

Commonwealth Connector

Newsletter of the Virginia Transit Association

VIRGINIA
TRANSIT
ASSOCIATION



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Change is in the Air!

The seasons change as do the faces in state government. As the leaves turn color and the temperatures drop, the work crews at the state capitol are erecting the grandstands for Governor-elect Glenn Youngkin's inauguration on January 15.

Questions arise about what this new administration will mean to transportation policy and specifically for transit and rail. The Washington-Post ran a story recently about Governor-elect Youngkin's statements on transportation and mentioned his recorded statement for us to present at our conference. It may have been the only transportation record of his campaign so we are glad it was to the VTA. He especially mentioned the need for rural transit such as the new microtransit service provided by Bay Transit.



The grandstands are going up in front of the VA state capitol.

Of course the change in Administration means many changes in Secretariat appointments and agency heads. It is encouraging to hear that Mr. Youngkin is already consulting with experienced transportation experts such as former Secretary of Transportation and Secretary of Finance Aubrey Layne. As a newcomer to state government, Mr. Youngkin recognizes the value of bipartisan communications and has even consulted with Democratic lawmakers.

Transportation is not a partisan issue. Just as we saw Republicans cross the aisle to support the infrastructure bill in the Congress, we will need Virginia legislators to work together to enact measures that benefit all Virginians. The House of Delegates majority is now Republican with a 52-48 split so the Speaker of the House and all Committee Chairs will switch to the GOP leadership. This will mean some change in priorities in the Appropriations and Transportation committees to be sure but we will need to emphasize the essential service that transit provides to communities of all sizes across Virginia.

The new Lt. Governor-elect Winsome Sears has no official position on transit policy that we know of but she will be a very important presiding officer of the Senate. With a split of 21 Democrats and 19 Republicans, every bill will have narrow margins. The Lt. Governor can and will cast tie-breaking votes.

Transit has made significant strides over the past four years. The Omnibus transportation bill of 2020 placed it on a solid funding foundation where our revenues increase along with roads and other transportation sectors. WMATA and the regional authorities now have the assurance of dedicated funding. The MERIT program guidelines offer predictability for state funding through capital and operating formulas even as they may need to be

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adjusted post-COVID. The Northern Virginia toll revenues to transit are gamechangers. Long Bridge and Transforming Rail will elevate rail transport along the entire eastern seaboard. These are huge advancements for public transportation that must be protected.

Our Secretary of Transportation Shannon Valentine, Deputy Director Nick Donohue, DRPT Director Jennifer Mitchell, and our Commonwealth Transportation Board members are to be commended for their strong support of multimodal transportation with a strong emphasis on transit and rail. They have also led Virginia toward a focus on cleaner energy and a transition to zero-emission vehicles and Artificial Intelligence.

As we turn our attention to the 2022 General Assembly session, we recognize the need to identify ways to attract and retain transit workers such as operators and mechanics in the midst of a national labor shortage, finding more resources for zero fare operations, and transitioning to zero-emission vehicles. We also recognize the need to fix the procurement process for transit agencies in this time of supply chain shortages. The VTA Legislative Committee will be making decisions soon on our agenda for this session.

This session will likely be a hybrid one with some in-person meetings at the Pocahontas Building and some online engagement for the public. The House and Senate are expected to each conduct their business in-person in the capitol each day. With the uncertainty of the plans, VTA has again postponed our in-person annual Legislative Advocacy Day and Transportation Choices Legislative Reception. We will, however, offer a virtual briefing and online meetings with some lawmakers on Monday, January 24 starting at 10 a.m. Stay tuned for more details as we get closer to session.

It will be more important than ever for transit advocates to make their case with elected officials this year. Consider how just a few minutes of your time to contact a newly elected Delegate could establish a valuable relationship going forward. When VTA signals that

your voice is needed on a close vote, please take action. The easiest way to do this besides picking up the phone to call your legislator is to sign up for our online eAdvocacy tool "[Voices for Public Transit](#)." It will always direct you to the appropriate legislator and give you sample language so it's easy. Check out [Who's My Legislator](#) too.

Hopefully the 2023 session will bring meeting in the new General Assembly Building with all COVID restrictions lifted. Until then, we keep strong and unified for moving transit forward!

Infrastructure Bill Crosses the Finish Line:

After 127 days of back-and-forth negotiations between the US Senate and the US House of Representatives, the **Bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA)** of 2021 passed and was sent to President Joe Biden's desk where he signed it on November 15, 2021.

Originally the five year (FY 2022-2026) surface transportation reauthorization legislation passed the House on July 1st as the Investing in a New Vision for the Environment and Surface Transportation in America Act or INVEST Act by a vote of 221 to 201. It headed over to the Senate where it was dramatically altered and amended to become what we now know as the IIJA. It passed the Senate on August 10th by a vote of 69 to 30. It then headed back to the House. After getting tied up in disagreements between the two chambers for a few months, the IIJA finally passed the House as amended by the Senate on November 5th by a vote of 228 to 206.

Senator **Mark Warner** (D), Senator **Tim Kaine** (D), Representatives **Don Beyer** VA-8 (D); **Gerry Connolly** VA-11 (D); **Elaine Lura** VA-2 (D); **Donald McEachin** VA-4 (D); **Bobby Scott** VA-3 (D); **Abigail Spanberger** VA-7 (D); and **Jennifer Wexton** VA-10 (D) all voted in favor of the legislation. Representatives Ben Cline VA-6 (R); Bob Good VA-5 (R); Morgan Griffith VA-9 (R); and Rob Wittman VA-1 (R) all opposed the final bipartisan legislation.

The bill includes **\$1.2 trillion** in infrastructure investments including **\$106.9 billion** for public transportation and **\$102.1 billion** for passenger and freight rail programs for the fiscal years of 2022 to 2026.

According to the American Public Transportation Association (APTA), the public transportation funding breakdown is as follows:

\$69.9 billion in contract authority or formula funding:

- \$1.225 billion in formula funding for Virginia's transit agencies. This is an average increase of about 34 percent for our transit systems from their FY 2021 funding.

\$15.75 billion in general fund authorizations:

- \$15 billion for Capital Investment Grants.
- \$750 million for WMATA.

\$21.25 billion of advance appropriations:

- \$8 billion for § 5309 CIG grants.
- \$250 million for § 5310 Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities grants.
- \$4.75 billion for § 5337 State of Good Repair grants.
- \$5.25 billion for § 5339 Low or No Emission Bus Competitive grants.
- \$1.75 billion for All Stations Accessibility Program Competitive grants.
- \$250 million for Electric or Low Emitting Ferry Competitive grants.
- \$1 billion for Rural Communities Essential Ferry Service Competitive grants.

APTA's breakdown of the passenger and freight rail funding is as follows:

\$36.1 billion in general fund:

- \$19.2 billion for Amtrak investment, including:
 - \$6.57 billion for Northeast Corridor (NEC) grants.
 - \$12.65 billion for National Network grants.
- \$15 billion for competitive rail grants, including:
 - \$5 billion for the Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvement (CRISI) grants.
 - \$7.5 billion for the Federal-State Partnership for Intercity Passenger Rail grants.
 - \$2.5 billion for a new Railroad Crossing Elimination competitive grant.
 - \$250 million for the Restoration and Enhancement grants program.

\$66 billion of advance appropriations:

- \$6 billion for NEC Grants.
- \$16 billion for National Network grants.
- \$36 billion for the Federal-State Partnership for Intercity Passenger Rail grant program (with a set-aside of not more than \$24 billion for projects on the NEC).
- \$5 billion for the CRISI program.
- \$3 billion for the new Railroad Crossing Elimination grant program.

In the previous rounds of CRISI and Federal-State Partnership grants, Virginia averaged about 4 percent of the available funding. If those averages hold, which is not a given, the Commonwealth could receive up-to \$3 billion in federal passenger rail grants to benefit our rail service.

In addition to public transportation and rail funding, the IJA also includes \$110 billion to repair our roads and bridges; \$25 billion for our nation's airports; \$17 billion for our water and port infrastructure; \$65 billion for broadband deployment; \$47 billion for climate resilience, and \$7.5 billion for electric vehicle (EV) charging infrastructure.

VTA applauds those who contacted their Congressional representatives to urge them to support this bipartisan bill through our [Voices for Public Transit](#) e-action network with APTA. We expect more action on the Build Back Better legislation soon and will be calling for your support soon!

Transit Region	FY 2021	FY 2022-2026	Increase over baseline
Blacksburg	\$ 2,719,335	\$ 18,342,635	\$ 4,745,960.00
Charlottesville	\$ 2,833,095	\$ 19,070,096	\$ 4,904,621.00
Fredericksburg	\$ 3,095,093	\$ 20,806,334	\$ 5,330,869.00
Harrisonburg	\$ 2,134,839	\$ 14,394,799	\$ 3,720,604.00
Lynchburg	\$ 2,789,412	\$ 18,795,698	\$ 4,848,638.00
Richmond	\$ 15,538,793	\$ 104,154,609	\$ 26,460,644.00
Roanoke	\$ 3,291,350	\$ 22,067,670	\$ 5,610,920.00
Staunton-Waynesboro	\$ 993,943	\$ 6,671,591	\$ 1,701,876.00
Hampton Roads	\$ 25,540,038	\$ 169,982,782	\$ 42,282,592.00
Williamsburg	\$ 2,112,028	\$ 14,248,268	\$ 3,688,128.00
Winchester	\$ 1,286,952	\$ 8,632,027	\$ 2,197,267.00
Greater Washington	\$ 374,092,309	\$ 2,445,862,907	\$ 575,401,362.00

2022 Save the Dates

Virginia Inauguration | Jan. 15

VA General Assembly | Jan. 12 - Mar. 11

VTA Virtual Legislative Briefing | Jan. 24

VTA 2022 Conference & Bus Expo | June 1-2
Roanoke, Virginia

Note: December 1, 2021 is the last day to renew your VTA membership before you're removed from our rolls.

JLARC review of transportation revenues proposes more local funding for transit

The Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission (JLARC) is the state agency that conducts research and analysis of state programs and agencies. In 2020, JLARC conducted a study of surface transportation infrastructure and funding in the Commonwealth. At its meeting on November 8, JLARC received a report on transportation revenue funding indicating that transportation revenues are in a strong position to meet future challenges. The report also provided recommendations to improve existing transportation programs. This study was conducted at the request of Delegate Terry Austin (R – Buchanan).

The meeting presentation is [available here >](#).
The report is [available here >](#).

After the report was presented, Delegate Austin remarked that he was pleased to find that state transportation revenues are in a remarkably stronger position than prior to the passage of the 2020 transportation omnibus legislation.

Among the concerns raised in the report is a concern that transit capital projects are not adequately funded. As such, the report recommends that the Commonwealth Transportation Board direct just under \$40 million in transportation revenue surplus funds towards capital needs. The report also identifies challenges presented by the loss of ridership impacting transit agencies in Virginia. The report suggests that the Department of Rail and Public Transportation develop options for directing additional funding to

transit agencies in the event that ridership does not return to pre-pandemic levels.

Ultimately, it is up to members of the General Assembly to take action and introduce legislation to follow through on these recommendations. VTA will continue to update members of any legislation introduced as a result of this report.

VTA Celebrates Public Transportation at 2021 Annual Conference

After a two year hiatus, the Virginia Transit Association held its 2021 Annual Conference and Expo on September 28-29 in Tyson's Corner in Fairfax County. The sold out event brought together 300 representatives from Virginia's public transit systems, elected leaders, and the business community to celebrate public transportation.



Our opening session discussing the importance of equity in transit.

The conference participants learned about several relevant and interesting topics such as the importance of equity in transit from Virginia House of Delegates Transportation Committee Chair Delores McQuinn, Jacqueline Hopkins from SEPTA, and Faith Walker with RVA Rapid Transit. Other session offerings included Zero Emissions Technology with Alleyn Harned with Virginia Clean Cities and DASH's Josh Baker; Jennifer Mitchell, Director of the VA Department of Rail and Public Transportation on Moving Virginia Forward; and a number of other relevant roundtable topics.

Our conference participants also got video updates from US Senator Mark Warner who discussed what's happening on the federal



Glenn Youngkin speaking to VTA's conference participants

VTA FY 2022 Officers

President

The Honorable Justin Wilson;
Mayor of Alexandria

Vice-President

The Honorable Deanna Reed;
Mayor of Harrisonburg

Treasurer

William Harrell; Hampton Roads Transit

Secretary

Josh Baker; Alexandria DASH

level; transit priority updates from Virginia gubernatorial candidates Glenn Youngkin and Terry McAuliffe; and an overview of the new direction at the Federal Transit Administration from FTA Administrator Nuria Fernandez.

The Annual Conference was capped with our Awards Luncheon featuring a keynote from Virginia Governor Ralph Northam who discussed his administration's progress moving the needle on transit.

VTA is grateful to all the sponsors, presenters, and participants who contributed to the success of this long-awaited conference. Check out the presentations and the photos [HERE](#).

Congratulations to our 2021 Award Winners!

The awards program was established to recognize innovation and achievement by public transportation systems and recognize the work of individuals who provide leadership and support for public transportation in Virginia at the local, regional, or state level.

"We are thrilled to recognize transit systems and individuals from across the Commonwealth for going the extra mile to improve public transportation for all Virginians," said Lisa Guthrie, Executive Director of VTA.

Distinguished Leadership for the Commonwealth

Award: The Honorable Governor Ralph Northam

The Joe Alexander Public Service Leadership

Award: The Honorable Delores McQuinn, Virginia House of Delegates

Unsung Hero Award:

- Erik Alvarenga, DASH (Pandemic Response – large agency)
- Sy Seibold, Fredericksburg Transit (Pandemic Response – small agency)
- Tabitha Benjamin, GRTC (transit agency)
- Emily Cass, TRAFFIX (TDM)

Outstanding Public Transportation Marketing

Award:

- Bay Transit (small agency)
- GRTC (large agency)

Exceptional Safety Award: Omni-Ride

Outstanding Community Program

Award: Danville Transit for "Dial a Ride and Same Day Service"

Helen Poore Transit Professional Distinguished Service Award:

- Tom Fox, Blacksburg Transit
- Debbie Taylor, JAUNT



VTA President Justin Wilson presenting Governor Northam with his award



VTA award winners showing off their awards!