

# DRPT CONNECTS

## FY22 ANNUAL REPORT

# DRPT



VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF RAIL  
AND PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION



# CONNECTING THE COMMONWEALTH, TRANSFORMING THE FUTURE

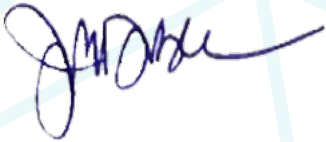
The past few years have been a story about accomplishments emerging from hardship. The COVID-19 pandemic tested the public transportation and rail industries in unimaginable ways, forcing the Department of Rail and Public Transportation to adapt and maneuver the challenges to meet Virginians' needs.

The pandemic highlighted how rail and public transportation are catalysts for the economy and link people to jobs and opportunities, benefiting all Virginians. DRPT and its partners faced adversity head-on and produced impressive results. Ridership rebounded to pre-pandemic levels for the Virginia Breeze. Microtransit projects in rural Virginia have shown promise in closing transit gaps. Transit agencies made adjustments to ensure they served those who rely most on public transportation. Virginia's resilient freight rail network met consumer demands, upholding its role as an essential part of the economy.

Over the past year, DRPT introduced new programs to support our transportation partners and benefit riders. The first two rounds of Transit Ridership Incentive Program grant recipients are launching their projects that help low-income riders and establish long-distance routes to improve riders' access to opportunities. DRPT also created the Virginia Transportation Navigator, a comprehensive database of public transportation services, to bridge the information gap that keeps many Virginians from accessing available transit options. To provide accountability and transparency to our work, DRPT is committed to having a data-driven approach to improve service. The agency unveiled its Open Data Portal, a repository of DRPT financial information and projects as well as statewide performance metrics and geospatial data.

For 30 years, DRPT's core purpose has been connecting people, communities, and businesses in Virginia. DRPT will celebrate its 30th anniversary over the next year, and I hope you will join us in marking our many accomplishments across the Commonwealth. From growing paratransit services and introducing battery-electric buses to transforming the Commonwealth's passenger and freight rail network, we have followed through on our mission to improve the mobility of all Virginians.

My appointment as the director of DRPT in June 2022 has been the highlight of my 30-year career in transportation. I could not do this job without the leaders and workers who keep the buses and trains moving and the amazing team at DRPT. Unprecedented challenges tested their resolve, and their commitment tells me that we will succeed together with promising opportunities to come.



**Jennifer DeBruhl**  
Director



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**GREAT SERVICE!  
LAST JULY, I RODE THE  
VALLEY FLYER ROUTE  
FROM HARRISONBURG TO  
DC, WHERE I CONNECTED  
TO AMTRAK!**





## Riders reconnect with Virginia Breeze

DRPT launched the Virginia Breeze intercity bus program in 2017, providing a vital transportation connection between rural Virginia communities and the national bus network. The COVID-19 pandemic hit the intercity bus service hard. Ridership plunged, and the Virginia Breeze halted service for four months in 2020. Over the last year, the Virginia Breeze saw ridership rebound to pre-pandemic levels. In fall 2021, DRPT launched a fourth route, the Highlands Rhythm, originating in Southwest Virginia, and residents have already shown a strong interest in the expanded service. All four routes posted record ridership in the past fiscal year. The Virginia Breeze has demonstrated the value in offering a mode of transportation for people to forge connections across the Commonwealth after two years of pandemic isolation.



## **Building confidence through technology**

DRPT is committed to improving transparency, and it is harnessing technology to use data and metrics for the public good. The agency launched the Virginia Transportation Navigator in October 2021 to connect residents to transportation providers in the Commonwealth. The Navigator is a one-call, one-click directory of public transit, human service, and specialized transportation providers, programs, and services, as well as mobility management and travel training services. DRPT also built the Open Data Portal to serve as a comprehensive repository of data and financial information about public transportation and rail. Government transparency is crucial to building public trust. It is an agency priority to invest in data transparency demonstrating the outcomes of public investments.





**“WE CHOSE TO BUY OUR HOUSE IN PART BECAUSE IT WAS NEAR A TRANSIT STOP... TAKING THE BUS WAS ESPECIALLY CONVENIENT WHEN I WAS PREGNANT.”**





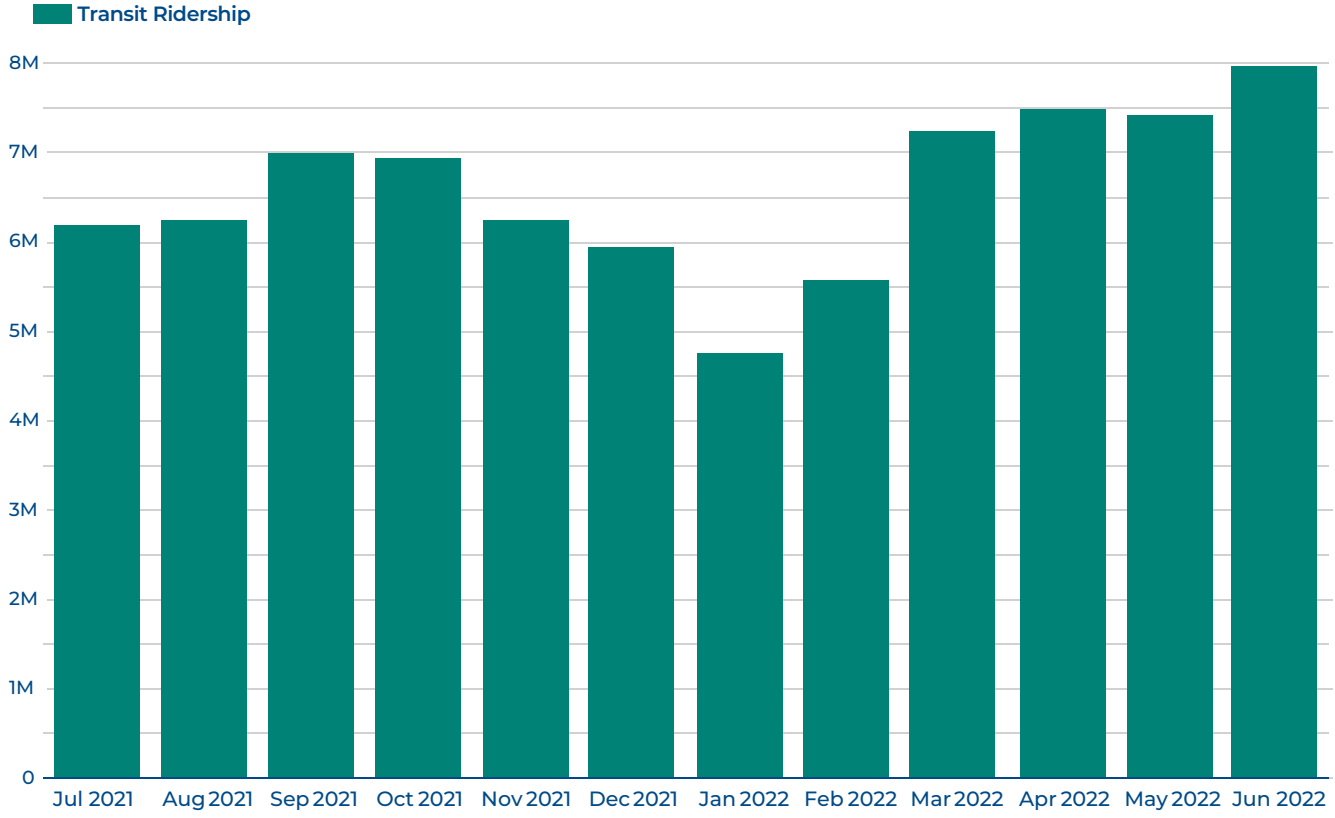


## Improving Virginia's economy through rail

Virginia's rail network is a valuable asset that grows the economy. Investing in it ensures the Commonwealth can efficiently move goods and meet consumer demands. One way that DRPT supports this mission is through the Rail Industrial Access program, which promotes truck diversion from Virginia highways by providing grant assistance to connect new or expanding businesses to the freight railroad network. Since 2018, DRPT has invested over \$6 million in 16 projects, resulting in the diversion of nearly 142,300 trucks and the creation of over 3,000 new jobs. The private companies receiving DRPT funding have invested a total of over \$1 billion in business expansion supported by rail. In FY22, DRPT awarded a record number of grants to businesses all across the Commonwealth. As a result, businesses such as Mondelez in Henrico County will expand its Oreo operations, and Staunton River Plastics in Pittsylvania County will build a new facility that will employ 200 people.

## **Transit ridership begins to recover**

Because of the increase of working from home and health concerns associated with COVID-19, transit ridership dropped precipitously in 2020. Ridership in Virginia declined 61% between FY20 and FY21. While ridership has not returned to pre-pandemic levels, it has rebounded — a 56% increase in FY22 compared to the prior fiscal year. For some transit agencies across the Commonwealth, ridership has returned to or is exceeding their pre-pandemic ridership. Transit agencies that responded to the needs of their core riders — largely people with low income and essential workers — by adjusting services and adopting strategies like zero fare have shown impressive recoveries. DRPT has supported these agencies in various ways, such as with the Rediscover Your Ride media campaign to encourage Virginians to return to transit.



# BAY TRANSIT EXPRESS

Download the App:  
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(804) 693-6977



Bay Transit Express logo and social media icons.





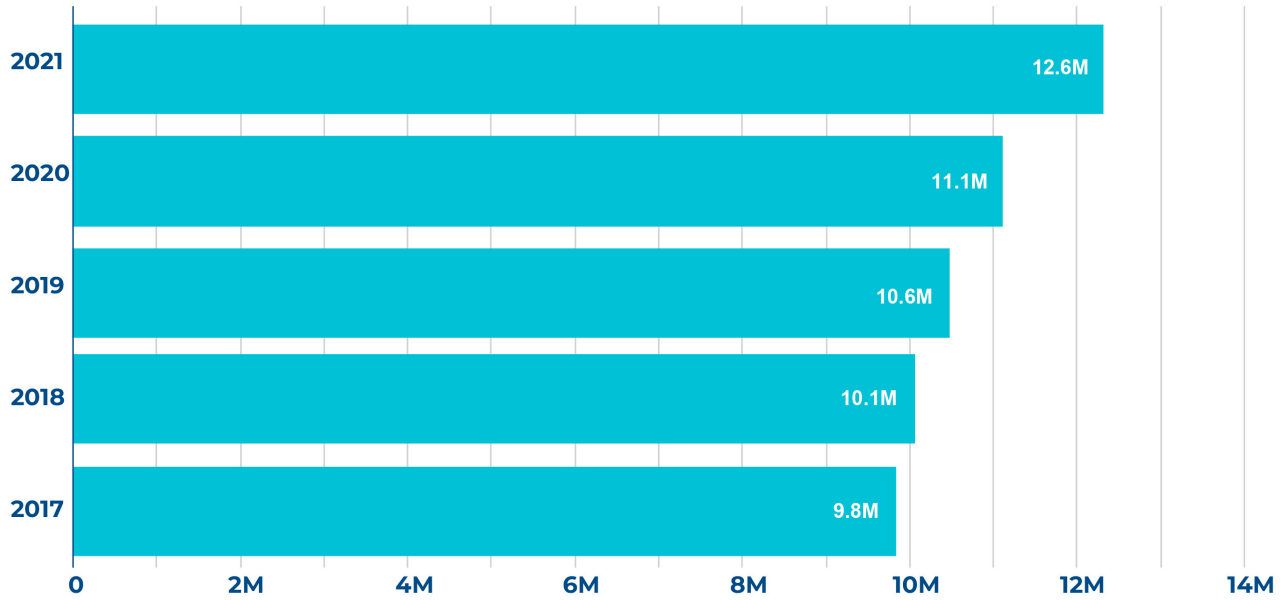
## Rural communities get microtransit lift

DRPT is dedicated to serving all Virginians by supporting a multimodal system that includes a variety of transportation approaches to meet different community needs. Microtransit is one such service that can play a key role in providing transportation to vulnerable residents in rural areas that cannot support an expansive fixed-route service. A year after DRPT provided funding to METGo! in Wise County and Bay Transit Express in Gloucester County to support their microtransit pilot programs, the two pilots are seeing promising results at making transportation more accessible and efficient. Hampton Roads launched on-demand microtransit service in summer 2022, Albemarle County and Charlottesville Area Transit will do a demonstration project in 2023, and the Harrisonburg Department of Public Transportation is studying the possibility of introducing microtransit within its transportation system. Microtransit has the potential to provide people with better access to jobs, health care, and their communities with efficiency driven by technology.

## **Increasing truck diversion to rail**

DRPT has been diverting more and more trucks from Virginia's highways to rail through its programs. In 2021, over 12.5 million truckloads were diverted from Virginia highways, a 28% increase since 2017. To gauge the performance of its rail programs, DRPT calculates the number of trucks diverted from Virginia's highways through funded projects. On average, one train carload removes the equivalent of 3.4 truckloads from the highway. There are numerous benefits to shifting freight from trucks to rail, including reducing the stress placed on existing highway pavement and bridge infrastructure and reducing congestion for people traveling on highways. Improving freight-by-rail can lower greenhouse gas emissions and reduce pollution. Companies consider transportation costs in business decisions like locating or expanding, and rail infrastructure can provide a competitive edge to Virginia's economy.

Trucks Diverted





DOMINION  
ENTERPRISES

409

409A

HRT

NEWTON ROAD

Ride the Tide

THE TIDE

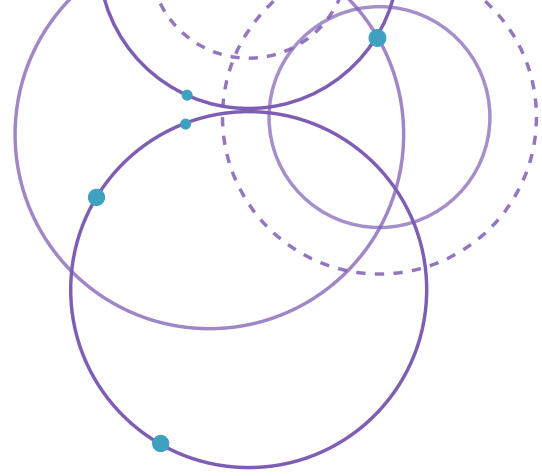
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EVMC

THE TIDE

THE TIDE





## Looking Ahead

DRPT has a lot to look forward to as it pursues innovative ideas and works with its partners around the Commonwealth to serve residents and businesses. The agency will embark on a comprehensive study about transit electrification at a time when more agencies are interested in transitioning to a cleaner fleet. The completion of the state rail plan later in 2022 will provide long-term guidance for how to ensure the Commonwealth's passenger and freight rail needs for people, communities, and commerce are addressed. DRPT remains ready to adapt to and thrive in the future.

# About the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation

For 30 years, DRPT has served as the catalyst to connect and improve the quality of life for all Virginians through innovative transportation solutions. Our vision is a connected Commonwealth with an integrated multimodal network that serves every person, every business, and every need. DRPT works with rail and public transportation stakeholders to provide service to people throughout Virginia and promotes transportation options to the general public, businesses, and community decision makers.

In FY22, DRPT invested over \$1 billion in state, federal, and local resources toward improving rail and public transportation capacity and service across the Commonwealth. DRPT's rail and public transportation stakeholders include 40 transit systems, 79 human service operators, 17 transportation demand management agencies, 15 metropolitan planning organizations, nine shortline railroads, two Class I freight railroads, an intercity passenger rail operator, a DRPT-supported intercity bus operator, and the Virginia Passenger Rail Authority.



# ***DRPT***



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