COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

Commonwealth Transportation Board

Nicholas Donohue
Chairperson

1221 East Broad Street
Richmond, Virginia 23219

(804) 482-5818

*Agenda item # 6*

**RESOLUTION**
**OF THE**
**COMMONWEALTH TRANSPORTATION BOARD**

**October 13, 2026**

**MOTION**

**Made By:** Mr. Payne, **Seconded By:** Mr. Davis
**Action:** Motion Carried, Unanimously

**Title: Policy for the Implementation of the Transit Ridership Incentive Program**

**WHEREAS,** Section §33.2-1526.3 of the Code of Virginia was passed by the Virginia General Assembly in the 2020 legislative session to establish the Transit Ridership Incentive Program (TRIP) as part of the Omnibus Transportation Bill; and

**WHEREAS,** HB 200 was passed in the 2026 General Assembly to amend and reenact TRIP to promote improved transit service across the Commonwealth by encouraging the identification and establishment of routes of regional significance; supporting the establishment of programs to reduce the impact of fares on low-income individuals; encouraging innovative approaches to micromobility, paratransit, and other specialized transportation; and supporting local, regional, and state entities in improving the accessibility and safety of transit bus passenger facilities; and

**WHEREAS**, the Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT) has consulted with the Transit Service Delivery Advisory Committee (TSDAC) in the development of guidelines for the eligible project types and recommended improvements to the existing policy; and

**NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED,** the Commonwealth Transportation Board (Board) hereby adopts the following policy to govern the structure and prioritization of projects for TRIP Regional Connectivity funding pursuant to §33.2-1526.3 of the Code of Virginia:

1. TRIP Regional Connectivity funding will encourage the identification, establishment, or improvement of routes of regional significance. For the purpose of review and prioritization, projects requesting TRIP Regional Connectivity funding will be classified into the following eligible project types: i) capital projects such as the establishment of bus-only lanes, implementation of integrated fare collection, or enhanced passenger amenities and; ii) operating projects such as enhancements to service frequencies, expansions of areas served, or extensions of service hours.

2. The following entities are eligible for TRIP Regional Connectivity funding: i) public transit providers that receive state operating assistance pursuant to 33.2-1526.1 D 1; ii) Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs), Planning District Commissions (PDCs), and other statewide or regional bodies; iii) local governments and; iv) tribes with state or federal recognition.

3. The Commonwealth recognizes the need for both state and local funding commitments to establish transit services. Therefore, TRIP Regional Connectivity funding can be applied to a project for a maximum of five years with the state share for operating projects decreasing over time.

4. Candidate TRIP projects should be supported by a plan or study at the regional level that documents regional travel needs and establishes an operational approach to transit service that addresses such needs.

5. A project that has been selected for TRIP funding must be re-scored and the funding decision reevaluated if there are significant changes to either the scope or cost of the project.

6. Projects that are interregional or have statewide significance may be eligible for TRIP funding if they demonstrate fulfillment of unmet regional, interregional, or statewide travel needs as determined by the DRPT Director.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED,** the Board hereby adopts the following policy to govern the structure and prioritization of projects for TRIP Zero and Reduced Fare funding pursuant to §33.2-1526.3 of the Code of Virginia:

1. TRIP Zero and Reduced Fare funding will support the establishment of programs to reduce the impact of fares on low-income individuals. For the purposes of review and prioritization, projects requesting TRIP Zero and Reduced Fare funding will be classified into the following four eligible types: i) the provision of subsidized or fully free passes to low-income or other transit dependent populations; ii) the elimination of fares on routes or high-capacity corridors, establishing ‘zero fare zones’ (net fares, less the cost of fare collection); iii) the deployment of an entirely zero fare system (net fare, less the cost of fare collection); and iv) fare policy planning.

2. The following entities are eligible for TRIP Zero and Reduced Fare funding: i) public transit providers who receive state operating assistance pursuant to 33.2-1526.1 D 1; ii) Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs), Planning District Commissions (PDCs), and other statewide or regional bodies; iii) local governments and; iv) tribes with state or federal recognition.

3. Applications focused on the provision of zero-fare transit services should be submitted by the organization providing the service.

4. The Commonwealth recognizes the need for both state and local funding commitments to establish programs to reduce the impact of transit fares on low-income and other transit dependent populations. Therefore, TRIP Zero and Reduced Fare funding can be applied to a project for a maximum of three years with the state share decreasing over time.

5. Successfully enacting system-wide zero fare operations rely on a strong financial commitment from the service provider and its community. To ensure the success of these projects, all system-wide zero fare applicants must commit to an additional year of operation beyond the project agreement with DRPT where the funding recipient provides one hundred percent (100%) of project expenses.

6. Projects prioritized for funding should be supported by planning, either at the regional or corridor level that documents an evaluation of fare policies and establishes an approach to meet community needs through the implementation of new fare policies.

7. A project that has been selected for TRIP funding must be re-scored and the funding decision reevaluated if there are significant changes to either the scope or cost of the project.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED,** the Board hereby adopts the following policy to govern the structure and prioritization of projects for TRIP Passenger Amenities and Safety funding pursuant to §33.2-1526.3 of the Code of Virginia:

1. TRIP Passenger Amenities and Safety funding will support local, regional, and state entities in improving the accessibility and safety of transit bus passenger facilities. For the purpose of review and prioritization, projects requesting TRIP Passenger Access and Safety funding will be classified into the following eligible project types: i) the improvement or addition of bus stops; ii) the improvement of other bus passenger facilities; iii) bus stop or passenger facility planning; iv) public safety equipment, planning, or programming.

2. The following entities are eligible for TRIP Passenger Amenities and Safety funding: i) public transit providers who receive state operating assistance pursuant to 33.2-1526.1 D 1 ii) Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO), Planning District Commissions

(PDCs), and other statewide or regional bodies iii) local governments and; iv) tribes with state or federal recognition

3. A project that has been selected for TRIP funding must be re-scored and the funding decision reevaluated if there are significant changes to either the scope or the cost of the project

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED,** the Board hereby adopts the following policy to govern the structure and prioritization of projects for TRIP Enhanced Mobility Innovation funding pursuant to §33.2-1526.3 of the Code of Virginia:

1. TRIP Enhanced Mobility Innovation funding will encourage innovative approaches to micromobility, paratransit, and other specialized transportation. For the purpose of review and prioritization, TRIP Enhanced Mobility Innovation projects will be classified into the following eligible project types: i) innovative approaches to improving first and last mile connections to public transportation with micromobility; ii) innovative approaches to specialized transportation that supports the mobility of older adults, people with disabilities, or other groups with special transportation needs; and iii) innovative approaches to coordinating specialized transportation with public transportation.

2. The following entities are eligible for TRIP Enhanced Mobility Innovation funding: i) public transit providers that receive state operating assistance pursuant to 33.2-1526.1 D 1; ii) local governments, Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs), Planning District Commissions (PDCs), and other statewide or regional bodies; iii) local governments and; iv) tribes with state or federal recognition.

3. A project that has been selected for TRIP funding must be re-scored and the funding decision reevaluated if there are significant changes to either the scope, timeline or the cost of the project.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that any such improvements modify or affect the policy set forth herein shall be brought to the Board for review and approval.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED,** the Board hereby directs the Director of the Department of Rail and Public Transportation to take all actions necessary to implement and administer this policy, including, but not limited to preparation of program guidance and outreach consistent with this resolution.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED,** the Board hereby directs the Director of the Department of Rail and Public Transportation to analyze the outcomes of this process on an annual basis and to revisit the process at least every three years, in consultation with the Transit Service Delivery Advisory Committee, prior to making recommendations to the Commonwealth Transportation Board.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED,** that all versions of the Policy for the Implementation of the Transit Ridership Incentive Program approved by the Board prior to this action are superseded by this revised policy and are hereby rescinded.

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**CTB Decision Brief**
**Title: Policy for the Implementation of the Transit Ridership Incentive Program**

**Issue:** HB 1414 (2020 General Assembly Session) established the Transit Ridership Incentive Program (TRIP) to promote improved transit service across the Commonwealth by encouraging the identification and establishment of routes of regional significance in urbanized areas and supporting the establishment of programs to reduce the impact of fares on low-income individuals. In the 2022 General Assembly Session, SB 342 made changes to the TRIP program by setting a minimum threshold of program funding to be used on regional routes of significance and in the 2023 General Assembly Session, SB 1326 made additional changes to the program by creating two additional program categories: passenger amenities and public safety. Furthermore, in the 2026 General Assembly Session, HB 200 stripped the TRIP program of all geographic restrictions and minimum/maximum funding thresholds between project categories. HB 200 also added a new project category under TRIP: innovative approaches to micromobility, paratransit, and other specialized transportation. Updates to the Commonwealth Transportation Board's TRIP policy are necessary to address these legislative changes to the program.

**Facts:** Section 33.2-1526.3 of the Code of Virginia provides that the Commonwealth Transportation Board shall develop TRIP program guidelines, in consultation with the Transit Service Delivery Advisory Committee. DRPT proposed policy changes to TSDAC on July 7, 2026 and received unanimous endorsement (with one abstention) on the following changes:

- *Add Eligible Applicants:* Add local governments and tribes with federal or state recognition.
- *Remove Geographic Restrictions:* Remove language that restricts Regional Connectivity projects to urban agencies.
- *Add New Project Category:* Add new Enhanced Mobility Innovation project category and associated eligibility requirements.

**Recommendation:** DRPT recommends that the CTB approve the Policy for the Implementation of the Transit Ridership Incentive Program.

**Action Required by CTB:** Approve the Policy for the Implementation of the Transit Ridership Incentive Program.

**Options:** Approve, Deny, or Defer.

HAMPTON ROADS TRANSIT

September 17, 2026

Director Mariia Zimmerman
Deputy Director Allan Fye
Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation
600 East Main Street
Suite 2102
Richmond, Virginia 23219

RE: Public comments on proposed changes to the Making Efficient and Responsible Investments in Transit (MERIT) operating and capital assistance programs and the Transit Ridership Incentive Program (TRIP)

Dear Director Zimmerman and Deputy Director Fye:

On behalf of the Transportation District Commission of Hampton Roads (TDCHR), I am pleased to submit the following comments regarding the proposed changes to the MERIT and TRIP programs. TDCHR appreciates the thoughtful and thorough process undertaken by the Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT) to review these important programs and develop recommendations with the Transit Service Delivery Advisory Committee (TSDAC) for their continued improvement.

## Performance-Based Funding

Hampton Roads Transit (HRT) supports DRPT's goal of incorporating performance-based funding into the MERIT Operating Program. HRT recognizes the value of establishing performance measures that encourage transit agencies to operate efficiently, effectively, and in a manner that maximizes the public benefit of state investment.

However, HRT is concerned that, as proposed, the 5% Performance Fund could create an inherent tension between efficiency and the obligation to provide comprehensive regional service. Although the proposed metrics are intended to reward strong performance, they may disproportionately favor transit systems operating in dense, compact urban environments, where land use patterns and population density naturally support higher levels of productivity.

In contrast, agencies serving geographically dispersed, multi-jurisdictional regions must balance productivity and efficiency with the responsibility to provide regional coverage, connectivity, and access across longer travel corridors and diverse communities. These service obligations are essential to maintaining a functional regional transportation network but may not be fully reflected in traditional productivity measures.

HRT is also concerned that reliance on a single-year dataset, combined with a 60th-percentile eligibility threshold, could introduce funding volatility and may not adequately reflect sustained agency performance. Year-to-year changes in operating conditions, ridership, service levels, and other factors may affect an agency's performance measures without necessarily indicating a meaningful change in its overall operational effectiveness.

Accordingly, HRT encourages DRPT and the Commonwealth Transportation Board (CTB) to evaluate whether the proposed methodology sufficiently accounts for the differing operating environments and regional service obligations of agencies within the Large Urban cohort. HRT also encourages consideration of a multi-year averaging methodology, which could provide greater funding stability while continuing to recognize and reward sustained strong performance.

HRT appreciates DRPT's commitment to developing a performance-based funding approach that promotes accountability while recognizing the diverse operating environments in which Virginia's transit agencies provide service. We look forward to continuing to work with DRPT and the CTB as these important changes are further evaluated.

## Expanding TRIP Eligibility to Local Governments

HRT supports expanding opportunities for mobility investments through the TRIP program. However, HRT encourages DRPT and the CTB to carefully evaluate the implications of expanding the applicant pool to include local governments. Because TRIP funding is limited, increasing the number of eligible applicants could create additional competition for program resources and potentially reduce funding available for projects sponsored by transit agencies responsible for delivering and maintaining transit services.

As the designated transit provider for the region, HRT is responsible for planning, integrating, and operating transit services across multiple jurisdictions. HRT recommends that locally sponsored applications include documented coordination with the affected transit provider and demonstrate consistency with the provider's service plans and strategic objectives.

For projects that require transit agency implementation, operations, maintenance, or integration into existing services, HRT further recommends that applications include

written concurrence from the affected transit provider. These measures would help ensure that limited TRIP resources are invested in projects that are practical, sustainable, and capable of being successfully implemented and integrated within the regional transit network.

## Interaction Between TRIP Zero-Fare Funding and MERIT Allocations

HRT requests clarification regarding how ridership generated through TRIP-funded zero-fare and reduced-fare initiatives will be reflected in the MERIT Operating Program allocation process. Because ridership is a factor in both the proposed Base Allocation and Performance Allocation methodologies, agencies receiving TRIP funding for fare-free or reduced-fare programs could experience increased ridership that subsequently affects their MERIT funding allocations.

HRT encourages DRPT to evaluate this interaction as part of the proposed funding methodology to ensure that the relationship between TRIP-funded initiatives and MERIT allocations is appropriately considered. DRPT should consider whether ridership increases attributable to separate state-funded incentive programs could result in an unintended compounding effect across state funding programs.

HRT appreciates DRPT's consideration of these comments and the opportunity to participate in the review of the MERIT and TRIP programs. Please let me know if you have any questions or require any additional information.

Respectfully,

E. Noelle Pinkard
Interim President/CEO

CC: The Honorable Nick Donohue, Secretary of Transportation
The Honorable Frederick T. Stant, III, Hampton Roads District, CTB
The Honorable Grindly Johnson, At-Large Urban, CTB
The Honorable J. Randall Minchew, At-Large Urban, CTB
The Honorable Marianne Moffat Radcliffe, At-Large Urban, CTB

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September 18, 2026

Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation
DRPTPR@drpt.virginia.gov

**Re: MERIT and TRIP Program Policy Recommendations**

The Southern Environmental Law Center (SELC) would like to provide the following comments on the policy recommendations for the Making Efficient and Responsible Investments in Transit (MERIT) Operating Program, the MERIT Capital Program, and the Transit Ridership Incentive Program (TRIP) that have been proposed by the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT). SELC works throughout Virginia to promote a cleaner, more equitable transportation program, including the operation and expansion of transit service as a less polluting and more affordable mobility option for Virginians.

Although not the focus of these comments, it is important to note that Virginia continues to underfund cleaner, more equitable transportation alternatives such as transit and that there is a pressing need to increase transit funding.

Particularly in light of the current funding constraints, SELC strongly supports the two primary policy goals DRPT has identified for transit funding: 1) providing funding stability to ensure transit agencies can plan for and provide needed services, while 2) incentivizing strong performance—which includes maximizing operational efficiency, growing ridership, and improving customer experience. We would further suggest that the second goal be slightly amended to include incentivizing reducing pollution.

MERIT Operating Program Recommendations

SELC supports DRPT's recommended changes to the MERIT Operating Program, which were unanimously approved by the Transit Service Delivery Advisory Committee (TSDAC). These recommendations are the most significant policy changes currently proposed by DRPT. They are grounded in DRPT's transit funding goals, as well as the recognition that the current policy's "one size fits all" approach does not adequately consider differences among the communities being served, has a relatively complex allocation formula, lacks performance metrics, and can result in variations in allocation levels from year to year that make it difficult for transit agencies to plan and budget.

The recommended policy changes attempt to address each of these items, including by providing a guaranteed base level of funding that is geared to the type of area served and by creating a Performance Fund (with 5% of total annual MERIT Operating funds) that will provide additional allocations to agencies to reward good performance on certain metrics. Again, we support these proposed changes and urge the Commonwealth Transportation Board (CTB) to adopt them.

MERIT Capital Program Recommendations

SELC also supports the proposed changes to the MERIT Capital Program policies. Although—as DRPT has noted—these changes are rather minor, they include useful revisions to project categorization and scoring, project definitions, and incentive scoring. These recommendations were unanimously approved by TSDAC as well, and they should be adopted.

However, we urge DRPT and the CTB to go farther in revising the MERIT Capital Program policies. Although we recognize that wholesale changes would be difficult at this point in the review process, we are concerned that no changes are proposed to address DRPT's goal of providing transit funding stability. While DRPT's proposed changes to the MERIT Operating Program attempt to reduce the variations in allocations from year to year that make it difficult for transit agencies to plan and budget operating expenses, there does not appear to be any proposal to address the exact same problem in the MERIT Capital Program. If anything, the problem is more severe for capital funding, and year-to-year allocations hamper the ability to make needed investments to maintain state of good repair and to expand services. At the very least, the CTB should direct DRPT to explore alternatives and to conduct pilots to test innovative ways to support multi-year funding of capital projects.

In addition, the scoring of applications under the MERIT Capital Program involving vehicle purchases should be modified to give additional points for the purchase of zero emission vehicles and associated charging or fueling infrastructure. Although the Merit Capital Program has funded the purchase of a number of zero and low emission vehicles, this funding should be expanded since these vehicles provide environmental and public health benefits by reducing climate pollution and other emissions and improve customer experience by reducing passengers' direct exposure to pollution. At a minimum, DRPT should be directed to evaluate and bring back to the CTB potential policy changes to the MERIT Capital Program that would do more to promote zero emission vehicle purchases and infrastructure deployment.

TRIP Recommendations

DRPT's proposed amendments to the TRIP policies are largely in response to changes the General Assembly made earlier this year to Va. Code §33.2- 1526.3 in passing HB200—legislation that SELC supported. Among other things, these amendments simplify the requirements of TRIP and reduce various funding limitations. SELC strongly supports the policy changes to implement these statutory changes.

In addition, we recommend that DRPT and the CTB revisit the current policy limiting TRIP funding for zero and reduced fares to three years, with the state share decreasing over time. This policy is not required by the state code. Although we understand the goals of limiting the duration of state funding and shifting to regional and/or local support, there is a pressing need for equitable, affordable transportation options and zero and reduced fares can be a powerful tool to address this need. We recommend that DRPT examine and bring back to the CTB potential policy changes to TRIP that would extend the maximum period of funding for zero and reduced fares to at least five years with a more gradual reduction in state support, as well as options that would allow for renewal grants if certain metrics are met.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments. We look forward to continuing to work with DRPT to improve Virginia's transit funding policies and systems.

Sincerely,



Trip Pollard
Land & Community Program Leader

**From:** DRPT
**To:** Fye, Allan (DRPT); Sparks, Grant (DRPT)
**Subject:** TSDAC Work Comments
**Date:** Friday, September 18, 2026 10:53:00 PM

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Name: Aparna Paladugu
Email : aparna.paladugu@ridewithvia.com
Comment or question about TSDAC's Work: Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation's proposed updates to the Making Efficient and Responsible Investments in Transit (MERIT) and Transit Ridership Incentive Program (TRIP). Via appreciates DRPT's continued efforts to strengthen Virginia's transit programs and ensure that state funding supports effective and innovative transportation options across the Commonwealth.

About Via and Our Work in Virginia
Via is a transit technology company that works with more than 800 transit agencies and municipalities around the world to deliver innovative public transportation solutions in urban, suburban, and rural communities. This includes deploying on-demand transit shuttles, also referred to as microtransit, making fixed-route bus networks more efficient, and improving paratransit and other demand-responsive transportation services.

Via has established a very impactful presence in Virginia since the launch of our first service with Hampton Roads Transit. We now operate and provide software for microtransit and paratransit services across the state. These include Hampton Roads Transit, Bay Transit, Mountain Empire Older Citizens, GLTC, GRTC and the Cities of Arlington, Charlottesville and Winchester. Whether it's helping residents access jobs and critical services including healthcare and grocery stores, or providing agencies with new solutions to connect to existing transit services, our work in the state is just beginning and we hope to become an important part of the larger transit network.

DRPT has led the way in utilizing innovative transit technology to provide improved transportation solutions for residents, helping improve access to jobs, healthcare and essential services. DRPT has provided statewide usage of Remix transit planning software to 40 agencies across the state and funded microtransit projects through both the TRIP and MERIT programs, with great success. For example, in Hampton Roads, a TRIP grant helped fund HRT's OnDemand microtransit pilot, operated in partnership with Via. The service has demonstrated strong demand: HRT reports that the flagship Newport News zone now provides more than 10,000 rides per month. Building on the pilot's success, HRT has continued service in Newport News and expanded microtransit to Hampton and Chesapeake. These investments demonstrate the important role DRPT has played in giving transit agencies the resources to test and deploy new service models.

Comments Regarding Changes to MERIT & Trip Programs
MERIT: Via supports DRPT's proposed updated approach to the MERIT program and appreciates the Department's efforts to simplify the operating assistance methodology and strengthen its focus on performance. As DRPT implements the updated approach, we encourage the Department to ensure that the performance framework appropriately recognizes demand-responsive transit. Demand-responsive services operate differently from traditional fixed-route transit and can play an important role in serving lower-density areas, filling gaps in existing networks, and providing mobility where traditional fixed-route service may not be the

most effective option. We encourage DRPT to ensure that performance measures do not inadvertently disadvantage these services because of their different operating characteristics and continue to provide agencies flexibility to deploy the service model that best meets the needs of their riders and communities.

TRIP: Via strongly supports the TRIP program and appreciates DRPT's proposed changes to improve and strengthen the program. Our experience in Hampton Roads demonstrates how TRIP can help agencies introduce innovative services, build ridership, and expand successful models. We are particularly excited about the proposed new Enhanced Mobility Innovation category and the additional opportunities it can provide to support innovative approaches to micromobility, paratransit, demand-responsive transit, and other specialized transportation. Via encourages DRPT to explicitly allow for demand response and microtransit projects in this category. We also encourage DRPT to maintain flexibility within this category so that communities can pursue innovative service models that respond to local mobility needs.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on these important programs. Via looks forward to continuing to partner with DRPT, transit agencies and communities across the Commonwealth to expand access to high-quality public transportation.

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Date: September 18, 2026
Time: 10:52 pm
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September 18, 2026

The Honorable Mariia Zimmerman, Director
The Honorable Allan Fye, Deputy Director
Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation
600 East Main Street, Suite 2102
Richmond, Virginia 23219
DRPTPR@drpt.virginia.gov

**Re: MERIT and TRIP Program Update Public Comments**

Dear Director Zimmerman and Deputy Director Fye:

On behalf of the Virginia Transit Association (VTA), I am pleased to provide the following formal comments regarding the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation's (DRPT) proposed updates to the Making Efficient and Responsible Investments in Transit (MERIT) Operating and Capital Programs and the Transit Ridership Incentive Program (TRIP) before the Commonwealth Transportation Board (CTB).

First and foremost, VTA would like to recognize the considerable work undertaken by DRPT and the members of the Transit Service Delivery Advisory Committee (TSDAC), who devoted countless hours to ensuring that this triennial review process was open, comprehensive, transparent, and engaging. While VTA is not taking a position on the proposed changes to the MERIT Operating Program, we commend DRPT for its extensive outreach throughout the process and its willingness to engage stakeholders and respond to questions and concerns.

Regarding the proposed changes to the TRIP program, which were legislatively directed in response to HB 200, passed by the Virginia General Assembly during the 2026 Legislative Session, VTA supports the proposed updates. The legislative changes streamline the program, remove unnecessary barriers that have limited some transit agencies' ability to access TRIP funding, and expand the program's ability to support innovative approaches to increasing transit ridership. We do look forward to additional opportunities to work with TSDAC and the CTB to continue to refine the TRIP program over the coming years.

VTA also supports the proposed changes to the MERIT Capital Program. These changes are relatively limited in scope and primarily address project categorization and scoring, project definitions, and incentive scoring. The recommendations were unanimously approved by TSDAC, and VTA supports their adoption.

Finally, we believe there is an opportunity to continue improving the MERIT Capital Program in the coming years by encouraging innovation, creating greater efficiencies, and increasing transparency through better use of data. As DRPT and the CTB considers future improvements to the program, VTA encourages consideration of the following ideas:

- **Create a statewide transit capital dashboard** that provides the public, policymakers, and other stakeholders with a clearer understanding of the condition of Virginia's core transit assets—including buses, rail vehicles, ferries, and facilities—and how the age and condition of those assets compare with their anticipated useful lives and replacement schedules.

- **Provide DRPT with greater flexibility to pilot innovative approaches**—either directly or in partnership with transit agencies—that have the potential to make public transportation more efficient, effective, reliable, and responsive to the communities it serves.

- **Improve the administration of the MERIT Capital Program through greater use of multi-year funding commitments.** Providing additional opportunities for multi-year commitments would help transit agencies and their state, regional, and local funding partners better plan for major capital investments and deploy limited resources more efficiently over multiple fiscal years.

- **Establish a streamlined capital funding allocation for minor capital needs.** DRPT should consider dedicating a small portion of the annual MERIT Capital Program allocation to a direct, formula-based capital allocation for transit agencies, potentially based on each agency's share of MERIT Operating funding. Agencies could use these funds for routine, low-cost capital needs—such as computers, office equipment, tools, and other minor equipment purchases—without requiring these relatively small expenditures to compete through the full capital grant process. Such an approach could reduce administrative burdens for both DRPT and transit agencies while allowing the competitive MERIT Capital Program to remain focused on larger and more consequential capital investments.

VTA appreciates the opportunity to provide comments on these proposed updates and looks forward to continuing to work with DRPT, TSDAC, CTB, and our transit agency partners to strengthen Virginia's transit funding programs. We believe the current review provides an important opportunity not only to improve the administration of MERIT and TRIP today, but also to establish a foundation for continued innovation, efficiency, transparency, and responsible stewardship of the Commonwealth's transit resources.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments.

Sincerely,



Danny Plaugher
Executive Director
Virginia Transit Association
Danny@vatransit.com