

Commonwealth Connector

Newsletter of the Virginia Transit Association

Contact: Danny Plaughter - Danny@VATransit.com | Spring 2021

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Biden's Building Back Better Begins

American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 – H.R. 1319

The President signed the legislation on March 11th. The bill provides \$30.5 billion in critical COVID-19 emergency funding through fiscal year 2024 to help public transit agencies continue to provide a lifeline to essential workers.

A primary objective of the \$30.5 billion of emergency transit funding is to ensure that public transit agencies receive sufficient funding under this bill, when combined with their prior COVID-19 transit allocations pursuant to the CARES Act and the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (CRRSAA), to equal **132 percent** of urbanized areas' public transit operating costs.

The transit funds provided under the bill are available for operating expenses related to the response to the COVID-19 public health emergency. Except for the Capital Investment Grant (CIG) funds, these emergency funds shall be directed to payroll and operations of public transportation (including payroll and expenses of private providers of public transportation) unless the recipient certifies to the Secretary that the recipient has not furloughed any employees. The federal share is 100 percent.

According to American Public Transportation Association the bill distributes the overwhelming majority of the emergency transit funds through several formula programs:

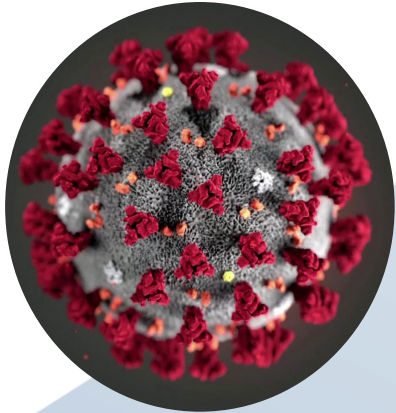
- **\$26.09 billion for 49 U.S.C. § 5307 grants to urbanized areas.** The amount made available for these grants, combined with CARES Act and CRRSAA grants, ensures that urbanized areas receive 132 percent of their transit agencies' 2018 operating costs. After making these apportionments, the Secretary of Transportation (Secretary) shall distribute excess funds to urbanized areas that did not receive an apportionment under the 132-percent operating cost threshold because they had received a greater

The graphic features the Virginia Transit Association logo at the top. Below it are icons for a bus, trolley, train, van, and ferry. A dark blue banner contains the text "March 2nd is #SaveTransit Day". The main text "Tell Congress to ACT Now!" is in large white font on a blue background. At the bottom, a yellow banner says "Take Action Here: http://bit.ly/30bTransit".

An example of our social media campaign partnering with APTA and others to highlight the importance of public transportation.

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percentage under prior COVID-19 § 5307 grants. These urbanized areas shall receive 25 percent of their transit agencies' 2018 operating costs. Finally, for agencies that had received CARES Act and CRRSAA grants totaling 130 to 132 percent of operating costs, these urbanized areas receive an additional 10 percent of their transit agencies' 2018 operating costs.

- **\$317 million for 49 U.S.C. § 5311 grants to rural areas.** States receive allocations of five to 20 percent of 2018 rural operating costs based on a sliding scale dependent on prior COVID-19 § 5311 grants.

- **\$50 million for 49 U.S.C. § 5310 grants for seniors and persons with disabilities.**

The bill also provides **\$2.21 billion** for operating assistance grants to eligible recipients or subrecipients that, because of COVID-19, require additional assistance for costs related to operations, personnel, cleaning, sanitization, and debt service payments incurred to maintain operations and avoid layoffs and furloughs.

H.R. 1319 provides **\$1.675 billion** for Capital Investment Grants under 49 U.S.C. § 5309. In particular, the bill provides \$1.425 billion for specific New Start and Core Capacity projects.

Earmarks to Return

On February 26, the House Committee on Appropriations Chair Rosa DeLauro [announced that the Committee will accept Community Project Funding requests](#) (i.e., earmarks) from Members of Congress for the upcoming FY 2022 appropriations bills. Each Member of Congress will be limited to 10 Community Project Funding requests. To be considered for inclusion, Members of Congress must show that a project has community support and submit a financial disclosure statement demonstrating no financial interest in the project. In addition, the Appropriations Committee has included other reforms to ensure transparency and accountability, including a ban on allocating funding directly to for-profit recipients and early public disclosure of projects to be funded. For more information on the Community Project Funding process, please see the [House Appropriations Committee Guidelines on FY2022 Community Project Funding](#).

In addition, on March 3, House Transportation and Infrastructure Chairman Peter A. DeFazio (D-OR) and Highways and Transit Subcommittee Chairwoman Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC) issued a [press release](#) announcing that Members of Congress will be able to submit requests for highway and transit project designations in the next surface transportation authorization bill. The Committee is expected to issue guidance on this process later this month.

Transit agencies are encouraged to work with Members of Congress to identify potential projects for inclusion in either the FY 2022 appropriations bill or in any surface transportation legislation. VTA stands ready to assist you in this outreach!

VTA FY 2021 Officers

President

The Honorable John McGlennon;
James City County Board of Supervisors

Vice-President

The Honorable Justin Wilson;
Mayor of Alexandria

Treasurer

William Harrell; Hampton Roads Transit

Secretary

Josh Baker; Alexandria DASH

Note: If you're interested in running to be a VTA officer for FY 2022, please email your statement of interest and a photograph to Lisa at lguthrie@img-llc.net by April 30th. Elections will be held at our May 21st Board of Directors Meeting.

Infrastructure, Reauthorization and Transportation Policy

With the passage of the American Rescue Plan, Congress is primed to next turn its attention to infrastructure and transportation policy. This is an opportunity to go BIG! There is a concerted effort that transit funding not only meet current demands but revolutionize and invest in a first class, 21st Century transit network.

On the basics, Congress should restore bus capital investments. In MAP-21, bus funding was cut by 57% and by the end of the FAST Act, authorized bus funding is still 15% below 2012 funding levels. This has reduced nationwide fleet size by 24% and ridership 15.8%. **The percentage of buses operating more than 15 years increased a staggering 82%.** The bus transit section of the Invest Act might be a good starting place for the transportation reauthorization.

Certainly repairing and replacing the 1,800 transit facilities identified by FTA's Transit Asset Management Plan at 100% federal cost share is important to equity considerations as well as safety and efficiency.

COVID-19 and CDC Guidance

Several organizations, including APTA, Transportation for America, and the Transportation Workers Union of America wrote to the new CDC Director, Rochelle Walensky, to thank her for the February order requiring transit riders to wear masks. They also called on her leadership to clarify that with proper precautions – such as wearing a mask and social distancing – public transit is an extremely safe, low risk, mode of travel.

eAction and YOU!

VTA has written letters to our Congressional delegation to urge them to support transit measures but we also need individuals and agencies to state the case as to why additional support is needed. If the recent calls to General Assembly and Congressional action did not reach you, please take a few moments now to sign up on our Voices for Public Transit network to be ready for the next call to action. It is so easy that all you need to do when you get an alert, is click your mouse. Messages are almost instantaneously created and sent to your

own representatives.

So stay informed and get active! Join the movement in Virginia [here!](#)

Mark Your Calendar for Important Upcoming Events

VTA Virtual Spring Board Meeting & Officer Elections

The VTA Board Meeting will be held on Friday, May 21, 2021 from 10 am to 12 noon. The meeting will be held via Zoom. All Board members and alternates are invited to attend but registration is required. Please contact [Jamie Crawford](#) for registration information and the Zoom link if you are a Board member.

2021 Annual Conference & Expo Now Scheduled for the Fall

Yes! We postponed the spring conference so we can finally meet in-person! The VTA 2021 Annual Conference and Expo will be held at the Tysons Corner Marriott, in Fairfax County, on September 28-29. Attend informative conference sessions, see the latest in transit products and services at the Expo, join us for a fun social event Tuesday evening, and don't miss the Awards Luncheon on Wednesday afternoon. Additional conference information and registration will be announced later this Spring.



Book your room reservations now if you'd like to ensure that you will have a room at the [VTA discounted room rate](#).

A Virtual General Assembly Keeps Transit on Track

Building off 2020's General Assembly session that reorganized the state's entire transportation funding formula (and led to increased funding for rail and transit), created the Virginia Passenger Rail Authority, and passed the Commonwealth Corridor passenger rail study. The 2021 legislature continued the progress that they started last year and advanced even more rail and transit priorities.

Biennial Budget:

The driving force of change this legislative session occurred through the General Assembly Conference Budget which passed 96-42 by the Virginia House and Senate. It is now on the Governor's desk.

The budget includes \$210.3 million in rail and transit projects under the special Item #447. Of this funding, \$167 million will be used to improve and expand Amtrak and Virginia Railway Express service along the Virginia Piedmont Corridor (Alexandria-Manassas-Charlottesville-Lynchburg-Roanoke). Of that total, \$83.5 million will be dedicated to expanding a 2nd Amtrak Regional train between Washington and Roanoke. It will also be used to extend both the new and current Regionals from Roanoke to the New River Valley, plus look at future stops and extensions of service in Bedford and Bristol. The other \$83.5 million will be used to expand and improve Virginia Commuter Railway service along the Manassas Line (Alexandria-Burke Centre-Manassas).

Item #	Line Name	FY 2021-2022 (Pre-Omnibus)	FY 2021-22 (Post-Omnibus)	FY 2021-22 (Gov Intro Budget)	FY 2021-22 (Final GA Budget)
442	Financial Assistance for Public Transportation (60900)	\$1,345,178,037	\$1,412,891,916	\$1,412,891,916	\$1,412,891,916
443	Financial Assistance for Rail Programs (61000)	\$273,019,629	\$334,219,629	\$384,219,629	\$334,219,629
447	Special VDOT Projects	NA	NA	NA	\$210,300,000
	Total	\$1,618,197,666	\$1,747,111,545	\$1,797,111,545	\$1,957,411,545

There was also up-to \$32.4 million dedicated to support the operation of the Washington Metropolitan Area Transportation Authority (Washington Metro) with any remaining funds from this funding directed to the Northern Virginia Transportation Commission, and \$10.9 million to support zero-fare public transit in the Commonwealth with up-to \$900,000 directed towards funding the transit equity and modernization study (HJ 542) passed by the General Assembly.

The \$210.3 million in additional funding came from a special one-time use of the Federal COVID-19 relief funds (\$233.4 million) in addition to \$55 million in General Fund revenue.

Public Transit:

There were a handful of important public transportation bills this legislative session, but none more so than Delegate Delores McQuinn's (HJ 542), the Transit Modernization Study. HJ 542 requests the Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT) to conduct a two-year study of

transit equity and modernization in the Commonwealth, with emphasis on transit services and engagement opportunities for underserved and underrepresented communities. VTA was a strong supporter of this study and is proud of its passage by a vote of 91-22.

Another piece of legislation that we followed was SB 1126 (Sen. Spruill) the Hampton Roads Transit board membership update bill. This legislation simply adds a member of the House of Delegates, to be appointed by the Speaker of the House, and a member of the Senate, to be appointed by the Senate Committee on Rules, to the Transportation District Commission of Hampton Roads. It passed 139-0.

Passenger Rail:

The key piece of passenger rail legislation were the New River Valley Passenger Rail Station Authority bills HB 1893 (Del. Hurst) and SB 1212 (Sen. Edwards). These bills gave the localities and higher education institutions in the New River Valley the ability to join together to build a station. Combined HB 1893 and SB 1212 passed the General Assembly by a vote of 128-9!

Other Legislative Items:

Delegate Rip Sullivan's HB 2282 directs the State Corporation Commission to report on policy proposals to accelerate transportation electrification in the Commonwealth. The bill requires the Commission to submit, no later than May 1, 2022, a report to the General Assembly recommending policy proposals that could govern public electric utility programs to accelerate widespread transportation electrification. VTA supported this green-energy bill as a foundation for potential transit fleet conversion. The bill passed the House (76-Y 23-N) and the Senate (38-Y 1-N) and is now awaiting the Governor's signature.

An interesting bill that we were following was SB 1364 (Sen. Cosgrove) which would have created a Commonwealth Transit Ridership Fund which would be funded from the tax revenue from marijuana sales. This idea went up in smoke when the patron requested the legislation be stricken from the legislative agenda.

We also followed, and opposed, HB 2076 (Del. Marshall) which would have deducted the value of a trade-in during an automobile purchase from the amount for which sales tax is generated. It was estimated that this legislation would have reduced rail and transit funding by nearly \$20 million annually. The bill was laid on the table by a vote of 9-1 in House Finance Sub-committee #1.

VTA's Equity Leadership Project

The experiences of 2020 – the pandemic and its economic blows, the George Floyd tragedy, the fall elections, and environmental and social justice movements – have moved the needle dramatically for those of us in the business of public transportation. No service is more critical than transportation to our underserved populations yet our industry has long been influenced by inherited, structural racism.

President Biden and Secretary of Transportation Buttigieg are promoting “Building Back Better” policies that tie equity to mobility. Vice-President Kamala Harris has even recorded a [video](#) defining equity that emphasizes the need to get everybody to the finish line even if they start in different places.

Virginia is also stepping forward to identify and implement some new studies and programs that advance equity goals across the Commonwealth.

Several bills during the 2021 General Assembly session focused on equity. Delegate Delores McQuinn's [HJ542](#) directs DRPT to conduct a 2 -year study with the cooperation of all transit agencies that will emphasize

transit services and engagement opportunities for underserved and underrepresented communities. Delegate Alex Askew's [HB 1993](#) calls for all state agencies to establish a comprehensive diversity, equity, and inclusion strategic plan in coordination with the Governor's DEI Director. This now codifies Governor Northam's [ONE Virginia](#) plan.

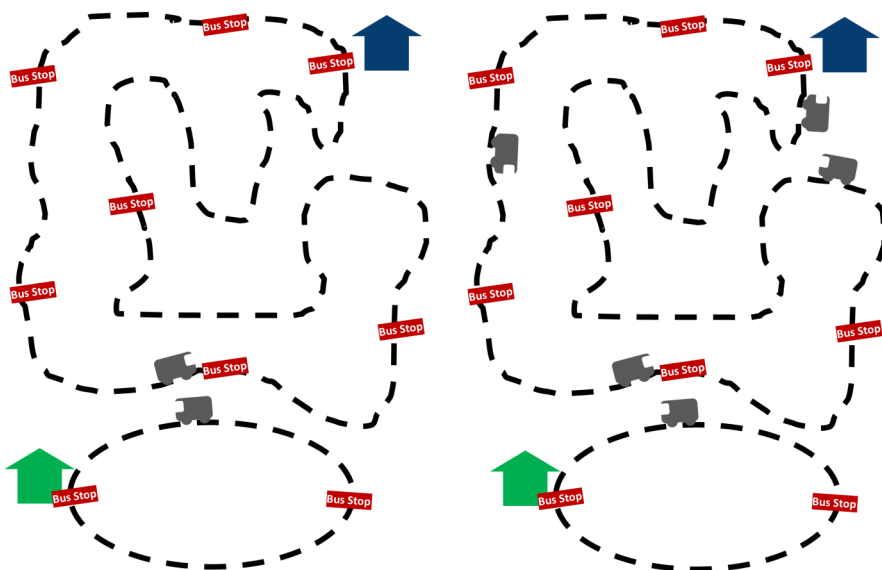
Both of these positive measures in addition to some local government resolutions like the ones from Alexandria or Richmond will have significant impacts on public transit systems and services. VTA wants our members to be ready to embrace calls for equity with confidence and proactive strategies so we are launching our Equity Leadership Project. We are pleased to partner with DRPT on the project and we have asked several of our transit CEOs and managers to serve on a Core Group to help us put together a toolkit of resources for transit agencies.

We are pleased to welcome Delceno Miles of the Miles Group and Sid Faucette of School Leaders for Educational Equity as our dedicated consultants on the project. Our goal is to put the tools and templates into your hands to use for your strategic planning, community outreach, or HR policies.

We'll be reaching out to gather your thoughts and input as the project moves forward so we can be sure that we are meeting your needs in advancing equity in your services, systems, and operations.

Equal: One bus on each route, although the green house has 15 minute service and the blue house has 60 minute service.

Equity: Both houses are served by 15 minute service.

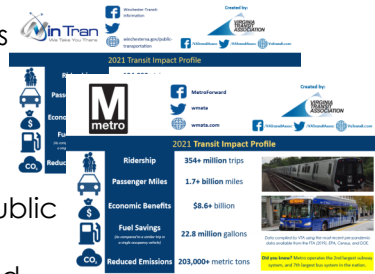


Quick Updates from Around Virginia

Transit Impact Profiles

VTA has recently released the 2nd edition of our Public Transit Impact Profiles for our transit members.

The data in these profiles is collected from a variety of sources including the Federal Transit Administration, the VA Department of Rail and Public Transportation, Federal Department of Energy, and the Environmental Protection Agency. All the data is pre-COVID and shows the enormous impact that public transportation was having before the world-wide pandemic hit.



To view these profiles, please visit: vatransit.com/transitimpacts

Faces of Transit



Virginia Faces of Transit

Our Faces of Transit Coalition continues to grow with over 17 partners spanning businesses, transit agencies, and non-profit advocates from across the Commonwealth.

The campaign has released six "Faces of Transit" videos featuring Art Dubey and Bay Transit, Pedro Martinez Jr. and Charlottesville Area Transit, Ben Blanks and Greater Lynchburg Transit Company, Tabitha Benjamin and Greater Richmond Transit Company, William Harrell and Hampton Roads Transit, and Tracy Sayegh Gabriel with National Landing Business Improvement District. The videos have been viewed over 2,000 times on YouTube.

To learn more about our Faces of Transit Coalition and campaign, please visit: Facesoftransit.org

Upcoming Transit Tuesday Webinar

The ten state transit association coalition (Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Illinois, Pennsylvania, South west, Tennessee, Virginia, and Washington State) are hosting our latest Transit Tuesday Webinar on March 30th titled "Moving Forward in 2021! Decisions in DC Roll Across America" presented by New Flyer.

This webinar features Mark Hybner with APTA, Katie Kachel with Chambers, Conion, & Hartwell, and Scott Bogren with CTAA. Lisa Guthrie with VTA and Rich Sampson with SWTA are moderating.

Our panelists will cover topics such as the latest COVID-19 relief measure "The American Rescue Plan Act of 2021" – H.R.1319, an infrastructure package and other Administration and FTA plans, possible elimination of Congressional earmarks, and what to expect with the fall Surface Transportation Reauthorization changes. What could all this mean to your transit agency or your company?

This is going to be an informative and timely webinar and we hope you'll RSVP today. You may register [HERE](#).

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To ensure that your ad makes it into publication, please submit (PDF, PNG, JPEG).

Rates are as follows:

Business Card (3.75"x2.5"): \$50 | **Quarter Page** (3.75"x5"): \$100
Half Page (7.5"x5"): \$175 | **Full Page** (7.5"x10"): \$300

Please send your ad to Danny@VATransit.com. Other VTA news can be found on our website www.VATransit.com

These extraordinary times call for extraordinary programs and essential heroes!

If you have any at your agency or company, shine some light on their exceptional service and nominate them for a 2021 VTA Award!



The 2021 VTA Awards nominations are now open! We're accepting nominations until April 30th. [Click here for the application and for more information.](#) Award winners will be recognized at the VTA Annual Conference in **Tyson's Corner** on **September 28-29, 2021** and will be permanently featured on the VTA web site.



Congratulations to our 2020 Award Winners!

Helen Poore Transit Professional Distinguished Service Award: [Debbie Swetnam](#)

The Joe Alexander Distinguished Leadership Award: [Secretary of Transportation Shannon Valentine](#)

The Distinguished Public Transportation Agency Award: [DRPT](#) and [Director Jennifer Mitchell](#)

Outstanding Contribution by a Business: [Transurban](#)

Outstanding Community Program: [Bay Transit](#) (Small Transit System)
| [DASH](#) (Community Service) | [Hampton Roads Transit](#) (Community Outreach)

Outstanding Public Transportation Marketing: [GRTC](#) (Transit System)
| [WMATA](#) & [Northern VA Transportation Commission](#) (Regional Collaboration)
| [Suffolk Transit](#) (Honorable Mention) | [Vanpool Alliance](#) (TDM)

Exceptional Safety Award: [Virginia Railway Express](#)

Public Transportation Unsung Heroes: [Tristan Cunningham](#), DASH (Transit) and [Cherika Ruffin](#), Ridefinders (TDM)

