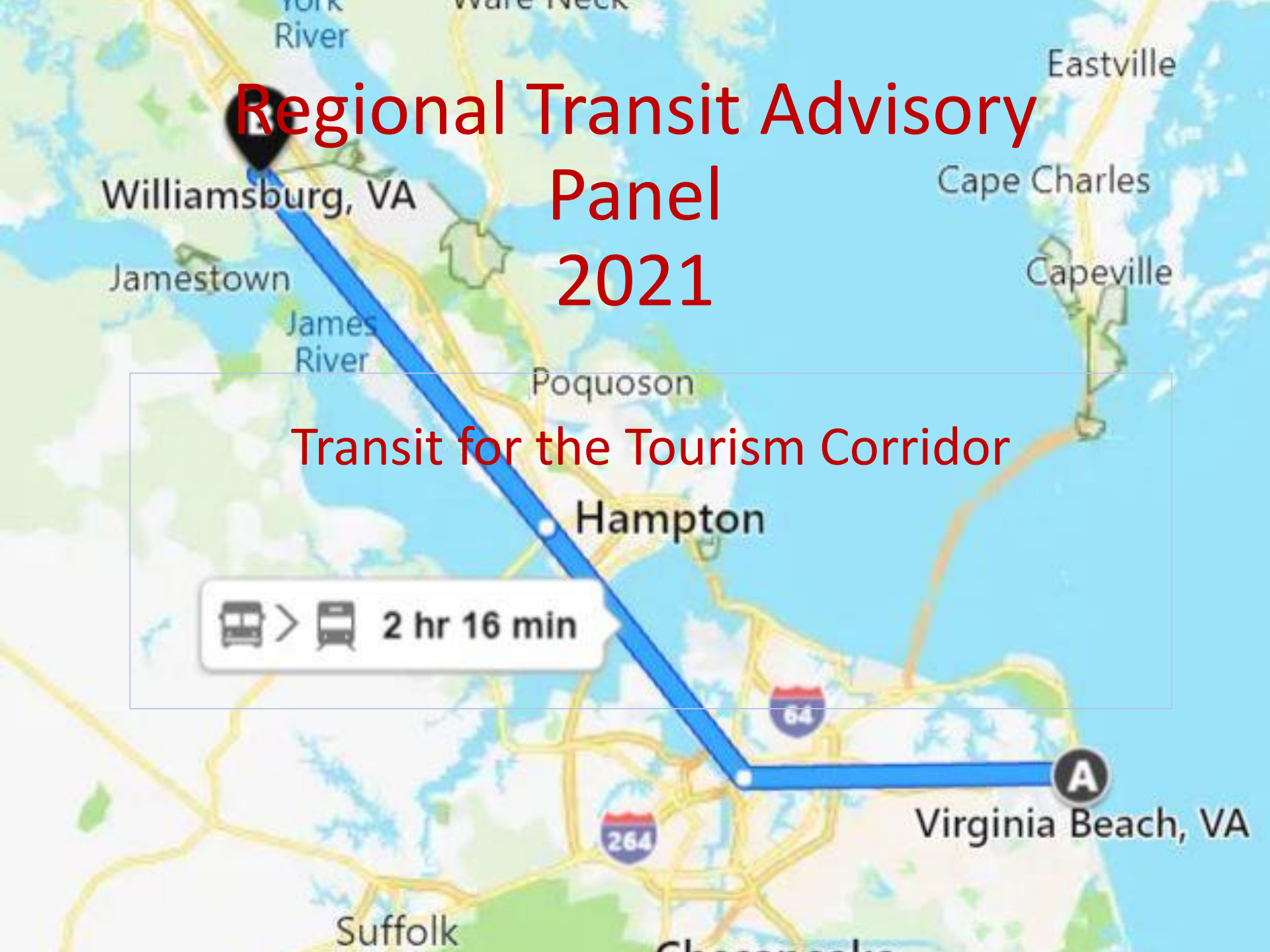


Regional Transit Advisory Panel 2021

Transit for the Tourism Corridor

  >  2 hr 16 min



Charge of the RTAP Tourism Work Group

“Hampton Roads contains many tourism assets that draw guests from outside of our region who visit and vacation here on an annual basis.

Wouldn't it be exciting if our tourism guests could visit our tourism destinations by using a public transit connector between these locations?

What if a vacationing family who drove to Williamsburg could take a bus to the Virginia Beach Oceanfront to spend a day? Or if a group who was vacationing in Virginia Beach could take a bus to tourism locations such as Busch Gardens, Hampton, or Norfolk?

This opportunity was presented as an idea for exploration at our first RTAP meeting.”

Members of RTAP Tourism Workgroup

Angela Bezik, Principle
Advantage Government
Relations Group, LLC
ABezik@Principle-Advantage.com

Rob Case, Hampton Roads
Transportation Planning
Organization (HRTPO)
RCase@HRTPO.org

Stephanie Gorham,
VOLUNTEER Hampton Roads
sgorham@volunteerhr.org

Joan Heikens, Jamestown-
Yorktown Foundation
joan.heikens@jyf.virginia.gov

Christine Neikirk, Smartmouth,
Brewing Co. (Atlantic Avenue
Association)
shechris@smartmouthbrewing.com

Zach Trogdon, Williamsburg
Area Transit Authority
ztrogdon@gowata.org

Verlaine Quinniey, The Connect
757
theconnect757@gmail.com

MEETINGS HELD:
April 23, April 30,
May 7, and May 14.

There was also an additional meeting with Rob Case, Zach Trogdon and Angie Bezik on May 17 to discuss opportunities to expand service.

Efforts of the RTAP Tourism Work Group

Outreach and research reveals the “Virginia Breeze” bus service.

- Blacksburg to D.C; Danville to D.C.; and
- Martinsville to Richmond to D.C.

These routes are provided by Dylan’s Bus Service.

The roundtrip fares for each of the routes are \$49.99, \$41.99, and \$42.99 respectively, with each having an additional \$2.50 transaction fee.



The Virginia Breeze

Is This An Idea Someone Had Before?

Some members of the Work Group remembered that there was service provided by HRT, which traveled from:

- Virginia Beach to Williamsburg and back;
- Williamsburg to Virginia Beach and back; and
- Virginia Beach to Busch Gardens.

It was called “*The Boomerang*.” It is believed that it was short-lived and was a pilot funded by VDOT/DRPT. It ended in 2005. Fares were free to the riders.

June 18 – September 1			
Depart Virginia Beach 8:00am 8:30am	Arrive Williamsburg 9:30am 10:00am	Depart Williamsburg 7:35pm 8:15pm	Arrive Virginia Beach 9:05pm 10:05pm

Williamsburg to Virginia Beach and back			
June 18 – September 1			
Depart Williamsburg 9:35am 10:05am	Arrive Virginia Beach 11:05am 11:35am	Depart Virginia Beach 6:00pm 7:00pm	Arrive Williamsburg 7:30pm 8:30pm

Virginia Beach to Busch Gardens and back			
Main Schedule (all dates except those noted below)			
Depart Virginia Beach 8:30am 8:50am 9:10am	Arrive Busch Gardens 10:00am 10:20am 10:40am	Depart Busch Gardens 9:00pm 9:10pm 10:10pm	Arrive Virginia Beach 10:30pm 11:40pm 11:40pm
July 4			
Depart Virginia Beach 8:30am 8:50am 9:10am	Arrive Busch Gardens 10:00am 10:25am 10:40am	Depart Busch Gardens 9:00pm 11:10pm 11:10pm	Arrive Virginia Beach 10:30pm 12:40am 12:40am
August 22 - 26, September 2			
Depart Virginia Beach 8:30am 8:50am 9:10am	Arrive Busch Gardens 10:00am 10:25am 10:40am	Depart Busch Gardens 7:30pm 8:10pm 8:10pm	Arrive Virginia Beach 9:00pm 9:40pm 9:40pm
August 29 - September 1			
Depart Virginia Beach 8:30am 8:50am	Arrive Busch Gardens 10:00am 10:25am	Depart Busch Gardens 7:10pm 7:10pm	Arrive Virginia Beach 8:40pm 8:40pm

The Boomerang is brought to you by:

VDOT Virginia Department of Transportation

DRPT Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation

HRT Hampton Roads Transit

THE BOOMERANG

**WILLIAMSBURG TO VIRGINIA BEACH
VIRGINIA BEACH TO WILLIAMSBURG
VIRGINIA BEACH TO BUSCH GARDENS
— AND BACK**

JUNE 18 - SEPTEMBER 1 - 7 DAYS A WEEK

If you're staying in Virginia Beach, there's a lot you could be seeing in Williamsburg. And if you're staying in Williamsburg, you're missing some great times in Virginia Beach. But with traffic, gas, and parking, it's always been tough to do both. Until now. On the Williamsburg-Virginia Beach Boomerang, it's always easy to get there and back. Catch a ride on the Boomerang to travel between Virginia Beach and Colonial Williamsburg's Historic Area or Busch Gardens – with no stops, no stress, and (believe it or not) no cost at all! That's right, the Boomerang is a totally free express bus service brought to you by VDOT. So take a look at the following schedules, then take advantage of the most worry-free ride around!



Boomerang, it's always easy to get there and back. Catch a ride on the Boomerang to travel between Virginia Beach and Colonial Williamsburg's Historic Area or Busch Gardens – with no stops, no stress, and (believe it or not) no cost at all! That's right, the Boomerang is a totally free express bus service brought to you by VDOT. So take a look at the following schedules, then take advantage of the most worry-free ride around!

Riding the Boomerang

- For day trips to Virginia Beach, buses depart from and return to the Colonial Williamsburg Visitor Center.
- For day trips to Colonial Williamsburg's Historic Area or Busch Gardens, buses depart from and return to the information kiosk at 24th Street and Atlantic Avenue at the Virginia Beach oceanfront.
- Connecting transit is available in Williamsburg (Historic Triangle Shuttle yorkcounty.gov, Williamsburg Area Transport williamsburgtransport.com, and Virginia Beach (V-B Wave Trolley hrtransit.org).

Colonial Williamsburg museum, with 801 acres of restored, historically furnished buildings, brought to life by costumed interpreters telling the stories of the 18th-century city's men and women and the challenges they faced. In this historic place, we help the future learn from the past.

ColonialWilliamsburg.com

Virginia Beach

The perfect destination for the classic beach vacation, Virginia Beach is a family-friendly oceanfront resort. A recently widened beach, a three-mile long oceanfront Boardwalk, and exciting attractions and events await your visit. Spectacular views, succulent seafood, and a mild climate make this an ideal vacation spot.

vbfun.com

Busch Gardens

Busch Gardens Williamsburg is an action-packed, European-themed adventure park with 17th-century charm and 21st-century technology. With more than 100 acres of fun and excitement for the entire family, Busch Gardens Williamsburg has been voted the world's "Most Beautiful Theme Park" for 15 consecutive years.

buschgardens.com/buschgardens/va

- All rides are free – when you board the bus in the morning, you will receive a ticket with your evening return time stamped on it.
- No food, drink (except water), luggage or restrooms on the bus – backpacks, beach bags and small carry-ons are allowed.
- Strollers must be folded and stored.

For more info, visit t64info.com

The Boomerang

*

*Special thanks to Brian Solis for digging around in the VB attic to find the Boomerang flyer!

Other Tourism Stakeholders

Some different ideas

Thank You!

- **Terry Banez**, CEO of the Greater Williamsburg Chamber & Tourism Alliance/Business Council
- **Diana Burke**, Executive Director of the Virginia Beach Hotel Association
- **Julie O'Neil**, Director of Marketing & Communications for Visit Williamsburg
- **Stacey Shiflet**, President of the Virginia Beach Restaurant Association
- **Ron Kuhlman**, Vice President of Virginia Beach Tourism Marketing & Sales for Virginia Beach Convention & Visitors Bureau

A Shift of Need

A New Focus for Tourism Work Group



Shifting focus to meet immediate and ongoing needs of hospitality and tourism.



Can routes be expanded to accommodate the extreme need for workforce for the tourism and hospitality industry?



Creating connectivity between job seekers and job providers who otherwise might not have the opportunity to come together.

New Focus | New Information

Fresh focus on how transit could create opportunities for all stakeholders, and improve hospitality and tourism for employers, workers and tourists alike.

Recent legislation passed by the Virginia General Assembly has created a dedicated funding stream for Hampton Roads Transit (HRT). Hopefully, these new-found funds can create synergy, opportunity, and connection.

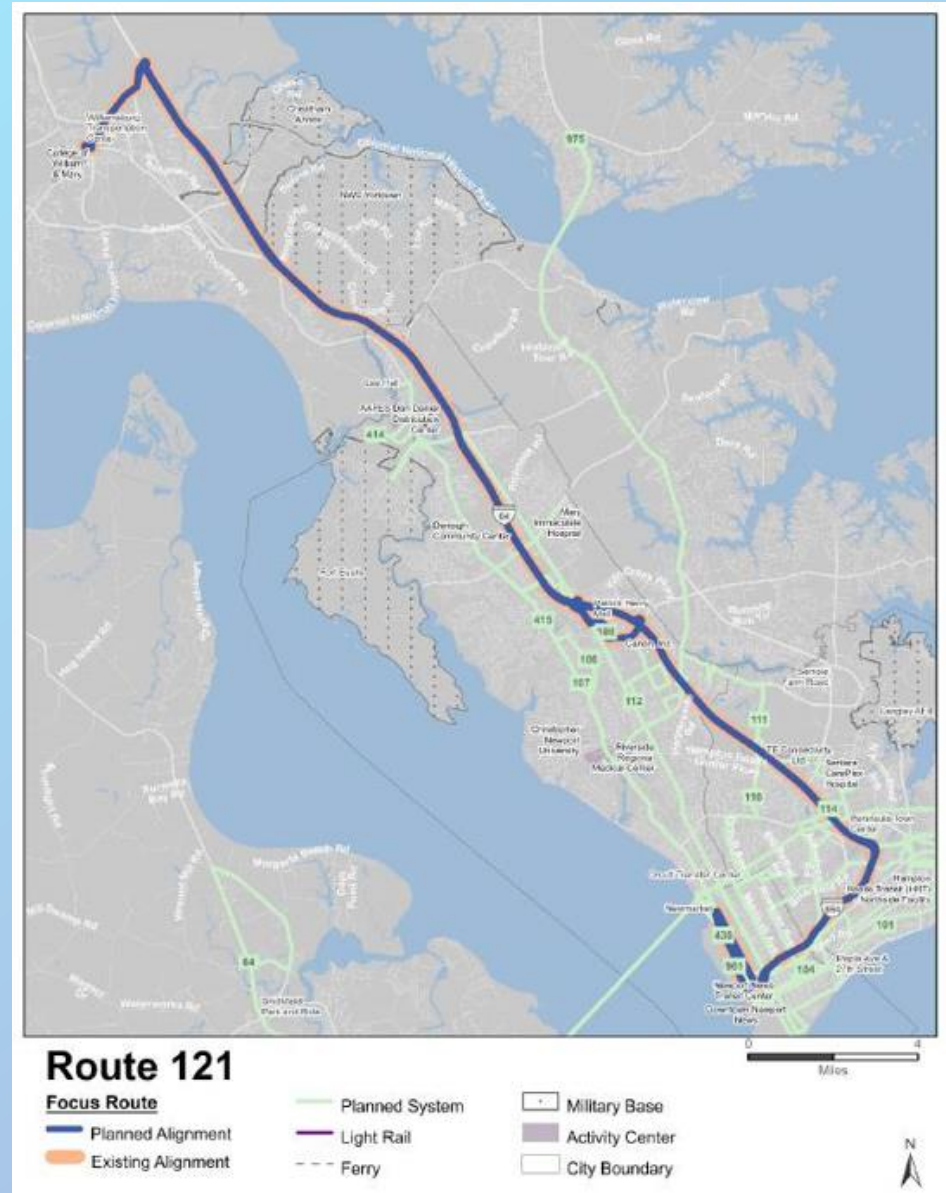
HRT recently shared that they have planned improvements to MAX Route 960. It currently ends at 19th Street but will be modified to end at 31st Street.

HRT also plans new MAX Route 121 running between the Newport News Transit Center and Williamsburg Transportation Center, stopping at Patrick Henry Mall. (The funding will be executed by HRTAC.)

MAX ROUTE 960



MAX ROUTE 121



Where Does That Leave the Historic Triangle?

Zach Trogon, Executive Director of the Williamsburg Area Transit Authority (WATA), was asked if simple things could be done to create similar opportunities for connection between employers and employees in the Historic Triangle.

Ideas offered/replies:



Changing the peak period frequency of one or more existing WATA bus routes that serve tourism sites within the Historic Triangle?

- ✓ Having better frequency to Lee Hall is helpful. Collaboration with HRT will be necessary to create an HRT connection that has same timing and frequency.



Creating “park and ride” opportunities at locations near such locations as shopping centers, government buildings, schools?

- ✓ Possibly. Transit agencies have also worked with ride-share companies (e.g., Uber) to get riders to transit stops.



What else can be done?

- ✓ WATA is working on a plan for a new bus route along the Route 17 corridor in York County. Due diligence is underway.

Wrapping Up Our Work

Questions to Ask Ourselves

Bob Crum asked RTAP workgroups to consider the following questions as they reviewed the information they gathered and began making recommendations:

- 1. Determine whether there is support** for a public transit connector between our regional tourism sites.
 - If so, could such a Tourism Transit Corridor enhance our ability to compete for tourism dollars and allow us to promote these tourism assets as a regional tourism hub?
- 2. What 1 – 3 action steps can be taken to advance this idea?**
 - Must be Actionable and Realistic
 - Can it be advanced in the next 3 years?
- 3. Who are the important partners to advance? Who are new partners?**
- 4. How can the effort be funded?**

1. Determine whether there is support for a public transit connector between our regional tourism sites.

If so, could such a Tourism Transit Corridor enhance our ability to compete for tourism dollars and allow us to promote these tourism assets as a regional tourism hub?

A shift in focus from moving tourists to moving workforce

- ✓ *Moving tourists should still be discussed later, following a fuller recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic*
- ✓ *Most immediate need of the tourism/hospitality venues and attractions is workforce*
 - *Visitors are coming and venues and attractions are ready and willing to hire*
 - *The aftermath of the pandemic has left a dearth of employees who are ready and willing to be hired.*
 - *A poor experience may leave visitors unwilling to come back*

RECOMMENDATION

Shift the focus from moving visitors / tourists between Hampton Roads attractions / hospitality venues to working quickly and directly with stakeholders to develop a robust plan for moving workforce to Hampton Roads tourism/hospitality venues and.

2. What 1 – 3 Actionable Steps Can Be Taken to Advance This Idea?

➤ **Must be Actionable and Realistic –**

1. *HRT, WATA, and Hampton Roads tourism/hospitality venues and attractions must commit to collaboration to develop routes more fully between the venues/attractions and where workers live. That willingness makes such an initiative very realistic and actionable.*
2. *WATA and HRT can and should quickly take steps to change peak period frequency of one or more existing routes that serve tourism sites within the Historic Triangle and potentially create “park and ride” opportunities.*

➤ **Can be advanced in the next 3 years –** *This should be advanced in the short-term (next few months), with a long-term vision applied.*

RECOMMENDATION

Act immediately and collaboratively to develop strategic routes and access opportunities within areas that will benefit from transit-assisted job and career prospects throughout the Peninsula and Southside.

3. Who are the important partners to advance? Who are new partners?

Venues/ Attractions

- *Busch Gardens / Water Country*
- *Great Wolf Lodge*
- *Colonial Williamsburg (Foundation Board, staff and donors)*
- *Jamestown Yorktown Foundation (Board, staff and donors)*
- *Virginia Aquarium (Board, staff and donors)*
- *Atlantic Avenue Association*
- *Travel Agents*
- *Hampton Roads Sports Commission*
- *Virginia Beach Hotel Association (Leadership and membership)*
- *Greater Williamsburg Hotel Association (Leadership and membership)*
- *Greater Williamsburg Restaurant Association*
- *Virginia Beach Restaurant Association*

MORE PARTNERS

Business and Economic Development Organizations

- *Greater Williamsburg Chamber of Commerce (Business Council & Tourism Alliance – Board, staff and members)*
- *Hampton Roads Chamber of Commerce (Virginia Beach Board Members especially – Board, staff and members)*
- *Economic Development Authorities in Virginia Beach, York County, Williamsburg, and James City County*
- *Local and state elected officials in Virginia Beach, York County, Williamsburg and James City County*

MORE PARTNERS

Education

- *College of William & Mary (President Rowe, past presidents)*
- *Christopher Newport University (President Tribble)*
- *Virginia Wesleyan University*
- *Tidewater Community College*
- *Thomas Nelson Community College*
- *K-12/Superintendents*

RECOMMENDATION

Begin outreach to these entities to garner broad support for a strategic workforce transportation plan for tourism / hospitality venues and attractions within the Hampton Roads region.

How Can the Effort Be Funded?

- *Pilot through grants*
- *ARPA Funds*
- *DRPT*
- *VTC*
- *Local EDAs (in concert with each other)*
- *Localities via American Rescue Plan funding*
- *Transit Agencies via American Rescue Plan funding*
- *Other transit / workforce / hospitality grants*

RECOMMENDATIONS

Begin discussions with:

- *Kevin Page (formerly of DRPT and currently HRTAC)*
- *Local EDA Directors (Williamsburg, James City County, York County and Virginia Beach)*
- *Local electeds (Williamsburg, James City County, York County and Virginia Beach)*
- *HRT and WATA*

...about possibility of funding a pilot that will address a portion of the workforce deficit.

Some Things to Think About

Virginia will eventually end the extended unemployment benefits and K-12 and daycare will normalize - people will likely have to go back to work.

Will they have the means to get there?

Should local and state decision makers consider how transit affects affordable housing, workforce development, education, and economic development more earnestly?

Should employers?

Some things to Remember

TRANSIT IS:



TOURISM



EDUCATION



*AFFORDABLE
HOUSING*



*ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT*

THANK YOU!