

Summary Minutes of the HRTPO Regional Transportation Advisory Panel (RTAP) Meeting June 16, 2025

The meeting of the HRTPO Regional Transit Advisory Panel (RTAP) was called to order at 12:06 p.m. in the Regional Building Boardroom, 723 Woodlake Drive, Chesapeake, Virginia, with the following in attendance:

RTAP Members in Attendance:

Mary Kate Andris	Dr. Claudean Kizart
Janice Taylor	Jim Wofford
Gilbert Bland	John Wiley
Sandra Brandt	Rick Dwyer
Ray Amoruso	Ben Goodill
Angela Effah-Amponsah	Brad Martin
Linda Peck	Peter Shaw
Jason Souders	Noelle Pinkard
Maria Ptakowski	

HRTPO/HRPDC/HRTAC Staff:

Robert A. Crum, Jr.	Matthew Harrington
Dale Stith	Quan McLaurin
Rob Cofield	Pavithra Parthasarathi
Jeff Raliski	Markay Hall
Joe Turner	Eric Walberg
Tho Tran	Sean Asbrand
Husain Alegimenlen	Jennifer Hodnett
Matt Klepeisz	Whitney Katchmark

Others Recorded Attending:

Captain Josh Appezzato, Commander Mike Avallone, Tracy Black, Alan Budde, Andrew Damon, Steve Florian, Kindra Green, Rachael Johnson, Diane Kaufman, John Lauterbach, Jeannie Leonard, Nakia Madry-Smith, Andria McClellan, Todd Nichols, Andrew Pease, Angelique Shenk, Jo Ann Short, and Laura Chalk.

Approval/Modification of Agenda

The meeting agenda was approved as distributed with no changes or amendments.

Public Comments

There were no public comments.

Minutes

Mr. Robert Crum, HRTPO Executive Director, noted that the RTAP minutes of the January 3, 2025, meeting were included in the Agenda packet distributed in advance of the session. The minutes were then unanimously approved.

Climate Pollution Reduction Grant (CPRG)

Whitney Katchmark presented an overview of the Climate Pollution Reduction Grant (CPRG) planning process currently underway in the region. The federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) awarded this grant to the Hampton Roads Planning District Commission in June 2023 to support development of the first ever regionwide plan to to reduce dreenhouse gases in Hampton Roads.

Under the CPRG process, a Priority Climate Action Plan was developed in March 2024 in support of an implementation grant application, which ultimately was not selected for funding. Further updating and refinement of the Hampton Roads Climate Pollution Reduction plan has continued since that time and currently includes a public survey (<https://www.hrpdcva.gov/1270/Climate-Action-Survey>). The assistance of RTAP members in promoting the survey was requested.

The updated regional plan is due to be submitted to EPA by December 1, 2025. It will include recommendations across six sectors: Energy, Buildings, Industry, Solid Waste and Wastewater, Agriculture and Natural Lands, and Transportation.

Ms. Katchmark highlighted that the primary transportation recommendations focus on: (1) Increasing Zero Emission Vehicles (ZEV) adoption in government and school fleets through information sharing, fleet assessments, and procurement processes, (2) Expanding Electric Vehicle (EV) charging Infrastructure, and (3) Reducing Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) in the region through improvements to public transit, enhancing infrastructure for active transportation, and updating zoning and land use codes to foster more compact development patterns.

The discussion among RTAP members identified that Dominion Energy could potentially be an important partner for expanding EV charging infrastructure across the Hampton Roads region. In addition, federal agencies and military partners are also seen as important players that need to be included as part of the development of an effective regional approach to reducing regional greenhouse gas emissions. WATA staff further stated that the agency currently has ZEV feasibility studies underway and will share results with group as the effort advances, since it is strongly believed that case studies and first implementor experiences will be important in gaining wider acceptance and adoption of ZEV technologies.

Young professionals and students were also identified as key groups to engage with during the CRPG process, particularly around the issues of transit expansion and improvement, active transportation enhancements, and land use updates. It was stated that walkability and connectivity issues are important factors in attracting and retaining young talent to an area. It was noted that these groups can also serve as supportive advocates for the development of accessible communities and active transportation improvements which can sometimes face opposition, especially during the early phases of implementation of a partial or limited network. It was noted that the experience of the Elizabeth River Trail in Norfolk, which recorded more that 600,000 users last year, clearly shows that, with sufficient time, support and funding, such facilities can become valued parts of the community.

In response to questions, Ms. Katchmark acknowledged the general uncertainty around the future of the CPRG program at this time, given the recent change in administrations in Washington and potential reductions to federal funding for climate programs. It was noted that even if the current CPRG program does not continue that there are still benefits to having a comprehensive plan for carbon reduction in Hampton Roads completed and approved in order to be ready for any new opportunities that may be created in the future.

HRT 757 Express

Ray Amoruso provided an update on the 757 Express Bus network Hampton Roads Transit (HRT) is currently implementing across the six cities in its system. The 757 Express system consists of a combination of 13 regional backbone routes providing frequent, all day service along major corridors and also other limited/express services serving key destinations and employment centers during specific times. Full implementation of the program will eventually result in over 2.4 million additional revenue miles of bus service annually.

The 757 Express system is funded by the Hampton Roads Regional Transit Fund (HRRTF) which was created by the Virginia General Assembly in 2020. The HRRTF supports both capital and operating expenses of the bus system as well as expansion projects and State of Good Repair efforts. To date, the fund has supported the purchase of 48 new buses, major technology enhancements including real time trip planning and mobile ticketing, and improvement of almost 400 bus stops with new shelters, benches, and other passenger amenities.

To date, three of the 13 backbone routes have been implemented and each has recorded monthly ridership gains of between 34% to 70%. The greatest challenge to further expansion of the 757 Express system at this time is bus driver availability. Mr. Amoruso stated that HRT is chronically short 40-50 operators, which limits how quickly further expansions of the backbone network can be implemented. For example, expanded Route 15 (Military Highway) service was originally scheduled to start in October 2025 but is now being delayed until May 2026. Similarly, the proposal to start transit service to Norfolk International Airport by extending Route 9 (Sewells Point) was planned to begin in October, but since it needs six additional drivers to operate, implementation may now be delayed.

Quality of life issues and not just salary levels are reported to be primary factors hindering the attraction and retention of new bus drivers. Under HRT's union contract with drivers, new hires have the last pick of routes to drive and also are first selected for mandatory overtime when needed, often resulting in very irregular hours and schedules. HRT's System Optimization Plan study is looking at options to potentially pare back existing services in low ridership, less productive areas to help relieve pressure on the current shortage of drivers. While recognizing the criticality of the driver shortage issue, it was also requested that HRT review any such changes carefully with respect to the potential reduction in Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) availability and coverage.

Mr. Amoruso concluded by highlighting that HRT's capital program is also presently advancing full replacements of the existing transit centers at Evelyn T Butts Avenue in Norfolk and Robert Hall Boulevard in Chesapeake and will also be developing an enhanced transfer point at the Virginia Beach Tidewater Community College campus. Most significantly, planning for the agency's new Zero Emissions Bus Maintenance facility in

Virginia Beach continues to advance. This \$130 million facility will have a capacity for 100 buses and 16 seasonal trolleys, charging infrastructure for electric buses, and create 125 new highly skilled jobs in Virginia Beach. It is scheduled to be completed in 2030.

HRT Unified Fare System Study

Ray Amoruso noted that a recommendation of the Tourism and Hospitality Subcommittee of RTAP from several years ago was to develop a seamless fare collection and payment system across the three different transit properties in Hampton Roads to ease and facilitate travel to any part of the region for visitors and residents alike. Towards this end, HRT has recently contracted with the consulting firm Arcadis to conduct a study on the technical and operational challenges of creating such a system. Mr. Andrew Pease of the Arcadis team was then introduced and presented an overview of the upcoming unified fare system study for Hampton Roads.

Mr. Pease stated that the analysis is advancing on a quick timeline and is scheduled to be complete by December 2025. It is expected that alternative options will be available for review by mid-fall. The goal of the effort will be to develop alternatives for eliminating barriers for transit trip-making barriers across the region's three transit agencies. Related work will focus on options for unified fare structures, policies, media, and overall systems, that also maintain individual agency autonomy. Need assessments with each agency are being completed, and industry scans and peer reviews of other fare unification efforts are other key efforts of the analysis.

It was stated that the Unified Fare System Study effort will be presented to RTAP for discussion at Alternatives Development Stage. It is viewed that the RTAP will have an important role in advocating and advancing the final recommended system and fostering support and buy-in by decision-makers and the broader community at large.

Legislative Priorities

Mr. Crum indicated that this topic would be deferred to a later meeting due to time constraints.

Other Business

"Around the Table" updates and general comments from RTAP members are noted as follows:

1. WATA staff reported that recent funding enhancements are facilitating several service enhancements and expansions.
2. Suffolk Transit reported that procurement challenges related to an Low Emission Vehicle (LEV) grant necessitated a scope change in vehicle specifications in order to move forward.
3. Senior Services noted that the agency will be starting an EV feasibility study in the near future.
4. The Future of Hampton Roads organization is researching the potential for hybrid electric maritime platforms.

5. Mr. Crum introduced Marcellus Nixon, Executive Director of the Southside Network Authority (SNA), and highlighted that the agency is presently moving forward with a 120-mile network buildout program across the region, which is projected to create significant new investment opportunities – detailed briefings on this topic will be scheduled for a future RTAP meeting.
6. The annual “Week without Driving” event is coming up at the end of September.

Adjournment

There being no more business before the group, the meeting was adjourned at 2:09 p.m.