# Transforming Transit

## Assessing Current and Future Transit Needs and Opportunities

Mariia Zimmerman, Director

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DRPT
VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF RAIL AND PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION



# What is this presentation?

- Informational only
- No CTB action required

***DRPT is kicking off an 18-month Transit Transformation Study to better understand needs and opportunities for transit across the Commonwealth. The study is part of a larger set of activities DRPT is advancing to improve operational efficiencies, accelerate project delivery, grow ridership and provide mobility options that support economic growth***

<u>Areas of Focus</u>

- Overview of Current Transit Performance Statewide
- Trends in Transit Impacting Future Scenarios
- Ways That DRPT is Responding

# Transit Today in Virginia



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# Public Transportation in Virginia by VDOT District

## BRISTOL
- 8 Bristol Virginia Transit (BVT)
- 15 Four County Transit
- 17 Graham Transit
- 26 Mountain Empire Transit
- 27 Mountain Lynx

## CULPEPER
- 10 Charlottesville Area Transit (CAT)
- 23 Jaunt
- 38 Virginia Regional Transit (VRT)

## FREDERICKSBURG
- 16 FXBGO!
- 4 Bay Transit
- 37 Virginia Railway Express (VRE)

## HAMPTON ROADS
- 20 Greensville Emporia Transit (GET)
- 21 Hampton Roads Transit (HRT)
- 30 PONY Express
- 34 Star Transit
- 35 Suffolk Transit
- 39 Williamsburg Area Transit Authority (WATA)

## LYNCHBURG
- 2 Altavista Community Transit System (ACTS)
- 7 Blackstone Area Bus System (BABS)
- 11 Danville Transit System
- 14 Farmville Area Bus (FAB)
- 18 Greater Lynchburg Transit Company (GLTC)
- 23 Jaunt
- 24 Lake Area Bus / Halifax Area Rural Transportation

## NOVA
- 1 Alexandria DASH
- 3 Arlington Transit (ART)
- 12 Fairfax Connector
- 13 Fairfax CUE
- 25 Loudoun County Transit (LC Transit)
- 28 OmniRide
- 37 Virginia Railway Express (VRE)
- 38 Virginia Regional Transit (VRT)
- 41 WMATA

## RICHMOND
- 4 Bay Transit
- 7 Blackstone Area Bus System (BABS)
- 19 Greater Richmond Transit Company (GRTC)
- 24 Lake Area Bus / Halifax Area Rural Transportation
- 29 Petersburg Area Transit (PAT)

## SALEM
- 5 Bedford OtterBus
- 6 Blacksburg Transit (BT)
- 27 Mountain Lynx
- 31 Pulaski Area Transit
- 32 RADAR
- 33 Radford Transit
- 36 Valley Metro

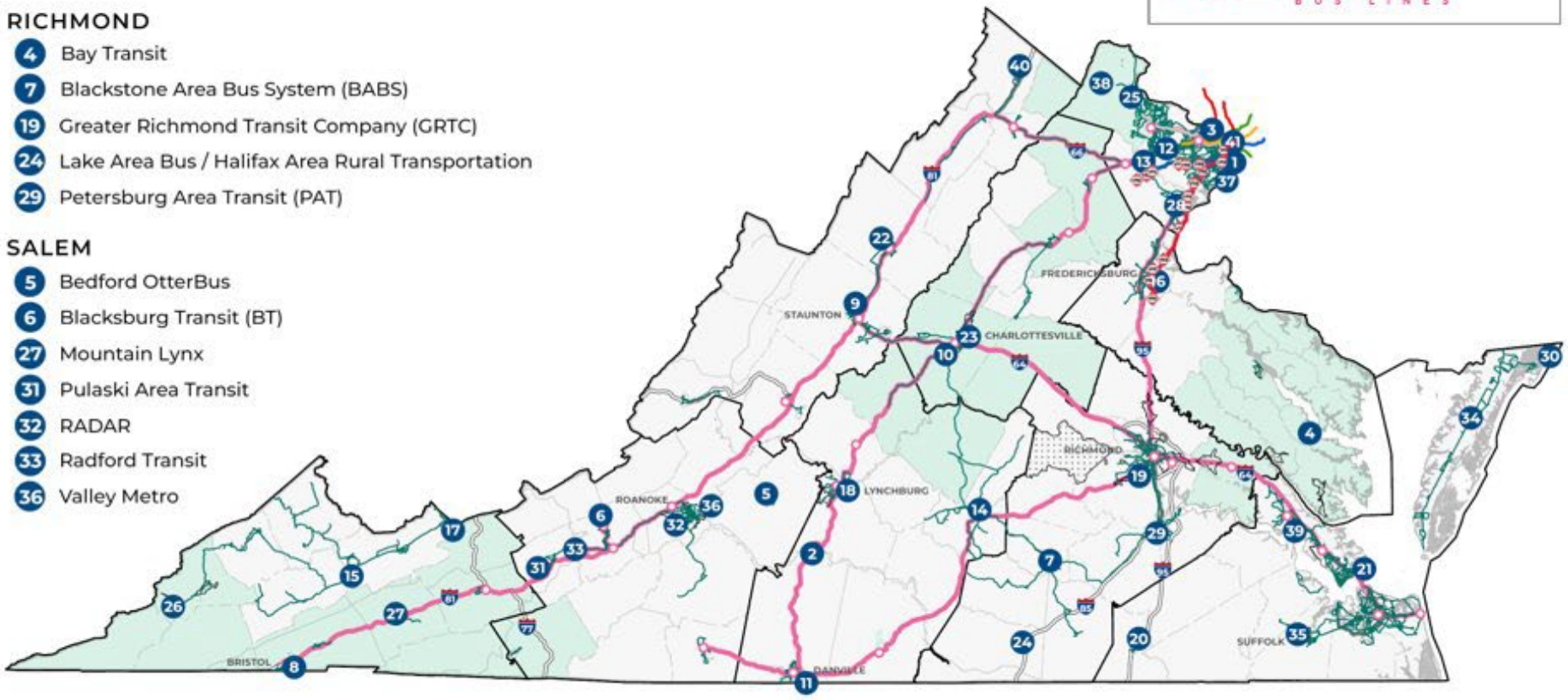
## STAUNTON
- 9 BRITE
- 22 Harrisonburg Dept. of Public Transportation (HDPT)
- 32 RADAR
- 38 Virginia Regional Transit (VRT)
- 40 WinTran

**Fixed Route Service Areas**
(includes Fixed-Route + ADA Paratransit + Deviated Fixed Route)

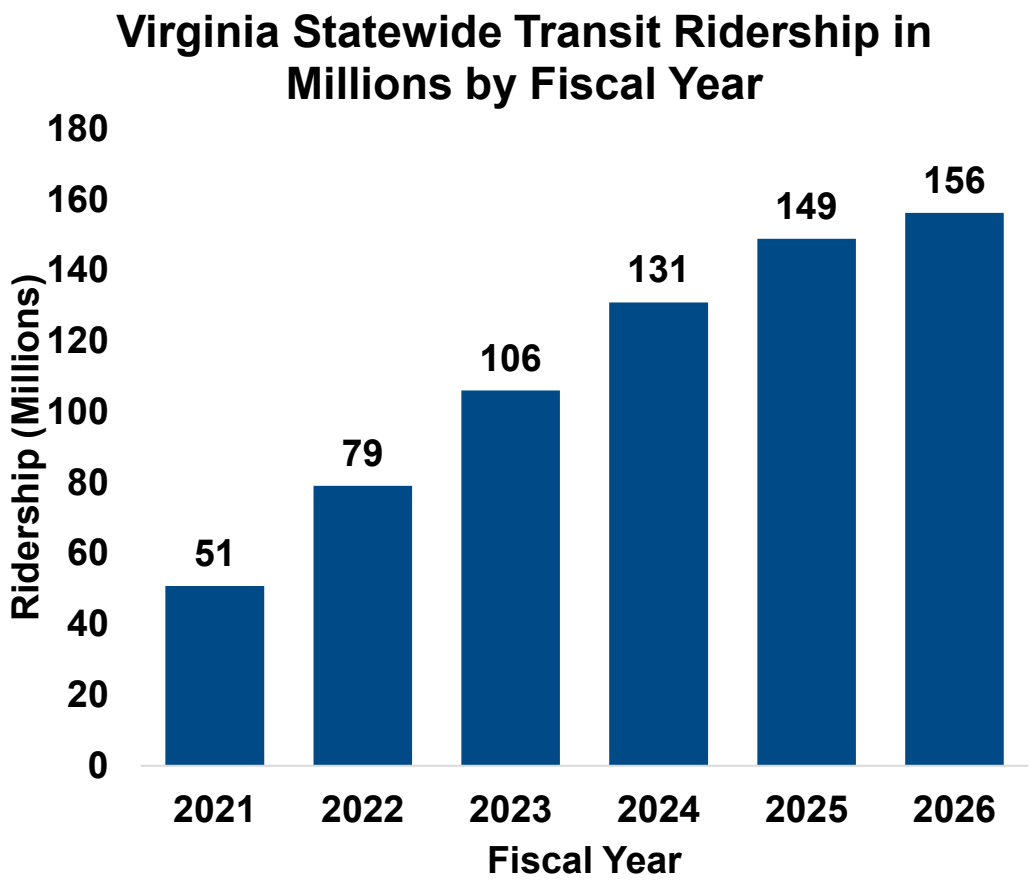
**Demand Response Service Areas**
(includes Demand Response Service available to all riders)

**Microtransit Service Zone**
(app-based Demand Response Service available to all riders)

VRE · Metro · VIRGINIA BREEZE BUS LINES



# Statewide Transit Ridership




Source: DRPT Open Data Portal, Transit Performance Measures

- Virginia's statewide transit ridership has grown since FY 2021-lows
- Changing commutes, emerging transit needs, and new investments in services have changed ridership patterns differently in different parts of the Commonwealth
- Agencies with highest recent ridership growth come from across the Commonwealth:
  - DASH (Alexandria) (FY 2026 Ridership 170% of FY 2019)
  - Fairfax CUE & Petersburg Area Transit (FY 2026 ridership 150% of FY 2019)
  - GRTC (Richmond) (FY 2026 Ridership 135% of FY 2019)
  - Mountain Empire Transit (FY 2026 ridership 130% of FY 2019)
  - FXBGo! (FY 2026 Ridership 115% of FY 2019)

# Changing Mobility and Commuter Demands

- Traffic congestion increasing in metropolitan areas along with increased costs of driving for all Virginians
- Fewer young adults are getting drivers licenses
- Virginia's population is aging, and more senior citizens require transportation
- Growing demand for transit beyond the 5-day work commute trip and "rush hours"
- Rural hospitals are closing, and the distance to travel for medical care is growing, increasing the need for alternative transportation options than driving
- More localities and non-profit organizations are evaluating or seeking transportation solutions as mobility needs evolve









# Transit is more than just ridership

"I am a retiree on a fixed income, and transit helps us save a lot of money by getting by with one vehicle. And when we had health problems that prevented us from driving, transit was a lifeline."

"Often drivers will help me in knowing my stops, this is because they know me by name. 'Ms. Deborah this is your stop' or hand me my bags. This is because I am always talking to other riders and sharing stories on the bus. My daughter, Jackie always keeps extra change on her in case someone is short of the fare. Jackie is disabled and this keeps her happy to serve others. The bus sometimes becomes our ministry to serve."

"I ride the Tide almost every day. Several workers in my building do too, and I've gotten to know them better from those shared Tide rides! PT is a connector of people not just places."

"Riding the 78 with my 2 kids (5 and 8) from a stop 2 blocks from our neighborhood. Their sense of empowerment knowing that soon, they will be able to ride the bus alone."

# An Impressive Return on Investment

- For the $963 million in funding allocated to public transportation in the FY27 SYIP:
  - Transit services mitigate congestion and save users **$681 million a year in time savings alone,** per the 2020 DRPT Economic Impact of Transit study.
  - Public transportation generated **$3.4 billion in economic value,** per the 2020 DRPT Economic Impact of Transit study. Transit enables people to access higher paying jobs and education that support personal economic mobility.
  - Transit is a **safe mode of travel**. Since 2019, the National Transit Database indicates that there have been only 5 fatalities on transit in Virginia.
  - Public transportation also produces **45% less carbon dioxide and 95% less carbon monoxide** per passenger mile than personal automobiles, per data from the EPA.
  - Transit, including specialized transportation and paratransit services, help **reduce healthcare costs**. According to National Health Interview Survey, among all individuals surveyed with chronic conditions, those experiencing transportation difficulties were 62% more likely to seek higher cost care in emergency departments.

# Trends Impacting Transit Needs and Opportunities



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# Emerging trends, challenges, opportunities







## Trends

- Expansion of transit across the Commonwealth
- Affordability and zero-fare programs
- Proliferation of microtransit

## Challenges

- Funding limitations
- Project delivery
- Changing priorities

## Opportunities

- Safety and Design Division
- Funding innovation

# Service Expansion + New Providers = More Transit

- **Future and Current Expansions**
  - Transit agencies seek to grow service areas & service intensity in response to local demand
  - Providers are expanding their footprints as transit needs grow
  - Numerous plans and studies for major expansions, new services, or creation of new transit authorities are underway
  - Major capital projects are currently in development, being planned, or under construction
  - New vanpool service being launched, including in rural regions

- **New and Future Transit Providers**
  - Newest public transportation providers in Virginia: Bedford Otter Bus
  - Several counties, non-profits, or other entities are studying or testing public transportation as an option
  - Other counties or non-profits express interest in expanding transit

# Providing Innovative Approaches to Transit

- **System Optimization Planning**
  - Numerous transit agencies across Virginia are studying and implementing plans for system optimization, ie HRT System Optimization Plan
  - This includes better route planning, removing unneeded stops, and eliminating or replacing low-performing routes with microtransit



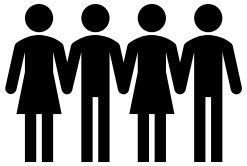
- **Growth of Microtransit**
  - Technology-enhanced demand responsive door-to-door public transportation
  - 11 Virginia public transportation agencies provide microtransit, many in rural areas

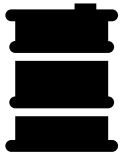


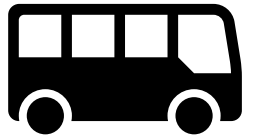
# Transit Capital Projects

- **Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Systems**
  - Several regions of Virginia are studying, actively planning, or preparing to construct BRT networks to provide more frequent, high-capacity transit on heavily used corridors.
- **Expansion and Modernization of Systems**
  - Transfer centers, operations and maintenance facilities needed to support system growth.
  - New technology deployment and Electric Vehicle expansion.
- **Capital Project Pipeline Grows, but Delivery Often Delayed**
  - Major capital transit projects often cross multiple jurisdictions and operate on VDOT or locally-managed roadways requiring coordination beyond the transit agency.
  - Many transit agencies lack internal capacity to manage a major capital project from planning through construction.
  - Funding for planning and preliminary engineering, design and cost estimation work is limited.
  - State capital funding has historically only been allocated on an annual basis.

# Growing Costs, Many Outside of Transit's Control







DRPT's operating assistance program accounted for 22% of all transit operating costs in FY23 but is projected to account for only 15% of all transit operating costs by FY32.

The Federal Transit Administration does not provide operating funds to urban transit providers.

Current demand exceeds available federal 5311 (rural) and 5310 (human service transportation) funding; compounded by loss of advanced appropriations.

Transit capital budgets and capital projects are constrained by several factors:

- Local match rates limit DRPT capital funding.
- DRPT historically has utilized an annual, itemized capital funding process.
- Many transit providers need assistance in developing major capital projects and rely on consultants, in contrast to highway projects which benefit from VDOT technical support.

# New Challenges and Opportunities

- **Transit Safety and Security Concerns**
  - Transit Workers
  - Transit Riders / Vulnerable Road Users
  - Potential Riders
  - AI and Digital Technologies
- **Customer Experience On and Off the Bus**
  - Shelters, sidewalks, lighting
  - Real time information and mobile applications
- **Economic Development, Housing and Place Making**
  - Transit Supportive Land Use
  - Transit Oriented Development
  - First and Last Mile connections






# Transforming Transit:
# How DRPT is Responding



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# Creating a Safety and Design Division

- DRPT recently elevated its engineering and safety teams to a division level creating a new Safety and Design division.
- The Safety and Design Division will focus on initiatives to promote safety and security through training, technical assistance, engineering and design initiatives.
- This will be done through:
  - Creating standards and guidelines for common transit features like bus shelters.
  - Developing a simple approval process for transit features.
  - Providing training programs to support agencies in implementing new and existing federal safety and security guidance and requirements.
  - Utilizing transit and rail safety data analytics to guide needed investments and interventions.

# Finding New Approaches to Funding and Innovation

- **MERIT Operating and TRIP Program Changes**
  - Proposed changes to the MERIT Operating Assistance program, to be voted on by the CTB, will create an easier to understand, more stable operating assistance program.
- **MERIT Capital Program Needs**
  - DRPT is undertaking an assessment of the state's approach to major capital projects and allocating State of Good Repair MERIT funding to ease administrative burden, improve project delivery and promote multi-year programming.
- **Modernizing DRPT's Grant Management Systems**
  - DRPT is updating its financial and grant management systems to harmonize agency data to better track grant and project delivery progress.
- **Promoting Innovation**
  - DRPT will be exploring new statewide procurement opportunities, especially to support new technology adoption; and emerging AI technologies to achieve cost efficiencies & improve service.

# Launching the Transit Transformation Study

- Between September 2026 – December 2027, the Transit Transformation Study will provide a comprehensive overview of public transportation in Virginia:
  - Quantify benefits of state investment in transit
  - Identify barriers and cost challenges affecting transit
  - Map strategic transit needs and long-range investment plans adopted at local/regional scale to provide a statewide picture of transit in the future
    - Regional Snapshots
    - Rural Transit Strategy
  - Build out scenarios for public transportation:
    - What are the costs and needs to maintain our statewide transit system, as it is now?
    - What are the most pressing needs in Virginia, and the costs to meet those needs?
    - What does true transformation look like, and what are the associated costs?

# Guiding Future Policy and Investment

- Significant public engagement is planned as part of the study:
  - Traditional transportation and transit partners.
  - Business leaders, employers, health care, university and colleges, housing and community development partners, and more!
- DRPT will apprise CTB along the way and bring forth policy recommendations for the Board's consideration.
- The Study may identify areas where internal policy, CTB policy, or Virginia law unintentionally create barriers to improving public transit, or where new opportunities exist to improve transit delivery and effectiveness.
- The Study will create short, medium, and long-term goals and objectives for public transportation in Virginia.

# Questions?

DRPTPR@drpt.virginia.gov



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