



External Legislative Advisory Committee Minutes
Wednesday September 18th, 2024
Hampton, VA
1:30 PM

Commissioners in Attendance:

August Bullock, Chair, ELAC
Commissioner Roland White, Hampton
Commissioner, Tony Goodwin, Portsmouth

Attendees:

Ed Reed, Two Capitols Consulting
Janice Taylor, League of Women Voters
Sherri Neil, City of Portsmouth
Philip Bianchi, Squire Patton Boggs
Gretchen Heal, Hampton Roads Chamber
Jessica Dennis, City of Norfolk
Brent McKenzie, City of Virginia Beach
Jerri Wilson, City of Newport News

HRT Staff:

Alexis Majied, Chief Communications Officer
Dr. Brian Smith, Deputy CEO Hampton Roads Transit
Amy Jordan, Director of Business Development
Uma Uma, Helpdesk Technology
Petra Jovanovic, Executive Assistant, Marketing & Communications
Monique Lynch, TRAFFIX TDM Program Specialist
Lawrence Mason, Emergency Preparedness 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 July 17th, 2024, External and Legislative Advisory Committee (ELAC) meeting. Commissioner Roland White made a motion to approve the minutes, seconded by Commissioner Tony Goodwin. The minutes were approved by the committee.

Legislative Update

Federal Legislative Update:

Phil Bianchi of Squire Patton Boggs provided Federal Legislative update.

FY 2025 Transportation/HUD Appropriations:

We are about two weeks from the start of a new Federal fiscal year on October 1, and none of the 12 spending bills have passed Congress. The goal is to avoid a government shutdown by enacting a short-term continuation of current-year funding, called a Continuing Resolution.



- In the House:

- On September 18th, the House is voting on partisan 6 months Continuing Resolution (plus SAVE Act, which is a bill that would require a proof of citizenship to vote, that has little chance of House passage and no chance of becoming law).

- In the Senate:

- Majority Leader Schumer will probably wait at least for another week, before sending a bill to Congress to pass a short continuing resolution extending funding into early mid-December.

How does this affect HRT?

- US DOT has a shutdown plan, but FTA employees are paid out of the dedicated revenues of Highway Trust Fund, so can continue to work in the absence of a transportation spending bill or Continuing Resolution.
- But FTA will not apportion FY 2025 transit formula funds with just a short-term (2 – 3 month) Continuing Resolution and will wait for full-year spending bills to pass, which will not take place until December.
- A full sweep by either of the parties (White House and majority of both chambers of Congress) could upend this schedule, e.g., push the final spending bill until next year, when they are in full control.

State Legislative Update:

State Legislative Update will be provided on the next ELAC October 2024 meeting.

Paratransit Update:

Dr. Brian Smith provided the Committee with an update regarding inquiry HRT received recently from Senator Warner's and Senator Kaine's office concerning the status of Congressionally Directed Spending approved as part of FY23 appropriations.

See page 5.

Dr. Smith also shared a short video regarding HRT Paratransit service with the committee.

2025 Legislative Priorities review- Dr. Brian Smith:

The Transportation District Commission of Hampton Roads (TDCHR) has outlined the following legislative and public policy priorities, with the goal to maximize opportunities to advance HRT's vision and mission.

Federal Priorities

- The TDCHR supports the IIJA funding levels for public transportation formula and discretionary funds and will pursue all appropriate federal discretionary grant opportunities. As Congress begins consideration of the next multi-year surface transportation bill, HRT will advocate for retaining the gains in funding achieved in IIJA for all transit programs, including Section 5339 bus programs.



- The TDCHR also supports the continuation of congressionally directed spending programs through annual appropriations as a valuable source of needed funding for HRT capital projects and an effective way for our Congressional delegation to directly support our regional multi-modal infrastructure and services.
- The TDCHR will advocate for full funding of the Capital Investment Grants (CIG) Program – an important source of funding for major fixed guideway capital projects. A robust CIG program will be essential if HRT pursues expanded service to provide broader regional benefits, such as extending The Tide light rail system and other high-capacity transit options in the region.
- The TDCHR will advocate for policies and funding to support continued advancements in the use of transformational technologies, including non-diesel technologies, upgrades to trip planning and fare systems, real-time travel information systems, demand-response service, and other innovations.

State Priorities:

- The TDCHR supports policies to create predictable, adequate, and equitable funding across varying transit modes and regions throughout the Commonwealth. Sustainable funding is critical for reliable transit services that reduce customer exposure to service cuts and fare increases.
- The TDCHR supports the review and revision of statewide performance-based funding policies in order to avoid disparate and negative impacts among different transit agencies and transit customers who represent a variety of travel and socio-economic needs.

Regional Transit Sustainability Study overview- Dr. Brian Smith:

The purpose of this study is to address long-term and sustainable funding for public transportation capital and operating needs in Hampton Roads.

Goals:

1. Raise awareness of linkages between public transportation and needs, benefits, and outcomes supporting regional economic prosperity and quality of life.
2. Document capital and operating funding needs for safe and dependable public transportation that fits regional priorities and the evolving needs of commuters.
3. Identify public policy challenges, opportunities, and strategies to support cost-containment and long-term operating and fiscal sustainability.
4. Equip stakeholders and advocates who desire to champion the ongoing improvement and dependability of public transportation on behalf of hundreds of thousands of residents and visitors.
5. Provide useful information and recommendations to the General Assembly and other policy makers.



Marketing & Strategic Communications Department update

Alexis Majied gave the Marketing & Communications update.

In August, the Marketing team kicked off its annual Student Freedom Pass campaign. As part of this campaign, the successful Student Freedom Pass Palooza event was held at Hampton High School on August 13th. Over 165 Student Freedom Passes were distributed to students that day. This not only has short-term benefits, like helping students get to places like home, school and after school jobs and activities, but it also has long-term impacts, like building the next generation of transit riders. Also, on August 20th an SFP event was held on Southside at 18th Street HRT Facility in Norfolk.

The marketing team recently worked with students that were participating in a summer program, teaching them graphic design. Students were given an assignment to help us promote the Student Freedom Pass. They designed the ads that were placed on the sides of our buses running on the North side, so students can see their work out on the street.

Local Advocacy City Council Presentations

HRT's efforts to engage with local city councils continues. Presentations have been made to Virginia Beach, Chesapeake, and Newport News councils. Presentation for Portsmouth City Council is scheduled for Tuesday September 24th.

The meeting adjourned at 2:30pm.

The next ELAC meeting is scheduled for October 16th, 2024, in the Norfolk Boardroom.



HAMPTON ROADS TRANSIT

August 28, 2024

The Honorable Mark Warner
United States Senate
703 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tim Kaine
United States Senate
231 Russell House Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Warner and Kaine,

I write in follow up to your inquiry concerning the status of Congressionally Directed Spending (CDS) approved as part of Fiscal Year 2023 appropriations.

Hampton Roads Transit (HRT) received \$2,240,000 for paratransit vehicles acquisition.

HRT has been successful in fully obligating this important funding. Working with our partners at the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), I'm pleased to report that these resources are in an active grant (VA-2024-024) and being utilized for the designated purpose of new paratransit vehicle acquisition.

HRT began receiving the new vehicles in July 2024.

As you know, paratransit is a vital transportation service for our communities. HRT is providing over 32,000 trips each month. Demand and service costs are increasing, as the number of customers in need of lifeline transportation services is growing for all types of trips, including getting to work, medical appointments, grocery shopping, and other purposes. The acquisition of new vehicles is helping us meet this demand.

I'm enclosing a photo of the new vehicles that are now rolling into service, as well as testimonials from paratransit customers and a link to a recent video on HRT's paratransit services.

We thank you for your support. HRT remains strongly committed to providing safe and reliable paratransit, in addition to other vital public transportation, across the Hampton Roads region. The federal investments afforded to HRT under Congressionally Directed Spending (CDS) and other programs has been invaluable. Should you have any questions or would like additional information, please don't hesitate to reach me at (757) 222-6159, or by email at wharrell@hrtransit.org.

Respectfully,

William E. Harrell
President and CEO

Enclosures



HAMPTON ROADS TRANSIT



Customer Testimonials:

Janice Taylor, an HRT paratransit user since 2016 and active member of the Paratransit Advisory Committee (PAC) notes that "A good paratransit service is based on a strong, robust and vibrant HRT fixed route. Good repair, maintenance and upkeep requires funding and/or an infusion of grants." She is pleased with the new vehicles and extends her sincere thank you for the appropriation.

When asked about her experience with the new vehicles, **Ina Kreps**, a paratransit user since 1997 and former PAC chair, stated, "the new vehicles provide for a safer, more comfortable ride. Additional vehicles also help with on-time performance and reduce passenger wait times."

Paratransit Video - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P1YILIMA00g>