

**Summary Minutes of the
HRTPO Regional Transportation Advisory Panel (RTAP) Meeting
May 26, 2021**

The HRTPO Regional Transit Advisory Panel (RTAP) Meeting was called to order electronically at 12:03 p.m. via Zoom.

Mr. Robert Crum, HRTPO Executive Director, stated that pursuant to the declared state of emergency in the Commonwealth of Virginia in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and to protect the public health and safety of the RTAP members, staff, and the general public, today's meeting is being held electronically. This electronic meeting is required to complete essential business on behalf of the region.

Per the requirements of the Code of Virginia, the agenda and all supporting documentation were posted on the HRTPO website for public review, and electronic copies of this information were provided to RTAP members and other interested parties.

The general public was provided an opportunity to comment on today's agenda in advance of the meeting via email and phone. No comments were received via either option as of 48 hours before the meeting.

Mr. Crum indicated that the meeting was being live-streamed and would be available for viewing on the Regional Connection YouTube channel. The meeting was also being recorded and would be available after the meeting through the HRTPO website.

Mr. Crum reviewed a few important housekeeping rules in order for the electronic meeting to run smoothly:

- All Commission members were asked to remain on mute before and after providing input.
- All Commission members were asked to identify themselves by name and locality when speaking and/or providing a motion or second.
- All votes must be made by roll call and recorded in the minutes.

Mr. Crum thanked the RTAP members for their commitment to the region and their cooperation and patience during the electronic meeting.

The following RTAP Committee members and guests were recorded as being in attendance:

RTAP Members in Attendance:

Zakkiyya Anderson

Terry Banez

Robert Bowen

Diana Burke

Jim Carroll

Kela Cowan-Gant

Bill Crow

Keith Darrow

Captain David Dees

Michael Giardino

Ben Goodill

Stephanie Gorham

Janet Green

William Harrell

Garry Harris

Kristen Hatchett
Kurt Hofelich
Jason Inge
Sarah Jane Kirkland
Chip Land
Brad Martin
Mary Mathena
Martha McClees
Bob McKenna
Jennifer Mitchell
Dr. Keith Moore
Tony Nero

Verlaine Quinniey
Captain Jason Schneider
Scott Silsdorf
Jason Souders
Bryan Stephens
Julie Summs
Bryant Thomas
Zach Trogdon
Michele Walker
Jesse Welsch
Jim Wofford

HRTPO/HRPDC Staff in Attendance:

Robert A. Crum, Jr.
Pavithra Parthasarathi
Rob Case
Greg Grootendorst

John Harbin
Jeff Raliski
Dale Stith

Others Recorded Attending:

Ray Amoruso; Angela Bezik; Joe Dillard, Jr.; Thelma Drake; Cindy DiFranco; Sarah Ellis; Amy Inman; Steve Jones, Kevin Page; and Mark Shea.

Reports from RTAP Work Groups

Mr. Robert Crum, HRTPO Executive Director, summarized the past RTAP actions to create and assign members to nine individual work groups dedicated to the following topic areas:

- Transit Oriented Development Along the Regional Backbone Network
- Affordable/Accessible Housing
- Bus Stop Amenities
- Transit Advocacy/Ambassadors
- Transit and the Military
- Serving Major Employment Centers
- Transit for the Williamsburg/Virginia Beach Tourism Corridor
- Technology
- Universities/Colleges

Each work group was tasked with developing 1 – 3 action steps that could be taken in each topic area to advance/strengthen transit in the Hampton Roads/757 Region.

Mr. Crum stated that the RTAP membership would begin today to hear reports from the various work groups on their recommendations. To ensure adequate time for presentations of these recommendations by the work groups as well as discussion by the RTAP membership, reports today would be limited to three work groups. Additional RTAP meetings will be scheduled at future dates to receive reports from the remaining groups.

Mr. Crum indicated that the work groups reporting and presenting today would be:

- Serving Major Employment Centers
- Transit and the Military
- Affordable/Accessible Housing

Each report was to be limited to 15 minutes to allow time for discussion by the RTAP membership.

Serving Major Employment Centers

Mr. Bill Crow presented the report of the Serving Major Employment Centers work group. Mr. Crow stated that the guiding principal for the work group was that in order for the Hampton Roads/757 Region to compete with other metropolitan areas for jobs and economic growth, a strong, regionally connected public transportation network is a necessity. Within this framework, the three recommendations being made to the RTAP are:

- Enhanced transit service to the emerging EVMS/CHKD/ODU health care epicenter in Norfolk with improved linkages to other health care and research facilities throughout the region
- Enhanced transit service and options to Newport News Shipbuilding
- Enhanced transit service and options to the Southside Shipyards

Mr. Crow indicated that the shipyards have major parking challenges and further added that the proposed Regional Transit Backbone Network configuration will not serve the Southside shipyard area well. The work group suggested that a potential strategy to improve commuting options is to partner with retail centers to take advantage of underutilized parking lots for expanded park and ride opportunities.

In the follow-up discussion, Mr. William Harrell stated that HRT is already looking at some of these issues.

Ms. Amy Inman reported that the current Norfolk transit system redesign study will enhance connections to medical facilities and major employment centers.

Ms. Angela Bezik shared the benefits of her past Park and Ride experience in New Jersey. Ms. Zakkiyya Anderson echoed these points from her time living in Atlanta.

Mr. Crum asked if the Chambers of Commerce could help with convening retail partners to discuss expanded Park and Ride opportunities in the region. Mr. Bob McKenna agreed to help facilitate such sessions.

Mr. Bryan Stephens highlighted the emerging Off Shore Wind industry as future transit need that will need to be supported. He also agreed to assist with the Park and Ride discussion.

Ms. Diana Burke summarized the importance of the tourism and hospitality industries, especially related to the criticality of transit for workers. Mr. Ray Amoruso of HRT summarized the new and reconfigured MAX routes that are being implemented to improve

transit service to the Virginia Beach resort area. Mr. Amoruso also stated that starting in the fall, MAX service to the oceanfront will charge the same fare as a local bus to assist commuting workers.

Transit and the Military

Captain David Dees presented the report of the Transit and the Military work group. Captain Dees indicated that the committee's recommendations focus on Naval Station Norfolk as the largest military facility in the region. The three recommendations being made to the RTAP are:

- Conduct a survey of military personnel at Naval Station Norfolk to determine interest in using public transit
- Developing an Internal Circulator on Naval Station Norfolk
- Enhancing Park and Ride and Ridesharing Options

In reviewing the committee's recommendations, Captain Dees highlighted the urgency and importance of updating the personnel survey from about a decade ago so that a true sense of current commuter and travel needs can be understood and also stated that an internal circulator is central to making alternative transportation options attractive since Naval Station Norfolk stretches across seven miles. He noted that since Department of Defense funding is not available for such an internal circulator option, other funding options will need to be identified. Captain Schneider also stated that dedicated bus lanes could be an interesting longer term option for improving transit services to the military.

In follow-up discussion, Ms. Inman stated that the need for a Naval Station Norfolk circulator was a regional issue needing regional solutions.

Mr. Crow stated that security concerns at military facilities have to be taken into consideration in the design of any options or proposals.

Mr. Zach Trogdon asked if autonomous vehicles have ever been considered as a circulator option on the base.

Mr. Crow reminded the group that the military approval review process can be lengthy and complicated.

Mr. Garry Harris stated that multiple new Green Energy and Technology programs that are emerging at the federal level could potentially provide a funding opportunity for the proposed transit circulator. Mr. Crum noted that the HRTPO organization is monitoring the federal situation for any new funding opportunities for regional transportation initiatives and priorities.

Affordable/Accessible Housing

Ms. Zakkiyya Anderson presented the report of the Affordable/Accessible Housing work group. Ms. Anderson reported that the work group focused on the following issues:

- Educating the entire community on what affordable housing really means and how it relates to a living wage
- Promoting greater understanding of how housing affordability is calculated
- Advancing the goal of doing more faster to address housing affordability through the creation of broad coalitions

Ms. Anderson emphasized that the Hampton Roads region has a severe urban housing crisis with some of the highest eviction rates in the nation at present. Further, investments in affordable housing have been shown to help save potential future costs in other programs.

In follow-up discussion, Mr. Harrell stated housing affordability is a very complicated issue and is part of the challenge in hiring staff right now. As part of the upcoming union negotiation upcoming at HRT, issues such as daycare and work/life balance are expected to figure prominently.

Mr. Jeff Raliski reported that the work group would like to encourage City Planning Departments to include the full consideration of potential affordable housing opportunities as part of the standard review process for new residential development proposals along the new regional backbone network.

Mr. James Wofford asked if the current real estate market might be pushing people out further in search of affordable housing options into areas that may not be as well served by transit.

Mr. Harrell responded that HRT will be introducing two microtransit pilot programs in the near future to help test the ability of such technologies to connect lower transit market areas to the backbone system.

Mr. Wofford stated that the RTAP group has an advocacy role to play in supporting and highlighting the need for more affordable housing in the region with good access to transit.

Mr. Crum responded that as reports from all of the groups are received and review, it is likely that some issues and priorities will overlap and align.

Mr. Jason Inge reported that the Senior Services organization is currently doing a rehaul of its services based on updated census data and will be looking to collaborate with HRT and other partners.

Ms. Inman emphasized the importance of linking transportation to development stating that the current St. Paul's redevelopment project in Downtown Norfolk has leveraged a \$15M federal BUILD transportation grant to help create an integrated network of sidewalks, bike lanes and bus lanes to enhance connectivity for residents in the new community.

Mr. Harris asked if it might be possible as the RTAP develops its recommendations to have a series of conversations with HRT riders in order to “ground truth” the proposals.

Mr. Crum stated that after all the work group report outs have been completed, such conversations could be set up later in the summer. Mr. Harrell stated that he would help to facilitate and assist all such efforts.

Next Meeting

Mr. Crum indicated that TPO staff will be sending a Doodle Poll to the RTAP membership in the coming days to help identify potential future meeting dates for completing the work group reporting process.

Other Business

There was no other business to bring before the committee.

Adjournment

There being no more business before the Regional Transit Advisory Panel, the meeting was adjourned at 1:31 p.m.