

October 12, 2021

**Memorandum #2021-153**

**TO: Regional Transit Advisory Panel Members**

**BY: Robert A. Crum, Jr., Executive Director**

**RE: Regional Transit Advisory Panel Meeting – October 18, 2021**

The next meeting of the Regional Transit Advisory Panel (RTAP) has been scheduled for **Monday, October 18, 2021, 2021, Noon – 2:00 PM**. The agenda is attached.

This meeting will be held **in person** in Board Room A/B of the Regional Building located at [723 Woodlake Drive, Chesapeake, VA 23320](https://www.hamptonroads.com/property/723-Woodlake-Drive).

/cm

Attachment

**Hampton Roads Transportation Planning Organization  
Regional Transit Advisory Panel  
Meeting**

**Monday, October 18, 2021  
12:00 Noon**

**The Regional Building  
723 Woodlake Drive, Chesapeake**

***Please note that this meeting will be held in person.***

**1. Welcome and Introductions**

**2. Minutes (Attachment 2)**

Minutes from the July 14, 2021 Regional Transit Advisory Panel (RTAP) meeting are attached.

**3. General Assembly Session and Transit Advocacy**

At the July 14 RTAP meeting, members discussed the important role that the RTAP membership could play during the 2022 General Assembly session regarding transit advocacy. To follow up on this discussion, options will be introduced regarding transit advocacy opportunities for the RTAP. RTAP members will be asked to discuss and provide input on next steps and opportunities.

**4. Review of Recommendations from RTAP Work Groups**

During the May 26, June 22, and July 14 RTAP meetings, the Panel received presentations from the nine work groups that were formed around the following topic areas:

- Transit-Oriented Development Along the Regional Backbone
- 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

Staff will provide a presentation summarizing the comments received from each Work Group and review common themes between the various work group recommendations. Input and discussion from the RTAP will be requested and will be used to develop a summary report that provides an overview of the RTAP's work and major recommendations. A potential strategy and timeline for reporting these RTAP recommendations to the HRTPO Board and transit partners will also be discussed.

**5. Other Business**

RTAP members will be provided an opportunity to share any information related to public transit in the Hampton Roads/757 region.

**6. Next Meeting**

**7. Adjournment**

**Summary Minutes of the  
HRTPO Regional Transportation Advisory Panel (RTAP) Meeting  
July 14, 2021**

The HRTPO Regional Transit Advisory Panel (RTAP) Meeting was called to order at 12:07 p.m. in the Regional Building Boardroom, 723 Woodlake Drive, Chesapeake, Virginia, with the following in attendance:

**RTAP Members:**

Jim Wofford	Jason Inge
Ben Goodill	Garry Harris
Julie Summs	Sarah Jane Kirkland
Martha McClees	Diana Burke
Captain Jason Schneider	Janet Green
Rick Dwyer	Bryan Stephens
William Harrell	Zakkiyya Anderson
Bryant Thomas	Susan Gaston
Keith Darrow	Kristen Hatchett

**HRTPO/HRPDC Staff:**

Robert A. Crum, Jr.	Jeff Raliski
Pavithra Parthasarathi	Rob Case
Logan Grimm	Rob Cofield
Kendall Miller	

**Others Recorded Attending:**

Ray Amoruso; Mark Shea; and Zach Trogdon

**Call to Order/Minutes**

Mr. Robert Crum, HRTPO Executive Director asked if there were any changes or corrections to the minutes of the June 22, 2021 RTAP meeting which were circulated previously. Hearing none, Ms. Julie Summs moved approval of the June 22, 2021 minutes as submitted, and Ms. Martha McClees seconded the motion. The minutes were approved.

**Reports from RTAP Work Groups**

Mr. Crum stated that four RTAP work groups – Bus Stop Amenities, Technology, Transit Advocacy/Ambassadors, and Transit for the Williamsburg/Virginia Beach Tourism Corridor – would be reporting to the RTAP today. Each of the nine RTAP work groups was tasked with developing between 1 – 3 action steps that could be taken in each topic area to advance/strengthen transit in the Hampton Roads/757 Region.

*Bus Stop Amenities*

Ms. Kristen Hatchett, presenting for the Bus Stop Amenities work group, reported that the team had been very active, generating and testing more than 15 separate ideas and

suggestions to improve bus stop locations with the goal of enhancing the total transit ridership experience. These ideas were condensed, after extensive review and discussion, to the list of recommendations being shared today.

The first recommendation of the Bus Stop Amenities work group to the RTAP committee is to share with the other localities and organizations the details of a new seating/lighting system WATA will be testing in the near future for their consideration and use. The cost for this seating improvement is approximately \$2,200 per unit.

In follow-up discussion, Mr. Crum asked how many seating units will be part of the initial WATA trial.

Mr. Ben Goodill stated that 15 units of the seating system will be installed during the initial trial phase.

Ms. Zakkiyya Anderson asked if just one seating unit per stop is being considered.

Mr. Goodill responded that just one unit per stop will be installed during the trial period.

Ms. Hatchett added that the manufacturer makes larger models of the system that offer more seating spaces per installation that can also be considered as needed.

Ms. Susan Gaston asked if there were sponsorship opportunities connected to the proposed infrastructure that could potentially help fund the cost of the units.

Ms. Hatchett responded that the upcoming recommendation of the work group will speak directly to partnering and sponsorship opportunities.

Mr. Rick Dwyer wanted to confirm that the units being proposed were solar powered.

Mr. Goodill affirmed that the lighting for the seating units is solar powered.

Mr. Garry Harris asked if the WATA program will be a phased approach, with additional rider amenities and weather protections being added at a later time.

Mr. Goodill acknowledged that any of the initial trial improvement locations could become a full shelter in the future if warranted, but that is not the primary intent of the program at this time.

Mr. William Harrell stated that this seating system could be a great option especially in areas with limited rights-of-way. He added that improving passenger amenities is an area of great focus for HRT since the bus stop is often the customer's first impression of the transit system.

Mr. Crum asked if there was an option to add some type of canopy or weather protection to individual units.

Mr. Goodill replied that they have not seen that option but are in contact with the manufacturers.

Ms. Hatchett continued with the second recommendation of the work group which focuses on expanding the Adopt-A-Spot program for shelter stops. She stated that both enhanced information about the program on HRT's webpage and also the creation of a business sponsorship program to help build improvements on a spot, not only maintain locations should be priorities. Ms. Hatchett reported that at present, only 67 of HRT's approximately 2,700 stops are adopted. Also, the most missing amenity across all stops on the entire HRT system is a trash can.

Mr. Mark Shea stated that the City of Virginia Beach is a strong advocate of the Adopt-A-Spot program. For example, the Green Run community association maintains eight transit stops in their neighborhood.

Mr. Crum asked Mr. Shea about the transit stop at the REI store in the Pembroke area and if the company itself was responsible for its unique design.

Mr. Shea replied that REI did specifically design the transit to fit in with the architecture of their building.

Mr. Raliski added that the IKEA store in Norfolk incorporated a transit stop into its development plan as part of the LEED certification for the project.

Mr. Harris observed that trash cans at transit stops are often too small and consequently overflow.

Mr. Zach Trogdon reported that several years ago, a private group in Williamsburg was active in installing benches and other amenities at transit stops so there is interest among the larger community in such partnerships.

Mr. Crum asked Mr. Bryan Stephens of the Hampton Roads Chamber of Commerce about what might be the best way to approach the business community about partnering on transit stop improvements.

Mr. Stephens replied that a pitch to the business community highlighting both civic responsibility issues as well as the marketing and promotion potential of the shelter partnership program could be effective.

Ms. Anderson stated that the campaign should frame transit as a human service need.

Ms. Kendall Miller recommended that the business community be approached and asked to have a footprint in the community and view support of transit as an investment in its workers and customers.

Mr. Jim Wofford asked who was responsible for maintenance at sponsored locations since failure to properly maintain a location and keep trash emptied could end up being a poor reflection on a business.

Ms. Hatchett replied that the work group's research found that a mix of models are currently in place with some sponsors providing just providing the infrastructure while others both funding improvements and conducting the ongoing maintenance.

Mr. Harrell indicated that the sponsors conduct the ongoing maintenance for the majority of the currently adopted locations.

Ms. Hatchett next listed the third recommendation which centered on working with VDOT and localities to construct more sidewalks to improve accessibility at transit stop locations, especially in underserved areas.

Mr. Harrell stated that sidewalks are a very important issue and that the agency works closely with the HRT member cities to match with capital plans wherever possible to improve connections to transit stops.

Mr. Shea added that such improvements are a good way to leverage and increase the impact of local dollars with the transit agency providing shelters and other amenities in areas that are adding sidewalks in line with established Complete Street policies.

Ms. Hatchett highlighted that the final recommendation of the work group centered on technology, both current and future, as well as how it could be augmented with both live and static displays at stop locations for individuals without access to a smartphone.

Mr. Ray Amoruso stated that during HRT's bus stop consolidation process several years that also standardized signage across the system, route maps and schedules were originally attached to the posts on the northside. However, since HRT makes changes to its network twice a year, keeping the displays updated and current proved to be a logistical problem with ongoing costs.

Ms. Kirkland asked if sponsorships on electronic displays could help address the problem of keeping information up to date.

Mr. Harrell responding that getting real time information to its customers is a key priority for HRT, and since 90% of its current customers have cellphones, they are viewed as the most efficient platform to utilize.

### *Technology*

Mr. Keith Darrow presented the report of the Technology work group. Mr. Darrow reported that the group focused its work solely on app technologies. Looking at existing conditions, it was stated WATA currently does not have a transit-only app. HRT has its own app that includes ticket purchasing, but it only covers the WAVE service at the Virginia Beach oceanfront. There is also a third party app with HRT schedules and route information but no real time data. Suffolk Transit uses a third party app that has live data for both web and mobile use.

Based upon this review of existing conditions and capabilities, the work group is advancing the following list of recommendations for consideration:

1. Get live GPS data into existing third party apps
2. Create app for fare purchase and mobile ticketing
3. Expand service and information on existing HRT app

4. Expand apps with additional services like traffic data and last mile connectivity including scooters, bikeshare, rideshare, and other services.

Looking towards implementation, Mr. Darrow detailed the following proposed next steps:

1. Conduct public survey to help refine needs
2. Identify funding sources
3. Procure developer
4. Eventually work towards a combined regional transit app

Mr. Harrell highlighted that the TPO currently helps to coordinate a regional planning process between the three transit agency properties and that technology enhancements and linkages have been a major topic of discussion in these meetings.

Mr. Harrell also offered to provide a full update of its current technology enhancement program at a future RTAP meeting.

Mr. Trogdon stated that WATA does have a rider app but the fact that it is not easily found on a web search is a problem.

Captain Jason Schneider emphasized that since Navy facilities and operations spread throughout the entire region, a combined, one stop shopping solution is key.

Mr. Shea suggested that integrating parking information into the app may be useful as well.

Ms. Pavithra Parthasarathi highlighted her experience with Seattle's "One Bus Away" app that combined information from eight separate transit agencies.

Mr. Crum asked HRT staff to provide an overview of how technology improvements are being planned and integrated as part of the 757Express rollout process.

Mr. Amoruso stated that the technology enhancements being planned as part of the 757Express system will benefit the entire HRT system and not just the backbone routes. In particular, mobile fare payment is one enhancement that is reported to be getting closer to rollout and testing. Mr. Amoruso also detailed that a formal Request for Proposals for consultant assistance for the development of a new transit app including real time data should be ready for posting later this summer and the HRT Chief Technology Officer could attend a future RTAP meeting to provide a summary of the agency's overall technology strategy.

Mr. Crum asked if anything was happening currently in the transit industry that could be similar to the WAZE app which was a disruptor for automobile trip planning and routing.

Mr. Harrell responded that concepts of integrated mobility on demand, including first mile and last connections, are at the center of discussions in the transit industry.

Mr. Amoruso echoed that the idea of seamless trip planning covering all modes, systems, and options is ideal but added that there are issues related to data security and integrity to be addressed when seeking to combine information from multiple different companies.

Ms. Parthasarathi reported that Seattle utilized a single fare card for every transit provider.

Mr. Amoruso noted that due to HRT's unique financial structure, they have the additional challenge of needing to separate fare income by the location where it is generated and not just assign it to the system as a whole.

Mr. Goodill stated that he believes that the Transit App has the opportunity to be that all-inclusive, single source for travel information.

### *Transit Advocacy and Ambassadors*

Ms. Sarah Jane Kirkland started the presentation for the Transit Advocacy and Ambassadors committee, noting that today's summary to the RTAP committee would be a tag team effort involving all members of the work group. She also indicated that a White Paper summarizing the group's findings and recommendations would be circulated to the Committee for its information (copy attached).

Ms. Kirkland stated that reminding elected legislators of the importance of a robust regional transit system in Hampton Roads for multiple groups and interests such as transit riders, businesses, the military, and citizens should be a primary focus.

Ms. Kirkland added that research on best practices in the transit industry nationwide can help inform the region's transit outreach approach and messaging, and therefore the work group will be continuing with this effort.

Ms. Kirkland also promoted that creating a strong group of diverse influencers who can advance the transportation efforts in the region should be a key aspect of the strategy.

Ms. Susan Gaston recalled that many RTAP committee members had worked together previously in support of the legislation which ultimately created additional funding support for Hampton Roads Transit.

Ms. Gaston then stated that we need to continue to meet with legislators to discuss the importance of transportation to the future of our region and proposed creating a Transportation Awareness Day focusing on HRT to lobby Richmond legislators as a main component of that strategy.

Mr. Gary Harris stated that creating a group of transit advocates and activists to serve as a hub to communicate transit needs in the region, similar to the MARTA Army in the Atlanta area, is proposed.

Mr. Harris added that building and sustaining momentum around transit issues and initiatives needs to be the goal.

Mr. Bryant Thomas noted that recent leadership changes in Richmond support the need for ongoing transit advocacy.

Ms. Zakkiyya Anderson asked if the area's transit agencies have continuing conversations with other transit agencies and organizations.

Mr. Harrell responded that HRT was an active member of the American Public Transit Association and that the Virginia Transit Association hosts a Transit Advocacy Day in Richmond annually during the General Assembly session.

Mr. Crum endorsed the idea of creating a Hampton Roads Transit Advocacy Day for the next General Assembly session and proposed using the next RTAP meeting to help strategize and plan for the event.

Captain Schneider noted that the federal government has a Defense Infrastructure program funded at about \$75 million so there may be opportunities to partner and lobby at the national level for some of these funds.

Ms. Diana Burke stated that it would be helpful to have written briefing materials prepared with talking points and metrics to be emphasized when meeting with legislators.

Mr. Harrell stated that countering misinformation about HRT and its services has been a long-standing concern, so providing an accurate transit story is an ongoing need and challenge.

Mr. Crum added that HRT had been saddled from its creation with an operating structure that could not succeed and was now just months into its new model which offered a brighter vision for the future making the messaging to legislators at this time even more important.

#### *Transit for the Tourism Corridor*

Mr. Zach Trogdon outlined that the work group began by researching existing past tourist transit connections and services such as the Virginia Breeze connecting multiple colleges and locations across Commonwealth to Washington DC and the short-lived “Boomerang” service operated by HRT connecting Virginia Beach to Williamsburg which ended in 2005.

Mr. Trogdon next summarized that the group quickly expanded its focus to also include the immediate and ongoing needs of hospitality and tourism sectors for workers.

Mr. Amoruso outlined the upcoming changes in routing and fares on the MAX Route 960 between Norfolk and the Virginia Beach oceanfront that have been designed to assist in getting more workers more efficiently to the resort area.

Mr. Trogdon also listed that there will be an upcoming new MAX Route 121 running between the Newport News Transit Center and the Williamsburg Transportation Center, stopping at Patrick Henry Mall.

Mr. Trogdon summarized some ideas that could improve the transit/tourism connection in the Historic Triangle area including increasing the frequency of certain routes especially connecting to the HRT network at Lee Hall, creating Park and Ride opportunities, and possibly adding new routes.

Mr. Trogdon stated that the work group was recommending a shift in focus from moving visitors and tourists between Hampton Roads attractions and hospitality venues to working

quickly and directly with stakeholders to develop a robust plan for moving the workforce to Hampton Roads tourism and hospitality locations.

Mr. Trogdon expanded that this approach would involve strategic outreach to potential partners and organizations as well as identify and secure funding sources for recommended enhancements.

Mr. Amoruso stated that the upcoming casinos being built in Norfolk and Portsmouth will be new tourist attractions with large workforces and that HRT is already in an early conversation with the developers especially since these casinos will largely operate on a 24/7 basis.

Mr. Crum stated that limited or lack of access to transit can sometimes be a regional disadvantage in the competition for new jobs and investment.

Ms. Anderson emphasized that extended and later transit service hours are often critical for individuals without cars to finding and keeping jobs.

Mr. Amoruso replied that the 13 new backbone routes will all have service until 1:00 AM, seven days a week creating a consistent level of service that does not exist at present across all six cities in the HRT system.

Mr. Jason Inge noted that the proposed backbone network does serve the Southside shipyards directly.

Mr. Amoruso reported that HRT is working closely with the City of Norfolk on its Transit Redesign effort which is proposing enhanced connections to the Southside. Also, a new MAX route from Virginia Beach and Chesapeake to the Norfolk Naval Shipyard is being proposed.

Mr. Darrow asked about the impact of the new regional transit funding stream for the regional backbone system on local funding commitments.

Mr. Amoruso stated that the legislation creating the new regional transit fund for Hampton Roads requires that local governments maintain current levels of funding support for transit, so switching qualifying existing services from local to regional funding frees local funding for reinvestment into other parts of the transit network.

Mr. Trogdon asked about the impact of the upcoming widening of the Hampton Roads Bridge Tunnel (HRBT) on potential transit routes and connections.

Mr. Crum stated that the widening of the HRBT will be complete in late 2025 and that transit vehicles will be able to use the new High Occupancy Toll (HOT) lanes on the expanded facility without charge to bypass congestion at all times.

## **Next Meeting**

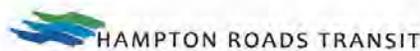
Mr. Crum thanked all of the work groups for their hard work and summarized today's discussions into the proposed following next steps:

1. Use the next RTAP meeting tentatively to be scheduled during the third week in August to actively plan and organize the HRT Advocacy Day in Richmond during the next session of the General Assembly.
2. Charge the three transit agencies and TPO staff to begin to synthesize the recommendations of all nine RTAP work groups, identifying overlapping issues and themes for a proposed work program for the Panel.
3. Invite Mr. Michael Price, HRT's Chief Technology Officer, to the September or October RTAP meeting to provide the group with an overview of the agency's technology enhancement plan and timelines.

## **Adjournment**

There being no more business before the Regional Transit Advisory Panel, the meeting was adjourned at 2:21 p.m.

Attachment – *Advocacy/Ambassador Work Group White Paper*



Presentation - July 14<sup>th</sup>, 2021  
Regional Transportation Advisory Panel  
Advocacy/Ambassador Working Group Study

**The Assignment:**

At our first meeting, we reviewed successful metropolitan regions from an economic perspective and noted that many of them have top-rated public transit networks. Transit systems in Hampton Roads have been historically underfunded, which has created major challenges to create the type of transit system that will help make our region economically competitive. Many employers who are considering moves to various metropolitan regions are looking for communities with effective transit systems that offer their employees choices for how they move around the community. In our region, major transit initiatives/ideas are sometimes met with opposition, and our transit system providers are often left to present the case for expanded or enhanced transit service on their own. One potential way for the RTAP to help address this challenge is to create a Transit Advocacy/Ambassador program. This effort would bring together pro-transit advocates in the community who can promote the importance of a strong regional transit system to the health and well-being of our region. These ambassadors would be able to promote public transit in our region and provide input at important times on the value of expanding the efficiency of our region's transit systems.

Some questions for this workgroup to address might include the following:

- How can a regional campaign that promotes and supports transit be initiated?
- How would this effort be organized and convened?
- Which regional stakeholders should be involved in this effort? How do you bring together all important stakeholders to this effort to demonstrate the positive benefits of transit to all aspects of our community?
- What type of advocacy would make the most impact? Social media, events, public meetings?
- What are 1 - 2 action steps?

**Working Group Committee Members:**

Susan Gaston, The Gaston Group, LLC  
Garry Harris, Center for Sustainable Communities  
Sarah Jane Kirkland, CIVIC Leadership Institute  
Jim Wofford, MacArthur Center

**Thanks to HR Transit team members for their support:**

Ray Amoruso  
Gene Cavasos  
Kendall Miller

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## RTAP Advocacy Working Group Findings –

We began our conversations identifying who are the key stakeholders for public transportation.

### Who are we advocating for? –

#### **Legislators, local and state elected officials –**

Advocacy efforts needed to emphasize the importance of a robust transportation system for the future development and advancement of our region. Keeping the transportation conversation front and center with the key decision makers

#### **Businesses/regional leadership –**

(Example - Amazon in Suffolk is buying everyone transportation passes – if more businesses looked to do this as a job perk could have a greater impact on numbers of people riding/improving congestion and reducing environmental impact).

#### **Citizens –**

Educate the citizens on what it takes to run a transit system effectively. Educate on the environmental benefits by selecting public transportation as mode of transit.

#### **The end-user - "Walk a mile in my shoes" -**

Advocacy to ensure customers have a dignified ridership experience. Passenger amenities imperative to this. (Safe shelter, benches, clean stops). Equity

#### **Next Gen ridership –**

College Accessibility

#### **Seniors –**

Transit can provide options for independency for seniors. Is there a way to provide senior bus passes like the 16–18-year-old pass at no cost?

#### **Military –**

How do we best serve our military riders? Discussed the challenges with the last mile – discussed how Newport News Shipbuilding has used bikes for employees to move around due to limited parking at the shipyard behind the gates. Autonomous vehicles – opportunity for public/private investment?

#### **HRT Operators –**

They are the #1 Advocates for transportation!

Each identified stakeholder is closely connected and intricately depends on the other:

- Without an increase in ridership the priority for funding will decrease
- Without the business leadership community (including the Association of REALTORS® and other industry sectors that depend on a reliable service) we will not have a voice to advance legislation.

- Without the advocacy in Richmond our region focused on building a robust transit system that can transport people across the region we fall behind other advancing regions that are focused on their public transportation as part of their growth strategy – (Think Raleigh Durham).
- Without educating our citizens of the importance of public transportation to our economy, our environment and to our overall position and ranking especially for young professionals looking to locate to progressive cities, we continue to fall behind other competitive markets that are bringing in young and diverse talent. Statistics show that our region is not growing – retaining and attracting young people here in the region is a top priority. A robust transit system will be a big part of that future growth.
- An increase in ridership will not happen without the increase in amenities, such as safe shelters, Wi-Fi, high frequency service, operators that are able to provide excellent customer service for their riders, technology to make the use of public transportation so easy and accessible to all.

**Action Items:**

**Research** best practices from transit advocacy groups around the country -  
How can a regional campaign that promotes and supports transit be initiated?

We looked at best practices from other transit advocacy groups around the country. Look for best practices – <https://transitcenter.org/publications/> and <https://www.martaarmy.org/ple>

These are among many resources that we can use to leverage our outreach and impact here in Hampton Roads. We will continue to research. There is grant funding potentially available through transit center.org for the work that we are trying to do here in Hampton Roads.

We will also bring together other existing groups in the region who have worked in the advocacy area for transit to discuss best practices and any findings – examples include but are not limited to:

- HR Alliance (Doug Smith)
- Reinvent HR (Jim Spore)
- CDDX
- VA Beach Vision (Martha McClees)
- Sierra Club – VA Chapter - <https://www.sierraclub.org/virginia/clean-transportation-smart-land-use>
- Envision HR
- League of women voters – Judith Brown (Have been advocating for transportation in the past)
- Environmental groups
- Organizations and groups dedicated to enhancing Diversity Equity and Inclusion in the region
- Association of REALTORS®
- The Future of Hampton Roads – Robyn Gayer
- Young Professional Groups – tHRive, Urban League etc.
- RVA-757 Connects

**Create** a strong group of diverse influencers who can advance the transportation efforts in the region -

We suggest creating a strong diverse group of influencers that can help advance the transportation efforts in the region. This group should include representation from all the identified stakeholders. Hosting both virtual forums and in-person opportunities we can allow everyone to have a voice and to build a network of transportation visionaries who can help to not only shape the future of public transportation in the region, but they will also assist in promoting the use of public transportation throughout the region. Using tools like social media, video storyboards, blogs, podcasts these transportation influencers can help build an army of supporters for the importance of public transportation throughout the region.

**757 Transportation Visionaries focused on:  
Connectivity. Community. Collaboration**

This effort will empower residents throughout the Hampton Region to improve the transit ridership experience in their own neighborhoods and is a grassroots effort.

**Advocate:** Meet with legislators and discuss the importance of transportation to the future of our region - The role of the Advocacy Group is to continually educate policy makers on the importance of HRT and its mission, its funding sources, and its needs as local, state, and federal elected and appointed officials. From budgets and appropriations to resiliency planning as legislated by the Code of Virginia, we need to make sure that decision makers are HRT's advocates in City Halls, County Administration Buildings, the General Assembly, and the Governor's Office, and in the Congress. Without advocating for the program, itself to our various policy makers as well as advocating for and alongside the funding partners, the transit system that we all hope for will not be sustainable.

Only through sound public policy impacting transit and transportation, as well as economic development opportunities in Hampton Roads, can we make sure that HRT is serving the various constituents. Our advocacy group should consider acting as quasi-HR Transit lobbyists who can advocate for the organization and its value proposition.

The ADVOCACY outreach to the elected officials should be strategic, targeted, and meaningful. A good example of successful advocacy was the coalition of advocacy efforts at the General Assembly and at the Governor's Office that were led by HRT, the area's Associations of REALTORS®, local governments and other stakeholders that supported the funding of the transit backbone.

The Associations of REALTORS® is a powerful group that has had a large impact. Collaborating with this organization will be important and we suggest a town hall style meeting on each side of the water so that the public can participate in brainstorming sessions and action-oriented meetings to engage in conversation with our elected officials.

Our advocacy goal is the continue to strengthen our purpose and our action steps to the various funders and to the decision makers who have supported the public policy that has brought us to where we are today. Timing is critical, we want to make sure that we articulate this need within our goals and objectives and actions, so that we can be strategically positioned for the 2022 General Assembly Session, the next Governor, his Administration, and beyond.

**Create Awareness: Transportation Day -**

Creating Awareness is critical. We suggest hosting a transportation day event inviting key business leadership, local officials, elected officials. Have groups ride buses from different locations across the region and have keynote speakers on each route – discussing the challenges and the opportunities. Speaker can include those with HRT important to include regular riders who can share their experiences and what their needs are. The call to action will be how can the business community and elected/local officials play a part in increasing ridership and increasing funding for public transit. Consider bringing in outside speakers who can share success stories and best practices from other communities around the country. Leadership Programs such as LEAD 757, LEAD Peninsula, LEAD Greater Williamsburg, CIVIC Leadership Institute and Lead Virginia.

**757 TRANSIT HUB –**

The advocacy group serves as the hub to communicate transit initiatives in the region.

We determined that the advocacy group is also the hub to communicate the success stories of those we are advocating for and to. Creating a social media presence telling the story in citizens voices can help inspire and engage others.

**Building Momentum**

We must build momentum and share recent success stories to build the engagement and excitement for the advancement of our region's public transportation.

- The roll out of Real Time bus data for smartphone users, allowing customers to track their bus
- The deployment of Virginia's first fleet of all-electric, zero-emission buses along Virginia Beach Boulevard's Route 20.
- The 757 Express

Respectfully submitted by:

Susan Gaston, The Gaston Group, LLC  
Garry Harris, Center for Sustainable Communities  
Sarah Jane Kirkland, CIVIC Leadership Institute  
Jim Wofford, MacArthur Center

Presented – July 14<sup>th</sup>, 2021