



112 MacTanly Place
Staunton, VA 24401

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**BRITE Transit Advisory Committee Meeting Summary
July 13, 2022, 2:30 p.m.**

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
✓	Alisande Tombarge	City of Waynesboro
	Krystal Moyers	Augusta Health
✓	Mike Kelley	Wilson Workforce & Rehabilitation Center
✓	Greg Beam*	Staunton Downtown Development
✓	Terry Rodgers, Chair	Shenandoah Valley Social Services
✓	Anastasia Triplett*	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*	
✓	Kayla Payne*	
✓	Rodney Rhodes, City of Staunton	
✓	Zach Beard, CSPDC*	
✓	Ansley Heller, CSPDC	

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. Pursuant to §2.2-3708.2 of the Code of Virginia, BTAC members may participate in meetings through electronic communication means. Those who attended virtually are indicated by an asterisk; all others attended in-person.

Public Comment

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



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Approve Minutes

Chairperson Rodgers presented the minutes from the May 11, 2022, BTAC meeting for consideration.

Mr. Paul Terry moved, seconded by Ms. Jennifer Whetzel, to approve the minutes of the May 11, 2022, meeting, as presented. Motion carried unanimously.

Business

Staunton Lewis Street Hub Rehabilitation Update: Ms. Ann Cundy announced the progress of the Staunton Lewis Street Hub Rehabilitation project. Staff had submitted the formal Federal Transit Administration (FTA) application for the grant award, and costs could now be incurred against the project.

Ms. Cundy indicated that the CSPDC was working with the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT) to create a Request for Proposals (RFP) for design and engineering services as well as construction administration. The RFP should be released in the fall, so design and engineer work could be conducted in the winter. CSPDC staff was also working closely with the City of Staunton to identify an alternative location for the buses to hub during construction. In the meantime, quotes were solicited for interim patching the current potholes in the lot. Staff acknowledged the detrimental shape of the lot and the need to patch prior to construction next year.

Ms. Leslie Beauregard inquired on the timeline for construction, and Ms. Cundy stated that the construction should not last more than a couple of months. Mr. Rodney Rhodes inquired as to when the construction would start, and Ms. Cundy stated the hope was to be able begin construction in 2023 during paving season. DRPT's engineering staff assumed that the design and engineering phase would be completed quickly, and construction would be completed quickly as well once scheduled.

ITS – Mobile Data Collection System Update: Ms. Devon Thompson provided an update on the ITS project. At the end of May, a data collection call was held with Kimley-Horn, the consultant providing technical assistance for acquiring a mobile data collection system. This data helped outline the technical specifications for the system. Kimley-Horn was developing a draft Request for Information (RFI) that would be complete soon, and it would contain high-level requirements to request that industry vendors demonstrate how their solution could meet the requirements. Ms. Thompson indicated that not only would this step verify that the requirements would be met by vendors without custom enhancements, but it would also further educate CSPDC and VRT staff on system capabilities. A call would be scheduled with Kimley-Horn to talk next steps and logistics for releasing the RFI and getting demos scheduled.

Afton Express Update: Ms. Paula Melester reported that Afton Express operations were going well. Every month had seen growth in ridership – from May to June there was a 25 percent increase. The average daily passenger trips



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were between 45-50. Higher numbers were seen Monday through Thursday, and lower numbers were seen on Fridays.

Ms. Melester announced that the service had received good press recently from local TV and radio stations, and the service was recently spotlighted on NBC29.

Ms. Melester also announced that the Commonwealth Transportation Board (CTB) approved the Six Year Improvement Program (SYIP), which included funding for a third Demonstration Grant for Afton Express. The grant would fund operations through the end of Fiscal Year 2023 and a planned expansion for the service that would provide an additional evening run to better serve UVA's 12-hour shift workers. The expansion would be planned to launch in fall 2022.

Ms. Leslie Beauregard inquired as to whether or not the reason for riding was tracked. Ms. Melester indicated that a rider survey was conducted last year, and a commuter assistance program (CAP) survey was launched this year. The CAP survey had just closed, and Ms. Melester would share that data at the next meeting. Ms. Melester indicated that passengers were pleased with the service, but where and why they rode weren't known at the time. Ms. Thompson announced that an Afton Express passenger was a Zoom participant and asked if they would like to share why they rode the route. The passenger indicated that they lived in Staunton and worked in Charlottesville and cited that taking the bus was a better deal than driving and expressed satisfaction with the service.

Transit Development Plan (TDP) Update: Ms. Lib Rood presented on the progress of the Transit Development Plan (TDP). Ms. Rood's presentation focused on the feedback received thus far, two additional projects, and decision-making (see attached presentation for further detail).

- **Feedback:** Ms. Rood outlined the projects that would move forward in the Plan and those that were not. Additionally, estimated local share costs were shared with the committee.
- **Additional Projects:**
 - Fare-Free Public Transportation – advantages, disadvantages, financial implications, and ridership impacts were presented and discussed.
 - Fleet Electrification – information and issues to consider were presented and discussed.
- **Decision-Making:** Two different ranking/questions would be asked – ranked service proposals with significant costs and asked questions regarding exploration of fare-free transit and fleet electrification. The presentation and information and polls would be sent out after the meeting.

A question-and-answer period followed the presentation:

- Ms. Anastasia Triplett sought clarification on the local match contributions for the proposed projects, and whether or not those costs were to be spread equally among partners. Ms. Rood indicated it would follow the current pattern in place for partner matches; but, for some projects, it would depend on the area being served; for instance, the microtransit pilot would be geofenced in a small area in either Staunton,



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Waynesboro, or Augusta County, thus the locality that received the service would pick up the cost. This would be unless there was consensus among the partners to share the cost equally.

- Ms. Whetzel inquired about the fare elimination alternative, and whether or not there was a federal requirement to charge a fare. Ms. Rood confirmed that fare charges were not required. Additionally, Ms. Whetzel indicated that she understood the hardship of collecting fares, but noted that in regard to riders, there was usually more value in something if there was payment involved versus if it was for free; to which Ms. Messer agreed.
- Ms. Beauregard asked if there were other Virginia transit agencies that were fare-free that BRITE could get additional information from and see what their experiences had been like. Ms. Cundy indicated that the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT) had launched a fare-free pilot – TRIP program – where they would cover certain percentages of cost for a certain period of time until the agency would fully cover the cost. CSPDC staff looked into the program, but at the time it was not going to be feasible for BRITE. As for the inclusion in the TDP, Ms. Cundy noted that DRPT encouraged the inclusion of the fare-free alternative because as a statewide agency, this was an initiative they were supportive of. Ms. Cundy also indicated that CSPDC staff were aware of the many things that needed to be considered in regard to fare-free transit, such as the cost of collecting fares versus how much fare was collected.
- Ms. Messer inquired if time or money would be saved if fares were not collected. Mr. Wilson noted that counting fares was time-consuming and an arduous task, but he could see the merit in both sides of issue.
- Ms. Rood indicated that she would conduct additional research into fares statewide.

Contractor Update: Mr. Wilson reported on the following:

- **Ridership:** There had been slight increases in ridership on both BRITE and Afton Express.
- **Employment Opportunities:** Virginia Regional Transit (VRT) continued to solicit employment for additional drivers. Mr. Wilson indicated VRT had acquired a program for driver training that would hopefully assist in bringing on new employees.
- **VRT Driver Bootcamp:** On June 25, VRT hosted a Driver Bootcamp in Culpeper, Virginia. There was a “roadeo” style obstacle course for completion, and breakout sessions were conducted that focused on accident investigation, etc.
- **Shenandoah Valley Infrastructure Discussion with Senator Mark Warner:** CSPDC and VRT were hosting Senator Mark Warner for his Shenandoah Valley Infrastructure Discussion at the BRITE Transit Facility on July 15.

Ms. Rood inquired as to whether or not any other VRT locations had any electric buses in their fleets. Mr. Wilson indicated that VRT was in the beginning stages of investigating this topic.

Ms. Becky Messer indicated that the new drivers she had experienced recently were excellent and extended her compliments to VRT staff.

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



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- Ms. Thompson reiterated on Mr. Wilson's update regarding the Senator Warner event. Ms. Thompson noted the time and date of the event, and encouraged committee members to RSVP if they had not already done so.
- Ms. Rood announced that any additional questions regarding the TDP could be sent to Ms. Thompson to be forwarded to Ms. Rood. Ms. Thompson indicated that after the meeting she would send an email that contained the link to the Mentimeter poll and today's presentation.

Adjournment

Chairperson Rodgers indicated that the next BTAC meeting was scheduled for Wednesday, September 14, 2022, at 2:30 PM at the CSPDC offices.

There being no further business to come before the BTAC, the meeting concluded at 3:17 PM.

BRITE TDP

Study Update | July 13, 2022



Today's Discussion



- Feedback thus far
- Two additional projects
- Decision-making



Feedback Thus Far



- Microtransit Pilot Project
- Staunton South Route
- Saturday Paratransit
- Sunday Service
- Later Hours of Service
- ~~Additional Service for Rural Augusta County~~
- Afton Express Adjustments – *include stops in Downtown Staunton and Waynesboro for select trips*
- Modifications to the Waynesboro Circulator
- Modifications to the Stuarts Draft Link
- ~~Additional Service between Staunton and Harrisonburg~~

Feedback Thus Far – What are the estimated local share costs?



- Microtransit Pilot Project
 - Software Platform - \$95,000 (32% of \$250,000)
 - Operating Costs - \$60,000 annually – based on the high end of current ratios (20%)
- Staunton South Route
 - Operating Costs - \$41,106 annually – based on the high end of current ratios (20%)
- Saturday Paratransit
 - Operating Costs - \$5,085 annually – based on the high end of current ratios (20%)
- Sunday Service
 - Operating Costs - \$18,081 annually – based on the high end of current ratios (20%)
- Later Hours of Service - Waynesboro
 - Operating Costs - \$5,540 annually – based on the high end of current ratios (20%)

Feedback Thus Far – What are the estimated local share costs?



- Afton Express Adjustments – *include stops in Downtown Staunton and Waynesboro for select trips*
 - Included in FY2023 budget. Downtown stops would be incremental cost to add.
- Modifications to the Waynesboro Circulator
 - Minor incremental costs
- Modifications to the Stuarts Draft Link
 - Minor incremental costs

Additional Projects



Fare Free Public Transportation

- Fare-free transit service is gaining popularity among small and medium-sized transit systems where the fares are relatively modest and do not generate a level of revenue that would be too difficult to replace from other sources. For many systems, the cost of collecting, securing, and accounting for the fare revenue exceeds the amount collected.
- BRITE collects about \$50,000 in fare revenue annually. Fare revenue for BRITE is collected, counted, secured, and kept by the contractor. The amount of fare revenue received each month is then deducted from the monthly BRITE invoice.
- The pandemic history with fare-free transit for BRITE does not show increased ridership, however; it is likely that once the pandemic is over ridership will respond more favorably to fare-free transit, as this has historically been the pattern within the industry. Providing fare-free service may help BRITE restore ridership to pre-pandemic levels.

Advantages

- Eliminates the need to collect, count, secure, and record passenger fares.
- Speeds up the boarding process.
- Eliminates conflicts that can occur between passengers and vehicle operators regarding fare payment.
- Provides financial relief for riders, many of whom are low-income.
- Will likely increase ridership. The pre-pandemic literature suggests at least a 20% increase in ridership.
- Reduces costs for fare media (tokens and punch cards).

Disadvantages

- Reduces revenue by about \$50,000 annually. This amount will need to come from other sources, such as advertising revenue, local partners, and federal/state sources.
- May encourage people to ride with no specific destination. This can be prevented through BRITE policy, but the drivers would have to enforce it.

Financial Implications

- Eliminating fares will cost about \$50,000 annually. There will be some minor savings from not having to purchase tokens and punch cards.
- Eliminating fares will increase the net operating deficit, which could make BRITE eligible for additional state and federal funds. However, this would only occur if these funds were available.
- If ridership increases, then BRITE's performance measures will improve, making the system eligible for more funds under DRPT's performance-based funding.

Ridership Impacts

- The literature suggests that ridership should increase by at least 20%. BRITE did not see this during the pandemic fare elimination but could post-pandemic.

Local Share Implications –

Without considering the savings from not having to purchase tokens or punch cards, or the potential for performance-based funding, about \$6,230 in additional local funds would be needed systemwide. This assumes the availability of federal and state funding at current funding ratios.

Additional Projects



Fleet Electrification

- An all-electric transit vehicle, also called a battery electric bus (BEB), is one that is driven using an electric motor rather than an internal combustion engine. Electricity to operate the vehicle is stored within on-board batteries. There are several appealing features of electric buses, including: zero tail-pipe emissions, zero dependence on oil, quiet and smooth operation, and potentially lower operating expenses than conventionally fueled buses.
- Interest in all-electric buses has been growing in the United States, driven by sustainability initiatives, as well as the Federal Transit Administration's Low or No Emission Vehicle Program (Section 5339 (c)) – "Low-No."
- As electric vehicles have become more available and tested, the CSPDC has expressed interest in exploring fleet electrification.

Additional Projects



Fleet Electrification

Issues to Consider:

- Vehicle Charging
- Operating Environment
- Life Cycle Cost Analysis
- Agency Training Resources
- CSPDC/Contractor Model and Vehicle Ownership



Decision-Making:

- The CSPDC will need to assess its ability to electrify the fleet based on the exploration of each of the issues above. For the TDP, the potential project is to fully evaluate the potential for the CSPDC to electrify some or all of the fleet used for service.

Decision-Making



Ranking of service proposals that have significant costs

- Microtransit Pilot Project
- Staunton South Route
- Saturday Paratransit
- Sunday Service
- Later Hours of Service

<https://www.menti.com/ipn7ypsfej>

The voting code **5677 6130**



Decision-Making



Fare Free – Yes/No

Exploration of Fleet Electrification – Yes/No

<https://www.menti.com/ipn7ypsfej>

The voting code **5677 6130**



Next Steps



- Choose TDP Projects
- Draft TDP Report
- Final TDP Report
- CSPDC Board Adoption