



112 MacTanly Place
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**BRITE Transit Advisory Committee Meeting Summary
March 9, 2022, 2:30 p.m.**

Video Conference Meeting via Zoom
Central Shenandoah Planning District Commission
112 MacTanly Place
Staunton, VA 24401

[Click Here for Audio Recording of Meeting](#)

	Name	Organization
✓	Leslie Beauregard	City of Staunton
✓	Jennifer Whetzel	County of Augusta
✓	Luke Juday	City of Waynesboro
✓	Karen Clark	Augusta Health
	Mike Kelley	Wilson Workforce & Rehabilitation Center
	Greg Beam	Staunton Downtown Development
✓	Terry Rodgers, Chair	Shenandoah Valley Social Services
	Cynthia Page	Blue Ridge Community College
✓	Becky Messer	Transit Service Rider
✓	Paul Terry	Transit Service Rider
✓	Steve Wilson	Virginia Regional Transit
✓	Steven Hennessee	Department of Rail and Public Transportation

	Name	Organization
✓	Ann Cundy	CSPDC
	Bonnie Riedesel	CSPDC
✓	Devon Thompson	CSPDC
✓	Paula Melester	CSPDC
✓	Lib Rood, KFH Group	
✓	Alisande Tombarge, City of Waynesboro	

Call to Order

The meeting of the BRITE Transit Advisory Committee (BTAC) was called to order at 2:30 PM by Ms. Terry Rodgers, Chairperson.

Public Comment

Chairperson Rodgers opened the floor for public comment. There were no public comments.



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Approve Minutes

Chairperson Rodgers stated that there was not an in-person quorum, and did not request a vote to approve minutes from the January BTAC meeting.

Business

Introductions: Chairperson Rodgers introduced Ms. Leslie Beauregard, Interim City Manager for Staunton.

FY 2023 Grant Applications (DRPT): Ms. Devon Thompson reported that the Central Shenandoah Planning District Commission (CSPDC) submitted the Fiscal Year 2023 (FY23) Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT) grants by the February 1 deadline. Grants submitted included Rural and Urban Operating; Rural and Urban Capital, which included the capital cost of contracting for the turn-key contract with Virginia Regional Transit (VRT) and a line item for the State match for the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) 5339 Bus and Bus Facilities grant for the Staunton Lewis Street Hub; an additional Demonstration grant for Afton Express operations through the end of FY23; and a Commuter Assistance Program operating grant for the RideShare program. DRPT would complete their review of the grant applications, and would make their recommendations to the Commonwealth Transportation Board (CTB) at their next meeting.

Ms. Thompson inquired as to whether or not Mr. Steven Hennessee, DRPT, had any additional comments regarding grant review. Mr. Hennessee remarked that DRPT had completed first and second rounds of reviews, and was entering a third phase of refinement. Mr. Hennessee indicated that grant recommendations should be ready to be presented to the CTB at their April meeting. The draft Six Year Improvement Plan (SYIP) would be voted on in June.

Afton Express Update: Ms. Paula Melester introduced herself, and provided an update on Afton Express operations. March was the seventh month of operation for the new commuter bus service, and ridership in February was the highest seen since launched in September 2021, with a monthly average of 30 total passenger trips per day. The highest ridership reported since launch was 38 daily passenger trips, which occurred in February as well. Ms. Melester indicated that the additional Demonstration grant would allow for service provision and potential expansion of operations. An additional bus would allow for increased stop frequency to provide service to 12-hour hospital shift workers who are not currently served by the existing Afton Express schedule. This expansion was contingent upon funding from the additional demonstration grant. Ms. Melester stated that staff continued to market Afton Express to both attract new riders and retain current riders.

Ms. Karen Clark inquired about whether there was an Afton Express sign located at the Waynesboro Park and Ride Lot shelter, and Ms. Melester replied that the sign was previously posted at Waynesboro Town Center (at Target) where the stop was temporarily staged during the construction of the lot, but had now been posted to the new shelters at the Park and Ride Lot.



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Mr. Luke Juday asked at what point would the group evaluate service performance and determine viability. Ms. Thompson replied that the additional demonstration grant would fund the service through the end of FY 2023, at which point, if the service were to continue, it would be funded through the BRITE operation and capital grants submitted to DRPT. Mr. Juday also inquired about intentions to expand service. Ms. Melester responded that staff was keeping track of all customer and potential customer feedback received, and would have that information to inform future changes to stops or frequency of service.

Transit Development Plan (TDP) Update: Ms. Lib Rood reported that Chapter 3 of the Transit Development Plan (TDP) was completed and submitted to CSPDC for review. Ms. Rood provided an overview of the pre-pandemic performance metrics, the rider and public survey results, and rider requests, which would inform recommendations for Chapter 4 (see attached presentation for additional information).

Pre-Pandemic Route Performance

- There was a dip in ridership from Fiscal Year 2019 to Fiscal Year 2021. This was not unusual (pandemic), and was on par with other transit agencies. The Staunton Loop routes fared the best with ridership.
- The TDP projects should be geared toward getting riders back on transit, which meant listening to the feedback provided by riders and their requests for improvements.

Rider and Public Survey Results & Rider Requests

- Great response related to brand awareness.
 - 72 percent of those who took the survey were aware of BRITE and had positive opinions of BRITE; 22 percent were not aware; and 6 percent were aware and did not have a positive opinion.
- Respondents were a mix of people who did and did not use public transportation.
- More frequent service, access to more information about transit, bus and shelter improvements, additional weekend service, and “better availability near my home, work, and school” were the most common responses to the question related to increased utilization of transit services.
- The number one request for increased utilization was to add service later in the day, and more weekend service.
- Potential areas identified for additional service:
 - Staunton – the fringe areas around Staunton, Hillcrest, West End, Churchville, Baldwin Acres, and West Beverley to the edge of city limits
 - Waynesboro – Coyner Park, and Main Street between Rosser Ave and Lew Dewitt Boulevard
 - Rural areas of Augusta County – Deerfield, Craigsville, Churchville, Green Spring Valley, Mint Spring, Ivy Ridge, New Hope, and a stop on Afton Mountain
 - More inter-city bus service – Richmond, DC, Harrisonburg, and southern Rockingham County
- Other general suggestions –
 - VA Breeze and Afton Express at the same stop;
 - Additional service and shelters;
 - On-demand service in Waynesboro;



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- Senior-oriented service; and
- Increased availability of information.
- 92 percent cited that there was a need and support for expanded service

Ms. Beauregard asked if there was information on why riders felt the locations in Staunton were not accessible, and whether it was because the lack of pedestrian amenities. Ms. Rood noted the service comments were not specific, but that she planned to visit the areas and note conditions of the locations (i.e. is it hilly, unsafe, too much traffic) for more insight.

Ms. Rood identified the following potential TDP projects from the survey results and would review them further to determine feasibility and include those analyses in Chapter 4.

- Microtransit Pilot Project – possible pilot project for Waynesboro to address some of the on-demand requests (small geographical areas see more success)
- Addition of Staunton Loop – address some of the concerns with the 250 Connector
- Adjustments to the Stuarts Draft Link – more linear route serving more employers
- Inclusion of Main Street between Rosser Avenue and Lew Dewitt Boulevard on the Waynesboro Circulator
- Addition of rural and senior-oriented service
- Intersection of Afton Express, VA Breeze, and BRITE service at a single stop
- Potential addition of Afton Mountain stop and Fontaine Research Park stop on Afton Express
- Addition of Saturday paratransit service
- Addition of Sunday service
- Implementation of later hours of service
- Improvement of connections between Harrisonburg and Staunton
- Implementation of new technology, such as the existing ITS plan

Ms. Karen Clark sought clarification on what “Microtransit” referred to, and Ms. Rood explained that microtransit was similar to an Uber or Lyft, but was publicly operated through a public transit program. It required implementation of technology to allow riders to use their phone to request a car, van, or bus service on demand. She noted that the major costs associated were related to the technology set-up – the software and procurement of vehicles and drivers could cost up to multiple hundred thousand dollars.

Ms. Rood noted that Chapters 1-3 would be available to the BTAC members for review within a week of the March meeting. The next steps would be recommendation evaluation and development of Chapter 4. Ms. Rood anticipated Chapter 4 would be available in April.

There were no further questions about the TDP Update. Ms Rood asked Ms. Ann Cundy if there had been any news about the 5339 Lewis Street Hub project funding, and Ms. Cundy noted that no new news was available.

Contractor Update: Mr. Wilson reported on the following:



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- **Ridership:** January saw 9,095 riders. Mr. Wilson believed this number was lower than usual due to weather delays and cancellations. February 2022 saw a 32 percent increase from February 2021, and year-to-date ridership showed an increase of about 1,500 riders compared to 2021. Afton Express also showed increased ridership.
Average BRITE ridership in 2019 (pre-pandemic) was approximately 23,000 riders per month; approximately 14,000 in 2020; and approximately 13,000 in 2021. Based on recent numbers, Mr. Wilson predicted an average of 18,000 monthly riders for 2022, which was closer to pre-pandemic ridership.
- **Mask Mandate:** Mr. Wilson noted that the Federal Mask Mandate was set to expire March 18, and no guidance had been received beyond that date. Mr. Wilson remarked that BRITE would continue to make masks available on the buses even if the mandate was lifted for those who were more comfortable with masking on transit.
- **Employment Opportunities:** VRT continued to solicit employment for additional drivers. Mr. Wilson stated that COVID illnesses among staff were lower than in previous months, and that those numbers continued to be reported to FTA.
- **Trainings:** VRT had a quarterly training scheduled for the following week, but due to weather forecasts there was high likelihood of rescheduling.
- **Other:**
 - Transit Appreciation Day was happening on March 18, and CSPDC and VRT would partner to provide donuts and coffee gift cards to drivers to show their appreciation.
 - Mr. Wilson noted that there had been a few riders who had used the Afton Express in the opposite direction (from Charlottesville to Staunton/Augusta/Waynesboro in the morning), and they had been assisting those passengers on how to best navigate that routing. Discussion ensued about the feasibility of the reverse commute, and what the challenges were for riders who sought to ride in that direction.

Other Business: Chairperson Rodgers asked if there was any other business to come before the committee.

- Chairperson Rodgers reported that she received a complaint regarding a Waynesboro stop at the corner of James Avenue and Gum Street. Mr. Wilson, Ms. Thompson, and Mr. Juday noted that this was a location that had been visited and reviewed previously. The complaint was from a homeowner on the street, and their complaint stemmed from the gathering of people at and near the stop that was bothersome. Mr. Wilson stated that the on/off counts for that stop did not reflect high utilization of the stop, and that it was not believed that any large gatherings were related to transit. Mr. Wilson would gather the data for the stop and report back.
- Mr. Wilson noted that CSPDC and VRT staff were planning to identify potential snow routes this Summer/Fall that could be implemented the following Winter. These would be routes that were safer for the buses to travel during inclement weather and would allow for less service disruptions while still maintaining driver and rider safety. Ms. Cundy also indicated the need for snow removal plans for both the lot and the sidewalks at the Waynesboro Park and Ride lot, and any other Park and Ride lots with bus facilities.



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- Mr. Juday inquired about the process for getting additional shelters installed. Ms. Thompson noted that BRITE currently had a few shelters available if the City had the means for installation.

Adjournment

Chairperson Rodgers indicated that the next BTAC meeting was scheduled for Wednesday, May 11, 2022, at 2:30PM at the CSPDC offices.

There being no further business to come before the BTAC, the meeting concluded at 3:16 PM.

BRITE TDP

Study Update | March 9, 2022





Today's Discussion – Setting the Stage

- Summary of Pre-Pandemic/Current Route Performance
- Summary of Public Survey
- Recap of Rider Requests
- Potential Projects for TDP
- Next Steps

Fixed Route Performance



Overall: 9.8 trips/hour in FY2019; 4.9 trips/hour FY2021 = 50% decline in productivity

By Route:

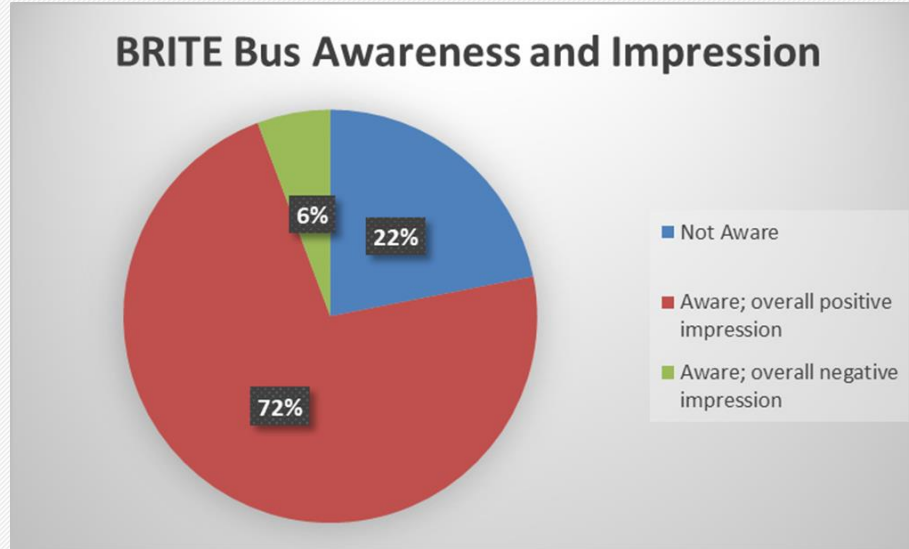
Route	FY2019 Trips/ Revenue Hour	FY2021 Trips/ Revenue Hour	% change
250 Connector	13.3	6.3	-53%
Staunton Trolleys	9.2	5.6	-39%
Staunton Loops	12.2	8.9	-28%
Waynesboro Circulator	13.6	5.9	-56%
BRCC Shuttles	5.6 N/7.1 S	2.1	-66%
Stuarts Draft Link	3.1	1.8	-43%

Challenge: Restore productivity to pre-pandemic levels

Public Survey Results



107 surveys completed – 95 online, 12 hard copy



Public Survey Results



Primary Mode of Transportation

Answer Choices	Responses	
	%	#
I drive	62.3%	66
I use public transportation	23.6%	25
Friends/family drive me	9.4%	10
I ride a bicycle	1.9%	2
I take a taxi	1.9%	2
I walk	0.9%	1
I take an Uber/Lyft	0.0%	0
	Answered	106
	Skipped	1

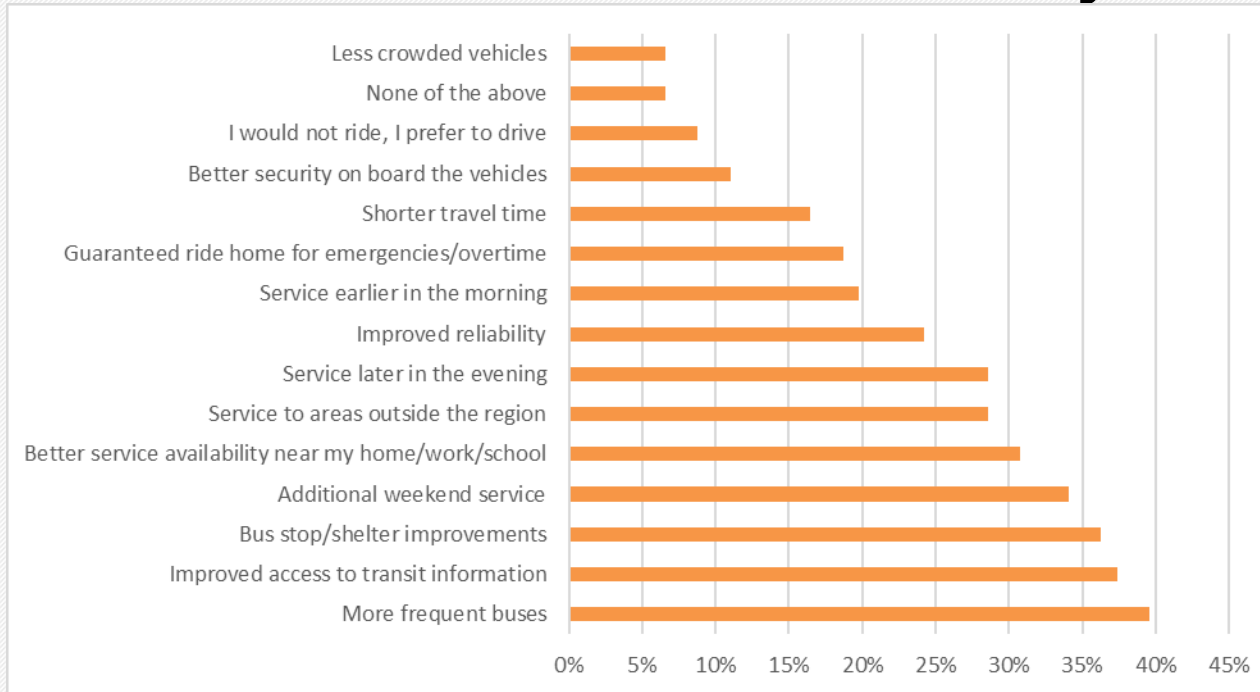
Modes Used

Answer Choices	Responses	
	%	#
I do not currently use public transportation	48.6%	51
BRITE Bus	30.5%	32
Uber/Lyft	11.4%	12
Afton Express	5.7%	6
Harrisonburg Department of Public Transportation	5.7%	6
Valley Program for Aging Services or other Human Service Transportation Programs	5.7%	6
Virginia Breeze	5.7%	6
BRITE Access	4.8%	5
Taxis	3.8%	4
Other (please specify)	3.8%	4
Vanpools or carpools	2.9%	3
	Answered	105
	Skipped	2

Public Survey Results



Improvements Needed for Non-Riders to Try Transit



Public Survey Results



Prioritization of Potential Improvements

Improvement	# Indicating a Top 3 Priority	%
Service later in the evenings	34	32%
Expanded service outside of Augusta County and the Cities of Staunton and Waynesboro	29	27%
Bus stop/shelter improvements	25	23%
Additional Saturday service	23	21%
Sunday service	22	21%
On-demand service using my smart phone	20	19%
Service earlier in the mornings	15	14%
Improved access to transit information	14	13%
Improved on-time performance	9	8%
No fares	9	8%
Safer buses	7	7%
Cleaner buses	5	5%
Lower fares	5	5%

Public Survey Results



Additional locations desired for transit service

Staunton

Staunton fringe areas

Lyle Ave and Pine St

Hillcrest area

The Selma Blvd area. The stop is too far to walk.

West End/Churchville Ave

W Beverley edge of city limits

Baldwin acres

Waynesboro

I live across the railroad tracks on Commerce Avenue and I'm over 65, the walk to the nearest stop is difficult for me.

Main Street in Waynesboro, between Lew DeWitt Boulevard and Rosser Avenue.

Coyner Springs Park

Public Survey Results



Additional locations desired for transit service

Augusta County

Rural areas of Augusta County; specific routes from those areas to hospitals and medical centers

Rural areas of Augusta County (Deerfield, Craigsville, etc.)

Churchville

Ivy Ridge

Greenspring Valley

New Hope area

Augusta County Mint Spring

Stop on Afton Mountain

There needs to be a stop at Valley CSB, not down on 250

Augusta Homes

Regional

Harrisonburg

SE Rockingham County

To Richmond, Virginia Beach

Sentara RMH Harrisonburg

Staunton to Dulles (afternoon to Dulles and then an early evening bus from Dulles to Staunton)

Staunton To Charlottesville

Other

Closer to high schools to pick up kids w/ afterschool jobs

More bus stops

Have the access buses have access greater than .50-.75 of a mile.

Anywhere there are senior citizen living communities.

Public Survey Results



Other Suggestions:

- VA Breeze and Afton Express at same stop
- More service
- More shelters
- On-demand service in Waynesboro
- Senior-oriented service
- More intercity bus service
- Increased availability of information

Public Survey Results



- 92% indicated a need for additional or improved public transportation in the region
- 90% indicated support for additional funding to expand public transportation in the future

Re-Cap of Rider Surveys – Desired Improvements



Fixed Route

- Top 4 desired improvements, in order: Sunday service (77%); bus shelters and benches at stops (44%); service later in the evening (39%); and additional Saturday service (33%)

Paratransit

- Desired improvements: Saturday service (41%); service later in the evenings (35%); Access service to other areas of Augusta County (29%); and service earlier in the mornings (29%)

Potential TDP Projects



Service

- Microtransit pilot project – Waynesboro. To address on-demand needs and test the concept.
- Additional “South Loop” in Staunton to address concerns with the 250 Connector, as outlined in the 250 Connector Study
- Adjustments to the Stuarts Draft Link – devise a more linear route, serve additional employment centers. There are suggestions within the 250 Connector Study.
- Adjustments for the Waynesboro Circulator – can Main Street b/t Rosser and Lew Dewitt be served? Is it feasible to serve Vector Industries?
- Additional rural or specialized senior-oriented service?
- Afton Express, VA Breeze, and local BRITE at the same stop. This will be accomplished through the Staunton Crossing Park and Ride Lot, which has been approved for SMART SCALE funding and is expected to be completed in 2023.

Potential TDP Projects



Service (continued)

- Is it feasible to add an Afton Mountain stop? There have also been requests for a stop at the Fontaine Research Park, part of UVA Medical Center in Charlottesville.
- Saturday paratransit service
- Sunday service
- Later hours of service
- Improved connections between Harrisonburg and Staunton

Infrastructure

- Lewis Street Hub Improvements
- Additional bus shelters throughout network

Potential TDP Projects



Technology

■ ITS Plan Implementation

- Mobile Data Collection System
- Scheduling Software
- Real-time transit information
- Traveler information displays at major activity centers
- Advanced driver assistance system
- Mobile ticketing

Potential TDP Projects



Are there others to explore?

Next Steps



- Provide complete details for each alternative
 - Description
 - Advantages and Disadvantages
 - Cost Estimate
 - Documented in Chapter 4
- Decide which projects to include in TDP
- Develop Draft TDP