

# VTC

VIRGINIA  
TOWN & CITY

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THE MAGAZINE OF THE VIRGINIA MUNICIPAL LEAGUE

## Hold on!

Transportation funding is  
shifting gears

### Also inside:

An interview with Clerk of the  
House Suzette Denslow

COVID-19 financial impacts  
on Virginia local governments



# VRSA Risk Management Grant Funds increased

The Virginia Risk Sharing Association (VRSA) remains committed to partnering with our members through education, training and consulting as they continue to serve their communities during these difficult times.

For the 2020-2021 fund-year the VRSA Members' Supervisory Board has voted to increase funding available in the program, as well as make COVID-19 related personal protective equipment eligible for funding.

Funds have also been earmarked for educational scholarships to cover professional management, leadership and governance training.



**Over the last 10 years, the VRSA Risk Management Grant program has provided \$3 million in funding to strengthen risk management programs and help members promote their strategic goals.**

Questions regarding the VRSA Risk Management Grant program should be directed to VRSA Director of Education and Training Thomas Bullock at: [tbullock@vrsa.us](mailto:tbullock@vrsa.us)



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Hold on! Get a grip! Grab hold of something solid and brace yourself! Transportation funding in Virginia is about to make a sharp turn for the better.

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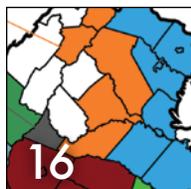
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### VRSA is here for our members (now more than ever)

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# Respect and appreciation available here!

**I** CONFESS TO BEING AMONG THOSE who wish that Zoom meetings would return to their proper place as a “second best” option behind face-to-face meetings. Nobody gets involved with local government to see less of each other. In fact, the attraction is quite the opposite. I miss seeing you! But we will have to wait a bit longer because, as the great pontificator Yogi Berra first observed in 1973, “It ain’t over till it’s over.”

Which is to say, this pandemic ain’t over yet, but it will be!

In the meantime, we endure our present predicament and make things work as best we can. Which brings me back to Zoom meetings, specifically one I had last Friday which struck me as particularly evocative of how I feel about our league and our localities.

Let me explain...

Every Friday afternoon, the Executive Directors of the municipal leagues across the nation and the National League of Cities hold a Zoom call to discuss the news, share personal accomplishments (and hardships) and offer encouragement to each other. On last Friday’s call, we heard from Michael Darcy, the Executive Director of the New Jersey State League of Municipalities, who is retiring after 30-plus years with the league.

Mr. Darcy was introduced with many accolades and some of those on the call read excerpts from the New Jersey league’s magazine interview with him. His words were powerful, and they struck a chord with me because they perfectly captured how I feel about all of you who serve Virginia’s localities. So, with permission from Michael and the New Jersey league, I would like to use his words to let you know what I would say to each of you if we were all sitting around a conference table (a really big one!) and someone asked me how I would encourage the next generation of local government officials to commit to a lifetime of service to local government. I would respond (as Michael did) with the following:

“I would not feel comfortable answering this question because I don’t feel like I have given a life of service that local officials have. They truly do that work from the goodness of their heart without expectation of rewards or compensation. They engage as local officials out of concern for their neighbors.”

Later, I would clarify my sentiments by telling all of you that...

“I know, and all league staff know, that local officials don’t normally get the respect and appreciation that they deserve. They give so much of their time only for the fact that they love their communities and want to see the best for them. It’s the ultimate in volunteering and caring for your neighbor. When we approach our challenges with that in mind it makes everything possible.”



So, while I had to “steal” from Yogi Berra and the outgoing director of the New Jersey municipal league, what I am saying is: I respect and appreciate all of you! Together we are making a difference and doing the work to get back to normal.

In closing, I ask that you join VML staff in celebrating Mary Jo Fields who, after more than 30 years with VML, has decided she no longer wants to get paid to work (i.e. retirement). A couple years ago Mary Jo switched to a part-time role but has now decided we are ready to get along without her!

Given the theme of this month’s issue, you will forgive my metaphor when I say that the whole VML staff take it as a great compliment that Mary Jo feels she can take her hands off the wheel. Thanks MJ...we’ll keep it between the ditches for you!



Due to the affects of the COVID-19 outbreak, many events are going through a rescheduling process. To view the latest updates and changes, visit our on-line calendar at [www.vml.org/events-list](http://www.vml.org/events-list).

PEOPLE

**Price elected head of the African American Mayors Association**



- Price -

Newport News Mayor **McKinley L. Price** has been elected as the president of the African American Mayors Association. He took office in May 5 and has announced that his plans are to focus on the CO-

VID-19 crisis, increase work opportunities for students in historically black colleges and universities (HBCU) and prioritize funding for the needs of HBCU students.

Price has served as the mayor of Newport News since 2010. He formerly served as an appointed member of the council for a five-month period in 2004 and served on the city school board for 8 years, including two years as chair. Price has received numerous awards and recognitions and has taken an active role in civic and professional organizations in Newport News. A dentist, Price has served as president of the Peninsula Dental Society and was also named "Dentist of the Year" by the Old Dominion Dental Society.

The African American Mayors Association, which was founded in 2014, takes positions on public policies that affects the vitality and sustainability of cities, provides mayors with leadership and management tools, and creates a forum for member mayors to share best practices related to municipal management. It is the only organization in the U.S. exclusively representing African-American mayors.

**McClellan showcases people on the front line of COVID-19**



- McClellan -

Norfolk City Councilwoman **Andria McClellan** has produced a series of short videos titled "A Day in the Life of COVID-19" that includes interviews with leaders of community nonprofits and essential workers such as emergency room doctors, warehouse workers and teachers. McClellan

noticed how city employees and other members of the community adapted to the changes required by the spread of COVID-19 and wanted to highlight the many people who had to adapt their work to continue to serve others.

McClellan posts her videos Monday through Friday on her Facebook page at [www.facebook.com/andriaforfolk](http://www.facebook.com/andriaforfolk) and on her YouTube channel.

A sampling of the people interviewed so far include a school teacher, the sheriff, a bus driver, a postal officer, the head of the Elizabeth River Trail and the head of the animal control shelter. McClellan also invites people to suggest industries and people to feature in the series.

McClellan was elected to represent Norfolk Superward 6 in May 2016. McClellan currently serves as the vice chair of the Hampton Roads Planning District Commission, where she serves on the Regional Broadband Ring Subcommittee and chair of its Coastal Resilience Subcommittee. She also is a gubernatorial appointee to the Chesapeake Bay Program's Local Government Advisory Committee and she is a member of the National League of Cities' 2020 Energy, Environment and Natural Resources federal advocacy committee.

**Currin appointed director of economic development in Petersburg**



- Currin -

**Carthan F. Currin III** has been appointed as the director of economic development in the City of Petersburg. A native of Petersburg, Currin has remained connected to the community serving on the Battersea Foundation Board and participating in various activities and programs in the city. One of his more notable career accomplishments includes spearheading the first "Save Buildings/Build Savings" collaborative seminar in Richmond.

Currin has 30 years of public and private development experience, including serving most recently as the economic development director in Brunswick County. He also has

served as the director of economic development for the City of Richmond and as the executive director of the Virginia Tobacco Indemnification and Community Revitalization Commission. As the executive director, he worked closely with the Virginia Economic Development Partnership to leverage the Governor's Opportunity Fund with the Commission's Tobacco Region Opportunity Fund to provide incentive assistance in economic expansions and relocations to approximately 85 companies creating over 10,000 jobs.

**Birch named chief financial officer for Albemarle County**



- Birch -

The Albemarle County Board of Supervisors named **Nelsie Birch** as the incoming chief financial officer for the county, effective at the end of June. As the CFO, Birch will directly oversee the county's financial systems, which support the nearly \$400 million annual budget, and the supporting functions of accounting, payroll, purchasing, real estate, and revenue administration.

Birch brings over 20 years of public and private sector experience in finance, budgeting, and administration, with experience working in Alexandria, VA; Baltimore, MD; Greensboro, NC; and Washington, DC. Most recently, Birch has served as president of BIRCHbark Strategic Consulting, a firm providing leadership, strategic planning and budgeting, financial and performance management, process improvement and operational excellence expertise and services to local governments across the U.S.

Birch has a master's degree in public administration from Northern Illinois University and a bachelor's degree in political science from Knox College. She is a graduate of the Senior Executive Institute at the University of Virginia and the Leadership program, of the International City/County Management Association.

## PEOPLE

### Utt tapped as Smyth County administrator



- Utt -

Pulaski Town Manager **Shawn Utt** has been appointed as the county administrator in Smyth County effective July 13. Utt has served as the town manager in Pulaski since 2013. Prior to coming to Pulaski, Utt was

the community development director in Pulaski County and had worked for the City of Radford and the New River Valley Regional Planning Commission.

Utt holds a bachelor's degree in psychology from Radford University and is a graduate of the Sorenson Institute's Political Leaders Program.

The county administrator's post was vacated at the beginning of the year with the resignation of Michael Carter.

### Sutherland set to retire on June 30



- Sutherland -

With over forty years of service at the Town of Wytheville, long-term Town Manager **Wayne Sutherland** will retire on June 30. A Wytheville native, Sutherland became assistant town manager under then

town manager Carter Beamer in 1980 and upon Beamer's retirement, was appointed manager in 1984. Sutherland's vision and leadership will be felt in his hometown for generations to come as he had led countless projects and improvements that have vastly changed the services offered to citizens and the overall positive image of Wytheville.

Professionally, Sutherland has represented the town in a variety of regional, state, and national organizations including the International City/County Management Association, the Virginia Local Government Management Association, and committees of the Virginia Municipal League. In 2018, he was honored with inclusion on the Civic Monument of the Wall of Honor in Withers Park.

"I want to thank Mr. Sutherland for his many years of hard work and dedication to the Town of Wytheville and the town's employees," said Wytheville Mayor Beth A. Taylor. "He will be missed."

### Sydnor, Tassinari announce retirements

**Jimmy Sydnor**, the town manager of the Town of Tappahannock, has announced his retirement at the end of June. Sydnor has served as town manager since 2016 but has worked in the town for 25 years, including 13 years as assistant town manager.

**Bobbie Tassinari**, the county administrator in King William County, has announced her retirement effective in September. Tassinari has served as administrator since 2018 and previously was the county's deputy administrator and director of finance.

### Hair takes position with Virginia Industrial Advancement Alliance



- Hair -

Pulaski Deputy Town Manager **Nichole Hair** has resigned her position with the town, effective July 5, and will take a position as economic development manager for the Virginia Industrial Advancement Alliance.

The Alliance conducts outreach marketing, prospect development, project management

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and economic development efforts for the counties of Smyth, Wythe, Grayson, Carroll and Bland, and the City of Galax.

Before coming to Pulaski, Hair was the planning director and zoning administrator for the Town of Christiansburg. She holds a bachelor's degree in urban planning from Virginia Tech and a master's degree in public administration from the University of South Dakota.

### Thomas elected president of Virginia Municipal Clerks Association



- Thomas -  
past April.

**Kyna Thomas**, the chief of staff and clerk of council in the City of Charlottesville, was elected president of the Virginia Municipal Clerks Association (VMCA) at its annual business meeting this

Other officers and members of the executive board include:

First Vice President: Colonial Heights City Clerk **Pamela Wallace, CMC**

Second Vice President: Cape Charles Clerk of Council **Elizabeth "Libby" Hume, MMC**

Treasurer: Gloucester County Deputy Clerk **Patricia Cronin, CMC**

Secretary: James City County Deputy Clerk **Teresa Fellows, CMC**

Historian: Alexandria Chief Deputy Clerk **Keia Waters, CMC**

Parliamentarian: Chesapeake City Clerk **Sandy Madison, MMC**

Albemarle County Senior Deputy Clerk **Travis O. Morris, CMC** is the immediate past president and continues his service on the board.

VMCA's mission is to promote professional development of municipal clerks through continuing education and networking opportunities. For more information regarding the organization, please visit [www.vmca.com](http://www.vmca.com).

### Northam announces appointments, reappointments

Governor Ralph S. Northam has announced the following appointments or reappointments:

**Jay A. Brown**, director of budget and strategic planning, City of Richmond to the Radford University Board of Visitors.

**Amy N. Parkhurst**, senior vice president of business development, Hampton Roads Alliance and **Leonard L. Sledge**, department of economic development, City of Richmond to the Virginia Economic Development Partnership Committee on Business Development and Marketing.

**Molly Joseph Ward**, treasurer, City of Hampton to the Hampton Roads Sanitation District Commission.

**Karen James**, general counsel, Portsmouth Redevelopment and Housing Authority to the Chesapeake Bay Bridge and Tunnel Commission.

**Treney Tweedy**, mayor, City of Lynchburg to the New College Institute.

## IN MEMORIAM

### Wytheville vice mayor passes away



- King -

Long-term Wytheville Vice-Mayor **Jacqueline K. "Jackie" King** passed away on April 30 after a two and a half year-long battle with ovarian cancer. King was first elected to Wytheville Town Council in 1992 and was serving her seventh term in office. She was the first woman elected as vice-mayor, a position she held for the last 26 years. She was also the first woman president of the Wytheville-Wythe-Bland Chamber of Commerce. In 2018, she was honored with the Outstanding Citizenship award by the Chamber. She was

also chosen to be an honored citizen on the Civic Monument of the Wall of Honor in Withers Park.

As a member of Wytheville Town Council, King served on the Budget & Finance Committee, the Wytheville Recreation Commission, as Chairperson of the Wall of Honor Committee and many other local and regional boards and committees. She was a driving force in bringing the Wytheville Recreation Center and Wytheville Meeting Center complex to fruition.

"Mrs. King's devotion to the Town of Wytheville and its citizens was evident through the many years of service that she unselfishly gave to our community," said Wytheville Town Manager Wayne Sutherland. "I was privileged to work with Mrs. King all of the years she served on Council and have always felt her full support and guidance. She worked hard to ensure that initiatives that would benefit Wytheville were carried out. She was very proud of the Town's employees and the success that Wytheville has achieved through the years. Wytheville is a better place because of Mrs. King's resilience and dedication."

The full obituary is posted at [www.grubbfuneralhome.com](http://www.grubbfuneralhome.com).

### Former Lovettsville mayor passes away

Former Lovettsville Mayor **Elaine Walker** died May 1. She served on the Lovettsville Town Council from 1980-1990 and as mayor from 1990-2012. At her retirement, after 22 years, she was recognized as the longest serving mayor in Loudoun County's history by the Board of Supervisors and her fellow Loudoun mayors, by the Town of Lovettsville for her years of dedicated service and by Inova Loudoun for her advocacy for quality healthcare for Lovettsville and Loudoun County. The town dedicated the pavilion on the town green to Walker in 2013 as she had supported the creation of a place where people could enjoy a concert, get a soda or ice cream and come together as a community.

Mayor Walker helped start the Coalition of Loudoun Towns, which includes the mayors of the seven towns in Loudoun County. The group meets to exchange ideas and information.

Walker and her late husband, Cliff, were active with the Lovettsville Fire and Rescue Company for decades; Cliff was an original member of the rescue squad, which formed in 1966, and Elaine joined the auxiliary when it formed two years later.

Lovettesville Mayor Nate Fontaine said the Town Council would pass a proclamation honoring Walker and host an event that celebrates her life when social distancing mandates are loosened.

The obituary is posted at [www.loudounfuneralchapel.com/obituaries/Elaine-Walker-6](http://www.loudounfuneralchapel.com/obituaries/Elaine-Walker-6).



- Walker -

## Historic farmhouse to serve as group home

THE ARLINGTON COUNTY BOARD has reached an agreement with Habitat for Humanity of Northern Virginia to turn the historic Reevesland farmhouse into a group home for individuals with developmental disabilities. The plan is for the group home to be managed by L'Arche Greater Washington, a nonprofit organization that provides housing and support services to adults with intellectual disabilities.

Arlington Board Chair Libby Garvey pointed out in a media release earlier this year that the project was a win-win-win, in that “the farmhouse will be preserved and protected as a historic site, the parkland around the house will stay as parkland, and the County will get much needed housing for people with developmental disabilities without our taxpayers footing the bill.”

Since 2010, Arlington County has been searching for appropriate uses for the historic farmhouse but no projects had come



forth. The county had started the process to prepare for the sale of the farmhouse parcel but in May 2017, Habitat NOVA contacted the County with an unsolicited proposal for rehabilitation and adaptive reuse of the farmhouse as a group home for people with developmental disabilities.

Under the agreement more than two acres of public parkland will remain for public use. All exterior alternations to the farmhouse, new construction and some changes to the grounds will require review and approval by the Arlington County Historical Affairs and Landmark Review Board. The site features an historic milk shed, a sledding hill, and the Reevesland Learning Center gardens.

Additional information is posted in a press release at <https://newsroom.arlingtonva.us>.

## Virtual camping adventures keep people engaged

ROANOKE PARKS AND RECREATION (PLAY Roanoke) hosted a virtual camping adventure called “The Great Roanoke Camp In” in late May. The event was accessible to everyone, with participants invited to camp in their yards or within their homes.

During the week leading up to the event, PLAY Roanoke released a series of videos to help prepare campers. These videos focused on topics such as how to pick a good spot to set up a tent, examples of pillows forts, how to cook over a fire, and even a campfire story. The campfire story was read by the mayor, city council members and several city employees. Check out the great cooking tips at [www.playroanoke.com/campcooking](http://www.playroanoke.com/campcooking).



## Mayors challenge spurs census returns

THE CITIES OF HAMPTON AND NEWPORT NEWS have joined forces to encourage people to respond to the 2020 Census. Newport News Mayor McKinley L. Price and Hampton Mayor Donnie Tuck are holding a friendly competition to see which city has the highest number of responses by July 1.

Mayor Tuck has waged 10 Hampton crabs and Mayor Price has waged James River oysters and a pass to the city's Celebration of Lights in Newport News Park.

Both mayors point out that completing the census is worth \$2000 a person a year.



The video is posted YouTube.



## Charlottesville launches comprehensive plan update

THE CITY OF CHARLOTTESVILLE is working in partnership with a consultant team on a two-year effort to update the city’s comprehensive plan (including creation of an affordable housing plan) and complete a re-write of the zoning ordinance. This process, branded Cville Plans Together, began with a virtual conversation series and webinars, as the project team begins to talk with the community about future priorities and goals,

particularly related to issues of equity and affordability.

Webinar and group discussions were held in May and June and residents may also complete an online survey or provide comments through a toll-free telephone number. Additional information is posted at [www.cvilleplanstogether.com/stay-involved](http://www.cvilleplanstogether.com/stay-involved).

## Roanoke refinances general obligation and refunding bonds

THE CITY OF ROANOKE successfully sold \$35.96 million in general obligation and refunding bonds, of which \$16.8 million was for new capital projects and \$19.1 million was to refund existing debt, to realize savings associated with lower interest rates. The cost of borrowing the funds was approximately 2.3%, a historically low interest rate. By refunding existing debt, the city will reduce its annual debt service thereby saving \$727,000 over the life of the debt.

The city has partnered with Roanoke County and the City of Salem through the Western Virginia Regional Industrial Facility Authority to refinance existing debt the authority is using in the

development of a technology park. This refinancing is expected to generate savings of \$950,000 over the term of the debt – \$423,000 in savings for the City of Roanoke.

Combined, these actions will enable the City to invest more than \$35 million in the local economy and save over \$1 million in financing costs – over \$170,000 in FY21 alone.



## Newport News holds seminars for home-based businesses

THE CITY OF NEWPORT NEWS is offering a series of lunch and learn workshops for home-based businesses. The series, which will be a combination of virtual and in person learning, will be held the second Wednesday of each month from 1:00-2:00 p.m. The workshops will discuss topics such as starting a home-based business, how to make your business grow and accounting and record keeping. The series began June 10 with a virtual tutorial on QuickBooks and book keeping.



## York County opens new customer service request portal

BEGINNING IN MAY, builders, contractors and citizens gained access to a newly enhanced customer service request portal for use in scheduling building inspections, as well as the ability to track requests made to Waste Management, Utilities, Zoning/Code Enforcement, and other public services. This portal also works on mobile devices for use by individuals at their building site.

Builders and contractors with current or prior permits on file with the county were notified of the new features along with instructions on requesting an account and using the new online portal. View the portal at [www.yorkcounty.gov/requests](http://www.yorkcounty.gov/requests).



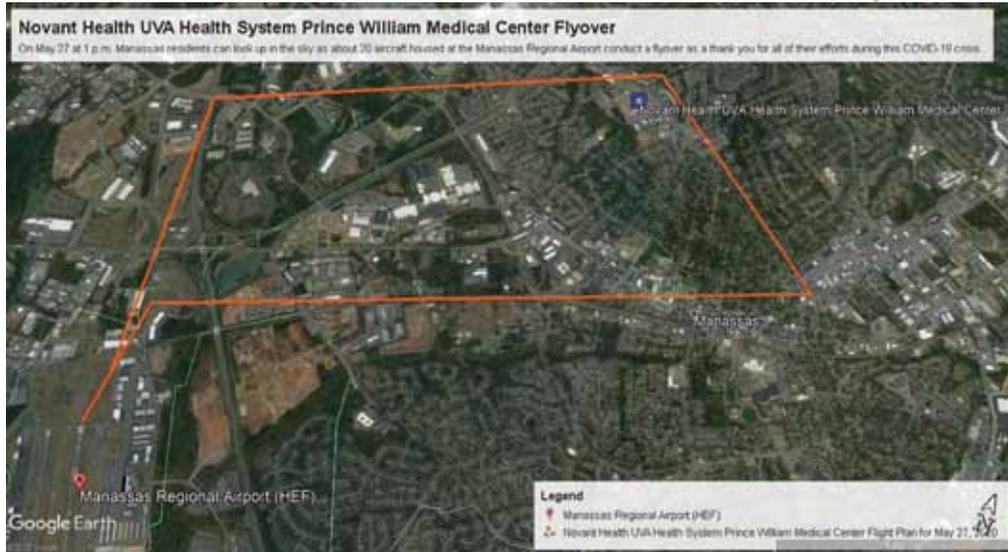
## Manassas honors health care heroes with fly-over



ON MAY 27 MANASSAS RESIDENTS could look up in the sky as 16 aircraft housed at the Manassas Regional Airport conducted a flyover of Novant Health UVA Health System Prince William Medical Center as a “thank you” for all of their efforts during the COVID-19 crisis.

The flyover started as an idea by Manassas community member Edie Clark, who took her idea to the staff at the Manassas Regional Airport staff. The staff flew with the idea and they did not have any trouble getting buy-in from the people who house their aircraft at the airport.

The flyover lasted for about 15 minutes, beginning at the Manassas Regional Airport, going over historic downtown



Manassas, then over the Novant Health UVA Health System Prince William Medical Center and back to the airport. The fly-over also was live streamed on the Airport’s Facebook page, [www.facebook.com/manassasairport](http://www.facebook.com/manassasairport).

## It’s a meower shower

THE NORFOLK ANIMAL CARE and Adoption Center has held kitten yoga adoptions and other creative approaches to spreading the opportunities for animal adoptions, and a pandemic did not cap the center’s creativity. For its latest venture, the center hosted its Second Annual First Ever Virtual Lunch Hour Meower Shower on May 28.

The thirty-minute Facebook Live event featured games, giveaways and kittens. Participants learned what to do if you find kittens in your neighborhood, how the animal care center cares for the kittens, and what people can do to help.



## Danville undertakes book giveaway

THE DANVILLE RIVERVIEW ROTARY, Danville Public Schools, DPS Education Foundation, Danville Public Library, Friends of the Library, Smart Beginnings Danville Pittsylvania County, and local volunteers teamed up recently to provide local students with reading materials in cooperation with the schools’ meals distribution program.

Martha Walker, Rotarian and project coordinator said, “It truly takes a village, and Riverview Rotary’s initiative is part of a community-wide commitment to building strong readers who will develop into the great leaders we know our children will be.”

Over 50 volunteers from Rotary, the school system, the library, and the community handed out around 2,600 books at the 13 locations for the Danville Public Schools’ meals distribution program.





VTC is pleased to highlight actions localities are taking to overcome the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. If your locality has something going on you'd like to have featured in VTC please let us know by emailing the editor Rob Bullington, rbullington@vml.org. We also encourage you to nominate groups and individuals for our "2020 Local Champion" awards. Details are on page 30 or visit www.vml.org/local-champion-awards.

# Helping businesses and residents cope with the pandemic

**L**OCAL GOVERNMENTS ACROSS THE STATE are doing what they can to help businesses survive and residents cope with ongoing issues brought about by the novel coronavirus. Here's a sampling of what some localities have done during the pandemic.

The **City of Newport News** and the Economic Development Authority of Newport News has set up the Newport News COVID-19 Small Business Resiliency Grant to support restaurants, breweries, wineries, etc. and recreational and entertainment businesses affected by the pandemic. The grant is one-time financial assistance given to eligible for-profit small businesses in amounts not to exceed \$5,000. The grants will be committed and funded on a first-come, first-served basis. Further, citizens and businesses experiencing financial hardship due to the health and economic crisis directly related to the current pandemic can apply for the COVID-19 Tax Payment Arrangement Program. This program allows citizens and businesses to make arrangements to extend the due date for real estate and personal property taxes from June to August 5 without the assessment of late payment penalty or interest. The city also created an interactive map that lets people find out which businesses are open, which restaurants are providing delivery and carry-out, etc.



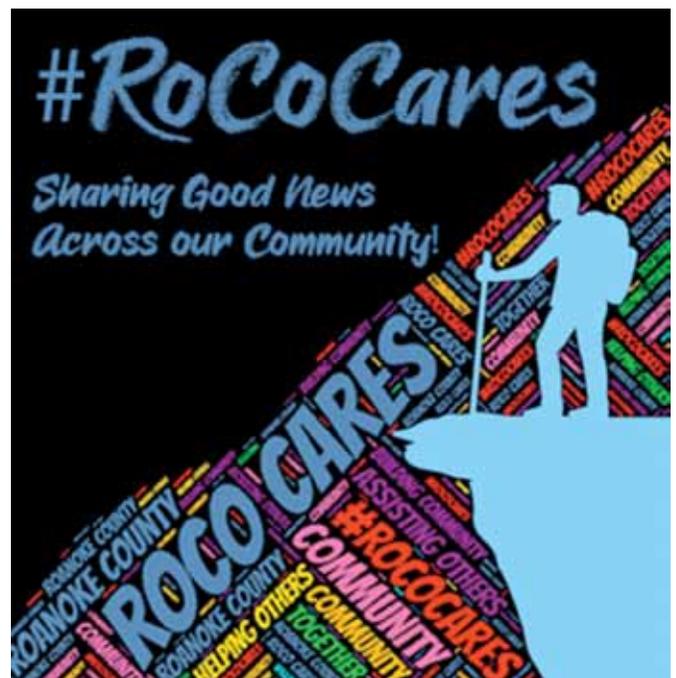
The **City of Roanoke** has partnered with the Roanoke Economic Development Authority and Total Action for Progress to offer loans up to \$3,000 each to city-based small businesses. The loans will be available to offset costs associated with employees, rent, leases and

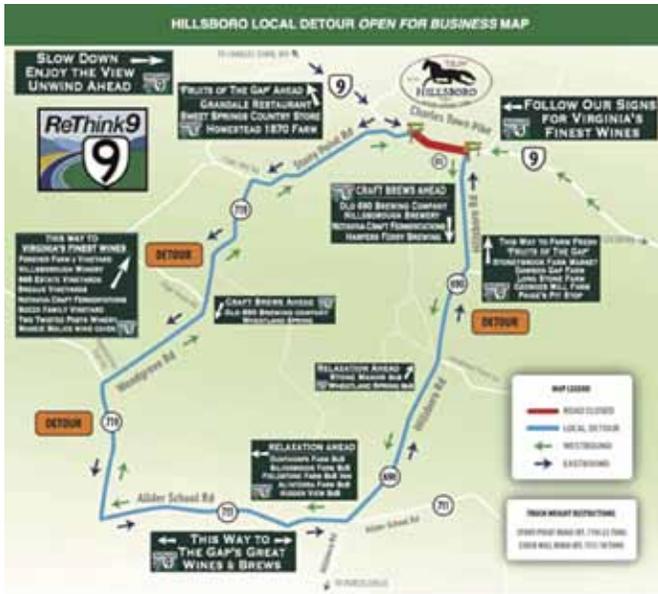
utilities. The terms of the loans will be 0% interest with a 12-month maturity and a 90-day deferred payment. The city also has extended the deadline for business and personal property tax payments by a month.

Roanoke also has established a task force to make recommendations to council on how the Star City Strong Recovery Fund should be used. This fund provides financial resources to support the community's recovery from COVID-19 and strengthen its long-term resiliency. The fund draws upon General Fund revenue, CDBG-CV/ESG funds, and CARES Act funds, and will include at least \$1 million. The Task Force will be co-chaired by Mayor Sherman Lea and Vice-Mayor Joe Cobb; City Manager Bob Cowell will serve as an ex-officio member.

**Radford City Schools**, working with the city and Ballpark Signs, arranged for banners featuring graduating seniors to be hung on lampposts along Main Street. School Superintendent Rob Graham said yard signs and t-shirts also have been distributed to seniors.

The **County of Roanoke** is using the hashtag #RoCoCares to help share positive stories and good news across social media. The county suggests people share how they are making a difference in the community; new ways to pass the time at home, or showcase their pet, garden or collectibles and hobbies. More ideas are posted at [www.roanokecountyva.gov/roco cares](http://www.roanokecountyva.gov/roco cares).





The **Town of Hillsboro** recently launched an initiative to help guide visitors to area businesses during the coronavirus pandemic and the closure of Route 9, a major thoroughfare. The Rt. 9 project is scheduled to be completed in 2021. The project involves multiple full road closures through the town. To help, the town has created a local detour map showing the names of areas businesses, installed signs along the local detour route, set up a featured business directory and pledged to continue supporting business on its social media outlet.

The **Town of Vienna** is providing \$1 million in CARES Act funding to Fairfax County’s RISE (Relief Initiative to Support Employers) grant program specifically to support Vienna businesses. Applications for the small business and nonprofit relief grant program were accepted June 8-15. While the \$1 million being provided by the Town of Vienna is designated specifically for Town businesses only, Vienna businesses also will be eligible for funding through the county grant program beyond the Town’s contribution.

The **City of Charlottesville** and **Albemarle County** have provided funding to the Community Investment Collaborative to launch the Business Recovery Fund micro-loan program. The fund will provide existing businesses in the city or county with an additional source of capital to restart operations. Loans of up to \$10,000 with a three-year repayment period, low interest rate and six-month grace period until first payment is due are available through the fund. The Community Investment Collaborative has been providing business education programming, mentoring and peer support and startup financing to Charlottesville area entrepreneurs since 2012.



In an effort to support residents and businesses that have been impacted by COVID-19, the **Harrisonburg City Council** has voted to allow the waiver of late fees for late payments of City-provided utilities bills to qualifying customers. In addition, the Harrisonburg Department of Public Transportation is waiving all fares for transit and paratransit customers at this time.

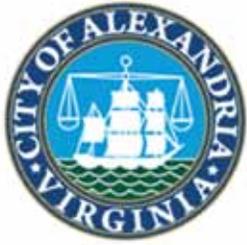
The **City of Danville** has designed a free marketing kit to help businesses communicate that they are opening safely to the public. Businesses in the city can pick up a COVID-19 “Standing Together, Six Feet Apart” campaign kit at any Danville Fire Department station. The kits contain anti-slip floor decals, window clings and a window decal featuring the “Standing Together, Six Feet Apart” logo. Pittsylvania County will be distributing the materials to businesses in the county. Further, the Danville Pittsylvania County Chamber of Commerce has produced a webinar outlining best practices. The webinar is available at [www.discoverdanville.com/covid-19-resources/](http://www.discoverdanville.com/covid-19-resources/) under “Recorded Webinars.” The “Standing Together, Six Feet Apart” awareness campaign was created in partnership with the City of Danville, Pittsylvania County, the Danville Health Department, the Danville Pittsylvania County Chamber of Commerce and Danville Regional Foundation to provide information and encouragement to the community as local establishments are reopened.



The **Town of Front Royal** temporarily closed Main Street on Memorial Day weekend, thereby allowing downtown businesses and restaurants to expand their services, displays and seating areas onto the sidewalks and Main Street. The town asked the owner of C&C Frozen Treats to apply for a special event permit to close the street, which was granted by the town. Interim Town Manager Matt Tederick said the town will assess the success of the weekend to decide if there will be similar future closures.

The **City of Winchester**, in partnership with Sysco, has launched a temporary pop-up market in hopes of reducing the stress on local grocery providers and offer a temporary option for household supplies. People can select from basic household essentials listed on a website. Payment is made online and people are given a pickup day and times. The Winchester Pop-up Market is sponsored by the City of Winchester, the Winchester Economic Development Authority, the Winchester-Frederick County Tourism Office, and Sysco Foods.

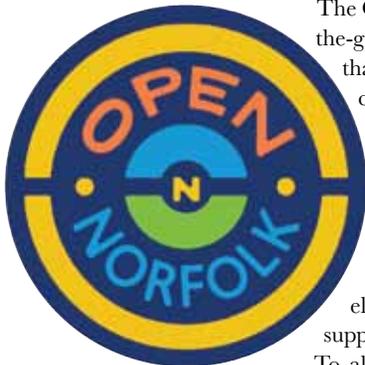




The **Alexandria Economic Development Partnership (AEDP)**, a public-private partnership that promotes Alexandria as a premier location for businesses, and the City of Alexandria will launch the Alexandria Back to Business (ALX B2B) grants program. Grants will be available to Alexandria-based, for-profit businesses with 2 to 100 employees that have experienced losses in revenue of 25 percent or greater due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Bank On Virginia Beach**, in partnership with Beach Municipal Federal Credit Union, will offer a series of free online courses to help individuals and families manage their finances in these difficult times. Courses to be covered include staying afloat when money is low; savings, budgeting and spending plans; how to avoid negative credit reporting; and understanding credit. This series of stand-alone events is designed to help families address the financial uncertainty brought on by COVID-19. Participants will leave with a better understanding of their financial choices and the impacts of the decisions they make.

The **Virginia Beach City Council** also approved temporary changes to allow restaurants to create outdoor restaurant seating adjacent to or in close proximity of the restaurant so long as the restaurant complies with the Governor's Executive Orders and the rules promulgated by the Virginia Alcoholic Beverage Control Authority. Fees also were suspended for resort open air café franchises through the calendar year 2020.



The **City of Norfolk** has created a boots-on-the-ground small business assistance program that will ensure businesses throughout the city are able to open in a safe, physically-distanced manner and financially recover as quickly as possible. The city also is offering a grant program to assist businesses in resuming or restructuring their operations. Funds can be used for expenses associated with pivoting models, required social distance practices or supplies.

To allow more people to dine outdoors with social distancing, the **City of Hampton** has set up an easy, expedited process for restaurants to obtain temporary outdoor dining permits. City Manager Mary Bunting said that "City Council is very proactive and creative in supporting solutions for local businesses, as well as local customers." Additionally, the city hall was lit up in school colors on June 11 through June 14 in celebration of the 2020 high school graduating class. On June 11, the colors were green and white for Kecoughtan High School; green and gold for Bethel High School on June 12, red and white for Hampton High school on June 13 and blue and gold for Phoebus High School on June 14.

The **City of Williamsburg** has created a program that offers grants to eligible applicants equal to half of their paid 2019 Business, Professional and Occupational Tax. The Economic Development Authority will administer the money to small businesses to offset the financial burden of the pandemic. The city also deferred payment on meals and lodgings taxes.



The **City of Poquoson** posted a list of restaurants that were open for carry-out or deliveries.

The **Town of Round Hill** plans to use 25 percent of its Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES) funding to support businesses in the town. The Loudoun County Economic Development Authority will distribute the funding to the businesses. Each brick-and-mortar business will receive \$350 and each home-based business will get \$200. All businesses will also receive an additional \$100 for each person they employ.

The **Town of Pennington Gap** is using grant funding to provide downtown employers with masks and hand sanitizer, in an effort to assist businesses in reopening. The town also has limited some parking to make room for additional outdoor seating for restaurants.



The **County of James City** suggested to residents that they start a new tradition with Takeout Tuesday by enjoying lunch or dinner at home with family from a local James City County restaurant. The county compiled a list of restaurants and dining venues that offered delivery or carry-out and posted links to the Williamsburg Area Restaurant Association.



The **Town of Leesburg** loosened requirements for outdoor dining. Town Council unanimously passed a temporary modification of zoning ordinance requirements for outdoor

dining areas at restaurants. The temporary changes give existing restaurants town-wide the opportunity to apply for a no-fee temporary use permit. Town staff members have also explored setting up an outdoor food court area in public parking spaces in the historic downtown area.

The **City of Richmond** is offering amnesty on penalties applied to overdue parking citations. Those who received parking tickets on or after March 16 will have additional fines and penalties waived as long as the original ticketed amount is paid by August 31, 2020.



# Hold on!

## Transportation funding is shifting gears

**R**OADS FIGURE PROMINENTLY in the American imagination. For evidence, one need to look no further than the songs we love. For example, we've known for a long time that country roads are the best way to get back home to the place where we belong. More recently, we learned that the Old Town Road is the best place to take your horse to ride until you prefer to no longer be riding.

Not convinced yet? Then let's talk literature. *The Grapes of Wrath* is the story of an epic road trip, as are *On the Road* and *The Road*. None of which have happy endings, but Americans are as enthusiastic about the journey as we are about the destination.

In fact, it seems that we're always headed somewhere (or, in our present circumstances, want to get back "On the Road Again"). This too is part of our culture. No less an authority on the American psyche than the great Chuck Berry chronicled in song the journey of a "poor boy" from Norfolk making his way to Los Angeles beginning on a bus, continuing on a train and winding up on a jet, wearing a silk suit, and eating a T-bone steak a la carte. Talk about upward mobility! By the time he found a telephone in the Los Angeles terminal gate and asked the operator to dial "Norfolk, Virginia, Tidewater four ten o nine" that poor guy had a lot to be proud of.

Oddly, nobody has ever written a popular song or a book about how roads are maintained or how that maintenance is paid for. Certainly, there are numerous examples of roads in disrepair in song and literature. In *The Wizard of Oz*, just before Dorothy, the Scarecrow and the Tin Woodsman meet the Cowardly Lion, L. Frank Baum tells us that "the road was still paved with yellow bricks, but these were much covered by dried branches and dead leaves from the trees, and the walking was not at all good."

Later, the road is impassable as it is cut by a "very wide ditch" that is also very deep with "many big, jagged rocks at

the bottom." This fault in the yellow brick road is nearly the demise of Dorothy & Co. as they barely escape the deadly Kallidahs thanks to the Lion's bravery and Scarecrow's ingenuity.

At this point, Dorothy and her companions do not pause to report the myriad problems with the yellow brick road. Indeed, who would they report them to? The Emerald City is the closest municipality, but no mention is made of a mechanism to collect revenue and allocate it to agencies for the maintenance and repair of the yellow brick road.

Admittedly, road maintenance and financing do not make for arresting fiction. But the *fact* is that Virginia has many roads, railroads, ports, and airports for our cars, buses, boats, trains and planes that require constant maintenance, improvement and planning. In this issue of *VTC* we look at how this will be accomplished in the coming years and we examine how some localities are getting creative to make the best of it all.

So, prepare to be transported by the facts from...

**Mitchell Smiley.** This VML policy staff member tells the complex tale of how Virginia will fund transportation in the years to come.

**Danny Plaugher.** The Executive Director of Virginians for High Speed Rail and Deputy Director of the Virginia Transit Association spins a colorful yarn about Virginia's public transportation network.

**Josh Baker and Hillary Orr.** The General Manager and CEO of DASH (Driving Alexandria Safely Home) joins the Deputy Director for Transportation for the City of Alexandria Department of Transportation & Environmental Services in a duet to sing the praises of their city's transportation adaptations to the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Thomas Rowley.** The Economic Development Manager for Roanoke County puts pen to parchment to relay the epic effort to make the dream of a revitalized Route 419 reality.

# Virginia shifts gears: Funding transportation in 2020 and beyond

**A**T THE START of this year's General Assembly session, it was more apparent than ever that Virginia was facing a fundamental problem with how the state paid for transportation projects. Assembly members heard frequent testimony from Secretary of Transportation Shannon Valentine who spoke to the crux of the issue: Virginia has long relied upon fuel taxes to fund transportation projects. However, vehicles have become more fuel efficient, or increasingly use alternative fuel sources. As such, vehicles are travelling more miles even as their owners purchase less fuel. The result? More demand (and wear and tear) on the state's transportation infrastructure with less transportation revenue available for road maintenance and construction projects.

Clearly, we were on a road to no roads. Sweeping changes and fresh ideas were needed and they were found as the Assembly passed several landmark omnibus transportation bills which Governor Northam then signed into law on April 22. Taken together, this transportation package will impact nearly all of Virginia's transportation

modes by increasing revenues, investing in expanded passenger rail service, restructuring the Commonwealth's transportation funds, and establishing new programs for public transit and road safety.

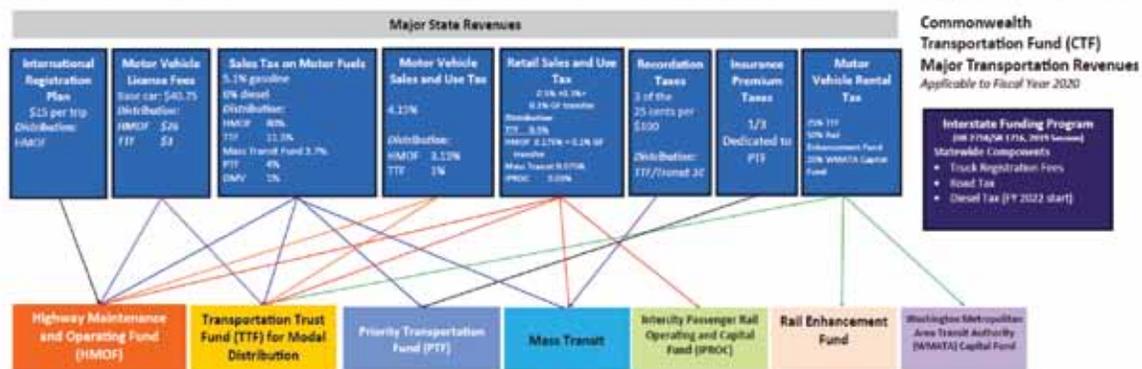
Let's take a look at what these bills do.

## Transportation funds restructured

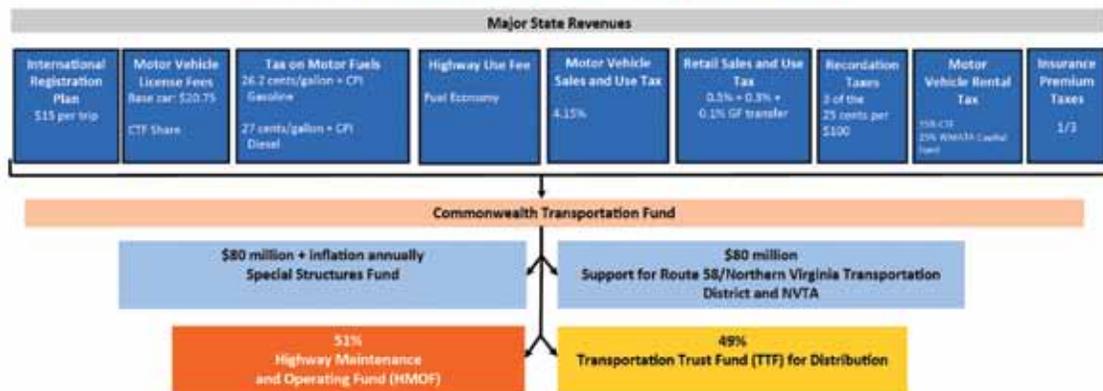
One of the major features of the omnibus legislation is that it simplifies the various transportation revenue streams by directing the bulk of the revenues into one fund, the Commonwealth Transportation Fund. From there, revenue is then directed into sub-funds such as the Highway Maintenance and Operating Fund or the Transportation Trust Fund.

Transportation funding in Virginia supports multiple modes of transportation including motor vehicles, shipyards, rail, aviation, transit, and space flight. Road maintenance and construction take the largest share of Virginia's transportation funding.

### Today's transportation funding allocation model: confusing and opaque



### New, streamlined allocation model



Old vs. New: Transportation Revenue Flow Chart (Source: CTB Presentation by Deputy Secretary Donohue, 3/17/2020)

## Funding transportation in 2020

Under the new structure, revenue flows from the Highway Maintenance and Operating Fund and Transportation Trust Fund into programmatic funds such as the City Street Maintenance Pavement program, the Special Structures fund, the Mass Transit fund, and others. The goal of this reorganization is to hold specific programs harmless while simplifying how the state manages and distributes funding to the programs overall.

This restructuring of transportation funds, clearly illustrated by Table 1, is the largest shift in how the Commonwealth of Virginia builds, maintains, and operates transportation programs in decades.

Table 2 breaks down how the estimated \$268 million in additional funding will be distributed across maintenance programs from FY21-FY26. Significantly, this includes an additional \$56 million in city street maintenance funding.

## Revenues & taxes get a tune-up

**Motor Fuels Taxes (Gas and Diesel Tax).** The gas tax in FY20 is based on a percentage of the wholesale price of gasoline and diesel fuel converted to a cents-per-gallon tax. As shown in Table 3, a rate of \$0.262 per gallon of gasoline will be phased in over two years beginning on July 1, 2020, and then indexed every year thereafter. The state tax on diesel fuel will be phased in at a higher than for gasoline. The regional gas tax will be converted to a rate of \$0.076 per gallon of gasoline and will be imposed everywhere in the Commonwealth including areas of the state where the regional gas tax is not already imposed.

There are two important changes in how fuels are taxed that will result in a more reliable rate of growth to the revenue needed to meet future transportation goals. The first important change is to how fuel taxes are levied. Currently taxes are levied on the wholesale price of fuel, not the price at the pump. The new legislation eliminates the tax on wholesale costs of fuel in favor of a cents-per-gallon tax.

The second important change is that fuels taxes will be indexed to align with the cost of consumer products instead of the price of gasoline as was done by the last major transportation funding legislation in 2013. That prior legislation resulted in declining gas tax revenues when the price of fuels dropped. Under this legislation, fuel taxes will be indexed to the cost of a broader basket of consumer goods monitored by the U.S. Department of Labor (The CPI-U index).

**Highway Use Fee.** A highway use fee is imposed on alternative fuel, fuel efficient, or electric vehicles, at a rate of 85 percent of the difference of fuels taxes paid by an average vehicle. This fee is paid at the time of registration and assumes average fuel economy (approx. 24 mpg currently) and miles travelled on average in Virginia. Beginning July 1, 2022, the owner of a vehicle subject to the highway use fee can choose to participate in a vehicle mile travelled program instead. Under this new program vehicle owners pay a fee based on miles the vehicle travels without exceeding the cost of the highway use fee. This prevents unnecessarily penalizing owners whose vehicle have a fuel efficiency greater than the average 25 mpg by giving them the option to choose between miles travelled or the flat fee. Oregon

**Table 1: Transportation Trust Fund Revenues**

(Source: CTB Presentation by Deputy Secretary Donohue, 3/17/2020)

Transportation Trust Fund	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24	FY25	FY26	TOTAL
Special Structures	10.0	30.0	80.0	82.1	84.0	86.0	372.1
Construction Fund	11.1	60.0	60.0	45.4	51.2	60.3	288.0
Mass Transit Fund	30.0	120.0	120.0	144.7	146.9	150.9	712.4
Rail Fund	12.8	24.4	32.7	57.4	55.5	56.3	239.2
Port Fund	2.0	4.0	4.0	5.3	5.5	5.8	26.6
Aviation Fund	1.0	1.5	1.5	4.6	4.7	4.9	18.1
Spaceflight Fund	1.0	1.5	1.5	5.6	5.7	6.1	21.4
Priority Transportation Fund	(7.8)	(16.7)	(25.0)	(34.1)	(41.4)	(46.9)	(171.9)
DMV	1.0	8.5	8.5	12.5	12.5	12.9	55.9
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>61.1</b>	<b>233.2</b>	<b>283.2</b>	<b>323.4</b>	<b>324.7</b>	<b>336.3</b>	<b>1,561.9</b>

**Table 2: Highway Maintenance and Operating Fund Estimates**

(Source: CTB Presentation by Deputy Secretary Donohue, 3/17/2020)

Highway Maintenance and Operating Fund	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24	FY25	FY26	TOTAL
Interstate Pavements	4.8	28.5	29.3	26.7	32.4	33.2	154.9
Secondary Pavements	4.8	10.1	10.4	9.4	8.5	8.7	52.0
City Street Maintenance	3.2	10.5	10.8	9.8	10.9	11.2	56.4
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>12.8</b>	<b>49.2</b>	<b>50.4</b>	<b>45.9</b>	<b>51.9</b>	<b>53.1</b>	<b>263.2</b>

**Table 3: Changes in Motor Fuels Taxes Beginning July 1, 2020**

(Source: DPB 2020 Fiscal Impact Statement for HB 1414 dated March 18, 2020)

	Statewide Impact	Regional Impact	Approx. Total Impact
Effective Gas Tax Rate as of 06/20	\$0.162 (approx..)	\$0.06 (NOVA, Hampton Roads, I-81)	\$ .22
Effective Tax Rate after 07/20	Gasoline: \$0.212 Diesel: \$.212	\$0.076 (All regions)	\$.282 \$.282
Effective Tax Rate after 07/21	Gasoline: \$0.262 + CPI Diesel: \$.27 + CPI	\$0.076 + CPI	\$.338 \$.346

and Colorado are currently experimenting with similar vehicle miles travelled based fees.

**Vehicle Registration Fees.** Beginning July 1, 2020, vehicle registration fees are reduced by \$10 for most passenger vehicles and pickups, \$4 for motorcycles, and \$2 for mopeds. It is important to note that this legislation holds local registration fees harmless, as it allows for a locality to levy registration fees up to the amount levied by the State prior to these reductions (i.e. prior to January 1, 2020).

## Regional revenues find new avenues

**Regionally applied fuels taxes.** A growing trend in transportation funding has been the use of regionally applied fuels taxes to create regional revenue sources. The 2020 General Assembly continued this trend by creating a regional transportation entity in Central Virginia. This brings the total number of regionally levied transportation bodies in the Commonwealth to four: Northern Virginia, Hampton Roads, I-81, and the new Central Virginia regional transportation entities.

The omnibus transportation legislation imposes the regional fuels tax in all areas of the state that do not currently have one. The rev-

enue generated from the additional 7.6 cents tax per gallon (gasoline or diesel fuel) will be deposited into each region's district grant construction program under SMART scale. This will add an estimated \$124 million in revenues by fiscal year 2024. Jurisdictions subject to the regional fuels tax along the I-81 corridor, but not where I-81 crosses directly, will have their share of regional funds directed to their district grant program under SMART scale. This legislation also indexes regional fuels taxes to the Department of Labor CPI-U.

## Regional (de)congestion

**NOVA: Fee Grantor's and Recordation Tax.** In Northern Virginia, approximately \$30 million in annual revenues from the "regional congestion relief fee" will be generated by levying an additional state recordation tax of \$.10 per \$100 in assessed value. The recordation tax is levied at the time property and real estate transactions occur and is based on the assessed property value.

For example, a real estate transaction assessed at the average home value in Northern Virginia of \$614,000 would pay \$614.00 at the time of sale in addition to the existing recordation tax of \$.15 per \$100. As such, the total recordation tax levied by the state would be \$.25 per \$100 in assessed value. This fee is paid by the purchaser, or grantor, of the property to the clerk of the court and remitted to the state treasury.

Additionally, \$20 million is to be directed annually to the Northern Virginia Transportation Authority from the Transportation Trust Fund. This "regional congestion relief fee" only applies to the Northern Virginia region.

The Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) capital fund will receive an extra 1 percent increase from revenue generated by the transient occupancy tax levied in the Northern Virginia region. Any revenue generated from this tax will be directed to the WMATA fund by the state.

**Hampton Roads: Recordation Tax.** The omnibus legislation directs recordation tax funds to the Hampton Roads region. Typically, funds from the recordation tax are distributed proportionally to localities across the Commonwealth. However, according to the Department of Taxation, as a result of HB1726 \$20 million will go the Hampton Roads region out of the state distribution fund prior to distribution to localities across the state. Due to this, there is no remaining revenue set to be distributed to localities as of July 1, 2020. Simply put, localities will receive no state recordation tax distribution in 2020 and beyond.

**Around the state: Bond Authorizations.** There are several significant bond authorizations for construction determined by legislation in Southwestern, Western, and Northern Virginia. In Southwest, bonds are authorized to finish the Corridor Q section of the Appalachian Development Highway System, Route 121/460, and Poplar Creek with approximately \$220-240 million expected to finish Corridor Q. Along the I-81 corridor, the Commonwealth Transportation Board (CTB) is authorized to issue up to \$1 billion in bonds using regional fuel taxes for the I-81 Corridor Improvement Program. In Northern Virginia, the CTB is authorized to issue up to \$1 billion in revenue bonds to construct passenger rail crossings over the Potomac River using I-66 inside the beltway toll funds.

**Around the state: Special Structures.** A special structure program was funded for special (i.e. "very large, indispensable, and unique"), state-owned structures that are extremely expensive to maintain across the Commonwealth. The structures include bridges and tunnels that must be approved by the Commonwealth Transportation Board. This program creates a plan for maintaining identified structures over a 30-year period and will be updated biennially. It is expected that these will be structures located across the Commonwealth.

## Rail and transit

**Rail programs poised to build up steam.** One of the most notable elements of this legislation is that it establishes the Virginia Passenger Rail Authority. This authority will construct, maintain, own, and contract out the operation of passenger rail facilities. The Authority will be managed by a board of directors with 15 members, 12 of whom will be voting members appointed by the Governor and two other members who are non-voting. The Director of Rail and Public Transportation will have a vote in the event of a tie. The broad powers enjoyed by this authority include the power of eminent domain to acquire rail facilities and right of way, purchase, own, and maintain property, as well as issue bonds using revenues from tolling on I-66 for the construction of rail facilities.

It is expected that the first order of business for the new rail authority will be to take over construction of a new rail crossing over the Potomac into Washington D.C. In the coming months we expect to learn more about board appointments, staffing, and operations of the Virginia Passenger Rail Authority.

**Transit funding and new programs abound.** As a category, transit is poised to receive one of the largest increases of funding because of the omnibus legislation. The Mass Transit Fund alone is estimated to receive new funding of over \$700 million over the next six years. Overall, this funding will be distributed to operating and capital funding needs as well as to WMATA and the new Transit Ridership Incentives Program. This is a substantial investment in public transit to provide alternatives to single occupancy vehicles and to use existing roadways and infrastructure more efficiently.

The Transit Ridership Incentive Program is designed to drive creative approaches to encourage the use of transit in urban areas across the commonwealth. This program's goal is to assist the development of multi-year programs that will improve transit systems such as dedicated bus lanes, reduced fares, regional subsidies, integrated fare collection systems, etc. This program is directed by statute to have a specific emphasis on providing reduced fares for low income persons who use transit. Additionally, the program will provide localities and municipal transit systems with a funding program to develop and test transit programs to improve transit ridership in urban areas around Virginia.

## But, are construction and maintenance funding headed for a dead end?

While transportation funding is unlikely to escape the current economic uncertainties, new funding is on a more sustainable trajectory than at any point in the past decade. Additional revenues are expected to generate significant amounts of funding for construction and maintenance. Although these estimates were generated prior to the COVID-19 pandemic they indicate that maintenance funds flowing from the Highway Maintenance and Operating Fund are expected to increase, but to increase less than construction funds. Of specific interest to cities, estimates indicate an additional \$3 million in FY21 and \$11.2 million by FY26 is expected for city street maintenance.

The bottom line: The 2020 General Assembly made significant investments in transportation infrastructure and programs in Virginia. Roads, transit, and rail will receive much needed investment as a result. This represents a historic investment in transportation projects and programs that is unlikely to be matched anytime soon. Thanks to the 2020 General Assembly and the Northam Administration, the future continues to look bright for Virginia's transportation system. 

**About the author:** Mitchell Smiley is VML's Policy Manager for Transportation & Natural Resources.

# Keep Virginia Moving: A look at Virginia's public transportation network

**Author's Note:** *Since this article was originally drafted the world has changed. All these changes, everything from the COVID-19 pandemic and generational unemployment to confronting the need for racial and economic equity, affect the transportation landscape. Exactly how remains to be seen, but I have no doubt that the public transportation network of tomorrow will be safer, cleaner, and more accessible than the public transportation network of yesterday. So, while this article provides a baseline of where we were a few months ago, I take some time at the end to outline some of the trends that merit attention by those looking to build upon that base for the future.*

**WHAT DO YOU THINK** of when you think about “public transportation?” Do you picture a bus? Maybe you see a metro train? Or, maybe an Amtrak passenger railcar? In fact, all of these are part of Virginia’s public transportation network. This network, which serves Virginians across the Commonwealth, encompasses two systems: public transit and intercity transportation.

**Public transit** includes the buses, subways, and commuter trains (among other modes) that serve one or more localities in a region. **Intercity transportation** includes offerings such as Amtrak and the Virginia Breeze, the Commonwealth’s state-supported intercity bus service, which connect regions within Virginia as well as providing service to destinations outside the state.

Combined, these systems offer Virginians across all demographics and age ranges an alternative to congested roads and the expenses associated with owning an automobile.

## Public transit highlights

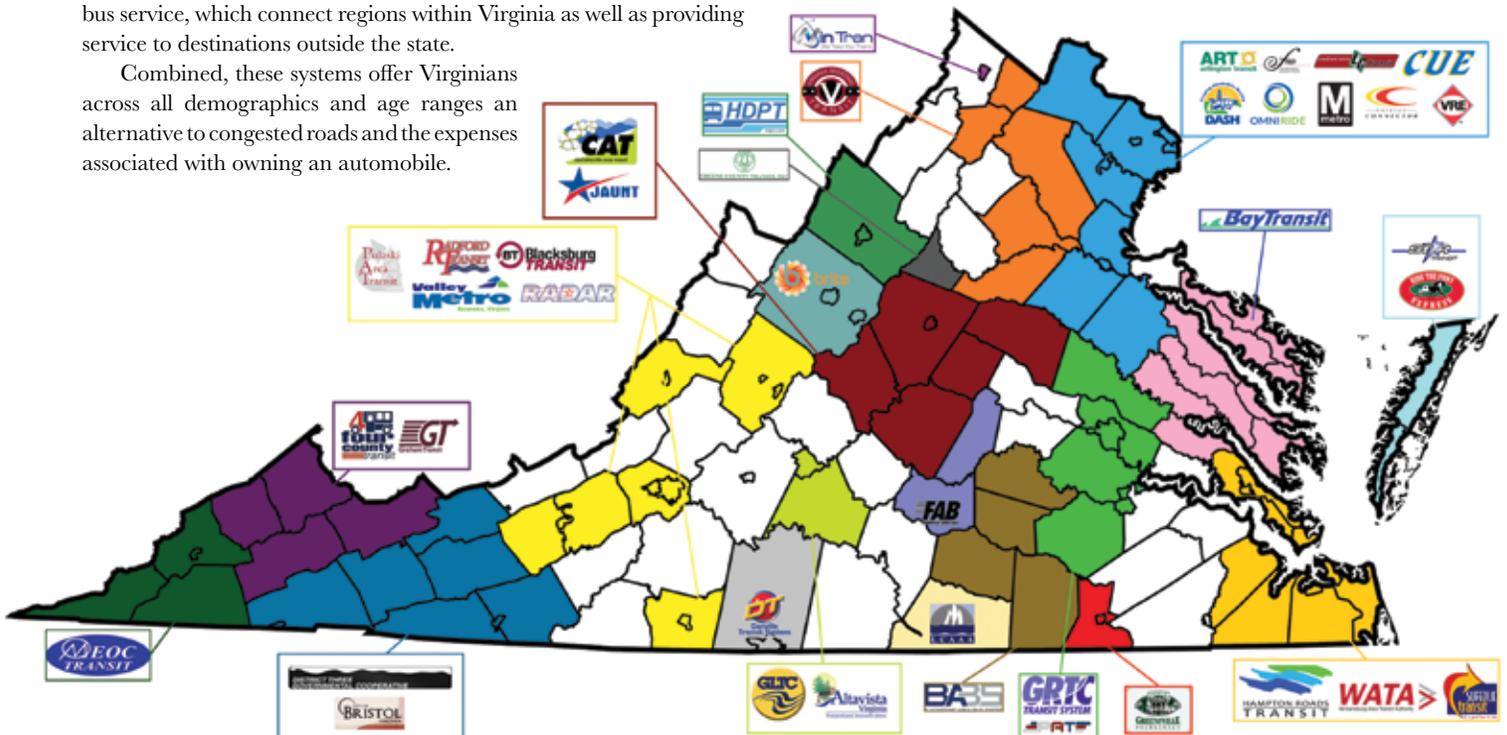
**Diversity.** Virginia’s public transit network consists of 41 systems spanning the entire state. While most of our systems rely primarily on standard public transit buses, Northern Virginia also has subways, commuter buses, commuter trains, vanpools, and bus rapid transit (BRT). In Hampton Roads, we also have light rail, ferries, and trolleys. Taken together, this network is one of the most diverse in the nation.

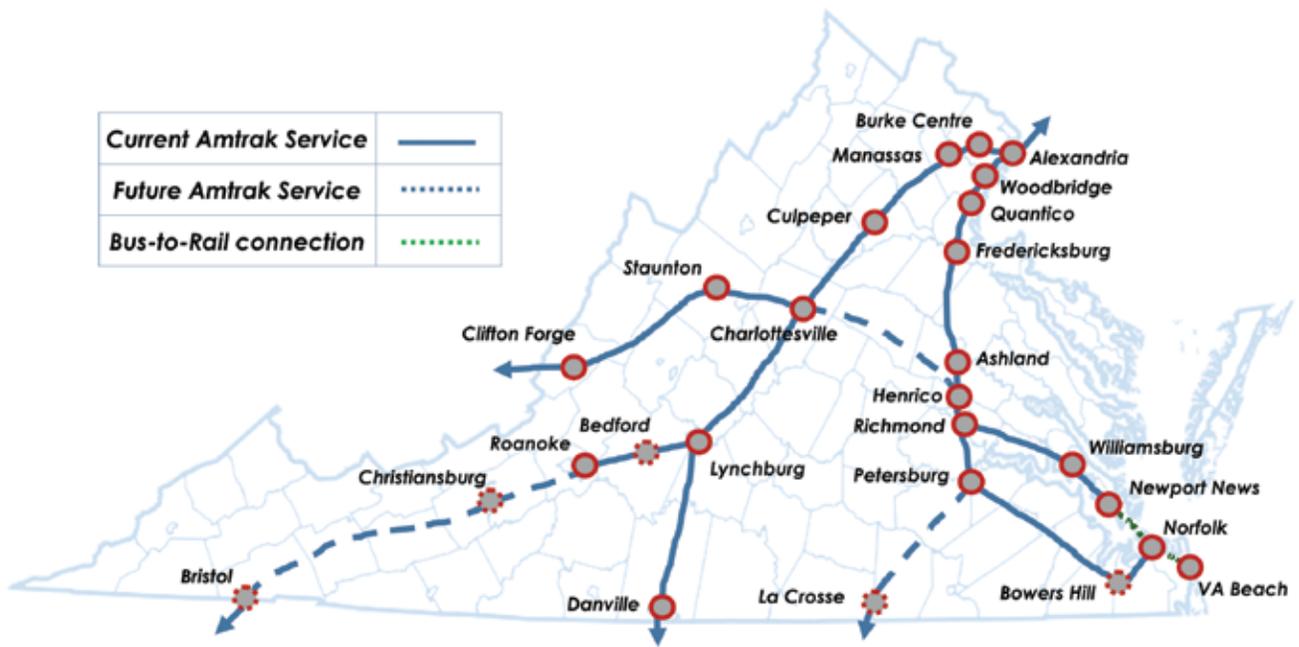
**Availability.** Nearly every Virginian has access to some level of public transportation. Communities from Lee County to Loudoun

County are served by some level of public transit. Localities serviced by public transit represent 92 percent of Virginians and 97 percent of the state’s population growth over the last decade.

**Capacity.** In 2018, our public transit systems handled over 175.3 million passenger trips including 91.1 million subway trips, 73.3 million bus trips, 4.6 million commuter rail trips, 2.6 million demand trips, 1.9 million vanpool trips, 1.4 million light rail trips, 327 thousand ferry trips, and 56 thousand BRT trips.

**Each day in Virginia, over 480,300 trips are taken on public transit and another 4,200 trips are taken on Amtrak. These trips divert over 5 million passenger miles from our roadways daily.**





## Intercity transportation highlights

**Diversity.** Virginia’s intercity passenger rail network is made up of 26 daily passenger trains\* serving 21 Amtrak stations and two Amtrak bus-to-rail stops which link Virginia to destinations such as Chicago, Boston, and Miami. We are served by five daily round-trip Amtrak national trains, including the only auto-train in the nation; one tri-weekly round-trip Amtrak national train (the Cardinal); one daily round-trip North Carolina regional train; and six daily round-trip Virginia regional trains.

*\*For simplicity, I’ve included the six weekly Cardinal trains as daily trains.*

**Availability.** The Commonwealth’s Amtrak intercity passenger rail trains serve over 83 percent of Virginians who live within 25 miles of an Amtrak station, as well as 8.6 percent of our nation’s armed forces, 88 percent of Virginia’s higher education students, and 85 percent of our state’s jobs.

**Capacity.** In 2018, our intercity passenger rail trains handled 1.53 million trips with another 219,000 pass-through trips.\*\* From this ridership, 839,000 trips were taken using Virginia’s state-sponsored regional trains and 695 thousand trips used Amtrak’s national trains and North Carolina’s state sponsored trains.

*\*\*These are trips that both begin and end outside of Virginia but, if not for the train, most likely would have led to additional vehicles on our roadways.*

## Economic benefits

Public transportation not only moves Virginians, it moves our state’s economy!

A recent Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation study found that for every dollar invested in public transit, \$2.91 was generated in economic benefits. In 2019, Virginia’s public transit systems generated over \$3.5 billion in economic benefits and created/sustained nearly 29,000 jobs across the state. For every million dollars invested in public transit in Virginia, about 20 jobs are supported and sustained.

A report published in the *Journal of Transportation Management* estimates that every dollar invested in intercity passenger rail generates \$1.84 in economic benefits. In 2018, Amtrak generated \$650 million in economic benefits for the Commonwealth, as well as creating/sustaining over 3,500 jobs. Our Amtrak trains also contributed to over \$190 million in tourism spending in our communities thanks to travelers arriving in our state by rail. Combined, public transit and passenger rail generate over \$4.1 billion in economic benefits and create/sustain over 32,000 jobs each year.

**Jobs.** One of the greatest economic benefits of public transportation and passenger rail are their ability to connect our citizens to jobs. Improved connectivity and access to high quality employment leads to higher wages and greater upward economic mobility. According to the American Public Transportation Association, the average annual income of a public transit user in the Commonwealth is \$54,400 and the average Virginia Amtrak passenger makes over \$94,000 annually. Furthermore, our public transit network serves nearly 93 percent of our jobs and our Amtrak trains connect 85 percent of our jobs.

**Home Values.** Transit and rail also impact how and where we live. According to a 2019 survey, 16 percent of respondents reported being “unhappy about a lack of public transportation in their neighborhood.” A report from Trulia found that homes that mention transit as a selling point sold for 4.2 percent more than comparable homes that did not. A recent FreddieMac report found that homes within a quarter of a mile from a Washington Metro stop sold for nearly 9 percent more than homes a mile away from a Metro stop.

## Environmental benefits

The environmental benefits of public transportation are straightforward: Every person who uses transit or passenger rail instead of traveling by single occupancy vehicle (SOV) helps reduce greenhouse gases.

Burning carbon-based fuels to power automobiles continues to have a significant and long-lasting impact on our environment. According to the Environmental Protection Agency’s 2020 report *Inventories of U.S. Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Sinks 1990-2018*, transportation continues to be the number one source of greenhouse gas emissions in both the United States and Virginia.

Utilizing data collected through the Federal Transit Administration’s (FTA) National Transit Database (NTD), the Commonwealth’s public transit agencies handled over 175.3 million trips across our multiple transit modes in 2018. These trips took 1.27 billion passenger miles traveled (PMT) off our roads, which reduced our state’s fuel consumption by 14.5 million gallons and prevented the release of nearly 130,000+ metric tons of greenhouse gas emissions.

Virginia’s 1.53 million Amtrak passengers removed 552.2 million passenger miles from our roadways. Furthermore, the 219,000 passengers that used our Amtrak trains to pass through the state removed an additional 41.6 million potential passenger miles from our roads. Combined, our Amtrak trains reduced our fuel consumption 15.5 million of gallons and lowered our greenhouse gas emissions by 137,000+ metric tons.

If these transit trips were replaced with SOV trips, it would add an additional 162,000+ cars on our roadways. Moreover, we would need to pave an additional 3,600+ lane miles of roadways (or equal to ALL of the local, primary, secondary, and interstate lane miles that were built in Virginia from 2008 to 2019) to maintain our current traffic levels. Given that the average cost to build a mile of lane roadway is \$5 million, transit and rail passengers saved Virginia taxpayers \$18 billion in unnecessary road construction costs in 2018!

## Transportation trends

There are several other transportation trends converging to make public transit and intercity passenger rail even more important.

### **Trend #1: The growing realization that we cannot simply pave our way out of traffic.**

According to the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), over the last 40 years total lane miles in the Commonwealth have grown 13.3 percent with 88 percent of that growth coming from the expansion of local and secondary roadways. Our interstate lane miles on the other hand grew by an estimated 57 percent, but only represented about 12 percent of the total growth of lane miles in Virginia.

But before we become too enamored of all the new roads and lanes, we must take into consideration the sharp uptick in vehicles mile traveled (VMT) on Virginia's roads. Since 1980, overall VMTs on our roads have grown 121 percent while highway VMTs have grown 174 percent. Since 1980, VMT per lane mile of pavement in Virginia have nearly doubled. This is why, even with all those new roads and lanes, gridlock and congestion are still the reality for many Virginia commuters.

So, why not just build even more roads and lanes? To return to 1980's traffic levels, the Commonwealth would need to pave 4,100 lane miles of interstate (at an estimated cost of \$181.2 billion) and 80,200 lane miles of local and secondary roads at an estimated cost of \$135.5 billion!

Even if we wanted to lay down that much asphalt, Virginia doesn't have over \$300 billion to attempt to pave our way out of congestion.

### **Trend #2: The changing behaviors of younger generations.**

Using United States Census and FHWA data, we can estimate that over 22 percent of Virginians between the ages of 16 and 34 currently do not have a driver's license. By comparison, in 2006 only 16 percent of that same demographic group did not have a driver's license. Before you start thinking it's time these kids learned how to drive, consider this: if Millennials and Gen Z had licenses and drove at the same rate as Baby Boomers, traffic on our roadways would increase 6 percent overnight!

### **Trend #3: The increasing cost of automobile ownership.**

The costs associated with owning and maintaining a car are taking larger and larger chunks out of our household incomes. According to AAA, the total average cost of car ownership is estimated at \$0.6715 per VMT which is about \$9,660 per driver each year. For a two-person, two car household in the Commonwealth, over 27 percent of their entire household income is potentially being spent on driving and automobile related costs.

### **Trend #4: The consolidation and reduction of our nation's airlines.**

Interstate connectivity is vital to the Commonwealth's tourism industry, as well as our ability to attract the next corporate HQ. Since 2000, the number of flights serving our state's airports have decreased 33 percent. This has especially impacted our more rural airports which have seen the number of flights drop 36 percent. As a smaller

number of flights serve our airports, our communities find they have few if any interstate travel options remaining.

## Conclusion...and COVID-19

In early 2020, Virginia was making progress in moving away from a "more roads" model to one that gives every Virginian several options when traveling between destinations.

The 2020 Virginia General Assembly's Transportation Omnibus bill was projected to increase the state's share of transit funding by \$118 million annually (to \$749 million annually) and increase our state's rail funding by \$40 million annually (to \$163 million annually). Further, Richmond and Hampton Roads created or expanded their regional authorities to generate an additional \$67 million in regional funding for public transit each year. Lastly, two studies with the potential to significantly improve travel in the Commonwealth were advanced by the Assembly. The first study looks at an east-west intercity passenger rail corridor connecting Roanoke-Richmond-Hampton Roads, and the second looks at returning the employer tax deduction for providing employees with free transit or ridesharing passes for commuting.

So, while there was still much work to do, Virginia was moving in the right direction.

Then COVID-19 hit.

Since mid-March, when the need for social distancing to mitigate the virus became urgently apparent, our transportation system's entire dynamic has been significantly altered. This is especially true of our mass transportation modes such as bus, rail, and air. What changed? In short: everything changed, from who was using public transportation, why they were using it, and how to keep them safe to how those systems could expect to receive funding.

It is still too early to draw firm conclusions, but the data we have so far is eye-opening.

For example, ridership on our public transit systems has declined by as much as 95 percent; total passengers for April on our Amtrak Regional trains dropped from 80,000 in 2019 to 3,000 in 2020; airline travel during April 2020 equaled only 4 percent of total trips taken in April 2019; and travel on our state's roadways was down as much as 64 percent.

Another example, farebox revenue for our public transit systems (which averaged over \$33 million a month in 2018) has all but dried up as overall travel has decreased, and many systems have gone fare free to reduce contact between transit operators and their riders.

The effects have also been seen on state and local budgets (which make up 21 percent and 33 percent respectively of Virginia's overall transit funding). In a preliminary report for the Virginia Transit Association on the impact to state transportation funding, Jim Regimbal with Fiscal Analytics estimates that there will be a 9 percent decline in state public transit and rail funding in FY 2021.

This decline in funding will occur even as the cost of operating our public transportation network has become more expensive due to the need to operate additional vehicles to allow for social distancing, increased cleaning standards, and sanitation measures, etc.

But, while there are still a lot of questions to be answered, the simple truth remains the same: public transportation is more important than ever. People who cannot afford a car still need to be able to get to work and run errands to obtain essential items. With more people struggling to make ends meet, this need is almost certain to increase.

With all of this in mind, the work needed to rebuild our economy must include considerations for public transportation so that it is more connected and equitable for all Virginians. 

**About the author:** *Danny Plaugher is executive director of Virginians for High Speed Rail and is deputy director of the Virginia Transit Association.*

# Transportation in the City of Alexandria finds a way

**N**UMEROUS ACTIVITIES HAVE been suspended since March due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Things like going to the movies, seeing live music and working out at the gym simply aren't happening. But many activities have continued, albeit in altered forms. We are still getting groceries, visiting the doctor and, for many of us unable to telecommute, going to work. All of this means being able to get around. Despite the restrictions and precautions necessary to stem the spread of the virus, localities have found ways to keep their transportation systems working for their residents. In this article we look at one such locality, the City of Alexandria, to learn how the city has adapted to keep everyone moving.

By reacting quickly and creatively to challenges posed by COVID-19, both DASH and the city's Department of Transportation & Environmental Services have been able to maintain operations. Administrators and staff realized early on that COVID-19 meant that it was more, not less, important to provide access to safe, reliable transit trips, and convenient parking options for essential jobs and tasks.

They have achieved this through continual program and policy adjustments to accommodate the changing transportation needs of the city's residents.

**DASH (Driving Alexandria Safely Home) is the public bus system operated by the Alexandria Transit Company for the city.**

## DASH: An evolving strategy for safety

In late March, DASH implemented a plan to reduce operations as part of the city's overall efforts to limit the spread of the virus. At that time, DASH eliminated fares on all routes to reduce contact between operators and riders and to support the growing number of residents experiencing economic hardship.

*"DASH has continued to provide essential trips for everyone who needs us while maintaining the best balance of the needs of the community and the safety of our operators and passengers."*

- DASH CEO/General Manager Josh Baker

In April, DASH recognized that its riders who were staying home during the week needed more options on the weekend to complete

essential errands to specific locations such as pharmacies and grocery stores. So, DASH rolled out an enhanced Sunday schedule with routes to new locations. Then in May, in response to Governor Northam's return to work orders, DASH implemented an enhanced Saturday schedule with longer service hours and increased frequency on some routes to prevent crowding on buses.

To ensure the safety of riders and operators, DASH also implemented a series of measures to create physical distancing on its buses. Measures included rear-door boarding access to ensure limited contact as well as signage with "No Passengers Beyond This Point" to encourage riders to maintain social distancing between themselves and the driver. Although rear-door boarding was encouraged, all passengers requiring assistance, such as those with mobility devices, could still access the front doors.

DASH also increased its use of 60-foot articulated buses. These longer vehicles allow for more space between people and for seats to be strategically blocked off to encourage people to sit further apart. Moreover, DASH instituted a maximum capacity for each of its different bus sizes and deployed extra buses to ensure all passengers could be accommodated.



**Buses aren't just great for public transportation, they're great for public awareness too! In fact, they're mobile billboards. DASH helped disseminate the Alexandria Health Department's "Stop the Spread" message with signs on its buses.**

In May, DASH implemented a mask/face covering policy based on guidance from the Alexandria Health Department. All passengers are now required to wear face coverings while using DASH buses to protect employees and passengers. In this respect, DASH's policy aligns with its regional transit partners including WMATA, Frederick Transit, Montgomery County, and Prince George's County Transit.



## Transportation & Environmental Services: Parking makes a difference

The city's Department of Transportation & Environmental Services has worked to quickly adjust parking restrictions to help residents stay safe at home and to support businesses adapting to a different kind of customer service.

*"The primary goal of our transportation response to the pandemic has been to support our local and state health departments in their work to stop the spread of COVID-19. That has meant implementing temporary changes that make it easier for residents and businesses to follow guidance to stay home and to maintain physical distance when making essential trips."*

**- Yon Lambert, Director of the Department of Transportation & Environmental Services**

In March, after the Governor issued Virginia's stay-at-home order, Transportation & Environmental Services worked closely with the police department to temporarily suspend enforcement of certain parking restrictions. This step was taken to keep residents from having to move their vehicles as often while teleworking or caring for loved ones.

The City of Alexandria also suspended enforcement of the following:

- Parking restrictions during times designated for residential street sweeping.
- The rule prohibiting vehicles from parking within the public right of way for a period of more than 72 hours.
- Time restrictions in residential parking permit zones and weekend time restrictions.
- Fees on metered blocks.
- The requirement that all vehicles display a valid state inspection sticker to ensure that residents whose inspection sticker expired just before or during the stay-at-home order would not be ticketed.

*"At a time when our residents and businesses were adjusting to a changing reality, caring for sick loved ones and, in many cases, facing economic hardship, we wanted to eliminate worry about moving their vehicles on residential streets to avoid getting a parking ticket."*

**- Hillary Orr, Deputy Director for Transportation for the City of Alexandria.**

## People got to eat: Creative solutions for food takeout and delivery

The Department of Transportation & Environmental Services worked quickly to respond to local restaurants that needed ways to increase their ability to offer takeout and delivery options as well as residents seeking an easy way to support local restaurants. In March, Alexandria established temporary curbside pickup zones in busy commercial areas throughout the city. Restaurants without adequate parking space near their business were able to request a curbside food pickup zone near their establishment. The city's GIS team then created an interactive map of the zones for residents to consult. This program was later extended to the city's libraries.

Despite these efforts, a busy commercial block in Old Town Alexandria found it difficult to maintain six feet of physical distancing between people due to the large volume of residents and visitors patronizing the area. Rather than simply insist that the businesses close, the city seized the opportunity to try various configurations of the block. During the Memorial Day week, the Transportation Department, working in conjunction with other city departments, reconfigured the block. The new configuration has one-way traffic, making curbside pick-up easier, and provides additional space for pedestrians to socially distance. The following week, the block began to be closed to all traffic on the weekends to provide the maximum amount of space for safe access. The result: a pedestrian-friendly corridor where residents can order takeout from their favorite restaurants and enjoy fresh-air and exercise without violating physical distancing guidelines. When the City of Alexandria entered Phase 1 of the state's reopening plan, which allowed for some limited outdoor

dining, the Transportation Department expanded the Pilot Parklet Program to make it easier for restaurants to convert on-street parking spaces into outdoor dining.

## Mobility options: Meeting essential needs and services

Alexandria has taken steps to ensure access to transportation for its most vulnerable citizens. The Transportation Department in conjunction with private sector partners retrofitted vehicles to provide paratransit (i.e. individualized rides without fixed routes or timetables) options for clients exposed to COVID-19 needing access to cancer treatments and dialysis. This public-private sector contract was later utilized by non-profit health providers and the hospital to transport COVID-19 positive residents experiencing homelessness or living in cramped conditions to an isolation/quarantine hotel. The Transportation Department’s fleet services division also retrofitted city vehicles to safely transport persons living in group homes. Additionally, the city has worked with non-profit food providers to utilize city vehicles for food distribution and delivery.

## Internal practices: Safety, health and the “new normal”

As a public transportation agency responsible for the safety and security of thousands of passengers daily, as well as a large workforce in contact with the public, DASH quickly adopted employee health checks and increased cleaning protocols in response to COVID-19.

DASH increased cleaning protocols for vehicles and facilities in March. These measures include enhanced cleanings focused on critical touchpoints like handrails, fareboxes, doors, and regular “fogging” of vehicles. “Fogging” involves spraying a disinfectant vapor inside the bus to sanitize every interior surface and object.

In April DASH began temperature checks for its employees, including drivers. Furthermore, policies currently being developed will create a “new normal” to include increased telework and fewer trips overall for the support and administrative staff. 

**About the authors:** *Josh Baker is the General Manager and CEO of DASH; Hillary Orr is the Deputy Director for Transportation for the City of Alexandria Department of Transportation & Environmental Services.*



Phase 1 reopening of King Street.

# When is a road more than just a road?

## Route 419: Place making and the art of leveraging

**L**OCAL GOVERNMENTS HAVE long relied on tax breaks, grants, and other incentives to lure industry to their communities to create jobs and increase the local tax base. Alongside such “deal making,” more and more localities are now adding another economic development tool: “place making.” Like those other incentives, however, place making can be expensive. In fact, it can be very expensive depending on what needs to be done to turn a place into an economic development asset. Moreover, the return on investment can take years, if not decades, to materialize, all of which makes it even more difficult to identify and commit funds to the project.

Still the benefits of place making are expansive, with aesthetic, social and economic dividends for the entire community that can go far beyond the cost of the initial investment.

So, how to do “place making” with limited resources? In Roanoke County, we have learned that leveraging – taking a (relatively) small investment and turning it into a much larger investment – is essential. With our series of “Reimagine” projects, this is exactly what we are doing.

### Route 419: Reimagining a Town Center

From its early days in the 1970s, the 1.1-mile Route 419 corridor has served as the County’s premiere shopping and business district – its unofficial “downtown.” In its current form, however, the area suffers from a limited availability of easily developable land, a near complete dependence on automobiles to bring in business, traffic congestion, outdated buildings, multiple store vacancies, and an overall lack of planned new investment.

Its assets include a prime location with proximity to Interstate 581, the growing Virginia Tech-Carilion healthcare/research/educational complex, and the City of Roanoke with its population of educated, high income earners. Furthermore, although topographic challenges have dissuaded past developers, there is plenty of undeveloped property for those willing to meet those challenges.

In short, the 390-acre area on Route 419 and I-581 is ripe for





redevelopment into a higher-density, pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly town center where people will want to live, work, play, and shop. Such a town center would bolster the local economy by attracting a skilled, diverse, and creative workforce. Its appeal would also extend to empty nesters, families, and individuals who desire the same amenities.

To enable such redevelopment, the County of Roanoke launched “Reimagine 419” in 2016. Under this banner, Roanoke County’s Economic Development and Community Development departments (working with outside consultants) conducted comprehensive analyses of the residential, retail, and food/drink markets. This analysis showed potential for 150,000 square feet of new retail development and a strong demand for multi-family housing.

Additionally, the same groups mounted a huge citizen-engagement effort and marketing campaign. This included regular updates (7,000 households and businesses contacted via mail and email), a video Public Service Announcement, an online education and input

portal, stakeholder interviews, place-making workshops, and community presentations. All this input was used to create the 419 Town Center Plan which was formally adopted and incorporated it into the County’s comprehensive plan in July 2019.

The *419 Town Center Plan* rests on five key principles:

- 1. Harness the power of location and market strengths** through choices in housing, retail, entertainment, and office space.
- 2. Create an authentic place** through mixed public/private/civic uses, elements unique to the Roanoke Valley, landscaping, and public green space.
- 3. Improve connectivity** through safer/better access for cars and transit, sidewalks, improved street crossings, and separated multi-purpose paths.

4. **Celebrate nature** through green infrastructure, greenways, bike trails, and health-oriented businesses and amenities.
5. **Promote a sense of community and inclusion** through choices aimed at younger residents and families, a diverse mix of retail and cultural choices, celebration of history, and tourism promotion.

## From planning to acting

Crafting and adopting a bold plan is one thing. Bringing it to fruition is another. This will, of course, take time and the involvement of many stakeholders – both public and private. It will also require leveraging resources from partner agencies.

The first step is to make the public investments needed to enable private investment. To create offices, apartments, restaurants, and shops the appropriate infrastructure – streets, sidewalks, bus stops, and pathways to serve them – must be in place. Also needed are the zoning and design codes to allow their construction. But patience will see the project through. Construction is slated to begin on the first project mid-2020 and finish on the last in 2026.

## Transportation projects build the foundation; leveraging makes it possible

As the foundation for the new town center, three key transportation projects are funded and scheduled: 1) street improvements, sidewalks, and bus stops on 419 itself; 2) extension of a key cross street to allow for development of multi-family housing; and 3) a diverging-diamond interchange at I-581 and Route 419 to improve traffic flow and safety at this central intersection.

Total costs of the projects will be nearly \$30M. Of that, only \$1.4M will come from the County; the remainder will be funded by State and Federal programs – a more than 20-to-1 leverage!

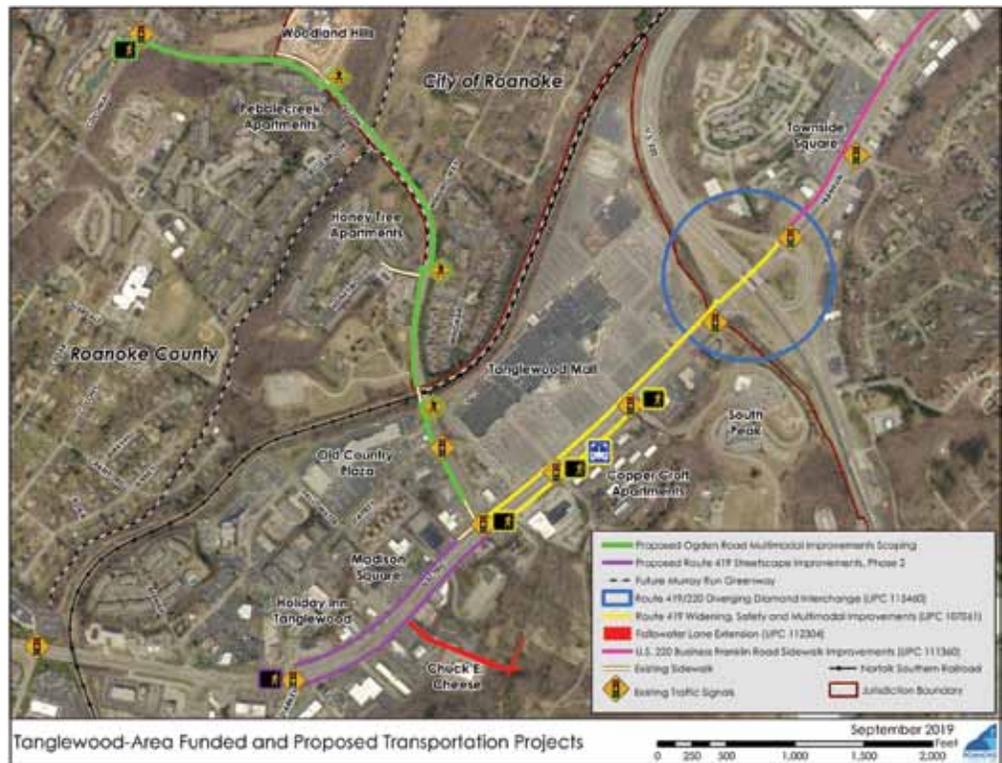
To accomplish this bit of funding magic, County staff worked closely with key partners from the Virginia Department of Transportation and the Roanoke Valley Transportation Planning Organization to complete five funding applications.

As hoped for, the investment of time, effort and public dollars is being bolstered by private investment. Carilion Clinic recently leased 150,000 square feet of space in the largely vacant Tanglewood Mall in the heart of the 419 Town Center. Once renovated, the space will be home to more than a dozen outpatient practices of Carilion Children’s (as well as other clinical services) which will bring in more than 500 employees and patient trips per day.

Having this strong private partner anchoring the mall – drawing patients and their families from a wide region – will serve as a catalyst for future development of restaurants, retail, and other commercial enterprises, with several currently underway.

## Replicating the effort

The 419 area is only the beginning. County staff are replicating the “Reimagine” process to jumpstart redevelopment in two other key commercial districts in Roanoke County with the Reimagine Oak Grove and Hollins area plans, again starting with transportation and multi-modal improvement projects currently underway. Meanwhile, the County Parks, Recreation and Tourism Department is supporting the County’s economic development efforts on the development of Explore Park – the County’s 1,000 acre outdoor destination attraction with hiking trails, river frontage, cabins, zip-lines and a craft brew pub – as well as the completion of the Roanoke River Greenway, 31 miles of scenic hike and bike trails following the river throughout the County and surrounding jurisdictions. Like the 419 Town Center, all of these places will become economic development assets – making Roanoke County, and the region, a more attractive place for businesses, families and individuals.



## Leveraging is key

None of this would be possible if the County had to foot the entire bill. By working closely with State and Federal programs and representatives (as well as investors and key stakeholders who provided valuable input), Roanoke County has managed to turn \$2.5 million of its own funding into more than \$125 million from State and Federal sources for a wide variety of transportation and recreation infrastructure improvements across the County. And if all goes according to plan, that public funding will itself leverage even more private investment, wages and taxes paid – making Roanoke County a premier place to live, work and play. 

**About the author:** *Thomas Rowley is the economic development manager for Roanoke County.*

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# A chat with Suzette Denslow

## CLERK OF THE HOUSE

**L**AST NOVEMBER, HOUSE SPEAKER-ELECT Eileen Filler-Corn announced that Suzette Denslow would be elected as the Clerk of the House of Delegates when the legislature convened in Richmond in January. This was a momentous announcement by the first woman who would serve as the Speaker of the House of Delegates: Denslow would be the first woman to be elected as Clerk.

For VML members this was a big announcement because Denslow had worked for the league on three different occasions and had formed a close working relationship with local officials from every corner of the state.

Suzette Denslow is a native of Richmond; her father at one time was a police officer for the city and her mother was associated with Covington International, a well-known travel agency in the area. She began her local government career as a budget analyst in the budget office in the City of Charlottesville, working with Deputy City Manager Bob Stripling and City Manager Cole Hendrix and during the succeeding decades would work for state and local government in virtually every capacity. She honed her analytical skills at the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission, where she was part of the study team working on education financing and the local fiscal stress index. She gained lobbying skills through her work with the City of Richmond and the Virginia Municipal League.

Denslow went on to work in the cabinet of five governors: Douglas Wilder, Mark Warner, Tim Kaine, Terry McAuliffe and Ralph Northam. During those years she also fit in stints as the executive director of the Tennessee Municipal League, a return trip as deputy director of the Virginia Municipal League and a five-year stint as the chief of staff for Richmond Mayor Dwight Jones.

Denslow has an undergraduate degree in urban studies from Virginia Commonwealth University and a master's degree in public administration from the University of Virginia.

VTC wanted to hear from Denslow about her new job and caught up with her – by telephone – this past month.

**VTC:** *What was something that surprised you about your new job?*

**SD:** I learned that when you are standing as Clerk in front of the assembled House you have to pay attention every second. If you lose your concentration, you will lose control of the situation.

**VTC:** *Sounds hard to do. How did you pull it off?*

**SD:** At every moment, you must be thinking about what you have to do next depending on what's happening on the floor. Has anyone asked a question? Is there a parliamentary procedure issue? As soon as a member is done speaking, either you or the Speaker will need to do something, and you must be ready to do it.

**VTC:** *Does having to maintain that level of concentration all day leave you exhausted?*

**SD:** I didn't find it exhausting. It's just a different way of listening.

I did find, however, that the biggest change from my previous experiences with the General Assembly is that, as Clerk, I am not listening to the substance of the issue. On several occasions, people would say things to me like "Well of course you heard that this bill went through." But really, I was totally unaware whether it passed or not, even though

I was in the room when it happened! Sure, I read it out loud, but my focus was not on whether it passed.

**VTC:** *Did you practice beforehand? Were there mock sessions?*

**SD:** Nobody could do this job without practice sessions. If you watch a floor session, you probably miss that the clerk reads different sections of the calendar at each reading; I had never noticed this before! At the mock sessions, I learned to only read certain information on the first reading, certain information on the second, etc.

**VTC:** *Do you have a script that guides you through the calendar each day?*

**SD:** Yes, and I started using the online calendar rather than using a hard copy. I realized that if I didn't start doing this from the start I'd just have to readjust to online later. I think that out of 400 years, I'm the first Clerk to do it all online! Of course, it wasn't even a viable option until

this term.

On the other hand, for the reconvened session in April, we talked about how if something went wrong with the internet signal, we'd have to do roll call votes which would have been hard but they did it for over 350 years, so I'm pretty sure we could have made it work.

So many of the practices of the General Assembly are done a certain way because they've "always" been done that way...until they change, of course. And then that's the new way they've "always" been done.

**VTC:** *You worked for the Virginia Municipal League on 3 separate occasions – once as research director and twice as deputy director. How has that helped you in your current job?*

**SD:** [Laughs] I'm always glad that I know the difference between what makes a town, a city, and a county! I can still name all of Virginia's cities and counties in alphabetical order. Towns are little trickier, because there are 190 of them. When I worked in the Governor's office, we put a premium on being accurate and when I saw that someone had referred to a locality incorrectly, I would have to say "that's not a city!"

It also drives me crazy that people say "municipality" and think that it includes counties.

**VTC:** *I can relate! I still have to watch using "municipality" incorrectly. You have lots of experience working in Virginia's government. What can local officials do to be more effective in working with their legislators?*

**SD:** I think it's the same advice that VML has always given to members: The time between sessions is the time to be talking to legislators, developing relationships with them and making your point.





Clerk of the Virginia House of Delegates, Suetta Denslow, takes the oath of office from Supreme Court Justice William Mimms, after being elected clerk during opening ceremonies of the 2020 Virginia General Assembly at the Capitol in Richmond, Va., Wednesday, Jan. 8, 2020.

Too many people wait until the session starts, when legislators have very little time, to try to and see them. That's only going to get worse with fewer people able to be physically in the same space and limits on how many people can be in a building at the same time.

**VTC:** *You make a good point that the way people interact with legislators, and how the legislators interact with each other, has had to change quickly. What do you foresee for the near future?*

**SD:** It may be that text and emails become more effective. Even before the pandemic, a lot of legislators spent a lot of time texting. It was already on its way to becoming a main way of communicating. So, email and texting may become the main way to contact legislators until we get back to normal. As for holding meetings, I know that the House Appropriations Committee has had a couple remote access meetings, so they are already happening but I'm sure there will be adjustments to be made as they proceed.

**VTC:** *Speaking of adjustments, you are almost certainly the first Clerk of the House to have to deal with car horns and legislators inadvertently unplugging A/V equipment during a session. What challenges unique to our current situation do you anticipate having to overcome during any special sessions coming up?*

**SD:** It's true! The reconvened session in April was the first time, I believe, that we've had an outdoor session. However, if I recall correctly, they had to relocate to Fauquier County about 100 years ago due to an outbreak of disease. **[Editor's note: The event Ms. Denslow is referring to actually occurred in 1849 but she is correct about the cause, an outbreak of cholera, and location, a posh resort called Fauquier White Sulphur Springs just outside Warrenton. Interesting side note - the General Assembly never paid its bill for the stay and the owner stopped trying to get his money in 1851.]**

As for any Special Sessions this summer, so much will depend upon restrictions that will be in place. Will we be in Phase 2 or Phase

3? When we were preparing for the reconvened session in April, we prepared for an outdoor, in-person and a virtual, remote possibility. So, we had trained all 100 members on remote meetings. Now we're doing same thing: planning for all possibilities.

**VTC:** *Any lesson learned from the reconvened session in April?*

**SD:** Yes! We need flooring to cover the voting machine wires. People were tripping on the exposed wires and because they were daisy chained like Christmas tree lights, a break in one section cut off the whole thing. I should say, however, that the staff is just wonderful, and they have lots of experience and they took it so seriously and I think, all things considered, it went very well. Of course, this summer the weather will be a larger concern. We can count on it being hot, but how hot? And rain?!?!

**VTC:** *Legally, where is the House permitted to meet?*

**SD:** The constitution and House rules vest in the Speaker the authority to determine where to meet in case of emergencies. If we revert to Phase 1 or are in Phase 2, having 100 people together spaced apart is not an option. However, we must meet – it's required by the constitution. So, the Speaker could designate a larger space for the delegates to use.

**VTC:** *This has been great. Thanks so much for your time. I've left the most important question for last: Would you say that your time with the Virginia Municipal League was amazing or just fantastic?*

**SD:** So that's an easy one. It was an amazingly fantastic time! I remember saying, when I was leaving VML to become the Director of the Tennessee Municipal League that my VML job was such fun, that if it hadn't been my career it would have probably been my hobby. **VTC**

# COVID-19: Financial impacts on Virginia's local governments

## A report to support local government decision making

**T**HE LOCAL GOVERNMENT budget process in Virginia can be tumultuous in the best of times, but this year looks to be particularly fraught with uncertainty and turbulence. Since March, when the full scope of the coronavirus pandemic became apparent, local government managers and finance staff have diligently worked to discern the implications for local revenues. Ultimately, this work seeks to provide informed recommendations to elected officials.

This is no easy task.

To help shoulder this burden, staff at the Center for Public Administration and Policy at Virginia Tech established a finance discussion network in April 2020. These weekly meetings bring together over 140 local government managers and finance officers to discuss topics such as methods to cope with local revenue shortfalls, the finer points of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act), and questions related to Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) assistance. Guest speakers have included representatives from the Federal agencies, the Virginia Department of Transportation, Virginia Housing, the Virginia Department of Emergency Management, the Government Finance Officer Association, the Virginia Municipal League, and the Virginia Association of Counties.

In these sessions, local government officials and staff from across the Commonwealth have learned from each other, shared information, and developed resources to support each other. At present, over 140 representatives from Virginia's cities, counties and towns participate each week.

### Survey results: A picture begins to come into focus

On May 27, the Center for Public Administration and Policy released the results of a statewide survey that gathered data from nearly 90 local governments on the anticipated budgetary impacts of the pandemic to FY20 and FY21.

The total number of local governments responding to the survey included 17 cities, 47 counties and 24 towns with an overall response rate of 27%. The median population was 23,418 with a range of a population from 445 to 475,000. The surveys were anonymous; not all local governments answered all questions.

Here are some of the big takeaways.

**#1 – Most respondents reported having a written financial policy.** The study asked the if the responding local government maintains written financial policies. Of the 88 respondents, 87.5 percent of local governments reported having written financial policies. Only 12.5 percent reported not having adopted financial policies (these included nine counties and two towns). All responding cities reported having adopted financial policies.

**#2 – The majority of respondents are experiencing a revenue shortfall.** Over 80 percent of local governments reported a revenue shortfall due to the pandemic (see Table 1). Based on 65 responses, the total financial impact in FY20 is over \$228 million dollars (see Table 2).



This is what meetings look like now (photo taken during a finance network meeting on May 6).

Why ask about financial policies? Financial policies inform and guide elected officials during their decision-making process and provide boundaries for the local government. The Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA) identifies adoption of financial policies as a best practice “central to a strategic, long-term approach to financial management.”

for FY21 to mitigate the fiscal impacts of the pandemic. However, 28 (40 percent) of local governments are using unassigned fund balance in FY21 (see Table 4).

**Table 1: Anticipated Revenue Shortfall in FY20**

Q: For the current year (FY20) budget, do you anticipate a revenue shortfall related to the Coronavirus Pandemic?		Total	City	County	Town
	Total Count	79	16	42	21
	Yes	72	16	35	21
	No	7	0	7	0
	Yes	81.8%	94.1%	74.5%	87.5%
No	8.0%	0.0%	14.9%	0.0%	

**Table 2: Anticipated dollar revenue shortfall**

Total revenue shortfall expected in FY20	
Total	\$228,137,507
Median	\$1,000,000
Average/Mean	\$3,509,808
Minimum	\$25,000
Maximum	\$51,200,000

**#3 – The responses are mixed on use of the general fund balance in FY20.** The respondents were asked if they expected to use unassigned general fund balance in FY20 to cover any revenue shortfalls due to the pandemic. Of those responding, 35 percent of local governments reported that they will be using fund balance to mitigate revenue shortfalls in FY20. Thirty (30) local governments projected that the general fund would be used to balance their FY20 budget. Just over 60 percent of local governments reported that they would use less than 5 percent of the unassigned general fund to balance the FY20 budget. However, about 8 percent of responding towns noted they would use 15 percent or more of the unassigned fund balance in the current fiscal year. On the other hand, just over 30 percent of responding cities reported that they would use 10-15 percent of the unassigned fund balance in the current fiscal year (see Table 3).

**Table 3: Level of unassigned general fund balance use in FY20**

Q: Indicate the percentage of unassigned general fund balance your locality expects to use at year end June 30, 2020.		Total	City	County	Town
	Total Count	30	6	12	12
	<5%	19	3	9	7
	5%-10%	5	1	2	2
	10%-15%	5	2	1	2
	>15%	1	0	0	1
	<5%	63.3%	50.0%	75.0%	58.3%
	5%-10%	16.7%	16.7%	16.7%	16.7%
	>15%	3.3%	0.0%	0.0%	8.3%

**#4 – Most (but not all) respondents do not anticipate using a large amount of their general fund balance to cover FY21.** Local governments were asked about their use of unassigned fund balance for FY21. Of the 70 respondents to this question, 42 (60 percent) of local governments are not using unassigned fund balance

**Table 4: Use of general fund balance as a percent in FY21**

Answer	%	Count
<5%	65.4%	17
5%-10%	23.1%	6
10%-15%	7.7%	2
>15%	3.8%	1
Total	100%	26

For comparison, local governments were asked to convert the percentage of general fund balance to dollars. On average, the responding local governments plan to use \$3.2 million in fund balance to balance the FY21 budget with a median of \$1,000,000 (see Table 5).

**Table 5: Use of general fund balance in dollars**

	Dollar of Fund Balance
Median	\$1,000,000
Average/Mean	\$3,213,905
Maximum	\$40,000,000
Minimum	\$40,000

## Lessons learned

- All local governments should consider developing and adopting written financial policies to guide elected officials during their annual operating and capital budget process.
- Local governments using general fund balance in FY20 and/or FY21 should document the justification and take actions to mitigate the financial impacts to the unassigned fund balance levels. Local government actions to be considered include deferral of one-time capital expenditures, reduction of travel expenditures, and reductions in targeted personnel expenditures related to business and recreational programming.
- Local governments using general fund balance in FY20 and/or FY21 budgets should develop a plan to replenish the fund balance as soon as practical. Be prepared to explain to the rating agencies how your local government plans to recover financially.
- Local governments need opportunities to share and learn from each other. Engaging in professional associations provides educational and networking opportunities for elected officials and local government staff.

## Learn more

For the Government Finance Officers’ Association’s best practices and fiscal first aid recommendations, visit [www.gfoa.org](http://www.gfoa.org).

The Local Government Management program facilitates a weekly webinar series for Virginia’s local finance officials and managers. The full report and more information are available by contacting Dr. Stephanie Davis, [sddavis@vt.edu](mailto:sddavis@vt.edu). 

**About the author:** Dr. Stephanie Davis is a Collegiate Assistant Professor and Program Director, Graduate Certificate in Local Government Management at Virginia Tech.

# Do you know a “2020 Local Champion?”

THIS YEAR, VML will be giving “2020 Local Champion” awards to highlight the hard work that our localities are doing to keep their citizens safe and healthy during the COVID-19 outbreak. Examples of “Local Champions” might be an agency that was willing to transition its work to provide more effective help to the community, an economic development department that did something spectacular to help local businesses, a communications director who came up with a creative way to keep residents informed and involved, or a locality’s first responders who were steadfast in their jobs.

We are asking any interested local officials or staff to submit entries in as many of the categories below as they like. However, please submit only one entry per category.

## Categories

- Communication
- Community Health
- Continuity of Operations
- Economic & Business Stability
- Public Safety
- Risk Management
- Education & Youth Initiatives

## How to enter

Use our online Locality Champion 2020 form (currently in development) to submit your entries. For each, please include:

- The person, project, organization or department you want to nominate.
- A description of what they have done and why you feel they merit consideration
- Links to supporting materials

We will announce additional details about the contest and will let you know when the entry form is ready via *eNews*, social media and on our website soon.

# 2020

VIRGINIA MUNICIPAL LEAGUE

# LOCAL CHAMPION

AWARDS





# VRSA is here for our members (now more than ever)

By VRSA staff

**F**OR 40 YEARS, the Virginia Risk Sharing Association (VRSA) has helped Virginia's cities, counties, towns, and governmental entities effectively serve their communities by providing them with financial stability through risk management.

VRSA's commitment has not wavered during the difficult past few months. Here are some of the ways we continue to be here for our members.

**Remote training and education.** Since March, VRSA has educated and trained more than 740 member representatives through 16 online events including webinars and virtual roundtables. These have been especially effective as many of our members' employees have transitioned to working from home. Similarly, VRSA continues to support professional organizations as we all shift to virtual environments.

**Reevaluating risk.** VRSA has looked for ways to reduce the financial burden on its members by reevaluating their risk during the changed circumstances. For example: "We have recognized that member exposures have been reduced with many vehicles parked and buildings unused," cites VRSA Managing Director Steve Craig. "In response, we refunded 15 percent of members' annual 2019-2020 automobile and general liability contributions."

**Funding for PPE.** The VRSA Members' Supervisory Board recently voted to increase funds available through the Risk Management Grant program for the 2020-2021 year, and to allow funding to be utilized for the purchase of COVID-19 related personal protective equipment.

**Revamped grant program.** Professional management and leadership development are critical now more than ever. Craig ob-

serves that VRSA has "earmarked a portion of our grant funds for educational scholarships as well as management and governance risk management efforts."

He continues, "Over the last 10 years, VRSA has provided \$3 million in funding through the VRSA Risk Management Grant program to help members bolster their risk management programs and promote their strategic goals."

**Anticipating the future.** VRSA continues to look for new and creative ways to provide support for Virginia local governments. As an example, the organization is sponsoring an "Anticipate the Future" virtual conference hosted by the Virginia Municipal League on July 7th and 9th.

Now more than ever, VRSA remains a committed supporter of Virginia's local governments and all their efforts to keep citizens safe and healthy. Rest assured, during this difficult time, we will continue to use our financial strength to provide stable rates and our signature service to our members.

Want to learn more about VRSA's annual Risk Management Grant program? Contact Director of Education and Training Thomas Bullock, [tbullock@vrsa.us](mailto:tbullock@vrsa.us).

Want to learn more about VRSA's educational scholarships or management and governance risk management efforts? Contact Local Government Specialist Peter Stephenson, [pstephenson@vrsa.us](mailto:pstephenson@vrsa.us).

**About the authors:** *The Virginia Risk Sharing Association (VRSA) is the first and most financially sound self-insurance pool in the Commonwealth of Virginia. VRSA provides auto, property, liability, and workers' compensation coverage to Virginia's local political subdivisions.*



# How Portsmouth survived the yellow fever epidemic of 1855

“IT WAS THE BEST OF TIMES; it was the worst of times,” Charles Dickens wrote in his classic story, *A Tale of Two Cities*. However, in the summer of 1855 – five years before Mr. Dickens’ novel was published – the City of Portsmouth was already experiencing the best and worst of times. The best of times: Economic growth and booming industry. The worst of times: a yellow fever epidemic.

Yellow fever traveled to the Commonwealth via a merchant ship called the *Benjamin Franklin*, which arrived from the West Indies and docked at Gosport Shipyard. Following the long journey, the ship’s crew performed routine docking procedures and unknowingly released mosquitoes carrying yellow fever.

## What is Yellow Fever?

In *The Great Pestilence: Yellow Fever in Portsmouth, Virginia*, a 2005 dissertation by Burden Susan Lundgren (Old Dominion University), the author outlines the parameters of the illness as a three to six day incubation period before flu-like symptoms and fever appear. Symptoms last about a week and are characterized by the yellow color of the patient, caused by issues with the victim’s liver. Death results from liver, kidney or heart failure.

## The community reacts

Upon learning of the first death from yellow fever, Portsmouth’s Town Council quarantined the *Benjamin Franklin* the next day, Sunday July 9, 1855.

It was too late. Portsmouth was hit hard.

In the days that followed, most of the population fled the city and the municipal government collapsed. With the municipal government out of commission, a benevolent organization called the Portsmouth Relief Association cared for the sick and dying and housed and cared for orphaned children. Many of those that remained in the city volunteered to assist during the epidemic.

**In a 2005 series of articles in *The Virginian-Pilot*, Lon Wagner asserted that the episode proved that, even early in its history, Portsmouth had a strong sense of community and a giving spirit.**

## An (involuntary) hero emerges

People were dying so rapidly that customary burial rituals could not be used. According to Mr. Wagner, coffins were in short supply. “Some people placed orders for coffins while a loved-one battled to stay alive. Fear of contagion from a corpse meant the dead were buried quickly.” Families had to make a hard decision – stay and care for their sick family members or flee the city. Those who remained began to fear they would die from starvation or from lack of care if



they became ill. At the height of the outbreak, a slave named Bob Butt was leased by his owner Mr. Britton (no first name given) to bury the victims in Cedar Grove Cemetery. The task was overwhelming, but Bob Butt stayed on task and buried scores of dead before they could infect others. Before the epidemic had passed, approximately 10 percent of Portsmouth’s population of roughly 10,000 were dead.

Later, a collection was taken up to purchase Butt’s freedom. Today, Butt’s service to Portsmouth is documented in the Yellow Fever Historical Marker in Olde Towne Portsmouth. The marker sits in a beautiful English-style garden and serves as a somber reminder of the individual and collective sacrifices made during the epidemic to ensure that Portsmouth’s legacy would continue.

## History repeats

The overarching themes of the yellow fever epidemic of 1855 sound tragically familiar as we weather the coronavirus pandemic: fear, flight, and a disproportionate impact on the poor and other vulnerable populations. Diane Cripps, Curator of History for the City of Portsmouth Museums, described the similarities in an interview for this article.

“People responded to the unknown with a good deal of fear, and we can recognize many of those behaviors today. Before there is a known cause, people look for someone or something to blame. They rail against being quarantined and ultimately try to escape. But those who filter out the distractions and persevere in looking for scientific answers are the real heroes in the end.” 

**About the author:** Sharon Riddick Hoggard is the City of Portsmouth’s Marketing Manager.



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