



External Legislative Advisory Committee Minutes
Wednesday, December 4, 2024
Norfolk, VA
1:30 PM

Commissioners in Attendance:

August Bullock, Chair, ELAC
Commissioner Roland White, Hampton
Commissioner Anthony “Tony” Goodwin, Portsmouth
Commissioner Andria McClellan, Norfolk
Commissioner Dr. Amelia Ross-Hammond, Virginia Beach

Attendees:

Michael D. Hawthorne, Squire Patton Boggs
Jessica Dennis, City of Norfolk
David Westcott, City of Chesapeake
Jerri Wilson, City of Newport News
Brent McKenzie, City of Virginia Beach
Sherri Neil, City of Portsmouth
Cassidy Taylor, Access Point PA

HRT Staff:

Alexis Majied, Chief Communications Officer
Ray Amoruso, Chief Planning and Development Officer
Amy Jordan, Director of Business Development
Noelle Pinkard, Organizational Advancement Officer
Thomas Becher, Communications Manager
John Powell, Telecommunications Specialist
Monique Lynch, TDM Program Specialist

The meeting began at 1:30 pm with Commissioner August Bullock, Chair, calling the meeting to order. Chairman Bullock asked for a motion to approve the minutes from the November 6, 2024, External and Legislative Advisory Committee (ELAC) meetings. Commissioner Anthony “Tony” Goodwin made a motion to approve the minutes, seconded by Commissioner Dr. Amelia Ross-Hammond. The minutes were approved by the committee.

Federal Legislative Update:

Squire Patton Boggs provided the federal legislative update reporting that Congress has just over 2 weeks to avert a government shutdown; it is likely that Congress will consider a Continuing Resolution (CR) prior to the current government funding deadline on December 20. A stopgap CR will push the government funding deadline and final consideration of Fiscal Year (FY) 2025 funding bills to March or early April 2025. Earmarks will not be included in a year-end CR but will likely be reincluded in future spending bills.



President-elect Trump has named former Rep. Sean Duffy (R-WI) to be the next Secretary of Transportation. President-elect Trump's deregulatory effort may not directly impact any transit regulations, but Republicans' plan to rescind/reprogram Infrastructure, Investment, and Jobs Act (IIJA) discretionary grants could reach transit and multimodal funds. Expect annual appropriations fights for Capital Investment Grant (CIG) funding for new transit projects, as in Trump's first term.

Congress will begin to consider surface transportation reauthorization in 2025 with oversight hearings; Republicans may not support continuing IIJA's record-high funding for transit and passenger rail.

State Legislative Update:

Access Point Public Affairs provided the state legislative update reporting on the state revenue outlook. FY 2024 general fund (GF) revenue increased by \$1.5 billion (5.5%) over FY 2023, exceeding the official forecast by \$1.2 billion. All but \$150 million of this funding already is committed. Year to date, revenue growth has been 8.6%, compared to a forecasted 3.1% decline. In FY 2026, GF revenue growth is expected to moderate to 1.7%, resulting in an additional \$1.1 billion of collections above the current budget forecast.

The current budget forecast was predicated on a recession that has not occurred. The higher-than-expected 2024 revenue base and the improved economic outlook will result in adjustments to the forecast in December exceeding \$3.0 billion. The General Assembly was able to fully meet its ongoing commitments in both years of the current biennium. Mandatory program costs have increased and unmet needs drive legislative interest for new and expanded programs – especially in the second year of the current state budget (FY 2026). Staff recommends that the General Assembly use one-time resources for one-time items, including those that reduce future liabilities.

General Assembly Advocacy Day:

Event Details: The Virginia Transit Association (VTA) and Pasture Rail Association are co-hosting a joint Transit/Rail Advocacy Day on **Monday, January 27th**. Specific details, such as the meeting room, are yet to be announced by VTA but will be communicated to the Commission once finalized.

- **Expected Agenda (based on last year):**
 - Begin at 9:00 AM in the Capitol.
 - Member meetings before and after lunch.
 - Lunch during session time.
 - Evening reception.
- **Participation:**
 - Commissioners interested in attending should inform Noelle, who will coordinate rides (Amtrak is an option).
 - Last year saw a record number of participants (over 16), including Hampton Roads Transit (HRT) staff and commissioners.



- **Goals:**
 - Maintain strong representation, with hopes of surpassing last year's turnout. Focus on ensuring the needs of Hampton Roads are highlighted without being overshadowed by other regions in the Commonwealth.
- **Preparation:**
 - Attendees will wear HRT lapel pins and custom name tags to ensure easy recognition.

Local Advocacy City Council Presentations:

The discussion centered on local advocacy presentations and ways to improve outreach to city councils about HRT projects and initiatives. Noelle provided an update, noting that most city council presentations were completed except for Hampton, which will be scheduled in January. Commissioners highlighted the importance of tailoring presentations to council members' knowledge levels, with feedback suggesting the need for high-level overviews and avoiding overly technical content.

Commissioners emphasized the value of conducting these presentations annually, akin to state and federal advocacy efforts, given the frequent turnover in council members. This regularity ensures that new members understand HRT's impact and ongoing projects. Suggestions included engaging government relations and marketing teams to refine presentations, reviewing them with commissioners beforehand, and inviting new council members to HRT board meetings or organizing a collective orientation session for all new members.

The idea of an "HRT Orientation Day" was proposed, potentially including an overview of HRT's history, current projects, and a bus ride to showcase transit operations. Commissioners underscored the importance of maintaining strong local advocacy efforts to foster awareness, collaboration, and support among council members for HRT's initiatives.

Marketing & Communications Update:

Alexis Majied gave the Marketing & Communications update.

This session highlighted the marketing team's innovation and community-driven focus to enhance HRT's visibility and user engagement. The discussion focused on updates from the marketing and communications team, highlighting their achievements and ongoing initiatives:

Key Points:

1. **Annual Report Success:**
 - The annual report was well-received, with commendations for its quality and design.
 - A video accompanying the report will be shared at an upcoming Commission meeting.
2. **Microtransit Marketing Efforts:**
 - New marketing campaigns were launched for microtransit services in Virginia Beach and Newport News.
 - Ads include radio spots, digital media, Hulu, and Spotify placements.
 - Social media platforms like Instagram are used for informal, engaging content that humanizes the HRT brand.



3. Community Engagement:

- HRT participated in the Grand Illumination Parade and plans to be in the Virginia Beach parade with holiday-themed decorations promoting the new On-Demand services.
- Suggestions were made to engage with other local events, such as Portsmouth's Holiday Music Festival, to boost visibility.

4. Social Media Expansion:

- HRT is considering joining platforms like Blue Sky to reach transit-friendly audiences.

5. Freedom Pass Program:

- Over 750 Student Freedom Passes have been distributed this school year, with efforts underway to expand outreach to more schools and increase pass distribution.
- Finalize a rescheduled date for outreach at IC Norcom High School.

Old and New Business:

Commissioner McClellan expressed deep gratitude to the chair for their exceptional leadership and contagious passion, which have energized the group. This commissioner also announced it was their last meeting and praised the contributions of the Chair, Noelle, Alexis, and the team. Other members echoed these sentiments, thanking the departing Chair for their dedication, and a group photo was taken.

Discussion shifted to upcoming initiatives, with enthusiasm for the New Year and ongoing efforts to champion transportation in Hampton Roads. There was a focus on advocating for the recognition of Hampton Roads Transit as a vital transportation asset at both state and federal levels.

The Chair highlighted the importance of continuing the committee's momentum and preparing for the next board meeting. The session ended with expressions of gratitude and excitement for future opportunities.

The meeting adjourned at 2:30pm.

The next ELAC meeting is scheduled for January 15, 2025, in the Hampton Boardroom.