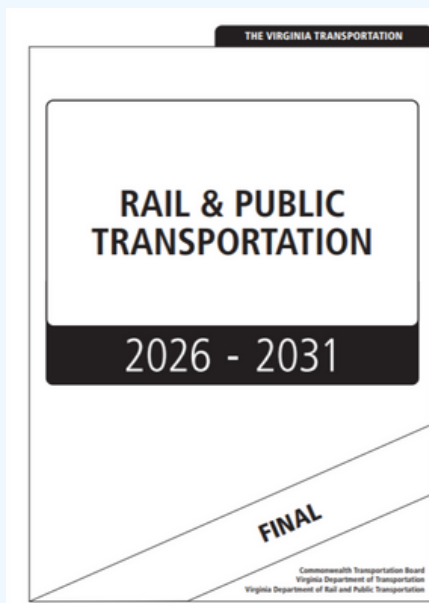
Greater Lynchburg Transit Company (GLTC) is advancing key repair projects, including bus and vehicle replacements, facility upgrades, and ADA-accessible “Simmie-Seats.” Forward-looking initiatives include a hydrogen fuel feasibility study and secure bike storage at the Transfer Station. In partnership with the City of Lynchburg and CVTPO, GLTC is also supporting the Lynchburg Multimodal Plan—an effort to improve walking, biking, and transit access citywide. Using data and community input, the plan will identify and prioritize projects that improve connections to jobs, schools, parks, and GLTC routes. Completion is expected in fall 2025, with a focus on safer more inclusive transportation options.



Lynchburgva.gov

Commonwealth Transportation Board Approves \$7.1 Billion Transit and Rail Plan

At their June 24th meeting, Virginia's Commonwealth Transportation Board (CTB) approved their \$26.7 billion Six-Year Improvement Plan (SYIP), which includes \$7.1 billion in public transit and rail investments. Of that \$7.1 billion in transit and rail investments over the FY 2026–2031 period, \$5,432.2 million comes from that state's dedicated transportation formula funds, \$927 million from Washington Metro (WMATA) dedicated regional funds, \$410.7 million in Federal Transit Administration funds, \$190.7 million in transit dedicated tolling revenue, \$134.6 million in other federal funds, and \$5.6 million in local funds.



During FY 2026, the Commonwealth is planning to invest over \$1.6 billion including \$574.1 million into WMATA, \$245.3 million into the Virginia Passenger Rail Authority's (VPRA) Transforming Rail in Virginia program, \$184.6 million into the bus and light rail operating program (MERIT-operating), \$363.2 million into the bus and light rail capital program (MERIT-capital), \$318.3 million into the Transit Ridership Incentive Program (TRIP) projects, \$20.3 million into the short-line and freight rail programs, \$21.6 million to Virginia Railway Express (VRE), \$15.8 million in paratransit services for seniors and individuals with disabilities (5310), and \$7.7 million into the Commuter Assistance Programs (CAP).

The latest SYIP also is investing \$5.8 million into 13 bus stops and safety improvement program projects, which is upgrading dozens of bus stops across the Commonwealth.

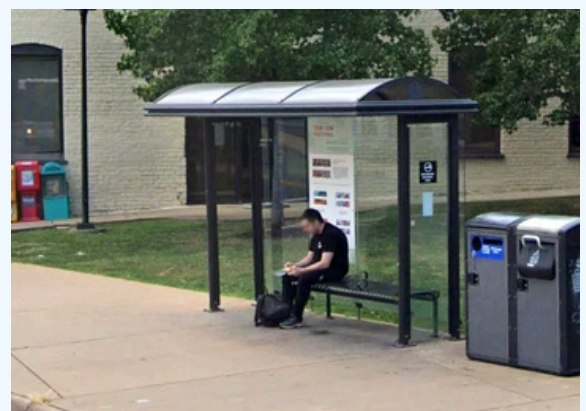
Major highlights from projects funded via the latest SYIP include \$244 million dedicated to Fairfax County's Richmond Highway Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) which will eventually connect Fort Belvoir and the Huntington Metro stop along Route 1; \$370.7 million towards advancing VPRA's Long Bridge expansion project; \$48.3 million for Arlington Transit's Shirlington Facility; \$9.4 million for construction of Alexandria DASH's William B. Hurd Transit Facility; \$8.5 million for construction of Hampton Roads Transit's Evelyn Butts Transfer Station; \$5.4 million for Charlottesville Area Transit (CAT) to purchase two battery-electric-buses (BEB) and renovate their facility to maintain those new BEB vehicles; \$5.2 million for construction of Suffolk Transit's phase 2 administration/maintenance facility; and \$5 million for engineering of GRTC's West End Transfer Station.

CAT Improvement Initiative

By: The CAT Team

Charlottesville Area Transit (CAT) is currently in Phase 1 of a systemwide amenities improvement initiative. This multi-phase effort focuses on enhancing the rider experience through better infrastructure and accessibility. CAT recently completed two new ADA compliant bus shelters at Midway Manor and Belmont Park, with three more coming soon to JPA at Maury, JPA at Shamrock, and Riverside.

These are just the first of many upgrades planned over the next 12 months as CAT works to modernize its amenities and make transit more comfortable, convenient, and accessible for the Charlottesville community.



David McNair of DTM