

ON THE MOVE

HAMPTON ROADS TRANSIT'S QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER • SPRING 2024



HAMPTON ROADS
TRANSIT

HRT Honors Rosa Parks on Transit Equity Day

BY ANGELA GREGORY

On February 5, Hampton Roads Transit honored civil rights activist Rosa Parks. About 100 people gathered at the Hampton Transit Center for the agency's Transit Equity Day celebration.

William Harrell, President and CEO of Hampton Roads Transit; Vice Mayor Jimmy Gray, Hampton; Gaylene Kanoyton, President, Hampton Branch NAACP; and Gilbert Bland, President, Urban League of Hampton Roads were the guest speakers.

"HRT is proud to recognize Parks' contributions to equity in public transit during Black History Month," said Harrell. "Promoting equity and celebrating diversity is core to HRT's values and who we are as a community."

In February 2023, HRT held its inaugural Transit Equity Day, honoring Parks by offering free fare on all bus, light rail, ferry, and paratransit services. It was well received by the community. The Transportation District Commission of Hampton Roads decided to make it official, passing a resolution establishing the first Monday following Parks' birthday on February 4, as Transit Equity Day.

During the ceremony at HTC, Vice Mayor Gray read the resolution and unveiled a plaque dedicated to Parks that will soon be on display in Hampton and Norfolk. TRAFFIX Program Specialist, Monique Lynch, concluded the morning's festivities by leading the crowd in singing "Lift Every Voice and Sing." ■



Hampton Roads Transit Drives Out Hunger

BY ANGELA GREGORY

Hampton Roads Transit began the New Year with a poverty awareness campaign to "Drive Out Hunger." The Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Access (IDEA) Committee sponsored a food drive to support the Foodbank of Southeastern Virginia and the Eastern Shore and the Virginia Peninsula Foodbank.

The month-long initiative was held in January, which is also Poverty Awareness Month, to bring attention to food insecurity in the Hampton Roads community. While this region focuses on opportunity and growth, countless families do not know where their next meal will come from.

Employees stepped up to the challenge, donating 819 pounds of food; enough to make 682 meals for families in need. While this barely puts a dent in the problem of food insecurity in the region, HRT is committed to working toward a Hampton Roads where food insecurity becomes a thing of the past and is replaced by shared prosperity. ■



Community Celebrates the Arrival of New Ferries

BY ANGELA GREGORY

Elizabeth River Ferries VI and VII are officially part of the Hampton Roads Transit fleet following a ribbon cutting ceremony on Friday, February 16. Nearly a hundred people gathered at the Waterside ferry dock for a celebration that was years in the making.

Benjamin Simms IV, Chief Operating Officer of Hampton Roads Transit; Mayor Kenny Alexander, Norfolk; Mayor Shannon Glover, Portsmouth; and David Jordan, Owner/Operator of Norfolk by Boat were the guest speakers.

“Public transit plays a vital role in moving the region forward,” said Simms. “The Elizabeth River Ferry is integral to the mission of Hampton Roads Transit and the success of the cities it serves.”

Each year the ferry brings tens of thousands of people to the Waterside District and Downtown Portsmouth for work and entertainment. Over the last 10 years, its partnership with Elizabeth River Crossings has allowed for an increase in hours of operation.

“HRT’s efforts in maintaining and expanding the public transportation system, including the vital Elizabeth River Ferry service, is instrumental in improving connectivity and accessibility across the region,” said Alexander.

“The ferry unites our communities and makes us stronger as a result,” said Glover. “By investing in efficient and reliable public transportation, we are investing in the future prosperity of our cities and our Hampton Roads region.”

The Elizabeth River Ferry has carried nearly 17 million passengers since it began in 1983. Jordan has been at the helm from the beginning and says there is something special about ferry riders.

“Whether they are riding to go to work, shopping, lunch or dinner, to attend a festival, concert or baseball game, or just to get out on the water and sightsee... there is a comradery among our riders, a feeling of friendliness, goodwill, and familiarity,” said Jordan.

The event concluded with a maiden voyage aboard ERF VI. ■



HRT Launches On The Move Blog

BY ANGELA GREGORY

Hampton Roads Transit is always looking for new ways to let people know what’s going on at the agency and in the transit industry. In January, the Marketing and Strategic Communications Department launched a blog. On The Move will complement this quarterly newsletter with engaging articles and enterprising content.

The most recent post takes a deep dive into the topic of free fare and explores its viability as a solution to bringing riders back to public transit. You can find a link to the blog at gohrt.com. ■



Hampton Roads Transit Visits Richmond on Transit Advocacy Day

BY ROYALL BRYAN

On Monday, January 22, the Virginia Transit Association held its annual Transit Advocacy Day in Richmond. Sixteen representatives from Hampton Roads Transit attended this year. They spent the day meeting with Virginia legislators advocating for continued support of public transportation. The goal of Transit Advocacy Day is to educate legislators on the importance of public transit to their communities.

HRT Representatives met with elected officials from across the service region, including Del. Phil Hernandez (Norfolk), Del. Jay Jones (Norfolk), Sen. Aaron Rouse (Virginia Beach), Del. Cliff Hayes (Chesapeake/Portsmouth), Del. A.C. Cordoza (Hampton), and many others.

“I enjoyed meeting with the various state legislators from Hampton Roads and explaining the positive impact HRT services have on their constituents,” said Caleb Smith, Military Outreach Liaison with TRAFFIX, HRT’s commuter solutions program.

HRT’s delegation also attended the day’s Senate session, receiving a warm welcome and special recognition from Lt. Governor Winsome Sears. ■



Hampton City Council Holds Moving Meeting

BY ANGELA GREGORY

On January 24, Hampton Roads Transit hosted its first mobile meeting. Hampton held a portion of its city council meeting during a ride-along on the 757 Express Route 114. HRT staff and all seven council members were there.

Route 114 runs along Mercury Boulevard in Hampton. Council members could see newly installed bus shelters and the planned locations of future shelters. They learned about connecting routes and ridership, which is up nearly 40% since 15-minute peak service was launched in May 2023.

“I think it’s important that we, as councilmembers, get out and see how transit is serving our community,” said Vice Mayor and HRT Commissioner Jimmy Gray. “So many people depend on it to get to and from work and, as we heard from the staff, over 70% are riding it to get to work.”

The ride-along also allowed the council to see how Hampton’s transit service interconnects with the City of Newport News at some of the region’s busiest stops.

“Our mission is to connect Hampton Roads with transportation solutions that are reliable, safe, efficient, and sustainable,” said William Harrell, President & CEO of Hampton Roads Transit. “Hampton City Council’s continued support has been vital to the service we provide to the community.”

Hampton City Council last completed a ride-along with HRT in 2017 when the city was considering the current alignment of Route 114 along Mercury Boulevard. HRT hopes to host future ride-alongs with its other member cities. ■

