



External Legislative Advisory Committee Minutes
Wednesday, March 15, 2023
Hampton, VA
1:30 PM

Commissioners in Attendance:

August Bullock, Chair, ELAC
Commissioner Andria McClellan, Norfolk

Attendees:

Janice Taylor, League of Women Voters
Adisa Muse, Hunton Andrews Kurth
Maddy Busse, Two Capitols Consulting

HRT Staff:

Alexis Majied, Chief Communications Officer
Gene Cavasos, Director of Marketing
Noelle Pinkard, Organizational Advancement Officer
Amy Jordan, Director of Business Development
John Powell, Telecommunications Specialist, Technology
Petra Jovanovic, Executive Assistant Communications and External Affairs

The meeting commenced at 1:30 pm with a call to order by Commissioner August Bullock, Chair.

Chair Bullock asked for motion to approve minutes from February 15, 2023, ELAC meeting. Commissioner Andria McClellan made a motion to approve minutes. Minutes were approved by committee.

Legislative Update – Noelle Pinkard

Federal Update

Noelle gave update on American Public Transportation Association Legislative Conference that was held in Washington DC. The biggest issue that we are facing now is debt ceiling. There are reports stating that President Biden is planning to increase the nation's debt limit sometime this summer, which could impact overall levels of funding available for transportation.

There are two (2) specific requests that HRT is working on at the Federal level related to Congressionally Directed Spending Programs. HRT is seeking a 3-million-dollar earmark in the fiscal year 2024 Transportation Appropriations Bill for 4 new electric buses.

The other project that we are continuing to work on is the South Side operating division. HRT is seeking Department of Transportation Grants; a RAISE grant application was submitted in February. In April, HRT



will be applying for the Low and No Emissions Grant Program and the Bus and Bus Facilities Program requesting \$25 million dollars in Federal funding for the southside operating division.

State Update

- The 2023 Virginia General Assembly adjourned Sine Die on Saturday, February 18th. As this year was a short-session and non-budget year, the legislature met for only six-weeks to consider legislation and update the biennium budget. There is budget impasse between Senate and the House.
- At the core of the impasse was how to use surpluses in state revenue. Administration proposed \$1 billion in tax cuts versus funding underfunded K-12 education, higher education and mental health needs proposed by Democrats.
- The General Assembly adopted a “stop gap” or “skinny” budget bill to allow for House and Senate budget negotiators to bridge significant differences. The short-term agreement included four primarily technical amendments dealing with the \$250 million error in revenue for local school divisions, mandated contributions to the rainy-day fund, unfunded VRS liabilities, and increased costs associated with previously authorized capital projects.

Adisa Muse commented that it’s expected that budget negotiations resume after the primaries and other nominating contests that occur in late June.

- Noelle then talked about bill HB2338 patroned by Delegate Dolores McQuinn and Senator McClellan that would direct the Commonwealth, Transportation Board to use up to 30% of available TRIP (Transit Ridership Incentive Program) funding to support improvements to transit bus passenger facilities and transitioning public transit bus fleets and infrastructure to zero-emission bus fleets and infrastructure. This bill passed and in presents an opportunity for HRT to apply for additional TRIP grants for passenger amenities and operating costs associated with the transition to zero emissions.
- HB2330 patroned by Delegate McQuinn also passed the legislature. The introduced bill included a two-day mandatory minimum sentence for anyone convicted of assaulting a transit operator. As passed, the legislation classifies operator assaults as a Class 1 misdemeanor, with up to a 15-day jail sentence, and a 6-month suspension from public transit services. Violation of the ban will be a Class 2 misdemeanor.
- The Transportation Partnership Opportunity Fund (TPOF) in relation to HB2302 authorizes the Governor to direct funds from TPOF to the Commonwealth Transportation Board for transportation projects determined to be necessary to support major economic development initiatives.
- Bill HB1496 allocates 3.5 percent of the Commonwealth Mass Transit Fund to Virginia Railway Express and excludes VRE from receiving allocations pursuant to other distributions.



Noelle also mentioned Recordation Tax Legislation bills that were introduced this session, but they didn't pass. HRT will keep monitoring development of events with these bills in future.

- All 140 seats are on the ballot this November 2023 elections. The combination of departures, coupled with incumbents who could be knocked out in upcoming primaries, may mean a turnover of 20%-30% of the General Assembly membership before the start of next year's session.

Chair Bullock announced DC Advocacy Day on April 19th – 20th. HRT will use this opportunity to meet with the Hampton Roads Congressional delegation to promote key projects and funding requests.

Marketing & Strategic Communications Department update

Alexis Majied gave highlights of the Marketing & Strategic Communication February report. The transit advertising group is now beyond \$1 million in total sales. The Public Outreach team organized a Community Resource Fair that was opportunity for HRT to use transit centers to connect customers with resources.

Upcoming events

Alexis mentioned upcoming events. Transit Advocacy Day (May 4th) as one of them, Earth Day which HRT will celebrate on April 21st with free fares. In addition, HRT will host a number of cleanups in the area. Traffix and Public Outreach are planning Bike month activities in each city of Hampton Roads.

Hampton Transit Center Ribbon Cutting is planned for mid-April, HRT Marketing team will inform commissioners about plans for this event in upcoming ELAC meetings.

Commissioner McClellan raised the question about what has been done in regard to Bus Operators Appreciation week. Mrs. Majied replied that the MarCom team has been doing pop-up events all week long in order to celebrate bus and train operators.

Commissioner McClellan asked about the Student Freedom Pass Program, considering summer is approaching soon. Mrs. Majied stated that Public Outreach team is reaching out to schools in Hampton, Newport News as well as Norfolk to provide students with passes.

Mrs. Majied noted that since March is Reading Month, the Marketing and Strategic Communications team has made appointments with elementary schools to go and read to kids in each of the cities. The goal is to be able to talk to students as early as possible about transit, make them familiar with different transportation options and public transportation in general.

Chair Bullock announced that April ELAC meeting will be canceled due to DC Advocacy Day. The next ELAC meeting is scheduled for May 17th, 2023.

The meeting adjourned at 2:30pm.