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Commuter Assistance Program Strategic Plan

Requirements and Guidance

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Overview

Many areas in the Commonwealth of Virginia have experienced or are currently experiencing significant and sometimes rapid changes in population size and demographics, workforce size and characteristics, households, income, commute patterns, and travel density. These changes along with the addition of new transportation infrastructure, technologies, transit services and mobility service providers have significantly changed the mobility and transportation needs and demands throughout Virginia. These changes require a strategic focus to assess how to restructure commuter assistance programs for an era of new mobility.

Strategic planning is key to addressing changes that affect the transportation system, and users of the system. Therefore, the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT) requires agencies operating a commuter assistance program (CAP) and are or will seek funding from DRPT for their CAP, to develop a Commuter Assistance Program Strategic Plan (CAPSP). Having a CAPSP will ensure that commuter assistance programs and services are planned in a way that better meets the mobility needs of their communities in the most effective and cost-efficient manner. The CAPSP gives those agencies that operate a commuter assistance program an opportunity to evaluate and update their programs and services to respond to changes in travel demand, mobility, and transportation needs.

A CAPSP will replace the previously required Transportation Demand Management Plan (TDMP) for agencies that are required to complete one. With this in mind, the CAPSP must also provide a foundation for future funding requests, directly advising each agency's programming and grant application processes in the years that follow its adoption. Applications for DRPT's grant programs should directly tie in to the CAPSP and DRPT application review will include an assessment of the relationship between the CAPSP and the application. However, DRPT is not obligated to fund the contents of the CAPSP.

Purposes of a Commuter Assistance Program Strategic Plan

The primary purpose of a CAPSP is to create a detailed blueprint of the strategic operating services and the resources needed to operate a CAP in a way that maximizes single occupant vehicle trip reduction results in the most cost-effective manner. The development of a CAPSP is an opportunity for each operator to look at their program as a blank slate and objectively re-examine objectives, marketplace, travel behavior, needs and priorities, and make unbiased strategic choices concerning where and how to provide services.

The purposes of a CAPSP are as follows:

1. To serve as a strategic planning, management, and policy document for operators of a commuter assistance program.
2. To identify the mission, goals, objectives, expected outcomes and performance measures for the commuter assistance program.
3. To identify areas for improved operational efficiency and develop ongoing efforts to improve cost effectiveness and results.
4. To assess the type of operating services, including marketing, for different service areas and needs.
5. To review and assess the performance and results of program services.
6. To examine the public's commuter assistance needs.
7. To inform DRPT of operators' commuter assistance program operating strategies and needs.
8. To provide the basis for inclusion of an operator's program in planning and programming documents such as: the Six Year Improvement Program (SYIP), Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP), Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) and Constrained Long Range Plan (CLRP)
9. To provide a clear understanding of unmet or unfunded needs.
10. To develop and track the progress of short-, mid- and long-term goals and results of the commuter assistance program.
11. To coordinate with neighboring commuter assistance programs; and
12. To inform the development of a comprehensive marketing plan that is strategic, targeted, results oriented, and efficient for the service area, size and demographics of population and workforce, and market conditions.

General Guidance

The CAPSP should be a data driven plan. Decision-making regarding what strategies, target markets, operation components, resources, etc. are needed, should be made based on what the data shows is needed and most effective.

Using a “blank slate” approach will enable research and data drive the planning process and program needs, rather than existing program activities. A similar, but equally effective way to approach the planning process is to imagine if the current CAP did not exist and there was no commuter assistance program. Then go through the planning process to create a new CAP.

The CAPSP must be adopted or approved by the CAP operating agency’s governing board. If the CAP receives funding allocated by a metropolitan planning organization (MPO) or transportation planning organization (TPO), it is recommended that the CAPSP be approved by the policy board of the MPO or TPO. It is also recommended that the operating agency’s governing board and, if applicable, the MPO or TPO be involved in the development of the CAPSP.

It is acceptable (and recommended) to use consultants to help develop the plan. Consultants can provide a “fresh set of eyes” to review the needs of the CAP service area and help develop new services, or refine existing services, to more efficiently and effectively meet the goals and objectives of the CAP. Additionally, consultants can conduct research, data collection, analysis, and conduct comparisons of similar CAPs across the country.

Include DRPT in the planning process, from start to finish of the plan. An agency that receives a grant from DRPT to develop the CAPSP is required to include DRPT in the planning process. However, including DRPT in the planning process regardless of if funding from DRPT is being used to develop the plan is a good idea. DRPT’s expertise can provide additional guidance, feedback, review, and answer questions throughout the development of the CAPSP.

CAPSP Terms and Conditions

Commuter Assistance Program Operating Agency Requirements

CAPSPs are required for agencies that satisfy either of the following requirements:

1. The agency currently receives either state or federal funding from DRPT and will seek this funding in the future to operate a commuter assistance program; or
2. The agency does not currently receive state or federal funding from DRPT but will seek funding that will come through DRPT, for a commuter assistance program.

Agencies listed in Table 1 below are currently required to have agency board approved CAPSP. Any agency not on the list below, but meets one of the requirements conditions, must prepare and adopt a CAPSP.

Table 1. List of Organizations That Are Required to Have a Commuter Assistance Program Strategic Plan

Agencies in Virginia that Require a CAPSP	
City of Alexandria	Arlington County
Central Shenandoah Planning District Commission	Central Virginia Planning District Commission
Fairfax County	George Washington Regional Commission
Greater Richmond Transit Company	Hampton Roads Transit
Loudoun County	Middle Peninsula Planning District Commission
New River Valley Regional Commission	Northern Neck Planning District Commission
Northern Shenandoah Valley Regional Commission	Roanoke Valley Alleghany Regional Commission
Thomas Jefferson Planning District Commission	West Piedmont Planning District Commission

Planning Horizon and Plan Due Dates

The CAPSP is five (5) year plan. A new CAPSP must be submitted to the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT) no later than November 30, 2024. Submission of a new CAPSP is a requirement for FY2026 funding requests.

Agencies must provide a schedule for CAPSP development to DRPT by June 30, 2022.

The CAP Strategic Plan may be developed in conjunction with the development of a Transit Strategic Plan or Transit Development Plan. Such coordination of plans are acceptable and encouraged.

Update Frequency and Deliverables

New Plan

At a minimum, a new CAPSP must be prepared and submitted every five (5) years. The purpose of developing a new plan every five years is to take a fresh look at service area conditions and accordingly develop a new plan. The new plan should take the same data driven approach and must include each of the chapters highlighted by this or a future revised requirements and guidance document. The new plan must also be adopted by the operator's governing body, and a resolution of approval shall be provided to DRPT with the submittal of the CAPSP document.

New Plan Deliverables

For each **new plan** (every 5 years), the following deliverables must be submitted to DRPT:

- An electronic version of the CAPSP including all appendices and related documents; and
- Proof of adoption of the CAPSP by the applicable board or commission.

Plan Updates

A CAPSP is a living document, and the planning process must provide flexibility to address major changes in areas such as: organizational/governance changes, new transportation services, new infrastructure, new transportation facilities, major public transportation service changes, major transit or highway service disruptions, available funding, economic conditions, changes in population, demographics and employment, significant residential or office development, and changes in federal and state laws and regulations. Therefore, the plan must be amended each year to address changes that will influence the delivery and/or cost of the services provided by the CAP. These annual updates are referred to as "minor updates" and serve as intermediate adjustments to account for unexpected changes.

The annual CAPSP update does not need to be a revision of the entire plan. Only the language or parts of the plan that is no longer accurate or conflicts with existing conditions need to be updated. If there are no changes to the plan, then there should not be any changes to the CAP services or its costs.

Annual Update Deliverables

For each **annual update**, the following deliverables must be submitted to DRPT:

- An electronic document (letter or email) that updates the sections of the CAPSP that are no longer accurate; and
- For significant updates that have a significant change to staffing, budgets, services or service area, proof of approval of the CAPSP annual update by the accountable Executive or board is needed.

Table 2. Update Frequencies and Requirements

Update Type	Time Frame/ Format	Requirements
New Plan	Every 5 Years/ New Plan	Complete update of all chapters and sections outlined in this requirements and guidance document: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chapter 1: Commuter Assistance Program Overview • Chapter 2: Service Area Demographics and Characteristics • Chapter 3: Strategic Vision, Goals, and Objectives • Chapter 4: Target Markets, and Customers • Chapter 5: CAP Operations Plan • Chapter 6: Financial Plan • Chapter 7: Monitoring and Evaluation Plan • Chapter 8: Use of Research and Data
Plan Updates	Annually/ Letter or short document to DRPT	Address changes in the CAP and causes of the changes, including, but not limited to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organizational/ governance changes • New Services • Elimination or revision of existing services • Transportation/commuting changes • Changes in funding sources and amounts

Strategic Plan Content Requirements

Each CAPSP must address all plan requirements and follow the chapter structure specified in this section. Agencies may go above and beyond the plan requirements to examine specific issues that are pertinent to their area.

DRPT may periodically modify the strategic plan requirements to reflect changes in legislation, priorities, funding, federal or state regulations and policy, economic factors, environmental conditions, or transportation infrastructure or services. Modifications of CAPSP requirements will be addressed in the annual minor update or the major update following the change in plan requirements.

Title Page

The CAPSP title page must include the words **Commuter Assistance Program Strategic Plan**, the fiscal years covered by the plan; the official name of the commuter assistance program, the name of the commuter assistance program's operating agency, and the date the plan was approved by the operating agency's governing board.

Chapter 1: Commuter Assistance Program Overview

In this chapter, provide details of the commuter assistance program's history, governance, organizational structure, and service area.

Program History

Provide a history of the creation of the commuter assistance program:

- Year of formation;
- Why the program was created;
- Current program name and name changes since program conception;
- Development and evolution of services;
- Changes in service focus areas; and
- Key milestones and events.

Governance

Provide an overview of the governance process, governing body, and decision makers involved in the commuter assistance program. This should include:

- Type of governance (e.g., city, county, joint powers authority, planning district, transit board, board of directors);
- The composition and nature of representation of the governing body (including the number of members). Indicate if members are elected or appointed and if appointed, how; what agencies and/or groups do members represent (e.g., cities, counties, general public);
- A list of current members and their terms; and
- A description of any advisory committees that provide direct input to the governing body or program.

Organizational Structure

Provide a description of the organizational structure and staffing including:

- An organizational chart that identifies departments and reporting relationships. The names and position titles of personnel should be provided in the organizational chart;
- A description of purpose, mission and activities of the operating agency;
- Roles and responsibilities of agency staff that work on the commuter assistance program; and
- Identification of all contracted staff and services (including the names of contractors and length of current contracts), and the roles, responsibilities, and tasks of the contractors.

Program Service Area

Define the geographic area served by the commuter assistance program. Include size of service area, boundaries and cities, towns and counties included in the service area. Provide a service area map.

Chapter 2: Service Area Demographics and Characteristics

This chapter must contain the research and data gathered for the service area. Include the source of all data and research results, how the data was gathered, how the research was conducted, and when the data gathering, and research was conducted. Service areas may include travel corridors.

Demographics

Describe the population, household, employment, workforce, and employer demographics and characteristics. Include the following:

- Population and employment size and demographics. Include workforce size, number of employers, size of employers, number of working residents, age categories of residents, etc. Cite data source(s) used.
- Travel patterns of residents and workers. Include numbers and percentage of workers that live and work in service area, live in service area and work outside area, live outside area and work in service area. Cite data source(s) used.
- Annual population and workforce turnover rate. Cite data source(s) used.

Transportation Services, Facilities and TDM Services Available in CAP Service Area

Describe the transportation services and facilities available in the CAP service area that are not provided by the commuter assistance program: (Include maps and data as needed.)

- The types of transit services and level of service (i.e., fixed route bus, commuter bus, passenger rail, light rail, heavy rail, human services, etc.)
- Other types of transportation services and level of service (i.e., bike share, transportation network companies, microtransit, carshare, Guaranteed/Emergency Ride Home program, etc.)
- Transportation facilities and their operations (i.e. toll lanes, HOV lanes, park-and-ride lots, commuter stores, etc.)

Chapter 3: Strategic Vision, Goals, and Objectives

This chapter will set the stage for the chapters that follow by determining the overall vision for CAP services adopted by the operating agency, as well as its goals, objectives, and measurements. Since the Strategic Vision will affect other aspects of the CAPSP, it is recommended that the vision, and any goals, objectives, and strategies included in it, be developed in consultation with the operating agency's governing body and/or approved by that body prior to completing other elements of the plan.

In this chapter, state the goals and objectives of the CAP, and describe the strategically targeted customers. The main goal of the CAP must be the reduction of single occupant vehicle trips. However, other goals may be included. Objectives should enable the CAP to meet the main and other goals.

Goals and objectives should be:

- Strategic in nature and be driven by the research and data collected for the plan
- Specific, direct, detailed, and meaningful
- Measurable and quantifiable
- Attainable
- Relevant to the strategic vision and main goal and CAP
- Time-based to periodically measure and re-evaluate.

Chapter 4: Target Markets and Customers

This chapter differs from the service area of Chapter 2 by providing a more detailed and strategic targets for CAP services.

Target Markets

The resources, including funding, of a CAP are not unlimited. Thus, tradeoffs in the provision of services need to be made to maximize the trip reduction results in the most cost-effective manners. Describe the rationale behind the selection of target markets.

Customers

Describe the strategically targeted customers of the CAP. The total population cannot be customers because the population includes children and retired residents. There should be a strategy for why certain customers are targeted. Describe the rationale behind the selection of customers.

Chapter 5: The Commuter Assistance Program Operations Plan

In this chapter, describe in detail the services that the CAP will provide and the resources needed to provide them. The planned activities should show what will take place in the first year of the CAPSP and five additional years. Not all activities have to occur in each year. Activities can be implemented or removed in different years.

Services Provided

Describe in detail the service provided by the CAP and which market segments the service will be available. Include a justification of why the service is being implemented and how it achieves SOV trip reduction or other goals and objectives. Examples of services that may be included in the CAPSP are provided below. These services are provided as examples and what to include

in the CAPSP depends on service area, demographics, goals and objectives, customers, research data, etc.

Staffing and Contracting

Describe the staff needed to implement the CAP services. Include details on each staff positions, position tasks, whether the staff is direct agency staff or contractor staff, full-time or part-time staff, and a justification for staffing needs.

Technology, Systems, and Tools

Describe the technology and systems used in the delivery of the CAP services. Include how the technology and systems are used and for what purpose. Identify technology needs and how the technology will make the CAP more efficient and lead to improved results. Examples of technology and systems include ride matching systems, customer relations management systems, databases, etc.

Partnerships and Coordination with Other Programs and Agencies

Describe existing and identify opportunities for partnerships and coordination with other commuter assistance programs, transit service providers, counties, cities, state agencies, federal agencies, metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs), planning district commissions (PDCs), transportation management associations (TMAs) etc. in the planning, marketing and delivery of the CAP. Explain the parties involved and how the coordination and collaboration improve the efficiency and results of the CAP.

Chapter 6: Financial Plan

In the financial plan, service costs are projected, and financial resources are identified. An objective of the financial plan is to demonstrate that operation of the commuter assistance program is sustainable. Consequently, it is through the development of the financial plan that agencies determine which services and potential new services can be realistically achieved and when those new services should be implemented. The financial plan should include funding and revenues from all sources, not just DRPT. The financial plan should include:

- “Baseline” level of service at the time of the CAPSP preparation. Committed service changes must also be defined, with their expenses identified in the operating and capital financial plan tables.
- Operating and capital (if applicable) budget forecasts; federal, state, regional, and local revenue projections; membership dues, sale revenues, competitive demands on funding, and regional priorities and policies.
 - Show projected cash flow needs, including any anticipated difficulties, and approved or anticipated decisions on financing.
 - Identify funds that have been programmed, allocated or received, and funds that have not been secured.
 - Show marketing budget separately.
 - Include the source of funds and amount from each source for the last five years; and
 - Use the recently approved Six Year Improvement Program (SYIP) to help with current and future estimates.
- The budget must be sustainable and generally balanced each year over the period of the CAPSP, using currently available or reasonably projected revenues.
- All expenses and revenues stated in year of expenditure dollars. Annual assumed escalation factors may be used but must be explained and justified.

- All sources of revenue should be identified individually
- All assumptions that relate to expenditure and revenue estimates must also be documented
- A narrative explaining any major changes in services, service area, changes in revenue, changes in expenses, changes in staffing, and changes in expenses due to a labor or service contract changes.
- Staff size, including contracted staff and changes in staffing and contracting needs over the life of the plan.
- Where increases in revenues are required in order to sustain service levels, or implement service expansion, the steps and timelines needed to achieve the revenue increases, and the policies and actions that will be taken if the proposed revenues do not materialize.
- Significant service expansion or reduction, and the introduction of new service.

Chapter 7: Monitoring and Evaluation Plan

In Chapter 7, include a description of performance measures and evaluation plan. Include details on what is being measured, data collection needs and timeline. Monitoring and evaluation should also include how results are being used to make the CAP more effective and more efficient by providing the largest benefit for the least amount of money. Also, include performance monitoring, data collection and other methods used to meet the goals and objectives of DRPT's Commuter Assistance Program. For all performance measures, describe the sources of the data and the process for data verification to ensure it is accurate and correct.

Chapter 8: Use of Research and Data

This chapter differs from Chapter 2 as this chapter could include additional research not used for Chapter 2 but used for strategic planning. Describe how all research and data was used to craft the strategies and target markets in this plan. Include all research and data used for development of the plan. Suggested data includes but is not limited to:

- Travel patterns and corridors
- Live in/work in, live in/work out, live out/work in
- Most congested travel times and locations
- Travel delay
- Travel time to work
- Employer types/categories
- Workforce numbers and highest concentration areas
- Work age population
- Auto occupancy rate
- Commute mode splits

Examples of acceptable data sources:

- Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT)
- DRPT
- US Census
- American Travel Survey
- OnTheMap
- Virginia Employment Commission