



VIRGINIA RAILWAY EXPRESS
OPERATIONS BOARD

August 30, 2018

The Honorable John McGlennon
Chairman, Transit Service Delivery Advisory Committee
C/O James City County Board of Supervisors
PO Box 8784
Williamsburg, VA 23187

Chairman McGlennon:

Thank you for the hard work you and the other TSDAC members have put into developing and implementing the statewide prioritization for the Commonwealth Mass Transit Fund. VRE fully supports the approach laid out in § 33.2-214.4, and we recognize that accountability is paramount to continued support for the Commonwealth's transit programs.

As you begin deliberations on the service delivery factors for the distribution of transit operating funds, I would ask that you consider some fundamental differences between commuter rail service and typical bus transit service. According to the American Public Transportation Association, the average length of a passenger trip taken on traditional bus transit service in the U.S. in 2017 was 3.8 miles, while the average trip on commuter rail was 23.9 miles. VRE passengers travel even greater distances, averaging more than 30 miles per trip. This fundamental difference in the travel markets being served directly affects any assessments of efficiency and effectiveness.

This is a critical point when considering service delivery factors such as Cost per Passenger Trip, which is the predominant factor currently being used for allocation of transit operating funding. A ratio such as Cost per Passenger Trip is useful when comparing performance across the various bus operators in the Commonwealth, but it struggles to capture comparative efficiencies for commuter rail. In other words, including a single commuter rail system in an evaluation of traditional bus transit systems is an "apples-to-oranges" comparison.

The table below shows various performance metrics for the five transit providers in Virginia that carried the most passengers in 2016 (the latest full reporting year available from the National Transit Database). While VRE has the highest cost per passenger trip, it has the lowest cost per passenger mile, as well as the highest number of passengers carried per vehicle revenue hour and revenue mile (measures of productivity).



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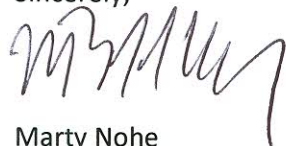
Agency	Mode(s)	Avg. Trip Length	Cost/ Trip	Pass. Cost/ Mile	Pass. Trips/ Hour	Rev. Trips/ Rev. Mile
Hampton Roads Transit	Bus & Light Rail	4.7	\$5.99	\$1.26	17.2	1.3
Fairfax Connector	Bus	4.6	\$9.06	\$1.97	12.5	1.0
GRTC (Richmond)	Bus	3.9	\$4.34	\$1.12	22.0	2.0
Virginia Railway Express	Commuter Rail	33.5	\$16.05	\$0.48	407.0	12.3
DASH (Alexandria)	Bus	2.3	\$3.93	\$1.75	20.0	2.4

As the only commuter rail service in Virginia, we believe VRE may be unfairly impacted by an allocation process that compares us to bus services based on passenger trips without considering trip length. However, we also understand that developing a new process for allocating operating support in a fair and equitable manner is a challenging task, particularly given the compressed timeline that TSDAC is working under. Therefore, we believe it may be necessary to separate VRE from the bus services in the evaluation and place VRE in a separate commuter rail category.

VRE is committed to continuing to work with the TSDAC members and DRPT staff to evaluate methods for allocating operating funding using service delivery factors. These factors should capture the efficiency of service delivery while also taking into consideration the different service characteristics and markets being served by the different modes.

Thank you again for your hard work on this important issue and for your consideration of our suggestion.

Sincerely,



Marty Nohe
Chairman, VRE Operations Board

Cc: Jennifer Mitchell, Director VDRPT
Paul Smedberg, Chairman, NVTC
Ruth Anderson, Chair, PRTC