

Afton Express: Annual Report

January 2024 - December 2024



CSPDC

Central Shenandoah Planning District Commission

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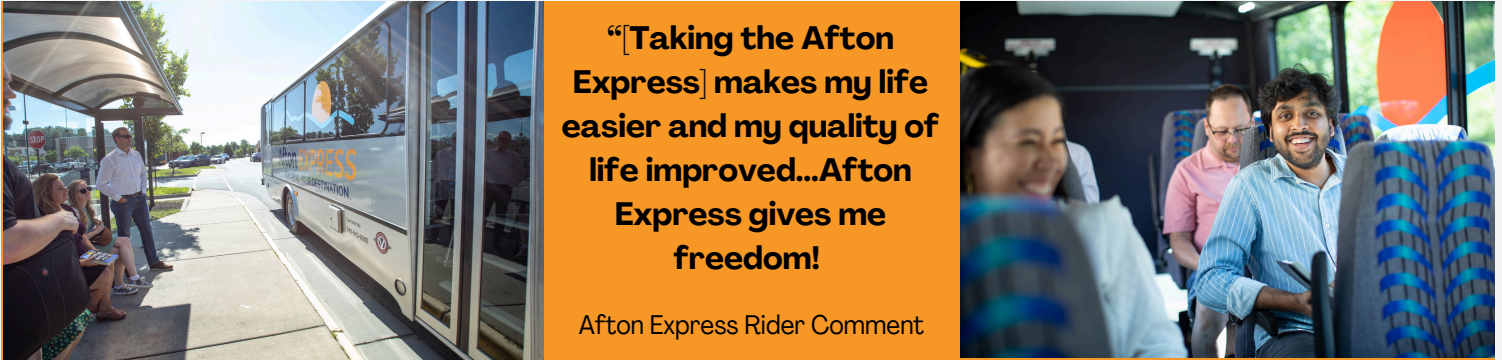
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Executive Summary



“[Taking the Afton Express] makes my life easier and my quality of life improved...Afton Express gives me freedom!

Afton Express Rider Comment

Ridership on the Afton Express continues to increase year-by-year with 19,146 passenger trips taken in 2024. This represents a 16% increase from the previous year and is the highest recorded ridership in a single year since the launch of the service in 2021. This annual report summarizes the year with performance data, events, and accomplishments.

We celebrated our third full year of service in September, and hosted pop-up events at various transit stop locations to mark the occasion. These opportunities to engage with our riders face-to-face allow our staff to hear how the service is working directly from passengers. The feedback gathered at these events is both informative and inspiring. In addition to in-person rider engagement, CSPDC transit staff conduct a survey every year to gain a more thorough understanding of the rider experience. Feedback from this survey, as well as data collected through our mobile data collection system are used to assess Afton Express performance and operations. Additionally, this information is used to make necessary changes or improve service when such opportunities arise.

The highlight of this year was the launch of the University of Virginia’s (UVA) Wahoo Commute program. Through this commuter rewards program, all UVA affiliates may ride the Afton Express at no cost, with fares being subsidized by the University. The program is led by UVA’s Parking and Transportation office. CSPDC staff partnered with them to implement the fare-free component on the Afton Express in September. The Afton Express and UVA partnership continues to be an important relationship that positively impacts our communities.

Also of note was the relocation of the Afton Express bus stops in Staunton and Fishersville and the implementation of a new mobile data collection system. These new stops provide improved rider amenities and will increase connectivity between the Afton Express and BRITE Bus routes. The installation of mobile data collection/GPS tracking systems on all of our buses will allow CSPDC and BRITE staff access to a plethora of data that will be used to help assess performance and streamline operations.

The Afton Express achievements in 2024 were many and we are pleased to share this summary of the year. This report offers insight into our services, our riders, and our plans for the future. We hope you will join us in celebrating another year of the Afton Express!



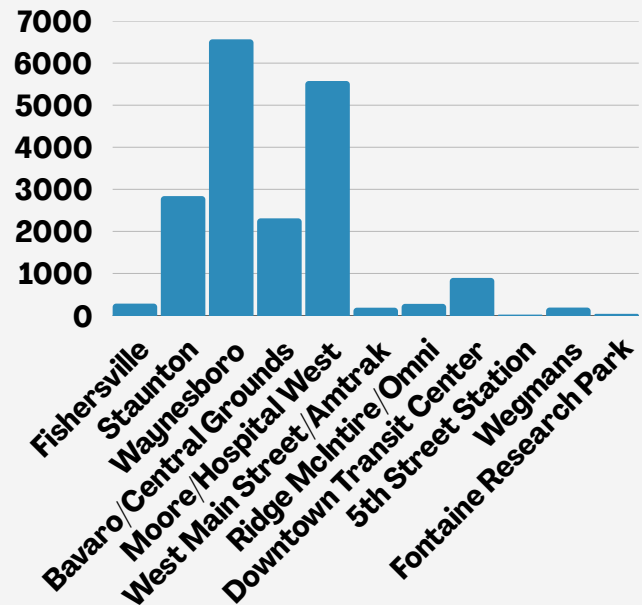
Performance Metrics

Figure 1. Annual Ridership

| | Total Monthly Passenger Trips | Average Daily Passenger Trips |
|--------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| January | 1,292 | 72 |
| February | 1,591 | 76 |
| March | 1,553 | 68 |
| April | 1,775 | 81 |
| May | 1,579 | 72 |
| June | 1,339 | 61 |
| July | 1,551 | 71 |
| August | 1,799 | 82 |
| September | 1,720 | 86 |
| October | 2,004 | 87 |
| November | 1,502 | 79 |
| December | 1,441 | 76 |
| TOTAL | 19,146 | |

Ridership in 2024 followed a similar pattern to previous years, with lower passenger trips around the winter holidays, and during the summer months of June and July. This is in part due to workers taking more vacation time during these windows, which results in them spending fewer days commuting to work. A single passenger trip is counted as one passenger boarding, one-way. Though most of our riders travel round-trip, counting passengers when they board ensures accurate ridership data. Like past years, the most popular boarding locations were the Waynesboro Park and Ride lot on the western side of the mountain, and the Moore Health Sciences Library / West Hospital Complex on the eastern side of the mountain.

Figure 2. Passenger Boardings by Stop



“I think this public transport system is one of the best...The level of public transit is what I would expect from larger cities like D.C. or Boston, but also has the cleanliness and locality of a small town.”

Afton Express Rider Comment



Passenger Profile

In addition to the quantitative data collected by the mobile data tracking systems on each bus, the CSPDC uses qualitative data from passengers and the general public to gain insight to the passenger profile and overall customer experience. We ran a year-end survey from mid-December to mid-January. This year, 80 individuals took our survey, a record number of participants since the inception of this practice in 2021. A summary of the rider responses is provided herein.

Passenger Profile

Of the 80 respondents, 71% said that they ride the Afton Express regularly, and 11% said they ride occasionally. Please note that 14 of the 80 respondents said they do not ride the Afton Express and will therefore be omitted from the passenger profile analysis.

Age among riders reflects the spirit of the commuting service, with 82% of riders falling within the typical working years span of 25-64 years old.

In terms of gender, we saw similar patterns to past surveys, with the majority of our riders identifying as female (68% of the responses). 29% of respondents identified as male, and one respondent identified as non-binary.

Figure 3. How long have you been riding?

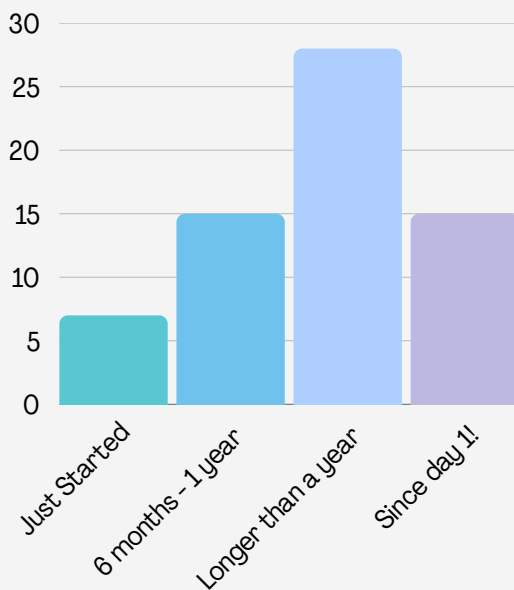
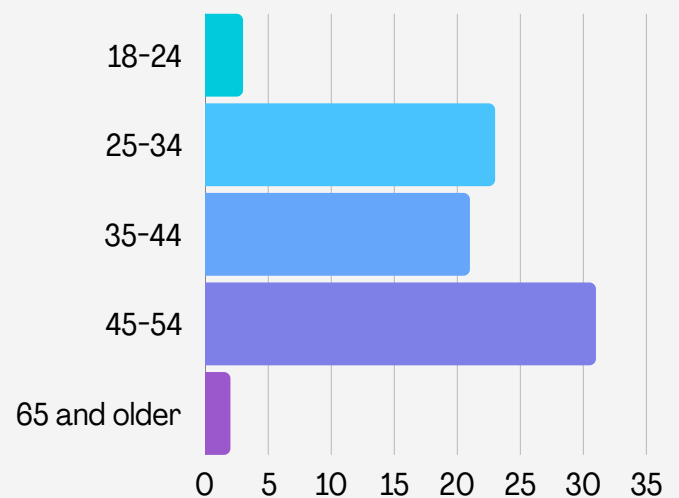


Figure 4. Passenger Age



The survey also asked participants to share their racial and ethnic backgrounds and responses generally reflect the racial make-up of the Staunton-Augusta-Waynesboro area. 77% of respondents identified as White, 8% as Black, and those who identified as either Asian, two or more races, or said that their race was not listed, each made up 5% of responses. Ethnically, 10% of respondents identified as Hispanic/Latino.

Historically, most Afton Express riders are choice riders, rather than transit dependent. This year, 98% of respondents said they own a vehicle, surpassing the vehicle ownership/access percentages of respondents from last year.



Trip Profile

Almost all respondents (97%) indicated they use the Afton Express to commute to and from work. As a commuter bus service, this trip profile is expected. Other reasons respondents gave for riding include: visiting a friend and traveling to the Amtrak station in Charlottesville.

Afton Express service was designed to provide a safe and stress-free commute for individuals living in the Staunton-Augusta-Waynesboro area to their places of employment in and around Charlottesville. Unsurprisingly, most survey respondents (95%) travel eastbound in the morning and westbound in the evening. However, service has posed as useful for some riders who choose to do the “reverse commute” and ride east to west in the AM (3% of respondents). The remaining 2% of respondents marked that they ride within the designated east or west corridors only.

On the west side of Afton Mountain, the Waynesboro Park and Ride lot was most utilized by survey respondents, at 69%, followed by Staunton Crossing Park and Ride lot at 29%. The most popular stops used on the Charlottesville/Albemarle side were the UVA Moore Health Sciences Library/Hospital West Complex stop with 38 of 65 respondents (59%), and the UVA Bavaro Hall/Central Grounds Garage, with 21 of 65 respondents (32%).

Figure 5. AM Trip Distribution

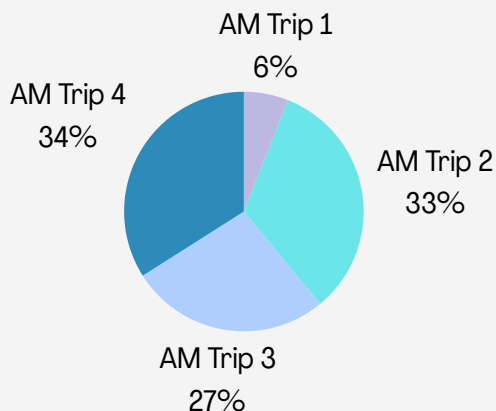
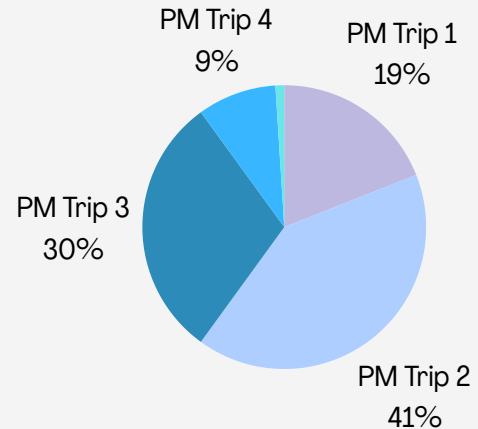


Figure 6. PM Trip Distribution



**“Taking the bus literally changed my life!!
It’s so convenient and practical.”**

Afton Express Rider Comment

The Afton Express works on a designated trip system, with the schedule and times following accordingly. In 2024, survey respondents cited that they use AM Trips 2 and 4 most often, at 33% and 34%, respectively. For the afternoon and evening trips, 41% of respondents said they ride PM Trip 2 most often, and 30% said they utilize PM Trip 3 most often.

“Having the Afton Express removed anxiety from having to drive over the mountain and deal with traffic. It opened employment possibilities in Charlottesville and allowed me and my family to enjoy life in the valley.”

Afton Express Rider Comment



Highlights

The most significant achievement this year was the implementation of the University of Virginia's (UVA) new Wahoo Commute program. Under this program, all UVA affiliates ride the Afton Express fare free, with fares being subsidized by UVA's Department of Parking and Transportation. The University of Virginia is the largest employer in Charlottesville, and this initiative not only benefits the employees directly, but also bolsters Afton Express ridership and impact. Additionally, programs like Wahoo Commute set a precedent for how commuter services and benefits can be used as a tool for positive change. UVA has been a partner of the Afton Express since its beginnings, and according to the survey, 95% of respondents this year ride fare free as part of the Wahoo Commute Program. In the survey, many Wahoo Commute riders stated that taking the Afton Express to work at UVA has decreased their stress levels, saved them money, and has even made employment at UVA possible in the first place.

UVA employees who sign up for the Wahoo Commute program log their alternative transportation trips, such as those on the Afton Express, and in return receive payment directly to their paychecks for each trip logged. Additionally, Wahoo Commuters are also eligible for emergency rides home, and prizes from drawings each month. To be eligible, members must give up their yearly parking pass, which can cost over \$1,500 a year.

"The Afton Express provides the gold standard for commuter transportation to and from the University of Virginia."

—Kendall Howell, Assistant Director of Transportation at UVA

Figure 7. Wahoo Commute Dashboard



By not driving to Grounds, riders save money, reduce congestion, and reduce UVA's overall parking needs. Additionally, many riders commented that they get work done during their commute and arrive to work less stressed. We are excited to continue to work with UVA to reach their goal of carbon neutrality by 2030.

"Prior to riding I was spending \$250 on gas a month, paying for parking, and racking up loads of miles on my car. Now, I get paid to ride! I have also made a few friends from riding and it is nice to just sit back and relax. The drivers are all super nice and look out for everyone."

Afton Express Rider Comment



Highlights

CSPDC and BRITE staff continue to look for ways to improve the rider experience and make Afton Express accessible to more riders. Based on feedback received from riders and community partners, we relocated two Afton Express bus stops to more accessible locations. The Staunton Mall stop moved from the old Staunton Mall to the brand new Staunton Crossing Park and Ride lot. This lot was constructed by the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) in partnership with the City of Staunton through the state's SMART SCALE Program.

"I love being able to get off the bus [and be] a five-minute walk from my office. No parking, no long walk once I arrive on grounds, just get off and go."

Afton Express Rider Comment

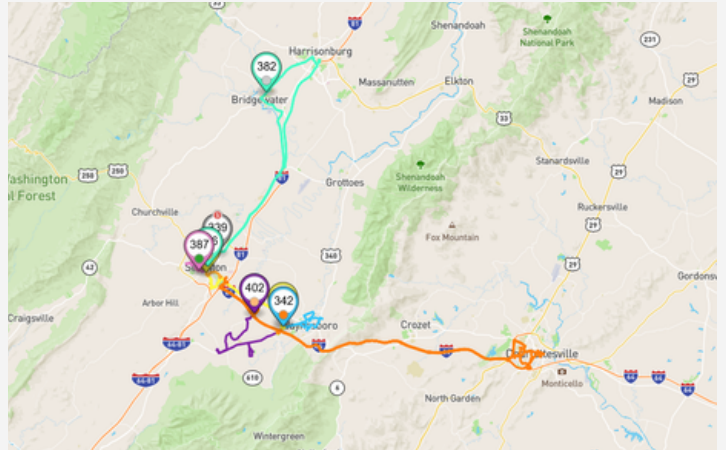
The new lot is complete with a dedicated bus lane, bus shelter, and connection to the Virginia Breeze. Once lighting is installed in partnership with the City of Staunton (estimated Spring 2025), Staunton Crossing will provide an elevated service experience for riders boarding the Afton Express in Staunton.

The Fishersville stop was also relocated from the BRITE Transit Facility to Augusta Health. This move was requested by Augusta Health and was initiated to better serve hospital staff who commute from Charlottesville to Fishersville. Both of these new locations provide an opportunity for future connections between BRITE Bus routes and the Afton Express.

Figure 8. Staunton Crossing Park and Ride Lot



Figure 9. GPS Bus Tracking Dashboard



Finally, BRITE Transit completed the implementation of an intelligent transportation system (ITS), installing mobile data terminals on all BRITE and Afton Express buses. All routes began mobile data collection through the GPS enabled devices in 2024, replacing the outdated manual passenger tracking process. With this upgrade, performance metrics such as ridership data, on-time performance, stop utilization, and much more, are easily accessible to BRITE operators and CSPDC transit staff through a web-based dashboard. Additionally, the devices allow dispatch and staff to easily relay important information to drivers on route. These tools offer planners and BRITE operators invaluable data that will be used to make service decisions and provide the digital infrastructure and framework for future improvements such as the development of a "real-time" bus arrival mobile application to improve passenger experience.



Impact

Looking beyond the ridership metrics, we seek to measure the greater impact the Afton Express has on the communities it serves. Some of these impact factors are quantifiable; others are not as easily measured, but are equally important. In this report, we highlight the environmental and economic impact, and quality of life factors for those who use the service.

Environmental

Afton Express riders who participate in the Rideshare Commuter Assistance Program regularly log their transit commute trips in the ConnectingVA mobile app. Based on the survey and data downloaded from the app, 21 respondents said that they log their trips in the ConnectingVA app. With this information and using the AgileMile platform, we can estimate that just these 21 respondents prevented 182,750 pounds of CO2 emissions in 2024 alone. Additionally, these riders prevented approximately 3,500 single-occupancy vehicle trips. When asked why survey participants choose to ride the Afton Express, 64% cited environmental reasons as at least one of the reasons as to why they ride.

Economic

When commuters spend less on gas, vehicle maintenance, parking, and other expenses related to their commute, they can spend their money in other ways - like supporting local restaurants and businesses where they live. When asked about their motivations for riding the Afton Express, saving money on gas (92% of respondents) and car maintenance (83% of respondents) were the most frequent survey responses. Saving money on parking was the third most common motivation for riding (67% of respondents). The average fuel price in Virginia in 2024 was \$3.37 per gallon. The 21 riders who logged transit trips in ConnectingVA collectively saved an estimated \$32,550 on gas, and another \$64,210 on vehicle wear and tear in 2024. When using the IRS standard mileage rate of 67 cents per mile, each of these riders saved \$7,879 per year, with a collective savings of \$165,463 in 2024 for 21 riders.

Quality of Life

Survey responses regarding quality of life factors were prevalent in the data. Though these responses were qualitative and lack the quantitative flare of exact dollar amounts or carbon measurements, the positive impact on riders' lives is no less real or important. Among the comments received in the 2024 survey, riders said that taking the Afton Express allows them to:

- Relax during their commute by reducing stress associated with navigating traffic
- Reclaim personal time to read, listen to podcasts or music, watch a tv show, or nap
- Reduce safety concerns by giving 12+ hour shift workers an alternative to driving
- Improve relationships and social lives by returning home from work refreshed and less stressed, and by becoming part of the Afton Express community
- Access broader career opportunities

3,500

**NUMBER OF SINGLE-
OCCUPANY VEHICLE
TRIPS REDUCED**

64%

**CITED
ENVIRONMENTAL
REASONS AS ONE OF
THE REASONS THEY
RIDE**

\$32,550

GAS SAVINGS

\$64,210

**SAVED ON VEHICLE
MAINTENANCE**

**"I especially appreciate not
having to drive after a night
shift when I am tired."**

Afton Express Rider Comment
2024 Annual Report



Looking Ahead



Additional AM or PM Trip

In the upcoming fiscal year, CSPDC transit staff intend to add an additional trip to the Afton Express schedule. As ridership continues to increase, the implementation of another trip will ensure that buses don't overextend their capacities. Additionally, adding a trip can open the possibility of new ridership, from riders whose schedules did not align with the previous Afton Express trip schedule. When planning for such a schedule change, transit planners will take into consideration performance measures, such as current trip usage and ridership, rider feedback obtained through all avenues, including this 2024 survey, as well as previously adopted plans and studies such as the BRITE Transit Development Plan.



New Stop in Crozet

A new Park and Ride lot is being constructed within the Afton Express service area and will provide an upgraded boarding experience for riders.

Crozet is planning for a new Park and Ride lot to be completed in 2026, located at the intersection of Rte. 250 and I-64 just off Exit 107. Adding an Afton Express stop at this lot will provide another point of access to transportation for commuters in Albemarle County and potentially those in Nelson County as well.



Potential for Expanded Marketing

On February 1, 2024, CSPDC transit staff made application to the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation Commuter Assistance Project grant for transit marketing. If awarded, this grant would offer more extensive and substantial marketing and advertising for the Afton Express. For example, funds would cover the cost of increased targeted digital advertisements and tv ads, as well as additional funds for greater marketing on social media.

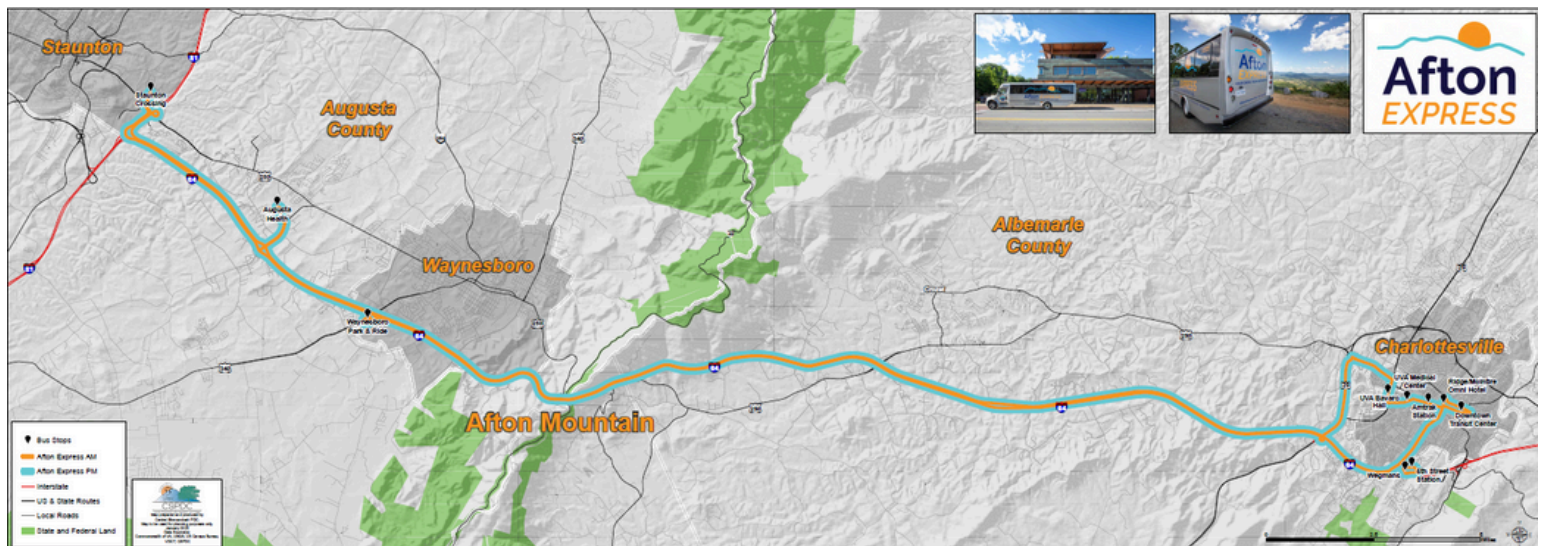
Though many of our riders tend to find us through word of mouth, prior marketing campaigns have proven to be successful. These trends were underscored by survey responses from our riders this year, as 40% said that they heard about the Afton Express through word of mouth, and 22% found us through an advertisement. Given the success of prior campaigns, we are excited about the opportunity to potentially utilize funds to work to increase ridership further.



Acknowledgements

CSPDC shares the success of this service with all of our regional partners. Operating the Afton Express would not be possible without the support of our local service and funding partners, the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT), the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), Virginia Regional Transit (VRT) operators and staff, local strategic partners, and of course, our riders. Thank you for your continued support of the Afton Express. We look forward to another productive year to come in 2025.

Afton Express 2024 Funding Partners: Albemarle County, Augusta County, City of Charlottesville, City of Staunton, City of Waynesboro, and the University of Virginia.



For inquiries related to this report please contact
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