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VIRGINIA MUNICIPAL LEAGUE

## Priority: Transportation







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## ABOUT THE COVER

And then came "Mary," the HRBT tunnel boring machine, named after Mary Winston Jackson, a NASA Scientist and Mathematician. The cutting head carries the Hampton Roads colors with 14 stars, one for each of the HRTAC member jurisdictions. Photo by Herrenknecht.

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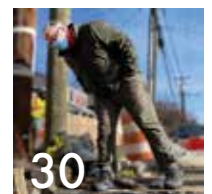
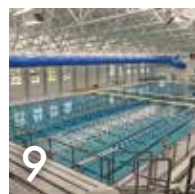
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### Local Government Member Spotlight: City of Alexandria

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# Nothing “boring” to read about here...

HOPE THAT EVERYONE had a nice Thanksgiving and is enjoying the month of December and all its festivities! Please note that VML will close its offices from December 23 to January 3 so that staff can enjoy their families and get some rest before the General Assembly returns. It will be a “short” session, so we are preparing to stay on our toes!



**Wednesday, Jan. 4, 2023 • VRSA Richmond, Va.**

Congratulations to all our elected officials who ran for office. Your willingness to serve our localities is much appreciated. I may be biased, but I really believe that the work done by local elected officials is what makes Virginia the amazing place we all love. Thank you for your service! Both new and returning officials should be aware that VML is holding a **Virginia Local Elected Officials Conference on January 4**. You have the option of attending in person in Richmond or virtually. This event will include Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and Conflict of Interest Act (COIA) training – both of which are required for newly elected officials. All elected officials must complete these trainings every two years.



**Thursday, Jan. 19, 2023 • Omni Richmond Hotel**

Another upcoming event for local elected officials is the **Local Government Day on January 19** in Richmond. This annual, day-long event provides legislative updates and gives local government officials and staff time to explain issues affecting their communities to General Assembly members before they make their decisions. The day concludes with an evening reception and an opportunity to network with state officials and other local elected officials.

To get ready for the 2023 General Assembly Session, please review the VML legislative program and share it with your delegation as soon as you can! The full program is available at [www.vml.org/advocacy/general-assembly/legislative-program](http://www.vml.org/advocacy/general-assembly/legislative-program).

It's very appropriate that we focus on transportation in this issue of *VTC* as one of the top priorities for VML this session will be to ensure that transportation is fully funded. How important is transportation? Well, during this past month I have taken the train, driven on I-95, I-81, and I-64, and flown out of Virginia's airports...now if I could only ride a bus or pilot a drone before the month is over, I will have done it all!

In all sincerity, transportation infrastructure is important to everyone in Virginia. As I drive and then walk to work each day, I expect that the bridges will be safe, the roads clear of debris and the crosswalks functional. Unless one of those things goes wrong, I don't worry about who is responsible for them or who pays for the repairs – I just expect that they will be handled by people who know what they are doing and have the resources necessary to do it.

In a similar vein, one of our members recently expressed a very legitimate concern to me over secondary roads – he pointed out that during COVID there were a lot of homes being constructed and not a lot of road maintenance. The constant flow of big trucks going on secondary roads caused damage that cannot be repaired by simply repaving. Roads need to be rebuilt so that they will last! It should be some comfort to know that the Virginia Department of Transportation is aware of this issue. VML also partners with the Coalition Against Bigger Trucks to fight to maintain the current truck size and weight laws to limit further damage to Virginia's roads.

As I prepare to drive to northern Virginia tomorrow, I am mindful of how complicated the Virginia-Maryland-DC transportation infrastructure is. While you will read about regional cooperation in the state, it's important to remember that cooperation amongst states is also essential to successful transportation projects. So, with all this in mind, I hope you enjoy this issue about the challenges of running a transportation system!

Happy Holidays – be safe, healthy, and happy!





- Jan. 4, 2023**     **Virginia Local Officials Conference** - VRSA Office, Richmond, VA
- Jan. 11, 2023**    **General Assembly Convenes** - Richmond, VA
- Jan. 19, 2023**    **Local Government Day** - Richmond, VA
- Oct. 7-9, 2023**   **VML Annual Conference** - Norfolk, VA

## PEOPLE



### VML welcomes Keyara Johnson as administrative assistant

**Keyara Johnson**, a Richmond native, began working as a contractor with VML during the summer and accepted a position on VML's team this fall. Before joining the league, Keyara earned bachelor's degrees in Business Management and Marketing at Virginia Tech. During her time at Virginia Tech, she worked as an assistant in the Career and Professional Development department. In Summer 2019, she worked as an Urban Radio Promotions Intern in New York City with Epic Records. During her free time, she works with College Access Collaborative to introduce secondary education to Title I public school students around the Commonwealth.

### Williamsburg Assistant Manager DeWitt honored for economic development work



The Virginia Economic Developers Association (VEDA) has awarded its most prestigious honor to longtime economic development leader and City of Williamsburg Assistant Manager **Michele Mixner DeWitt**.

In her role, DeWitt oversees strategic planning products and leads the city's legislative effort. Prior to assuming that position in July 2021, she spent 16 years as Williamsburg's first economic development director. During that time, she was instrumental in the Prince George Redevelopment Project that

enhanced physical and cultural connections between Williamsburg and William & Mary and created a tourism development fund for the Historic Triangle.

The Cardinal Award recognizes leadership in economic development, outstanding professional accomplishments, and exceptional service to VEDA. The Cardinal Awards were presented at the VEDA Fall Conference in Lynchburg held Sept. 21-23.

DeWitt's nomination letter notes her "true caring and concern for those she comes in contact with. She has consistently mentored and positively influenced the careers of many young economic developers. As a graduate of the LEAD Greater Williamsburg class of 2007, she was responsible for helping the class start and continue to organize the PIPE concert series, which is an annual concert the proceeds of which go toward installing indoor plumbing in residences in Greater Williamsburg that do not currently have indoor plumbing. Most recently, DeWitt personally worked during the COVID crisis to deliver food and critical supplies to the underserved of the Williamsburg area."

DeWitt has served in almost every capacity within VEDA, culminating with a year as its president in 2015. Her leadership was instrumental in securing VEDA's financial future and building the organization's

financial reserves following the last recession. DeWitt holds a Master of Public Administration from VCU and a Bachelor of City Planning from the School of Architecture at the University of Virginia.

### Banks is Harrisonburg's new manager



**Ande Banks**, a lifelong resident of Harrisonburg and a longtime leader in the community, was elevated to the position of city manager during the October 25 council meeting. The appointment is the culmination of a multi-month process that included interviews with candidates from across the country and a wealth of input from community members.

"Time and again, Ande has proven himself to be a caring leader who is dedicated to the City of Harrisonburg staff and the people of our community," Mayor Deanna Reed said in a press release. "He is committed to advancing our mission of making sure all in Harrisonburg receive distinctive, reliable delivery of high-quality city services. There is no one we trust more to lead our organization forward for many years to come with what's best for the Harrisonburg community always at the forefront."

Banks, who has served as interim city manager since January 1 following the resignation of City Manager Eric Campbell, is no stranger to leadership positions in Harrisonburg. The city's deputy city manager since 2017, Banks also previously served as assistant to the city manager from 2016 to 2017, and as the city's director of special projects and grants management from 2009 to 2016. Prior to that, he was district representative to a member of the U.S. House of Representatives from 2001 to 2009.

Banks attended the Senior Executive Institute at the Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service in 2019, completed his Master's in Public Administration from JMU in



## PEOPLE

2017, achieved a Certificate in Local Government Management from Virginia Tech in 2013, and earned a Bachelor of Science in History from Eastern Mennonite University in 1997. He is a member of the International City/County Management Association, the Virginia Local Government Management Association, and the American Society for Public Administration.

### Ashland hires Carey as business development manager



- Carey -

**Bobbie Carey** has joined the Town of Ashland staff as business development manager working on economic development initiatives within the Planning & Community Development Department.

After relocating to Mechanicsville with her family in 2006, Carey worked as a part-time business consultant at the Greater Richmond Small Business Development Center. Her work included counseling small businesses and assisting in marketing and training. Prior to joining the town, Carey was working for a Hanover County-based travel agency planning international travel, managing large group incentive trips for corporations, and marketing the company's services.

Carey is a graduate of Lehigh University in Pennsylvania with a degree in Engineering and holds an MBA from Pace University in New York. Her economic development experience began in Dutchess County, NY in 2001, where she managed a tax incentive program that encouraged businesses of all sizes to create jobs and make investments.

### Roanoke County: Hall to retire as chief of police; Poe begins as assistant economic development director



- Hall -

In September, Roanoke County Chief of Police **Howard B. Hall** announced he will be retiring, effective January 1, 2023.

Hall has worked in law enforcement for nearly 40 years, serving 26 in Baltimore County, MD prior to coming to Roanoke County. He was sworn in as the Roanoke County Police Chief in August

2012 and led a nationally accredited agency of 140 sworn and 16 civilian personnel.

In his time with Roanoke County, Hall is credited with development of an officer wellness program; construction of the Roanoke County Criminal Justice Academy; incorporation of a data-driven approach to crime and traffic safety; officer training for response to individuals in mental health crises; and working alongside the school system to increase safety measures.

During Hall's career he received numerous recognitions, including the Public

Service Award from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and the J. Stannard Baker Award for lifetime contributions to traffic safety from the International Association of Chiefs of Police. He is a 2019 inductee to the Evidence Based Policing Hall of Fame at the Center for Evidence Based Crime Policy at Mason University. Hall is a graduate of the FBI National Academy. He has also served in leadership roles with organizations including the Virginia Association of Chiefs of Police, the Virginia Highway Safety Committee, the International As-



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sociation of Chiefs of Police, the Virginia Alcohol Safety Action Program, the Blue Ridge Transportation Safety Board, and the Washington-Baltimore High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas.

On November 28, Roanoke County native **Danielle Poe** began work as the county's new assistant director of economic development. Previously, Poe worked for the Roanoke Regional Airport Commission where she has been the business manager for nearly three years, managing the day-to-day operations within the organization and over-



- Poe -

Poe earned a Bachelor of Science in Exercise, Sport, And Health Education with a Concentration in Sports Administration from Radford University. She has several

seeing risk management strategies in various projects. She has gained over 15 years of experience in various additional roles including as the economic development specialist for Downtown Roanoke, Inc.

professional affiliations, most notably she serves as chair of Leadership Roanoke Valley, with additional involvement in the Roanoke Boosters Club and Wasena Elementary PTA.

## Beauregard appointed Staunton's city manager



- Beauregard -

In October, the Staunton City Council approved the appointment of **Leslie M. Beauregard** as city manager. Beauregard, who had been serving as the city's interim manager since February of this year, will be the first female city manager in Staunton's history.

In addition to her service as interim city manager, Beauregard served as Staunton's assistant city manager from October 2019 until January 2022. In these capacities, Beauregard played a key leadership role during the city's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, provided financial and budgetary guidance for the city's operational needs, and was the key staff member in organizing the city's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Commission. Before her tenure with Staunton, Ms. Beauregard served the City of Charlottesville as its director of budget and performance management as well as an assistant city manager.

Beauregard received her Master's in Public Administration from Virginia Tech's Center for Public Administration and Policy. She has served as an adjunct instructor for the University of Virginia's Batten School for Leadership and Public Policy as well as an instructor for Virginia Tech's Local Government Management Certificate Program. Beauregard is a member of the International City/County Management Association (ICMA), and she has been an ICMA Credentialed Manager since 2020.

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## Movers and shakers

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## In Memoriam: Gordonsville Councilmember Jim Bradley



**James Lyman Bradley**, 74 of Gordonsville, died Monday October 24, 2022. Born January 21, 1948, in Honolulu, HI, he was the son of the late Willie Warren Bradley and Laurretta Carr Bradley. He was preceded in death by his brother, Ronnie Bradley. Bradley was retired from the U.S. Navy where he served for 21 years. He was a member of the Waddell

Masonic Lodge in Gordonsville, and he served as a councilman for the Town of Gordonsville.

In a press release, the Town of Gordonsville noted that Bradley “made an impression on everyone he met. He was a councilmember who loved his community and fiercely advocated for his town and its residents. His decades of public service have made an impact on countless individuals that will continue well into the future.”

He is survived by his daughter, Wendy Bradley of Orange, two sons, Michael Bradley of Hawaii, Jason Bradley and wife Jen of Somerset, his brother, Bill Bradley and wife Estrella of Long Beach, CA, three grandchildren, Jessica Corbin, Torie Bradley, Lindsay Bradley, one great-grandchild, Anja Kozlica and a host of other relatives and friends.

A funeral service was held on Friday, October 28, at Preddy Funeral Home in Gordonsville. Interment will be at a later date in Arlington National Cemetery.

## In memoriam: Former Charlottesville City Manager Cole Hendrix



On November 15, **Cole Hendrix**, city manager of Charlottesville from 1971-1996, passed away. Recognized as an excellent city manager, Hendrix served the city for 25 years. Most notable among his many accomplishments was his championing of the Downtown Mall even though it was not an idea that was universally supported. Hendrix saw the Downtown Mall as an economic generator that would stem the decline of downtown. The years that followed the creation of the Downtown Mall proved that Hendrix was right.

He was successful in getting the Omni Hotel, which anchors one end of the Downtown Mall, to locate in the city. He was also involved with the creation of the Rivanna Water and Sewer authority and Rivanna Solid Waste Authority and the revenue-sharing agreement between the city, Albemarle County, and the University of Virginia.

After leaving the city, he served as an interim manager, including as interim town manager in Orange. He also served as manager of the Rivanna authorities, and as associate vice president for community relations at the UVa Health Sciences Center.

He was active in the Virginia Local Government Managers Association (VLGMA) and served on the executive committee, as an officer, and as the president in 1987-88. After he retired from the management profession he served as a VLGMA senior advisor to managers across the commonwealth. He was a VLGMA Life Member.

During his tenure as city manager, he provided stable, professional management and leadership. Many in the local government profession in VA benefitted from his knowledge and wise counsel over the years as he mentored many young public administrators. He and his wife Janet continued to be part of the community after his retirement, and he will be remembered for being a stable anchor in Charlottesville’s history.



The VML Voice is the official podcast of the Virginia Municipal League. Each episode explores a different locality or issue but the focus is always on Virginia and the local governments that make the Commonwealth work for everyone.

Contact Rob Bullington, [rbullington@vml.org](mailto:rbullington@vml.org) to suggest topics, ask questions, or inquire about sponsorship opportunities.

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## Herndon project provides vehicle and pedestrian access to Metrorail stop

IN ALIGNMENT WITH THE TOWN of Herndon's plan to provide ready access for vehicles and pedestrians to the northside of Metrorail's Herndon stop on the Silver Line, the town has com-

pleted a \$5.9 million project. The new bus bays provide drop off lanes in both directions along Herndon Parkway. The bays accommodate Fairfax County Connector buses as well as cars. Shelters were also built as part of the project, and a signalized crosswalk at the entrance of the Metrorail promenade allows for safe crossing of Herndon Parkway. Construction began in August 2021 and was completed in October 2022.

Town funding for the project was \$1.2 million. An additional \$1.5 million was funded through use of general bonds. The remaining \$3.2 million was funded through federal, regional, and local grants applied for and secured by the town, to include grants from Northern Virginia Transportation Authority (NVTA), the Federal Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) program and Fairfax County Herndon Metrorail Station Access Management Study (HMSAMS) program.



## Arlington County tests zero emission buses

ARLINGTON COUNTY'S PUBLIC BUS network began testing a zero emissions bus (ZEBs) pilot program in September. The pilot will extend into 2023. According to the county's media release, ZEBs will be driven on select Arlington Transit (ART) routes at designated times and will test battery performance, range, and response to geographic features such as steep hills. The ZEBs will be integrated into bus service routes to allow passengers to give feedback on the rides. Rides on the pilot buses will be free.

Earlier this year, ART received responses from four companies responding to a Request for Information asking bus manufacturers to provide ZEBs for testing. Each company proposed to use a Battery Electric Bus with charging equipment.

This pilot is part of the County's continued commitment to providing safe, reliable public transportation while offering

environmentally responsible options beyond driving to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050. The Zero Emission Bus Pilot supports the implementation of several County programs, including the Community Energy Plan.



## Manassas makes plans for its 150th anniversary

THE CITY OF MANASSAS is giving citizens ample avenues to participate in the city's upcoming 150th anniversary. An online House and Business Tour will allow people to share history, stories and pictures of their historic houses and businesses. People can tell their Manassas story through videos or voice stories recorded by the city's communications team or uploaded to a city website. In a similar vein, the city is asking people to submit historic pictures.

And that's just for starters! The city is also contracting for a piece of public art as part of the anniversary ceremony. In the first phase of the three-part process, artists will submit their qualifications and proposed concepts. Then a selected group of artists will be asked to elaborate on their proposals with complete details on all materials, vendors to be used, any engineering requirements and a final cost proposal. In the final phase, the city will negotiate a final contract with the artist or artists, with the artwork to be completed in 2023.

A complete overview of anniversary celebration plans is posted to the city's website: [www.manassasva.gov](http://www.manassasva.gov).



## Ribbon cutting held for new police department in Vienna

ON SEPTEMBER 2, the Town of Vienna celebrated the town's new police department with a ribbon cutting ceremony. The new building replaces the 1994 structure that had been located at the same address. For the first time in 15 years, all police operations in the Town of Vienna will be under one roof. For years, detectives have operated out of the Vienna town hall basement, the bike team operated out of a basement in a nearby building, and property and evidence were stored in secure storage lockers on another street.

The \$14 million facility includes upgraded technology security measures and a large community room. In addition, the secure areas of the building include a sally port for suspect transfers to and from the station, a firing range for training purposes, an up-to-date crime scene processing facility, dedicated computer server space, secure town archive and evidence storage space, a dispatch center and enough administrative and office space to accommodate all sworn and civilian personnel. Notably, for the first time in the 75-year history of the town's police department, secured parking for all the department's cruisers and officers will be available.

In a press release, Mayor Linda Colbert gave credit for the new facility to Chief Jim Morris. "He worked with the Town Council and staff to prioritize police department needs, and today, we can celebrate a new police station that is safe, secure and will serve the Town of Vienna residents well for many years to come."



## Norfolk awarded for Excellence in Citizen-Centric Reporting

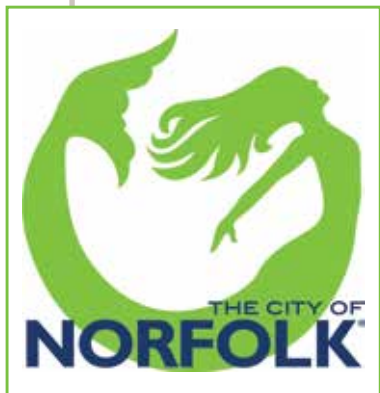
FOR THE FIFTH year in a row, the City of Norfolk has received the Certification of Excellence in Citizen-Centric Reporting from the Association of Government Accountants (AGA).

The goal of the report is to simplify how financial and performance information is presented so that the information is clear, accurate, relevant, and easily accessible. The city's four-page publication contains a high-level overview on the city's Fiscal Year 2021 accomplishments and key measures of progress.

The AGA applauded Norfolk's commitment to good government and responsible fiscal actions and highlighted how the report

provides residents the opportunity to better understand the services provided – and at what cost.

The report can be seen at [www.bit.ly/3CK8GmD](http://www.bit.ly/3CK8GmD).



## City of Richmond receives grant to help reduce community violence

THE CITY OF RICHMOND has been awarded \$1.9 million from the U.S. Department of Justice for its "Youth Shape the Future" program that looks to enhance the city's efforts to reduce gun violence. Richmond was one of only six city/county/tribal governments in the country chosen for the highly competitive enhancement and expansion grants that have the goal of reducing community violence.

The grant furthers the work of the Gun Violence Prevention and Intervention Framework to include youth justice, We Matter RVA, and the implementation of Youth LIFT Messengers. The project will also fund enhancements of the City's Gun Violence Prevention Steering Committee and GVPI Framework through the development of a robust strategic plan.

The grant includes funding for a rigorous three-year independent evaluation of these Gun Violence Prevention initiatives to be led by VCU's Survey and Evaluation Research Lab (SERL). In a press release, the City of Richmond along with its community partners expressed gratitude that "the USDOJ believed in the work that is already being done and understood that the infusion of \$1.9M will only help in making a bigger dent in changing lives and generations."







## Hampton Aquaplex swim center celebrates its opening

ON OCTOBER 29, the City of Hampton's new Aquaplex opened with fanfare courtesy Olympic gold medalist Cullen Jones, a four-time Olympic medalist and the first African American swimmer to hold a world record. Working with USA Swimming Foundation's Make a Splash Program, Jones is dedicated to promoting the importance of minorities learning to swim.

The Aquaplex is a 62,739 square foot state-of-the-art facility including an eight-lane, 50-meter competition pool, and a 25-yard programming pool. Along with national and regional events, the

Aquaplex will accommodate local school swim teams and residents. Hampton City Schools' second graders will learn to swim as part of their PE classes, and the facility will also offer event rentals, fitness classes, swim lessons, and open-swim activities for all ages.

The October celebration included demonstrations of swimming, diving, water polo, and artistic swimming; self-guided tours of the facility; and interactive games and giveaways throughout the day. In addition, participants had a sneak-peek tour of Splash Down Park, which will open next summer.

## "Made in Bristol" branding supports local producers

THE CITY OF BRISTOL in partnership with local non-profits has created a "Made in Bristol" program to help local producers and manufacturers promote their products outside of the local community. The brand includes all small-scale production and manufacturing businesses in Virginia and Tennessee.

The "Made in Bristol" concept began with a Virginia Main Street pilot study in 2019 that identified and mapped small-scale producers and that recommended creating a coordinated membership program. That program now includes a branding and marketing campaign, website, training, and grant opportunities and a visit widget. Furthermore, all locally produced goods are now shipped with the newly created Made in Bristol promotional sticker.

A grant from the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development supported the creation of the brand – formalizing the community and expanding its reach. The grant funds



also provided a total of \$65,000 in capacity building grants that went directly to local producers. For example, Southern Churn, an ice cream and candy shop located in Bristol, VA that specializes in homemade fudge, received such a grant and has since hired three new employees, bought two new freezers, updated their website,

added online ordering capabilities, and enhanced their "Fundraising with Fudge" program, which enables them to support local organizations such as schools and churches.

The training element proved especially timely as businesses emerged from COVID lockdown and adapted their business models to the post-pandemic realities. The educational opportunities offered through the program focused on specific needs

for small-scale production, such as revamping existing websites and establishing ecommerce functionality.

View the makers in Bristol at [www.discoverbristol.org/discover/made-in-bristol](http://www.discoverbristol.org/discover/made-in-bristol).

## Fairfax Village in the City program to support residents in need

THE CITY OF FAIRFAX has taken the adage "It Takes a Village" to a new level by creating the Fairfax Village in the City. The Village is a volunteer-driven program designed to facilitate access to services and resources that help city adults with disabilities and those who are aged 55 and older stay independent while remaining in their homes.

The Village does not replace existing supports and services currently available to city residents through Fairfax County and local nonprofits. Instead, it recruits and schedules vetted city-based

volunteers to provide personal services like check-in calls and visits, basic and seasonal yard assistance, technology assistance, and transportation to appointments. The goal of the Village is to support healthy aging by sharing useful information, strengthening personal connections between neighbors, and providing opportunities for social interaction.



# Priority: Transportation

By Rob Bullington

*The General Assembly must make transportation funding whole with a consistent and sufficient revenue source or with state general funds after discarding a dedicated transportation revenue stream as a part of the elimination of the state sales tax on groceries during the 2022 Session. A decent transportation system is fundamental for attracting and retaining businesses, residents, and tourism. If not addressed, this funding loss will have a long-term negative impact on transportation projects statewide. The rise in project costs due to increased inflation will compound this impact.*

The above statement is included as a top priority in VML's 2023 Legislative Program. But don't just take our word for it! In this issue of *VTC*, we've got several folks who can tell you why transportation is important, why we need to ensure it is properly funded, and all the things that can be accomplished when localities, regions, and the state work together to make big things happen.

Our journey begins with HRTAC Executive Director **Kevin Page** who explains how the Hampton Roads region came together under a regional authority to make big dreams come true.

No road trip can go far without some spending money, but those dollars aren't going as far as they used to! **Jim Regimbal** from Fiscal Analytics offers some perspective on how the Commonwealth's wealth fares when it comes to transportation.

They say you should never pick up strangers, so we take a moment to get to know Virginia's newest regional transportation authority, the CVTA. PlanRVA Director of Transportation **Chet Parsons** helps us get acquainted.

**Erica Hawksworth** from the NVTVA helps us to remember to send postcards with a great photo spread of her organization's busy year of breaking ground and cutting ribbons.

Finally, we hope for the best but plan for the worst with the experts at the **Virginia Risk Sharing Association** who want to make sure your locality has the right coverage for its fleet.

## What about Interstate 81?

During production, this issue of *VTC* got very big, very fast. But fans of Interstate 81 can rest assured, we haven't forgotten about any of its 324.92 Virginia miles. Stay tuned for updates on 181 projects in the December issue of *VTC*!





# The long and winding road:

## How the Hampton Roads region stepped up to deliver generational transportation projects

**I**N HAMPTON ROADS, signs of progress in transportation are everywhere. Highway construction cones are popping up like ever-blooming orange flowers all over Interstate 64. Construction cranes dot the horizon along highways. A new high-rise bridge towers over the Intercoastal Waterway even as an enormous tunnel boring machine makes its way under the Hampton Roads navigable channel. Buses show up more often on the region's core transit routes where hundreds of new bus shelters have arisen to welcome riders.

These details are part of the larger story about how a regional government is addressing congestion relief and improving the economic vitality and quality of life for 1.7 million people in the Hampton Roads region. While the pace of improvements seems to have taken on a new life in recent years, the full story goes back much further. For those interested in learning how to bring some of this energy to their own region, it's a story worth hearing in full.

### The evolution of a regional government: A 20-year journey in the making

The original U.S. Interstate Highway System was proclaimed complete in 1992, but in the decades that followed, the Hampton Roads region continued to experience rising transportation issues. Improvement projects promised some relief, but even after the Federal Highway Administration and VDOT completed the last major I-64 improvement project in 2009, the region continued to experience rising congestion. The federal or state funding necessary for Hampton Roads to pave or bus its way out of its congestion crisis was simply not available and the list of needs was growing larger each year.

Thelma Drake, who served in Virginia's House of Delegates and the U. S. House of Representatives for thirteen years, remembers that "Hampton Roads always

VDOT



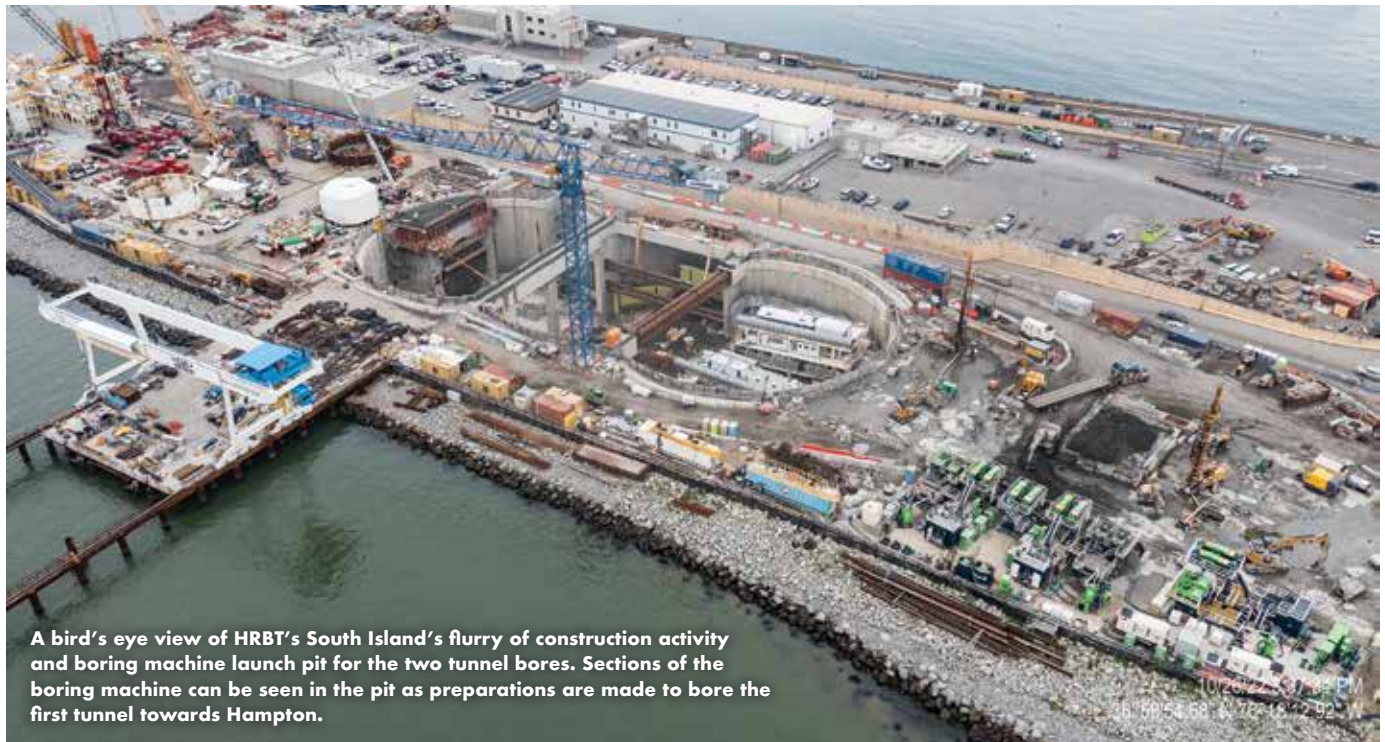
HRBT South Island looking towards Norfolk before HRBT's expansion project began.

VDOT



HRBT South Island looking towards Norfolk today. The South and North Islands have been expanded making room for the two new tunnels. The existing South Island to Norfolk trestles will be replaced by one eight lane bridge to accommodate all traffic.

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**A bird's eye view of HRBT's South Island's flurry of construction activity and boring machine launch pit for the two tunnel bores. Sections of the boring machine can be seen in the pit as preparations are made to bore the first tunnel towards Hampton.**

came to me with an unprioritized project list and an ask for \$9 billion. It was easy to say 'no' as neither Congress nor the General Assembly had that much funding available for one region. They needed to prioritize their projects and come back with one or two projects for funding at a time."

In 2012, the Hampton Roads Transportation Planning Organization (HRTPO) approved a list of priority projects as part of the region's long-range transportation plan. The initial list included improvements to several regional highways, bridges, and tunnels with a total cost of \$9 billion. Although HRTPO had succeeded in identifying and prioritizing the region's transportation needs, there was still not enough money to address those needs.

During the time HRTPO was developing its list of priorities, the General Assembly set in motion a near two-decade long effort to identify funding and governance to address highway and transit needs for the Hampton Roads region. This was driven in large part by the increasing congestion at the Hampton Roads Bridge Tunnel (HRBT) where backups of four to five miles were increasingly the norm.

In 2001, then Senator Frank Wagner carried legislation that created the Third Crossing Commission to study the traffic woes in Hampton Roads. "At that time a new crossing was being considered as a way to relieve pressure on the HRBT," recalls Wagner, who served 28 years in the General Assembly's House and Senate. "The study determined that expanding the existing HRBT, as opposed to a new third crossing, would be less expensive and easier to get the requested permits. The Third Crossing Commission also determined that this project would cost between \$3 and \$4 billion. This figure is far more than our region would expect from our normal allocation of transportation trust fund dollars."

Wagner remembers that there were two choices: "We could do nothing, traffic would continue to build, our local economy would suffer, and we would risk losing valuable military assets due to our increasing inability to move goods and services; or we could create a regional source of funding to expand HRBT and take care of other critical road infrastructure projects."

In 2002, a bipartisan majority of the General Assembly recognized that the existing, statewide transportation funding allocation

process did not address the very different needs of Virginia's geographic regions. They created the Hampton Roads Transportation District Fund as part of a regional referendum effort. Pierce Homer, Virginia's deputy secretary of transportation at the time, who went on to service as Virginia's secretary of transportation from 2005 – 2010, recalls that "while the 2002 referendum failed, the concept of dedicated regional revenues had gained bipartisan support."

A second attempt in 2007 passed with bipartisan support and created dedicated regional funding for Hampton Roads. This measure was subsequently invalidated by the Virginia Supreme Court.

In 2012, the General Assembly passed HB 2 which established competitive priority multi-modal ground transportation funding for statewide and VDOT district specific projects. This program soon became known as Smart-Scale.

Finally, in 2013 the General Assembly hit a home run when it passed HB 2313, a major funding package to address both statewide and regional needs.

Sean Connaughton, former Virginia secretary of transportation, who had a hand in drafting HB 2313 for Hampton Roads, recalls

that addressing the needs associated with large projects dominated the discussions between the Administration and the region. "Incredibly, there was opposition to using regional funds for transit," he remembers. "After a lot of back room fighting, transit was dropped."

Even with transit off the table for the time being (see sidebar), the funding required to address highway congestion in Hampton Roads was voluminous. Chris Jones, who served in the General Assembly's House of Delegates for 22 years and helped negotiate HB 2313 observes: "Creating a long-term regional funding mechanism to address the highest priority needs of the region was the top priority. The next

## What about transit?

THE HAMPTON ROADS transit needs, neglected by design in 2013, were addressed in 2020 by legislation creating the Hampton Roads Regional Transit Fund. This fund is administered by the Hampton Roads Transportation Accountability Commission to support network transit projects and operations in localities connected by Hampton Roads Transit (HRT).





The 757 Express launched in October 2022 provides more frequent bus service on the core connected HRT system. HRTAC funding supported new bus purchases and service operations.

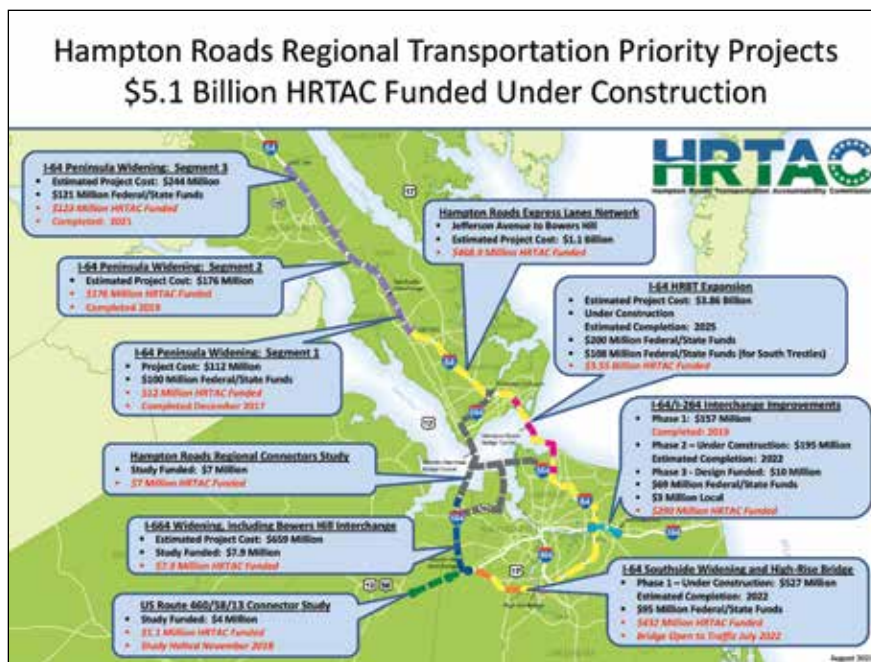


New bus shelters with solar lighting are HRTAC funded improvements to the HRT system.

VDOT



Then HRTAC Chair Michael Hipple and VDOT Commissioner Stephen Brich shake hands after signing the historic HRBT funding agreement, the largest single value transportation project undertaken in the history of the Commonwealth. (L-R) HRTAC Executive Director Kevin Page, Governor Northam, Secretary of Transportation Valentine, and HRBT Project Director Jim Utterback look on.



priority was to ensure that the monies generated could only be used as intended.”

To address concerns related to the use of the funds, HB 2313 established the Hampton Roads Transportation Fund and stipulated that it be used solely for new construction projects on new or existing roads, bridges, and tunnels, as approved by the HRTPO (changed in 2014 to the Hampton Roads Transportation Accountability Commission).

With the funding mechanism in place, it remained to be determined how the funds would be administered. “The HRTPO was a placeholder for the administration of the new regional funds in HB 2313,” recalls Jones. “We were informed by the experiences of NVTC and NVTa and set out to address the inherent needs and establish a governance model that best fit Hampton Roads. It had to truly be an accountable commission, hence the requirement that the chief elected officer of each jurisdiction serve as its representative. It was also important to have General Assembly representation.”

During 2014, the General Assembly passed the enabling legislation creating the Hampton Roads Transportation Accountability Commission (HRTAC) including accountability measures for the 2013 regional revenues in Hampton Roads. Under the new law, a

23-member board of 10 mayors, four county board member appointees, five legislators, and four members of the Executive Branch would procure, finance, build, and operate highway, bridge, tunnel, and transit projects in Hampton Roads. For the inaugural cohort it was an immense responsibility that required strong leadership. It took some careful prodding from the Administration and legislators, multiple votes to elect its first chair, and then a careful process to hire an executive director, but by mid-2015 HRTAC was ready to roll. Soon thereafter it stepped on the accelerator pedal and has never looked back!

Reflecting on the fast pace of HRTAC, Michael Hipple, James City County supervisor and former HRTAC chair and current HRTAC Finance Committee chair says, “If you are going to be a bear, be a grizzly.”

Those seeking evidence of Hipple’s willingness to go big, should consider that during his stint as HRTAC’s chair he was signatory to the historic funding agreement for the HRBT project. In fact, at present over \$5.1 billion of HRTAC controlled monies support construction contracts for congestion relief improvements, and \$62.2 million support transit improvements for Hampton Roads Transit’s core connected network.



## The low hanging fruit: HRTAC's first six projects

Knowing that all the projects on the list of transportation priorities could not be started at once, HRTAC and VDOT determined that six projects should take precedence and that the \$1 billion in funding necessary to complete them all was within reach. These projects included:

- The three distinct segments of the I-64 peninsula widening project
- Phases I and II of the I-64/I-264 interchange east bound to Witchduck Road
- The I-64 widening southside high-rise bridge project

In total, just under 200 lane miles of new capacity and rehabilitated interstate would be delivered in just seven years. Indeed, we are on the cusp of realizing the success of these first six projects which broke ground in 2015 and will be fully completed by the end of this winter. All these projects were primarily funded by HRTAC with VDOT participation on several projects through Smart Scale program awards.



Rear view of Mary the HRBT tunnel boring machine, named after Mary Winston Jackson, a NASA Scientist and Mathematician.

HERRENKNECHT

## Speaking of HRTAC...

*"HRTAC has been a model of regional cooperation that has exceeded even the most optimistic expectations for how a region comes together to solve its problems."*

-Former member of the Virginia House of Delegates Chris Jones

*"Starting up a new commission that is addressing today's transportation needs and will still be there for future generation's transportation needs in Hampton Roads was the high point of my political career. I can look back and say I helped create and build an organization that will continue to serve the citizens of Hampton Roads long after I am gone."*

-Former member of the Senate of Virginia Frank Wagner

*"Working in partnership with the regional leaders and the state to achieve a shared vision has shown great results. I am very proud to be a part of the generational projects that the regional leadership through HRTAC has brought forward in our relationships with the HRTPO, the Commonwealth, and HRT in such a short period of time."*

-Mayor of the City of Hampton and HRTAC Chair Donnie Tuck

## The Big Kahua: The I-64 Hampton Roads Bridge Tunnel project blues in

With the first six projects underway, the time was ripe for the region and VDOT to tackle what was to become the largest single value transportation project undertaken in the history of the Commonwealth: The I-64 Hampton Roads Bridge Tunnel (HRBT) Expansion Project.

To inform the HRBT decision makers, HRTAC funded a VDOT supplemental environmental impact study and evaluation of 14 elements of the next "Third Crossing" of the Hampton Roads Channel. At a pivotal moment in October 2016, the HRTPO approved the HRBT project as a priority highway congestion project (albeit, with conditions).

Of that moment in 2016, HRTPO/HRPDC Executive Director Bob Crum, recalls: "By selecting the HRBT project as the preferred alternative, it allowed the region the funding to also move forward with a group of projects that would represent a generational investment in the region's interstate highway network including the I-64 Peninsula, I-64/I-264 interchange and High-Rise Bridge/I-64 Southside projects. As part of this consensus building process, the region also provided the HRTPO funding through HRTAC to evaluate the next group of projects that might be considered as regional priority project."

Norfolk Mayor Kenneth Alexander, who has a combined 14 years of elected service in Virginia's Senate and House, notes that "It was extremely important for the region to continue the evaluation of future improvement opportunities to solve our transportation challenges."

Mayor Alexander, who began his role in Norfolk in May 2016, led the October 2016 negotiations that influenced the HRBT decision

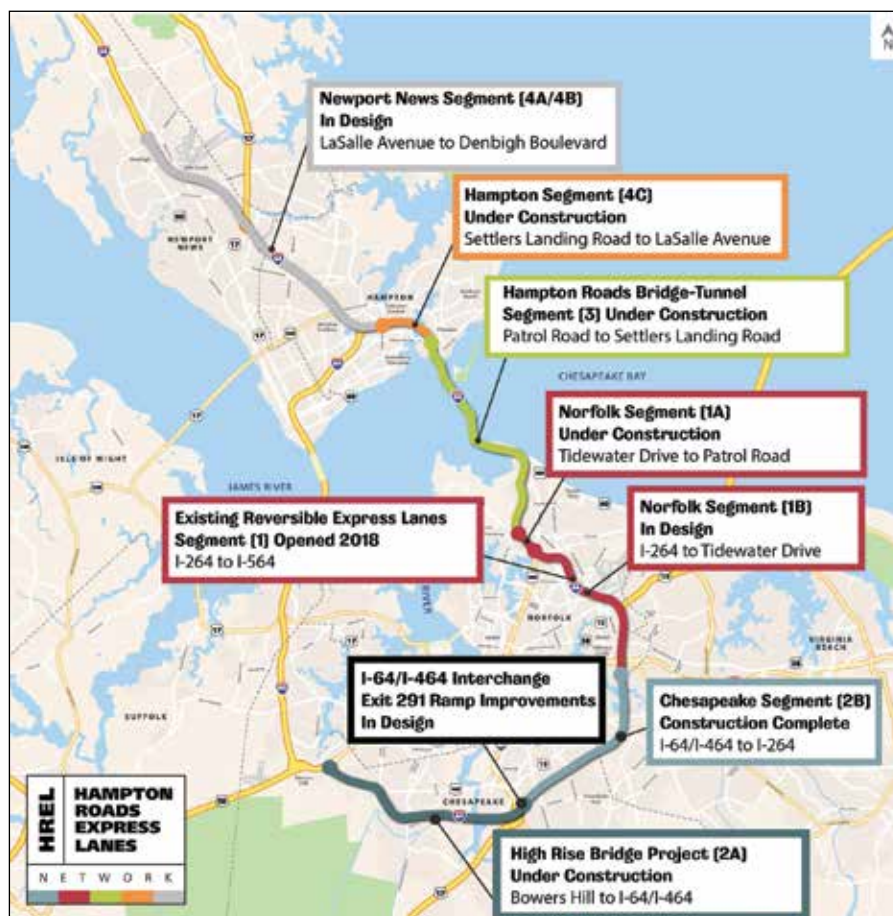


to include HRTAC funding in further evaluation of the Bowers Hill Interchange/I-664 and the next set of mega transportation solutions for Hampton Roads that would follow HRBT. The HRTPO's decision for HRBT and future projects was backed up by a commitment from HRTAC for \$3.56 billion of the \$3.86 billion needed for the HRBT project to be completed during 2026 as well as funding for the Bowers Hill and Regional Connector studies.

## Get in the HOT lane: The Hampton Roads Express Lanes

The Hampton Roads Express Lanes Network (HRELN) was developed to make it possible for HRTAC to finance a portion of its commitment for the HRBT and to ensure reliable congestion relief over a 44-mile-long section of I-64. In 2020, the General Assembly conditionally extended the authority of HRTAC to include the governance of HRELN. This authority included collection of toll revenues from the managed lanes network being developed by HRTAC and VDOT on I-64 between West Jefferson Avenue in Newport News through the HRBT to the Bowers Hill Interchange in Chesapeake.

Like the I-95 toll lanes in Northern Virginia, the HRELN High Occupancy Toll (HOT) lanes will be an option for drivers willing to pay a toll with free HOT access for qualified high occupancy vehicles. In August 2020, HRTAC and VDOT entered into a master agreement for the HRELN to define the roles and responsibilities of the parties. HRTAC has now set the initial tolling policy and begun funding HRELN project segments to be constructed by VDOT. The HOT lanes are slated to be in operation by the completion of the HRBT project.



The Hampton Roads Express Lanes Network of High Occupancy Toll ("HOT") lanes will be adjacent to the general-purpose lanes with free access for qualified high occupancy vehicles.

## Project financing and COVID-19: Moving, moving, moving. Keep those projects moving!

While the world slowed to a crawl during the pandemic, and many infrastructure projects were halted or delayed, HRTAC and VDOT forged ahead. All HRTAC funded construction projects kept pace with their project schedules to deliver nearly 200 lane miles of combined highway capacity and rehabilitation improvements for congestion relief by the end of 2022. Also, during this time, HRTAC kept its funds flowing to support the HRBT project.

How was this accomplished?

HRTAC and its financial advisors developed an approach that tested the impacts of COVID-19 and the availability of HRTAC controlled funds. HRTAC took advantage of unprecedented low interest rates from 2018 through 2022 to implement a debt financing plan that produced \$4.07 billion in debt and federal TIFIA loan revenues. These revenues were issued and closed for the most part during the pandemic. Moreover, HRTAC issued debt and borrowed federal funds at a time when the interest rates were well below construction cost escalation.

"The prudent and active financing activities of HRTAC saved the region around \$551 million in present value dollars in financing costs," according to David Miller of PFM Financial Advisors.

"HRTAC has never missed a payment" said Chris Hall, VDOT's Hampton Roads district engineer.

## The road (and transit rides) ahead

With HRTAC serving up the funding, and VDOT completing the work, the next set of highway projects to address congestion in the Hampton Roads region is already in development. HRTAC's \$11.4 billion 2045 Long Range Funding Plan includes the delivery of improvements to I-264 and the Independence Boulevard Interchange; I-64/I-664 Bowers Hill Interchange and I-664 to College Drive; I-64/I-464 Interchange; I-64 Denbigh Boulevard; and improvements to major interstate feeder corridors in Portsmouth and Chesapeake.

HRTAC and HRT will continue to develop core connected transit operations and capital projects through the HRRTF program's \$1 billion 2045 Long Range Funding Plan. But it's not time yet to tell that story. For the time being, the 1.7 million people in Hampton Roads can rest assured that their regional leadership is committed to addressing congestion relief and to improving their economic vitality and quality of life.

**About the Author:** Kevin Page has 37 years of executive and senior leadership experience in the transportation industry in Virginia. Kevin joined HRTAC as its first executive director in August 2015.

# Are Virginia's revenues adequate to meet its transportation infrastructure needs?

By Jim Regimbal

IT'S FAIR TO SAY that most Virginians don't lie awake at night pondering the question posed in the title of this article. So long as the potholes get filled (sometimes) and the bridges don't collapse (ever), the buses run on time (mostly) and the rush hour traffic keeps moving (because it's hard to rush when sitting still), the typical person doesn't worry how the state will pay for it all. However – at the risk of causing the reader to lose sleep – it's important to remember that our population is growing, the number of vehicle-miles traveled is increasing, and citizens expect economic development, expanded public transportation options, and new mobility options. Does the Commonwealth have a transportation funding approach that addresses the increasing burden of maintenance coupled with the rising cost of construction driven by materials and wage inflation? And, since transportation funding is set out in annually updated Six-Year Financial Plans (SYFPs), the question isn't simply "Do we have the funds allocated for tomorrow?" Rather, the question is, "Do we have the funds allocated for 6 years' worth of tomorrows?"

## Let's start with a bit of perspective...

**The Reassuring:** State transportation revenue losses were not as dire as originally predicted from the COVID-19 shutdowns. In addition, the recently adopted federal Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) provided over \$2 billion in additional transportation funding.

**The Worrisome:** Despite the above reassurances, available revenues cannot meet all Virginia's transportation needs. Total transportation revenues in the latest Fiscal Year 2023-28 SYFP declined by \$1.76 billion from the final FY 2022-27 plan (See Table 1). One major factor in the reduced 2023-28 Six Year Improvement Plan (SYIP) outlook is the \$741 million loss of revenues resulting from the 0.5% elimination of sales taxes on food for home consumption adopted during the 2022 General Assembly session (see sidebar).

Table 1

Six-Year Transportation Plan Revenue Outlook (\$ Bil.)				
	Original FY 2022-27	Revised FY 2022-27	FY 2023-28	Difference
State Revenues	32.43	\$35.79	\$34.87	-\$0.92
Regional/WMETA	5.43	\$5.97	\$6.10	\$0.13
Debt Financing	2.02	\$2.02	\$0.90	-\$1.12
Federal Revenues	7.16	\$9.69	\$9.84	\$0.15
Total SYIP Revenues	\$47.04	\$53.47	\$51.71	-\$1.76

## Impact from the Elimination of the Grocery Sales and Use Tax

THE VIRGINIA TRANSPORTATION OMNIBUS legislation enacted by the 2020 General Assembly affected how the Commonwealth addresses transportation funding in several ways. It increased our transportation revenues, tied our gas tax to inflation, and began transitioning transportation funding towards a more sustainable future. The legislation also increased transportation funding transparency so that, for the most part, we can closely track every dollar after it enters the Commonwealth's transportation coffers and flows downstream. This transparency allows us to estimate with some certainty how the \$741 million reduction from the elimination of the sales and use tax on groceries impacts our communities and transportation modes.

For an example, let's consider the City of Harrisonburg. If we run the reduced funding through the state's transportation funding formula then we can estimate that over the course of the Six Year Financial Plan, the elimination of the grocery sales tax will reduce Harrisonburg Transit's operating funds by nearly \$350,000. Theoretically, it will also lower street maintenance funds to Harrisonburg by \$9.7 million. Indeed, the elimination of the grocery sales tax will leave a \$378 million maintenance funding hole statewide. However, since maintenance has priority over construction the CTB has the discretion to supplement roadway maintenance funds with roadway construction funds. Of course, this means that there will be less resources to add roadway capacity or deal with increasing costs (mentioned elsewhere in this article).

## Robbing construction to pay maintenance

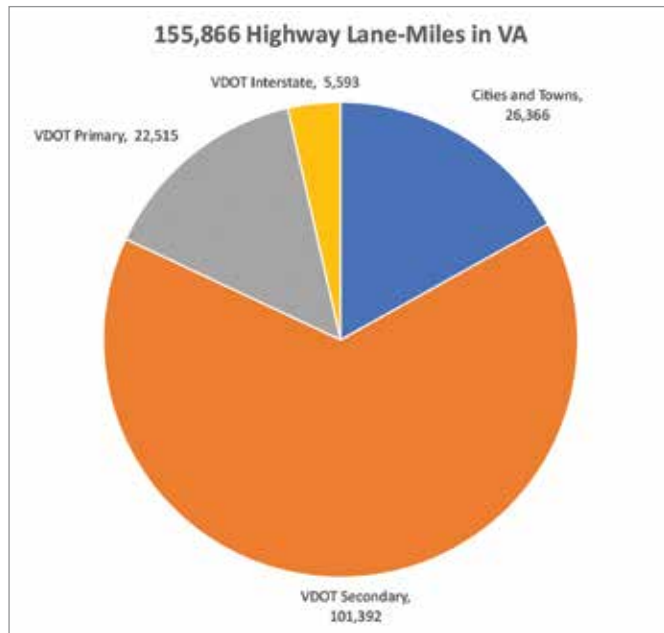
Projects to maintain our transportation infrastructure take precedence over projects to expand that infrastructure. Certainly, Virginia has a large transportation infrastructure to maintain. VDOT and the cities and towns in Virginia are responsible for maintaining nearly 156,000 lane-miles in Virginia (see Chart 1). In addition, over 21,000

bridges require maintenance. This is particularly true in the Hampton Roads region where complicated special structures such as tunnels and movable bridges must also be maintained. Furthermore, our public transportation and rail systems need operating support and improvements to encourage additional ridership.

So, there's no shortage of infrastructure maintenance to occupy the state's available transportation dollars. To make matters worse, several factors are conspiring to erode the real purchasing power of those dollars. These factors include recent high inflation in material costs and tight labor conditions caused by rapidly rising



Chart 1



contractor wages. For evidence, look no further than the 17 percent increase in VDOT's bid prices from November 2020 to August 2022 due to increasing costs of raw materials, skilled labor, trucking, and shipping.<sup>1</sup>

We know that transportation maintenance and operation needs will continue to increase faster than revenues will grow, especially in a high inflationary environment. As such, it's safe to predict that the funding available for new construction will continue to decrease for the foreseeable future.

Fans of new transportation construction projects may ask "What about Smart Scale? Won't that help?"

Unfortunately, funding available for Smart Scale – a program that receives 40 percent of available transportation construction funds – has never been close to meeting application requests (see Table 2). Smart Scale distributes available funding by evaluating and scoring both statewide and construction district highway, transit, rail, and bikeway/pedestrian applications based on how a project improves

Table 2

Smart Scale Applications and Funding (\$ Bil.)					
	FY 2017	FY 2018	FY 2020	FY 2022	FY 2024
	Round 1	Round 2	Round 3	Round 4	Round 5
Funding Requested	\$7.20	\$9.70	\$7.00	\$6.30	\$7.70
Funding Allocated	\$1.42	\$1.03	\$0.86	\$1.39	?

Table 2.1 (\$ Mil.)

Round 5 Smart Scale Funding Requests By District				
District	Largest Request Project	Largest Request	Projects Requested	All Requests
Bristol	I-81 Exit 77 Interchange J-Ramp Reconfiguration	\$218.0	22	\$515.0
Culpeper	Spring Creek/Camp Creek/Route 15 Intersection Improvements	\$32.5	38	\$495.0
Fredericksburg	I-95 Eight-Lane Widening NB and SB B/T Exit 130 and Exit 126	\$134.5	46	\$485.0
Hampton Roads	Centerville Turnpike Widening	\$311.2	59	\$1,020.0
Lynchburg	Connector Road Expansion at Berry Hill	\$78.2	30	\$470.0
N Virginia	Town Center Parkway Underpass	\$252.0	38	\$1,820.0
Richmond	I-64 Gap: Exit 205 to Exit 211	\$248.5	88	\$1,780.0
Salem	Cambria Street to North Franklin Street Connector Route	\$38.3	48	\$745.0
Staunton	Exit 317 Interchange Improvement Project	\$35.5	42	\$335.0
		<b>\$1,348.7</b>	<b>411</b>	<b>\$7,665.0</b>

## Transportation Infrastructure Needs

safety, reduces congestion, increases accessibility, contributes to economic development, promotes efficient land use, and affects the environment. It is still uncertain how much funding will be available for Round 5 funding requests in FY 2024 (see Table 2.1). However, what is certain is that there will be a large gap between funding requests and available revenue.

## Revenue: It isn't what it used to be

New construction and public transportation allocations are expected to decline by nearly \$2.2 billion, while maintenance allocations are expected to rise by nearly \$600 million in the state's new 2023-28 SYIP (see Table 3 on the next page). Moreover, the buying power of these allocations has dropped substantially due to inflation over the last year.

In FY 2023, 85 percent of the \$4.7 billion in expected state transportation revenues are from motor fuel taxes (30.4%), motor vehicle sales (25.5%), and retail sales taxes (28.7%). The current state SYIP estimates that state transportation revenues will only increase to \$4.8 billion by FY 2028.<sup>2</sup> There is little growth expected in the major state transportation revenue sources (see Table 4 on the next page). This means there will be a 2% increase in revenue during a period where 5%+ annualized CPI is possible and the recent 17% growth in construction bids could continue to rise. Regional pass-thru dollars also rely on a 0.7 percent statewide sales tax levy and an 8-cent regional gas tax levy. Expect the retail sales tax estimates to be revised in December by the loss of tax revenue from food for home consumption. Remaining state revenues that come from license and registration fees (7.7%), insurance premiums (4.3%), recordation taxes (1.7%), and a highway use fee for electric/hybrid vehicles (1.4%) are unlikely to change the equation as currently constructed.

## Approaches to sustainable transportation funding in the coming age of electric vehicles

In 2019, the Secretary of Transportation issued a report to the General Assembly entitled "Transportation Funding Sustainability"<sup>3</sup> in response to a request to examine (i) the impact of increased fuel efficiency and increased use of electric vehicles (EV) on transportation revenues, and (ii) options to provide a sustainable funding stream for transportation infrastructure. This report detailed transportation revenues – particularly for motor fuel taxes – that were not keeping pace with inflation or increases in vehicle-miles travelled. The report also detailed various options the state could take to respond to expected higher fuel efficiency and adoption of electric vehicle trends.

In response, the General Assembly increased state motor fuel taxes by 5 cents on both July 1, 2020 and July 1, 2021. As recommended by the sustainability report, the state motor fuel tax is now indexed to inflation to provide a transportation funding bridge. The statewide regional 7.6 cent gas tax was also indexed to inflation. Including indexing, the current effective Virginia motor fuels tax is 36 cents per gallon.

## Transportation Infrastructure Needs

This increase has brought Virginia more in line with other states.

While electric vehicles currently represent a small percentage of the overall vehicle fleet, consumer preferences, auto manufacturers' investments in new models, and technological improvements will lead to increased adoption of electric vehicles in the Commonwealth as in other states. Recent estimates indicate that electric vehicles could comprise up to 50 percent of new vehicle sales by 2030 and all new cars by 2040.<sup>4</sup> As such, Virginia's motor fuel tax increases will not be adequate to keep pace with maintaining and improving the states' transportation network.

Additional transportation funding sources may need to be considered, particularly to offset the \$137 million per year loss from the repeal of the state grocery tax. In 2020, Virginia did adopt a highway use fee for electric vehicles comprised of "85 percent of the amount of taxes paid on fuel used by a vehicle with a combined fuel economy of 23.7 miles per gallon for the average number of miles traveled by a passenger vehicle". However, this fee will provide less revenue than a traditional motor fuel tax and is currently not a major source of revenue.

Other sources of revenue examined by the 2019 Sustainability Report included moving to vehicle-miles travelled charges, adopting more usage-dependent toll charges, and enacting higher registration fees for electric vehicles. Vehicle registration fees were lowered by \$10 in 2020. However, none of the revenue alternatives discussed in the 2019 Sustainability Report would make a significant difference in overall transportation revenues.

Another approach would be to raise the motor vehicle sales tax rate of 4.15 percent to the level of the statewide retail sales tax rate of 6 percent, which would yield about \$500 million per year.

## The road ahead

Virginia uses a variety of revenues to fund maintenance operations and construction of roads across the Commonwealth. Over the last several years, Virginia has improved our transportation financing systems through more sustainable revenues, and more transparent resource allocations, such as Smart Scale. Still, revenues are not at the point of meeting all our critical needs. The question going forward is whether we are going to squander hard won improvements to our transportation finance system or are we going to use these recent gains as a bridge to an even better system of transportation infrastructure that places Virginia's roads, bridges, and public transportation among the best in the nation.

There is always a degree of uncertainty in predicting Virginia's

**Table 3 (\$ Mil.)**

	FY 2022-27	FY 2023-28	
	<u>SYIP Allocations</u>	<u>SYIP Allocations</u>	<u>Difference</u>
<b>Construction</b>	<b>\$18,941.6</b>	<b>\$16,960.8</b>	<b>-\$1,980.8</b>
<b>Maintenance &amp; Operations</b>	<b>\$14,560.0</b>	<b>\$15,146.4</b>	<b>\$586.4</b>
<b>Public Transportation</b>	<b>\$3,923.3</b>	<b>\$3,716.4</b>	<b>-\$206.9</b>
Administration	\$3,200.8	\$3,310.9	\$110.1
Debt Service	\$2,740.5	\$2,473.6	-\$266.9
VA Passenger Rail Authority	\$1,418.5	\$1,312.9	-\$105.6
Toll Programs	\$575.5	\$585.4	\$9.9
Special Structures	\$475.6	\$504.4	\$28.8
Port Trust Fund	\$340.8	\$339.8	-\$1.0
Other Agencies and Transfers	\$326.4	\$303.5	-\$22.9
Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT)	\$240.4	\$238.0	-\$2.4
Airport Trust Fund	\$202.7	\$205.7	\$3.0
DMV	\$149.5	\$142.0	-\$7.5
Space Flight Authority	<u>\$165.4</u>	<u>\$134.9</u>	<u>-\$30.5</u>
<b>Subtotal Operating Programs</b>	<b>\$47,261.0</b>	<b>\$45,374.7</b>	<b>-\$1,886.3</b>
<b>Pass Thru Programs:</b>			
Northern VA Transportation Fund	\$2,353.1	\$2,412.0	\$58.9
Hampton Roads Transportation Fund	\$1,504.8	\$1,546.3	\$41.5
Central VA Transportation Fund	\$1,180.2	\$1,211.6	\$31.4
WMATA	\$931.5	\$934.6	\$3.1
Hampton Roads Transit Fund	<u>\$243.3</u>	<u>\$245.1</u>	<u>\$1.8</u>
<b>Subtotal Pass Thru Programs</b>	<b>\$6,212.9</b>	<b>\$6,349.6</b>	<b>\$136.7</b>
<b>Total CTF SYIP</b>	<b>\$53,473.9</b>	<b>\$51,724.3</b>	<b>-\$1,749.6</b>

**Table 4**

		Latest Estimates (\$ Mil.)					
	<u>FY 22 Actual</u>	<u>FY 23</u>	<u>FY 24</u>	<u>FY 25</u>	<u>FY 26</u>	<u>FY 27</u>	<u>FY 28</u>
<b>Motor Fuels Tax</b>	<b>\$1,215.3</b>	<b>\$1,431.9</b>	<b>\$1,380.7</b>	<b>\$1,392.5</b>	<b>\$1,405.2</b>	<b>\$1,428.1</b>	<b>\$1,458.4</b>
<b>MV Sales Tax</b>	<b>\$1,110.6</b>	<b>\$1,198.0</b>	<b>\$1,119.4</b>	<b>\$1,128.9</b>	<b>\$1,124.2</b>	<b>\$1,121.5</b>	<b>\$1,120.0</b>
<b>Retail Sales Tax</b>	<b>\$1,264.1</b>	<b>\$1,349.2</b>	<b>\$1,315.1</b>	<b>\$1,348.1</b>	<b>\$1,356.5</b>	<b>\$1,363.3</b>	<b>\$1,368.4</b>

future revenue and there are always factors beyond our control. Today Virginia's revenue is being affected by things like inflation, war in Ukraine, and labor and supply chain issues. Tomorrow our revenue will undoubtedly be affected by different factors we can neither predict nor control. However, the Virginia General Assembly can exert some control over what revenue is available for transportation in the Commonwealth. The decision to remove revenue from transportation without replacing those funds will be felt by Virginia's local governments and by extension their citizens.

The future is unwritten, but the current forecast looks like it will include things that every Virginian is sure to notice: More potholes, fewer bridge repairs, longer waits for the bus and more time in traffic. Let's hope the General Assembly notices as well.

**About the author:** *Jim Regimbal is a principal at Fiscal Analytics.*

<sup>1</sup> Source: Strategic Resource Evaluation Study, Virginia Department of Transportation – Virginia Commonwealth Transportation Board Meeting, October 2022

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ctb.virginia.gov/resources/2022/june/pres/5.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <https://rga.lis.virginia.gov/Published/2020/RD54>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.cnbc.com/2022/06/25/exxon-mobil-ceo-all-new-passenger-cars-will-be-electric-by-2040.html>



# Get to know the CVTA: Central Virginia's new approach to transportation

**T**HE CENTRAL VIRGINIA Transportation Authority is Virginia's newest entity of its kind. It was created by the General Assembly in the spring of 2020 and held its first meeting in August of that year. At the time of the CVTA's creation, there were two other Virginia transportation authorities: the Northern Virginia Transportation Authority (NVTA) and the Hampton Roads Transportation Accountability Commission (HRTAC). Thanks to the advantages of pooling regional assets and resources, these entities have been able to advance critical transportation projects (e.g., the Hampton Roads Bridge Tunnel project) at an accelerated rate.

The CVTA's nine member jurisdictions have transportation investments throughout Central Virginia that allow them to leverage resources for competitive funding opportunities to compete on a larger scale. The Authority administers transportation funding generated by additional regional taxes including a sales and use tax of 0.7 percent (revenue collection began October 2020) and a wholesale gas tax of 7.6 cents per gallon on gasoline and 7.7 cents per gallon on diesel fuel (revenue collection began July 2020). In addition, CVTA has tolling authority and can issue bonds as needed for project development and construction.

CVTA revenues are used in three primary ways:

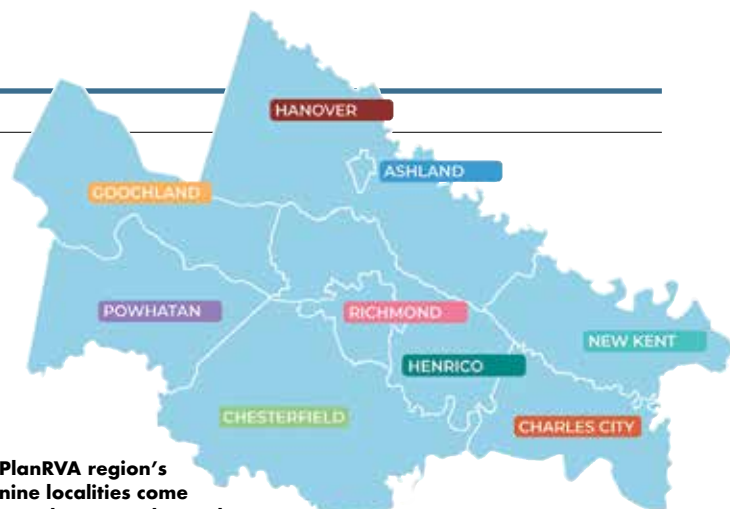
- Fund regionally significant projects (35%)
- Support the Greater Richmond Transit Company (GRTC) and its efforts to develop regional public transportation projects (15%)
- Distribute to member jurisdictions for local transportation needs (50%)

Revenue that the CVTA administers can be used for a wide variety of transportation purposes. Using local CVTA funding, its members develop plans, acquire rights-of-way, and complete projects at the local level – some of the CVTA's more rural jurisdictions have even hired transportation staff to capitalize on the opportunities presented by the CVTA. For significant regional projects, CVTA regional funds are used to leverage additional funding through Smart Scale and over 20 new competitive grant programs available through the federal Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.

Through two separate actions in December 2021 and April 2022, the CVTA made major commitments to over 30 regionally significant projects benefitting urban, suburban, and rural jurisdictions. To date, the CVTA has committed more than \$380 million in funds over a six-year period from FY21 to FY26 for projects across categories such as planning, engineering, bicycle and pedestrian trails, highways, and bridges. Member jurisdictions have received disbursements from CVTA's local funds totaling over \$188 million and GRTC has received \$56.4 million to support regional transit services.

## Lining up the Fall Line Trail

From the start, one of the CVTA's cornerstone commitments was to be the flagship supporter of the Fall Line Trail. As such, PlanRVA staff (who provide support to CVTA) have been involved in the Fall Line Trail project from its inception. Staff have also served



**PlanRVA region's nine localities come together to analyze, plan, consult and collaborate on issues and opportunities that impact every citizen and every community.**

as members of the Ashland to Petersburg trail study, identified key stakeholders, supported public engagement opportunities, and worked with decision-makers. These efforts resulted in a December 2021 pledge of \$104.5 million.

The impetus for the Fall Line Trail project came about during the development of the Ashland to Petersburg Trail Corridor Study by VDOT in 2020. The concept of a North-South regional trail was very attractive to local jurisdictions given the success of the Virginia Capital Trail that connects Richmond and Williamsburg. An advisory group consisting of local governments, PlanRVA, Crater PDC, The Department of Conservation and Recreation, The Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation, Dominion Energy, Sports-Backers, the Virginia Capital Trail Foundation, and the Friends of the Lower Appomattox, galvanized overwhelming support for this new trail. Enthusiasm for the trail grew rapidly as jurisdictions came to appreciate the potential boon for recreation, tourism, commuting and economic development in the region.

When completed, the Fall Line Trail will traverse seven localities (Town of Ashland, County of Hanover, County of Henrico, City of Richmond, County of Chesterfield, City of Colonial Heights, and the City of Petersburg), cross the three rivers (the Chickahominy, James, and Appomattox) and connect with parks, businesses, and schools along the way. The Fall Line Trail will be the spine of a regional trail network connecting with the Virginia Capital Trail in Richmond and the Appomattox River Trail in Petersburg. At the groundbreaking for the trail in Ashland, Governor Ralph Northam drew upon this theme in his remarks. "The Fall Line name reflects the corridor's unique geography," noted Northam, "and it's the perfect name for the new biking and walking highway to connect people in Central Virginia."

The Fall Line Trail will feature a shared use path, with accessibility for pedestrians, strollers, bicyclists of all types, and micromobility devices like scooters and skateboards. The shared use path will vary between 10' and 15' wide with narrower sections where space may be more restricted. Of course, no matter where a traveler enters or exits the Fall Line Trail, there will be wayfinding features and signage with directions to nearby attractions. With such a variety of localities on the trail, one of its attractions will be the dramatic variety of views and experiences as users move from places like rural Hanover County to downtown Richmond.

## Learn more

Visit [www.planrva.org](http://www.planrva.org) for more information on the Central Virginia Transportation Authority, PlanRVA, and the Fall Line Trail.

**About the author:** Chet Parsons, AICP CTP is the Director of Transportation for PlanRVA.

# A big year for the NVTA

THE NORTHERN VIRGINIA TRANSPORTATION AUTHORITY has had a very busy 2022. Don't believe it? Well, since a picture is worth a thousand words, we've got the equivalent of 12,000 words representing just some of the milestones NVTA has reached in 2022 to prove it!

For more information about these or any NVTA initiatives, email [theauthority@thenovaauthority.org](mailto:theauthority@thenovaauthority.org). (Thanks to Communications & Public Affairs Manager Erica Hawksworth for all the great pics!)



TOWN OF HERNDON

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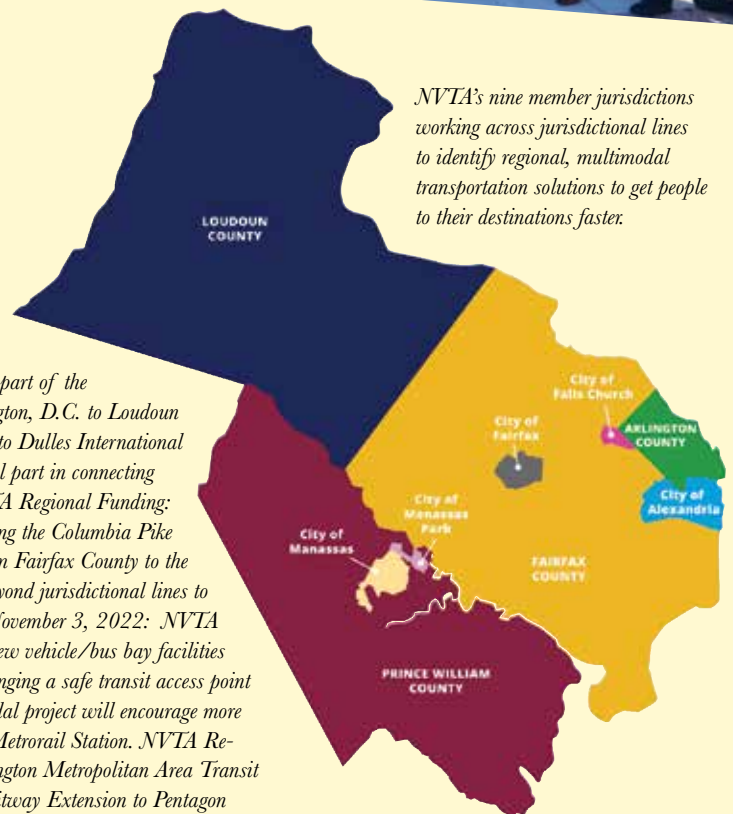
PRINCE WILLIAM COUNTY

3



**1** - March 25, 2022: The Town of Herndon broke ground on the Van Buren Street/Herndon Parkway Intersection Improvement Project expected to bring congestion relief during peak AM/PM commuting hours and aid in increasing access to pedestrian/bicyclist facilities, nearby the Silver Line connection at the Herndon Metrorail Station. NVTA Regional Funding: \$500K. **2** - January 27, 2022: Loudoun County, in partnership with NVTA, hosted a groundbreaking in the North-South Corridor of Statewide Significance, to celebrate the start of construction on the widening of Belmont Ridge Road from Truro Parish Drive to Croson Lane, complete with shared-use paths for pedestrians and bicyclists on each side. NVTA Regional Funding: \$19.5M. **3** - March 28, 2022: NVTA joined Prince William County for the Route 234 (Prince William Parkway/Dumfries Road) and Brentsville Road Interchange Project groundbreaking ceremony, marking a special day, as the project came to fruition after first being conceptualized by the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) in 1994. This major commuter route serves as a gateway to connecting Route 1, I-95 and I-66, and the project includes a shared-use path for bicyclists and pedestrians and improving bottlenecks in the corridor. NVTA Regional Funding: \$54.9M.





*NVTA's nine member jurisdictions working across jurisdictional lines to identify regional, multimodal transportation solutions to get people to their destinations faster.*

**4** - November 15, 2022: The opening of the Innovation Center Metrorail Station, part of the Silver Line extension grand opening earlier the same day, aids connection of Washington, D.C. to Loudoun County, and supports rail, bus, bike/pedestrian, and now air travel with connection to Dulles International Airport. NVTA joined Fairfax County to cut the ribbon on this project playing a vital part in connecting the region's many residential communities and employment and activity centers. NVTA Regional Funding: \$69M. **5** - November 14, 2022: NVTA celebrated with Arlington County, unveiling the Columbia Pike Multimodal Street Improvements project to improve connection within the region, from Fairfax County to the Pentagon and National Landing, further demonstrating the importance of looking beyond jurisdictional lines to reduce congestion and keep NoVA moving. NVTA Regional Funding: \$12M. **6** - November 3, 2022: NVTA joined the Town of Herndon for a ribbon-cutting ceremony to mark the opening of new vehicle/bus bay facilities that are part of the Herndon Metrorail Intermodal Access Improvements project, bringing a safe transit access point to Herndon just ahead of the Silver Line Phase II Extension opening. The multimodal project will encourage more ridership on rail as commuters will be able to easily and safely access the Herndon Metrorail Station. NVTA Regional Funding: \$1.1M. **7** - May 9, 2022: NVTA, Arlington County, the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA), and DRPT celebrated the start of construction on the Transitway Extension to Pentagon City project, which will serve as a major connection enhancement to the Metrorail and economic and activity centers in National Landing. NVTA Regional Funding: \$18.85M (Phase I).





1



2



3

PRINCE WILLIAM COUNTY

**1** - June 15, 2022: NVTA joined Arlington County, Arlington Transit (ART) and DRPT to officially break ground on the new ART Operations and Maintenance Facility, essential for regional transit needs situated just off the major commuter route, I-395. As the demand for public transit increases, the facility will become more essential to get people to their destinations, including nearby Metrorail and Virginia Railway Express stations more efficiently. NVTA Regional Funding: \$39M. **2** - September 28, 2022: With the backdrop of I-395 during rush hour, NVTA, Arlington County and VDOT celebrated the start of construction on the Boundary Channel Drive Interchange, which will help alleviate traffic congestion in the I-395 corridor, one of the most congested areas in the DMV; create enhanced connections for pedestrians and bicyclists; and improve safety for all travelers in the corridor that's often considered a maze. NVTA Regional Funding: \$4.33M. **3** - September 27, 2022: NVTA joined Prince William County for a groundbreaking ceremony to celebrate the start of construction on the Prince William Parkway and University Boulevard Intersection Improvements project that will reduce traffic congestion and increase vehicle and pedestrian safety. NVTA Regional Funding: \$24.2M.





METRO

**4** - February 25, 2022: NVTA joined Fairfax County for a Richmond Highway Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) brand launch and press conference, marking a major milestone as this transportation project benefitting transit riders, motorists and bicyclists/pedestrians alike is one step closer to connecting the NoVA region and beyond through a multimodal approach. This project – also known as “The One” – has received the most NVTA regional revenues than any other project, to date. NVTA Regional Funding: \$330M. **5** - October 24, 2022: NVTA, Arlington County and the National Landing Business Improvement District broke ground on the Army Navy Dr Complete Street project, the second component of the Pentagon City Multimodal Connections and Transitway Extension. The NoVA region will benefit from both components of the project as it will support an increase in regional travel demands as Crystal City and Pentagon City continue to boom with the arrival of new businesses, such as Amazon’s HQ2 and Virginia Tech’s Innovation Campus, while enhancing bike, transit, pedestrian, and environmental facilities. NVTA Regional Funding: \$10M (Phase II). **6** - November 15, 2022: The highly anticipated Silver Line Extension to Washington Dulles International Airport and Loudoun County came to fruition with a big grand opening event, featuring federal government representatives, state and local government officials, and transportation leaders. Authority members Phyllis J. Randall, Chair of Loudoun County Board of Supervisors and NVTA, Jeff McKay, Chairman of Fairfax County Board of Supervisors, and Jennifer DeBruhl, Director of DRPT, shared the stage with U.S. Senators Mark Warner and Tim Kaine, U.S. Representatives Gerry Connolly, Don Beyer and Jennifer Wexton, U.S. Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg, Metro General Manager Randy Clarke, Metro Board Chair Paul Smedberg, and more. In total, NVTA has invested more than \$454M to fund 18 multimodal transportation projects in the Silver/Orange Line corridor.

# Is your locality covered for a high-value vehicle loss?

**S**CENARIO – ONE of your entity's high-value vehicles is totaled. How much will it cost your entity to replace it in the current environment?

The past 24 months have seen record inflation throughout the United States, with the most significant increases in energy and food. However, the costs for new and used vehicles, as well as for parts and services, have also increased.

The global pandemic has affected the production of these vehicles through labor shortages, increased material costs, and supply chain interruptions. This impacts not only the manufacture of new vehicles – but also the production of parts needed to repair existing vehicles.

Even if vehicles are not totaled, the time they may be out of commission waiting for parts or labor continues to increase. This, while prices for used and new vehicles have increased between 12 and 16 percent, may already be a strain and something your entity is facing as it completes budget forecasting and development.



The cost to replace a high-value vehicle, however, should not keep VRSA members up at night. VRSA has been providing stable rates and dependable coverages for more than 40 years - and our Automobile Physical Damage Coverage provides protection for new vehicle replacement.

Generally, this tailored protection is available for vehicles less than five years old and valued at more than \$100,000.

For vehicles between five and 15 years old, VRSA will cover the cost to replace them with “like kind and quality.” Vehicles older than 15 years will receive actual cash value cost.

“VRSA is committed to providing stable rates and dependable coverages that our members can rely on,” said VRSA Managing Director Marcus Hensel. “Beyond that, we are also committed to easing our members’ worries through unique coverages like this – that protect the valuable assets that our members need to serve their communities each and every day.”

While your entity may have insurance, does your entity have coverage?

For more information on VRSA's New Vehicle Replacement Coverage see our ad on the inside front cover or contact your member services representative at: 800-963-6800.

### New Vehicle Replacement Coverage

**Coverage -**

- The Virginia Risk Sharing Association (VRSA)'s **Automobile Physical Damage Coverage** provides for new vehicle replacement. This coverage is available for vehicles **less than five years old** and generally **valued at more than \$100,000**.
- Benefits include:
  - Covers cost to replace covered vehicle with comparable new vehicle;
  - Avoids financial strain of replacing high dollar vehicles such as school buses, fire trucks, ambulances, refuse trucks and other heavy trucks;
- Vehicles between five and 15 years old qualify for replacement of “like kind and quality;” &
- Vehicles older than 15 years old receive actual cash value cost.

A VRSA member bus hit a tree, causing extensive damage. The bus was three years old. VRSA paid **in excess of \$95,000** for a new bus, whose estimated actual cash value was \$60,000.

A VRSA member refuse vehicle was totaled. The refuse truck was one year old. VRSA paid **in excess of \$250,000** for a new truck, whose estimated actual cash value was \$185,000.

For additional assistance, contact VRSA's Member Services team at: 800-963-6800.

[www.vrsa.us](http://www.vrsa.us) | 800-963-6800



## PMA ARCHITECTURE

By Pam Scruggs

# Bold moves create a showstopping new town hall in Ashland

**D**RIVING OVER THE TRAIN TRACKS that run through the heart of Ashland's downtown, visitors can't help but feel that they have arrived somewhere special. Nicknamed "The Center of the Universe" by the town's enthusiastic 16-year former mayor, Dick Gillis, the Town of Ashland is beloved by its residents. With its 100-year-old train station, beautiful old homes, and string of locally run shops and restaurants lining Railroad Avenue, the downtown is alive with color, activity, and a sense of history.



Afternoon visitors to Ashland's downtown in October of this year were greeted by trees flashing the brilliant oranges and reds announcing fall had arrived and by the local restaurants along Railroad Avenue percolating with lunch-time crowds as passenger and cargo trains rolled by. However, just beyond the railroad crossing, visitors would have been pleasantly surprised to find a new, modern focal point that has quickly become the newest jewel in the crown of this small, quirky community.

The gleaming façade of the new Ashland Town Hall rises from behind the trees across the tracks, a show-stopping center for town operations which, until recently, were crammed into an aging, sequestered building whose best days had long passed. The story of how the town brought the new building to life is one of local government leadership, an engaged community, and a talented team of designers working together to make it happen.

## Step 1 – What to do about a failing building?

The idea of a new or renovated building had been deliberated by Ashland's council long before the town's current manager, Josh Farrar, arrived on the scene as assistant town manager in 2006. "One of the first meetings I ever sat in was about a space needs study to look at renovating the town hall, but the project never rose to the top of the to-do list. A decade later, it became clear we had to do something," he recalls.

To be sure, by 2016 the old building was rife with issues. Sewer lines under the concrete needed to be replaced. The roof was leaking. There were cracks in the walls. "Initially we thought renovation would be cheaper. But simply put: *every system was failing*. Name one, it was bad," observes Farrar. "The HVAC was

dead or dying, the plumbing was in horrible shape. We had sinking on both ends of the building we had to jack up. It's not a professional way to put it, but we basically had the equivalent of a beer funnel in an office to drain rainwater from the ceiling down into a plant!"

The 1955 building had already been through several renovations and for all practical purposes had ceased to be functional. "It felt spliced together," says Ingrid Stenbjorn, the town engineer. Buried plumbing, thousands of dollars spent chasing roof leaks, and other expensive maintenance complications plagued the building.

Not only was the deteriorating building a problem for town staff, it also presented an incredibly confusing arrangement for residents trying to access services. Some employees worked out of the original town hall while Public Works staff, including Stenbjorn in the engineering department, were based in an old fire station across the street. "There was nowhere to expand. We couldn't go back, we couldn't go forward, and the foundation wouldn't enable us to go up either," she remembers.

The dream was to have a healthy building where the whole team could work in one place. "The old building couldn't accommodate that," says Farrar.

But change is never easy, and the past has a way of asserting itself. The whole town knew the old building and it had a strong community presence. The town hall had served many functions over the years including being home to the town's police and volunteer fire stations and had even been immortalized in the town's logo.

"Constructing a new town hall is a generational project," says Matt Reynal, the assistant town manager and finance director. "We knew a new building would need to evoke a similar response."

## Step 2 – Making the case for change

The town officials and staff needed a plan to not only re-evaluate the old building but to also build community consensus for an upgrade. To help with this, the town sought out a professional design team with the right sort of experience.

### A new source of community pride

**"As a small community, we took a big project all the way from concept to finish and, I think, did a really, really good job of it. I'm very proud of that, and I hope our staff are, but really, I hope the community is proud of their government. It's a reflection of a good staff and a good set of elected officials doing good work on behalf of the community."**

- Town Manager Josh Farrar



Farrar notes, “We needed someone who’d done this before and had the expertise of getting through a municipal process. It’s not the private sector where the CEO has all the say – you have a public input process. We needed someone to ask the questions we didn’t even know we should be asking.”

In a similar vein, Reynal observes, “We also needed professional designers involved in our public meetings to translate community input into actionable design recommendations.”

A committee made up of town leadership and citizens interviewed various design teams and selected PMA Architecture out of Newport News to lead the project. The first step was for structural and mechanical engineers to conduct a formal assessment of the building. The results of this study were unambiguous – a new building was the best option for the town.

“It was a sick building,” recalls architect Jeff Stodghill of PMA Architecture. “There was mold. They couldn’t keep the water out. There were toilets that didn’t flush. Their building was failing them.”

The design team presented their findings during a public engagement session at a local school. This allowed the design team to answer questions, and present possible solutions. For the staff at PMA Architecture, this was familiar territory.

“Community engagement isn’t an option. It’s baked into the cake,” says Farrar. A steering committee comprised of one-third local citizens helped drive this effort. Farrar was keenly aware of the importance of making sure the committee was seen as a reliable arbiter for the community. “You must convince the community of the need and that you are following the right process to solve it,” he notes. “We didn’t just pick friends of the project. The committee included folks that we knew would give us honest critique.”

Reynal adds, “We also wanted to hear from the community on what design and functional elements they wanted to see in a new town hall.”

So, what was the community concerned about? Spending money, predictably, topped the list. Questions included: Was it better to renovate or build new? Did the town government need a new building?

Could town operations simply move into an empty shopping center?

In the end, the town chose to build a new structure on town-owned property across the street from Railroad Avenue in the heart of the downtown. Beyond the practical reasons for pushing ahead, there were other considerations, like employee morale. “You want a place you’re proud to work, and I don’t know that going into an old grocery store would really do that for our employees. That wasn’t the right approach for us,” concludes Farrar.

The town’s citizens remained engaged even after that decision had been reached. Community members were interested in being a part of deciding where the new town hall would be located, how many stories it would be, and what it might look like. They cared about Ashland’s past and wanted the new building to reflect that.

And, of course, there was the cost.

“Up until that moment, Ashland was debt free,” remembers Farrar. “That’s rare for a Virginia local government and we were proud of that, but we knew this was a large enough project that we’d have to take out some level of debt.”

Town leadership worked with financial advisors to develop a funding strategy. They packaged the town hall project with major renovations to the municipal pool and funded it with a 20-year bank loan, supplemented by some unreserved funds. The next year, the loan was refinanced down to 1.99 percent.

“Our timing worked out very well and the project ended up being very affordable for us,” observes Farrar.

### Step 3 – A vision takes shape

Architecturally, the final design for the building provided a 21st century solution that would be well-adapted to Ashland’s unique character. A two-story glass façade would reach upward, carving a distinctive shape in the skyline and bookending what Stodghill calls a “new urban edge.” Furthermore, the new building was envisioned as an extension of the downtown with outdoor event space and convenient parking. Designed to reflect elements of the iconic local





train station just a few blocks away, the new building would feature an overhanging roof with gathering space and seating below, fronted by large white columns. The selection of interior materials, finishes and furniture, such as white subway tile and the red benches in lobby areas would also speak to the train station “vibe.”

“We spent many hours going over the requirements prepared by our steering committee, pouring over preliminary designs, and meeting regularly with Jeff and the design team. PMA just ran with it and put it together. It was a smooth process and the biggest project I’ve worked on with the town,” observes Stenbjorn. “While we have staff

## Next up?

**The framing for a bandstand gazebo out front marks the spot where musicians are already being lined up to entertain. “It’s been part of our Parks and Rec masterplan for 20 years,” says Farrar. “The strategy was, if we can get this building done within budget, we can use what’s left over to build the pavilion - a community gathering space with the Town Hall right in the middle. We’re almost there. We can finally check the box and we’ll be done.”**

engineers, we do not have staff architects. As much as we want to think we can do it all, we can’t. We relied heavily on the design team and that was really helpful – especially with aesthetics.”

The floorplan addressed the unique needs of town employees working in specialized jobs. It provided space for everything from water testing to the storage and review of full-size architectural and engineering plans as well as a formal town council meeting room. The plans also included considerations for the convenience of employees such as a mud room and a bike sharing room. A spacious new breakroom replaced what had been just a coffee pot in a hallway in the old building.

Moreover, the project was designed according to the U.S. Green Building Council’s Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) principles. The plans for the building and site featured many sustainable elements such as a permeable paver parking lot with electric vehicle charging stations, outdoor planters designed to catch rainwater from the roof system and nurture native plant gardens, and high efficiency mechanical and electrical systems.

## Step 4 – “We love it!”

The town hall project was the subject of at least a dozen public meetings. Progress updates, including time-lapse videos during construction, were featured on the town website, providing “a record for us to see the progress and for the community to see it too,” says Stenbjorn.

“The decision to tear down the old building was tough. As many troubles as it had, it was beloved and one of the picturesque buildings of our town. We had to work through that sentiment with the community,” says Farrar. “Once the landscaping went in – that was the moment when people started going, ‘Oh! I see what you’re doing!’,” he says.

The town received “very positive feedback during the design process, and even more so upon completion of the building,” says Reynal. “Feedback from our open house was amazing. The community especially enjoys the openness of the town hall lawn with the building set to the western edge of the site, opening the rest of the lot for the Farmers Market, picnics, and other gatherings.”

Mayor Steve Trivett, who held the scissors at the ribbon cutting, summed up what everyone was feeling in just three words: “We love it!”

## The result – Wins abound

For staff, getting everyone together and into a safe environment was the biggest win. “And it’s a comfortable and productive working environment,” says Farrar. “Having the engineering team in the same building, the extra office space and more windows, and room to grow – it’s having an impact. When I’m meeting with state representatives or Economic Development prospects, it’s a place I’m proud to bring them. It presents a much more professional, clean face to the public that says, ‘These people know what they’re doing’. That’s been a benefit,” says Farrar.

In terms of budgeting, Reynal enjoys a smoother forecasting and planning process now that the town is unburdened by an outdated facility with its maintenance headaches and unpredictable expenses.

The final product also brought additional bonuses. “We have more parking downtown. That’s good for the entire economy of our downtown and for the visitor experience and the new community gathering space is a wonderful amenity for the public,” reports Farrar.

Asked to name a favorite building feature, several elements resonate. The view from the second story overlooking the downtown is a staff favorite. “I also like that the town hall is now the backdrop to the end of downtown. As you come over the tracks, you have something framing the downtown,” says Farrar.

It's no surprise that residents have been spotted outside the new town hall taking pictures, modeling clothing, and even having wedding portraits made. The covered "front porch" with Adirondack chairs is popular too.

"It's right outside of my office window and I hear people chatting as they sit there," says Farrar.

"It has such a community feel," adds Stenbjorn, who especially loves the permeable paver parking lot. "It's aesthetically pleasing and helped with our environmental requirements, but even more, it gives me, and everybody here, that 'feel good' element of doing something for the environment."

Farrar sums up the success of the endeavor by (literally) bringing it all back home: "In one project we were able to meet customer service needs, employee needs, and our health and safety needs. We now have a one-stop-shop where people can get planning, finance,

P M A  
ARCHITECTURE

and public works answers – and even pool passes – without having to remember which building to go to. Now that it's done and in its final state, there is a sense of civic pride in the building. It's an element of a bigger picture and becoming part of the fabric of the community. It's even starting to show up in custom prints – my wife bought one!"

**About the author:** A William & Mary graduate, Pam Scruggs has worked in the Architecture / Engineering industry since 1991. She serves as a Proposal Specialist for PMA Architecture.

**About PMA Architecture:** Located in Newport News, Virginia, PMA Architecture has served Virginia local governments since the 1970s. The firm specializes in architecture, interior design, urban design and historic preservation. PMA Architecture is proud to be a VML Silver Community Business Member.

## Downtown Ashland now has free Wi-Fi

THE TOWN HALL isn't the only new thing in downtown Ashland. Recently the town was thrilled to announce the launch of a free Wi-Fi network now available to residents, visitors, and businesses in the historic downtown. The network, created in partnership with Connected Solutions Group, LLC (CSG) officially launched on Monday, Oct. 24th with a ribbon cutting in front of Ashland Town Hall.

"We've been discussing the deployment of free public Wi-Fi in our historic downtown for years," said Matt Reynal, Ashland's deputy town manager. "We recognize that it will attract even more people to the Center of the Universe and help support our tourism economy."

The downtown wi-fi network project was also undertaken to

better support and meet the needs of business owners. Utilizing CSG's partnerships with Verizon, Aura, and Cradlepoint, four hubs were strategically built and positioned to help provide the most coverage across the historic district and take some of the burden off those businesses currently providing free Wi-Fi. Depending on network usage and performance, additional hubs may be added in the future.

This exciting project was made possible thanks to the town's ongoing relationship and involvement with the Virginia Innovation Partnership Corporation (VIPC), a non-profit created by the Commonwealth to support innovation, opportunity, and job creation in Virginia. The Virginia Municipal League is pleased to have VIPC as a Gold level Community Business Member.





## CITY OF ALEXANDRIA

By Amanda Dolasinski

# A flood mitigation program prepares the city to meet 21st century challenges

*“An interdisciplinary approach to problem-solving is fundamental to success. We need lots of people who think differently and who can work in a collaborative environment to solve problems. What we are doing is not just engineering. It’s engineering, communications, legal advocacy, and financing. These are elements of what a local government does, and you must have people who know each of these facets and know how to solve problems at the table to make these things happen.”*

- Director Yon Lambert, City of Alexandria’s Department of Transportation and Environmental Services

## Extreme storms warrant a strong response

Flooding caused by climate change-induced storms and sea-level rise has afflicted communities across the globe. In the City of Alexandria, that flooding has been exacerbated by the city’s waterfront proximity and aging infrastructure. The first instance of an extreme storm was in 2019, recording rain accumulation levels that rivaled tropical storms.

Jesse Maines, chief of Alexandria’s Stormwater Management Division, who has worked for the city in numerous stormwater management roles for more than 13 years, says he couldn’t recall flooding events as severe as those in 2019. “We knew we had to do something,” Maines remembers. “The mood of the staff was to roll up our sleeves and work together.”

Other extreme storms followed. Anxiety reached a boiling point in September 2020 when an intense storm caused widespread flooding that damaged basements, flooded garages and some first floors, and totaled cars. During a public meeting days after the storm, com-

munity members demanded answers and the then city manager and city councilmembers called on staff to draft proposals for solutions.

Ashland’s Department of Transportation and Environmental Services Director Yon Lambert’s first step was to bring together specialists from diverse backgrounds to form an interdepartmental strike team. He attributes the strength and speed of the city’s flood mitigation response to the group’s diverse expertise.

“When you have hundreds of people in a city whose homes are flooding, that’s a lot of people who are experiencing property loss and who are seeing disruption in their lives,” observes Lambert. “People within the organization understood the severity of the problem, pushed other things aside and made this the highest priority so we could go after legislation at the state level and overhaul our existing stormwater program to demonstrate to the public that we were not only taking it seriously, but we were moving as fast as we possibly could to get things in the ground.”

Unlike other government projects guided by public input during meetings, strike team members grabbed notebooks and fanned out in neighborhoods to talk to residents. With the COVID-19 pandemic making in person interactions difficult, the team used virtual meetings to gather input from residents. Notes and pictures from their experiences were folded in with other information sources, including stormwater infrastructure analyses and requests filed through the city’s service hotline.

“We really went out to the community to gather first-hand information,” Chief Maines says. “We met online and on-site with community groups and people who had flooded, to hear their specific issues and then brought that information back to help inform the projects that were going to help our community. We had to have boots on the ground and talk to people to learn what they were experiencing to better formulate solutions to address the issues.”

Three months after the strike team was formed, city council established the Ad Hoc Stormwater Utility and Flood Mitigation Advisory Group, a resident advisory group that serves as the liaison between city staff and the community. The nine-member group reviews relevant program documents and products developed by staff, reviews recommendations for program funding and monitors relevant state legislation.

## Funding to fight flooding today and tomorrow

The early efforts led to budget proposals that city council ultimately passed. Since its launch, the Flood Action Alexandria program has strengthened its bond with the community, launched a first-of-its-kind grant program, installed early warning systems, secured state and federal grants, and prompted the start of 35 active flood mitigation projects. With support from elected officials and the community, the program plans to invest



Contractors work to install new, larger inlets on Clifford Avenue on March 2 under the Flood Action Alexandria program.

## Alexandria

about \$200 million in stormwater infrastructure upgrades and additions over the next 10 years.

The group also helped successfully lobby state lawmakers for permission to offer grants from public funds to be used in private property to help defray the cost of homeowner-installed floodproofing measures. Funded by the Stormwater Utility Fee, the Flood Mitigation Pilot Grant Program is the first of its kind in the state. It reimburses homeowners 50% – up to \$5,000 – if they install flood mitigation devices or practices on their property. Since the grant was launched in August 2021, the city has reimbursed about \$600,000 to more than 200 residents.

Group members view the grants as a measure to help reduce flood damage while city staff work on large infrastructure projects that would take years to deploy. To this end, city staff secured state and federal grants to accelerate infrastructure projects. To date, the city has received more than \$5.5 million in grant funding to help cover the cost of smaller-scale flood mitigation projects and portions of large capacity projects.

The city also expanded its monitoring network by installing eight rain gauges and six stream gauges to measure rainfall and issue early warning of hazardous situations. Data from the gauges is transmitted to a web portal the public can use to monitor rainfall accumulations in watersheds. Some gauges are programmed to trigger flashing lights if rainfall accumulation reaches a certain level to warn motorists on nearby roads.

## Getting the word out: Complex solutions take time

Daniel Medina, an experienced stormwater management and urban waterways engineer, was hired to lead the Flood Action Alexandria program. Medina traces his interest in flood solutions to a rescue he witnessed in his native Colombia when he was six years old. He remembers looking out the window of his family's home during a flood to watch soldiers pull a city bus with passengers trapped inside to higher ground. Throughout his career, he has advised municipalities on how to protect their communities against flooding. Medina is pleased to help Alexandria, the city where he lives, tackle its flooding issues.

In his first month on the job, Medina began meeting one-on-one with members of the resident advisory group. During one meeting, Medina and a group member visited a neighborhood with repeated flooding events to examine the infrastructure and its connection to a culvert. A resident saw them inspecting inlets and asked how to get one on her street cleaned. Medina explained the steps for filing a service request to the city.

"I realized that we needed to reinforce our outreach to the public to disseminate critical information," Medina says. "My goal was to become completely familiar with the program and the resources that I had available to me. The second component was to become more aware of public sentiment about the program. And in that case, I had to bring some reality checks to people's patience and reassure the public that we were moving



Brian Rahal, civil engineer for the Flood Action Alexandria program, checks out progress on a flood mitigation to increase inlet capacity on Hume Avenue on Jan. 24.

as fast as possible to solve these problems. The solutions are complex and just take time."

With more than 35 active projects, it became apparent that the city needed to effectively communicate its progress. The city launched an interactive map on its website so residents can track the status of projects in their neighborhoods and obtain basic information about proposed solutions. Publishing the interactive project map and continuing to update the public through social media and public meetings of the advisory group has helped boost the public's support for the program because these methods of communication offer transparency into the city's flood mitigation plans.

The Flood Action Alexandria program has evolved from a provisional strike unit into a specialized team of experts working to build resiliency to climate change-induced flooding to protect people and property in this historic, riverfront city.

"People have grown more aware of our processes," Medina says. "Now we operate as a partnership, a symmetrical relationship between the city staff and the public."

If other municipalities set out to launch their own flood mitigation programs, Medina encourages them to start with the public. "Work on establishing an environment of trust with the residents," he said. "We need an involved public that helps us identify the problems and plays an active role in the search for solutions."

**About the author:** Amanda Dolasinski is the communications officer for the Flood Action Alexandria program.



The Flood Action Alexandria program has been working to find solutions for flooding throughout the city. Backrow (L-R) : Civil Engineers Ehsanullah Hayat, Brian Rahal, Jonathan Whiteleather, Zerihun Tadele, Aziz Mahar, Mitch Dillon and Qais Ayubi. Front row, (L-R) : Civil engineer Haweni Gabena, Stormwater Management Division Chief Jesse Maines, Flood Action Alexandria Program Manager Daniel Medina, Director of the Department of Transportation and Environmental Services Yon Lambert and Director of the Department of Project Implementation Terry Suehr.





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