

AUGUST 2022

# **HJ 542 Final Report Executive Summary**

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**Virginia Transit Equity and  
Modernization Study**

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## Study Overview

During the 2021 General Assembly session, House Joint Resolution 542 (HJ 542) passed with support from interest groups across the Commonwealth. This legislation required the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT) to complete a needs assessment that focuses on the modernization of transit in Virginia and engagement opportunities for underserved and underrepresented communities.

DRPT embarked on the Virginia Transit Equity and Modernization Study to address the issues identified in HJ 542 in a manner that is reflective of the values and needs of Commonwealth residents, businesses, and leaders for 21st-century transit modernization. The study was designed to elicit those values and needs and define the actions that will guide the Commonwealth and local transit agencies in meeting the transit challenges of today and the future with an emphasis on shared outcomes. A strong, consistent focus on technical data, national and peer-state best practices, and community engagement has informed this planning study.

The study's Action Plan identifies 29 recommendations that serve as a roadmap to direct subsequent efforts—by both DRPT and local transit agencies. The Action Plan recommendations were developed through consultation with local transit agencies, evaluated by technical experts and industry partners, and refined during a robust public process. Final recommendations are organized by their anticipated timeline for implementation—near-, mid-, and long-term.

Each recommended action represents a worthwhile investment that will improve transit in the Commonwealth. Most notably, each recommended action has several components that, when implemented alongside other recommended actions, will bring considerable benefits to both transit agencies and transit riders:

### Potential Agency Outcomes

- More informed decision-making
- More efficient allocation of resources
- Increased coordination with partner agencies
- Shared knowledge of industry best practices
- New or improved metrics and measures to track performance
- Additional funding opportunities
- Improved requirements to ensure better transit outcomes

### Potential Rider Outcomes

- Improved experience through high quality transit infrastructure
- Improved processes focused on rider needs
- Increased use of state-of-the-art technologies
- Improved perception of and actual safety while using transit
- Expanded opportunities for rider input to ensure services provided are more closely aligned with desired rider travel patterns
- New or enhanced transit service

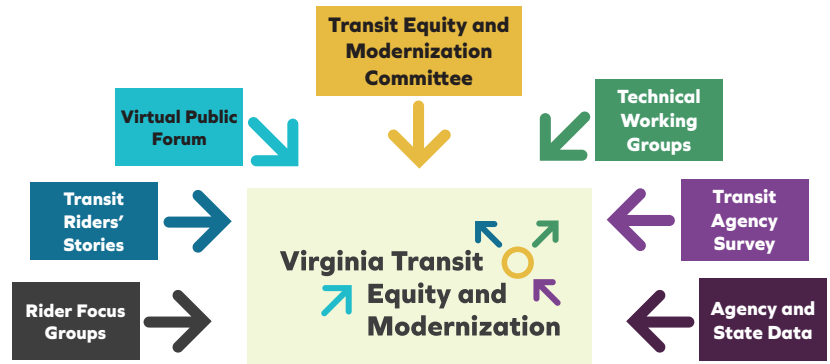
Further, each action is aligned with one of the six technical focus areas of the study:



## Public and Stakeholder Engagement

Listening to a wide range of voices was a key component of conducting the study and developing solutions that reflect the varied needs and priorities of transit users across the Commonwealth. Authentic communication and genuine partnership were critical to hearing and understanding diverse lived experiences. This input provided important qualitative information to support and enhance the study team’s data collection and technical analysis efforts.

The study team also received input from riders and members of the public through rider focus groups, a transit rider story campaign, a public survey, and a virtual forum held in spring 2022. This input from the transit-riding public was foundational to the development of this study and is featured throughout this summary.



DRPT received valuable input through more than 3,500 interactions across the Commonwealth. DRPT met with a broad array of members of the public and stakeholders, local transit agencies and operators, metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) and other regional bodies, advisory and advocacy groups, and local government leadership and staff. An intentional and consistent effort to engage the transit-riding population and local transit agency leadership and staff from all areas of the state provided a rich source of insight into Virginia's diverse needs and perspectives.

## 3,500+ Interactions



**1 public survey**



**1 virtual public forum with 77 attendees**



**4 Transit Equity and Modernization Committee meetings**



**16 Technical Working Group meetings**



**3,300 study website visits**



**7 rider focus groups with 48 participants**



**“Share Your Transit Story” campaign with 24 responses**



**2 surveys of local transit agencies with responses from all 39**



**30 briefings to local and regional governing bodies**



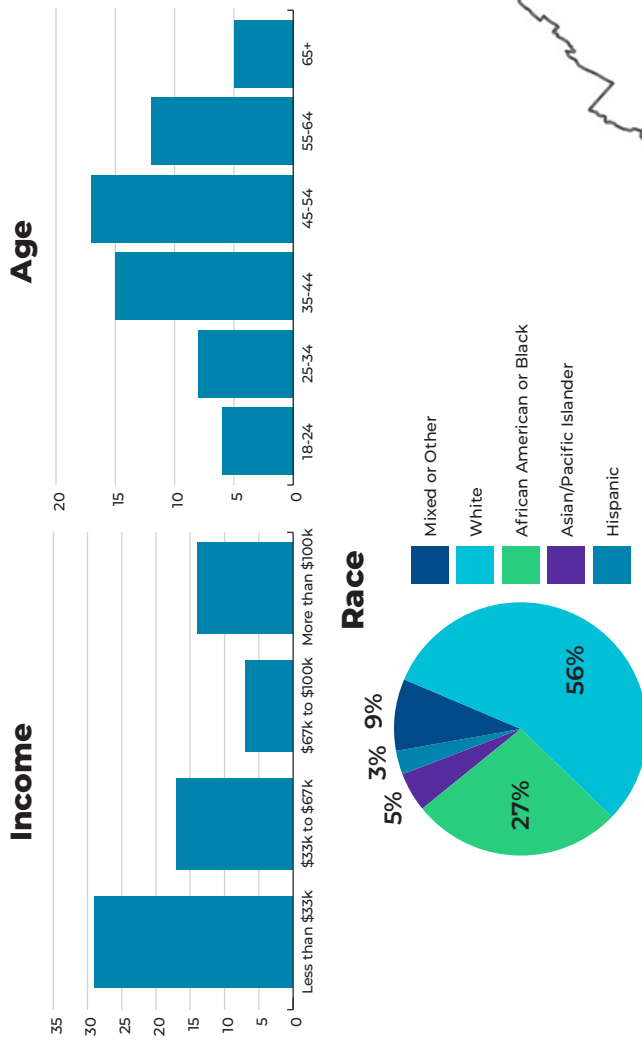
**7 e-newsletters and 15 social media posts from DRPT and partners**

The public participation program captured a variety of lived experiences from communities across the Commonwealth. Meetings, events, and other touchpoints engaged stakeholders and members of the public from a wide range of incomes, ages, socioeconomic backgrounds, and geographic areas, from Virginia's biggest cities to its most rural towns. Several out-of-state stakeholders and transit industry partners also engaged, adding to the study's robust diversity of thought and input.

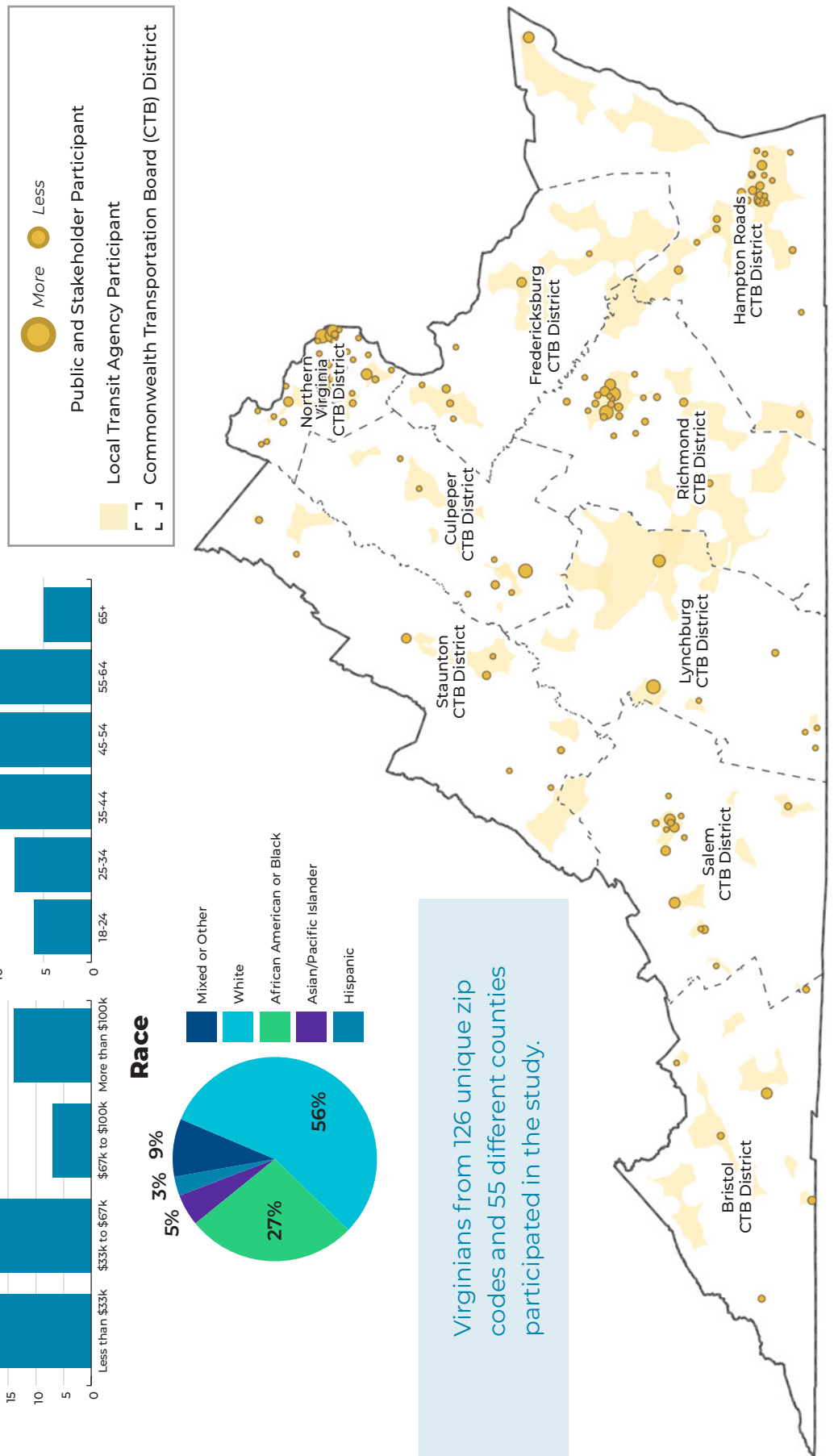
In addition to public participation, input and engagement from **all 39 Virginia transit agencies**—representing paratransit, on-demand transit, and fixed-route bus services provided perspective on providing high-quality service for Virginians with disabilities, expanding access in rural communities, and improving connectivity among Virginia's many towns and cities.

# Statewide Study Participation

## Rider Focus Group Participant Statistics



## Statewide Study Participation Map



# Addressing Study Findings through Action

Through the early stages of this study, several study findings were identified that account for the current state of transit equity and modernization across the state. These findings present several opportunities that the team has explored further throughout the study—many of which serve as the basis for study actions found in the following section of this report.

## Study findings include:

1. Many bus stops are poorly placed and not well-connected to sidewalks
2. Basic transit infrastructure is inconsistent
3. Transit riders have limited opportunities to be a part of the decision-making process
4. There is strong interest in transitioning to zero-emission fleets across Virginia transit agencies
5. There is increasing interest in piloting zero-fare service to overcome barriers to transit access
6. The availability of transit in Virginia is high, but gaps exist
7. There are unique needs for and barriers to adopting new and emerging technology among Virginia's transit agencies
8. Transit is among the safest ways to travel, but there is room to improve both perceived and actual safety for transit riders, operators, and employees
9. More data with better precision is needed to make informed decisions
10. Equity and accessibility must be more heavily considered in guidance, requirements, and funding programs for transit agencies

*Note: Order of study findings do not indicate importance or priority.*

The process of identifying study findings served as the foundation for the development of actions that promote transit modernization and equity across the Commonwealth. The action plan highlights work that DRPT and local transit agencies can undertake across the study's six topic areas to modernize transit and expand access to jobs and opportunities for all communities across the Commonwealth. A subset of actions, grouped by potential rider outcome, are shown on the following pages. A full list of the study's recommended actions can be found in the full Final Report document available on [DRPT's website](#).

# Potential Rider Outcome: Improved processes focused on rider needs

Transit agencies and staff often make decisions that have a variety of inputs and impacts.

We are recommending actions to improve agency processes to better incorporate rider needs in the decision-making process while also satisfying state, federal, or local requirements.

## Relevant Study Findings

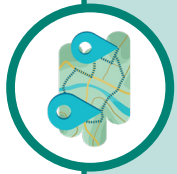
6. The availability of transit in Virginia is high, but gaps exist
8. Transit is among the safest ways to travel, but there is room to improve both perceived and actual safety for transit riders, operators, and employees
9. More data with better precision is needed to make informed decisions



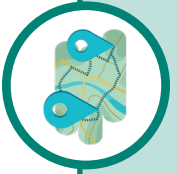
Transit is my lifeline. I don't own a car, so my feet, my bike, and the bus is all I have to get around for work, shopping, and the rest of my trips."

— SHARE YOUR TRANSIT STORY SUBMISSION





**Action:** Develop suggested best practices for coordination between land use planning and transit planning.



**Action:** Develop qualitative and quantitative metrics to measure reliable and efficient transit service that promotes access to opportunity and lifeline services.



**Action:** Identify and share inclusive transit safety training opportunities for agency staff.



**Action:** Provide technical guidance or best practices for monitoring and reporting infrastructure performance.

# Potential Rider Outcome: Increased use of state-of-the-art technologies

More and more innovative technologies are available to transit agencies—for example, real-time arrival systems and information displays.

We are recommending actions that support the planning and deployment of these technologies in a way that makes transit easier to understand and use for riders.

## Relevant Study Findings

4. There is strong interest in transitioning to zero-emission fleets across Virginia transit agencies
5. There is increasing interest in piloting zero-fare service to overcome barriers to transit access
7. There are unique needs for and barriers to adopting new and emerging technology among Virginia's transit agencies
9. More data with better precision is needed to make informed decisions

DRPT will continue to provide technical assistance for grants and procurement for local transit agencies.

A complete list of actions can be found in the Final Report [here](#).



# Potential Rider Outcome: Improved perception of and actual safety while using transit

The customer's experience with transit starts before the rider boards transit, through the transit trip, and getting off transit.

We are recommending actions that foster a safe, kind, and easy-to-use customer experience.

## Relevant Study Findings

8. Transit is among the safest ways to travel, but there is room to improve both perceived and actual safety for transit.

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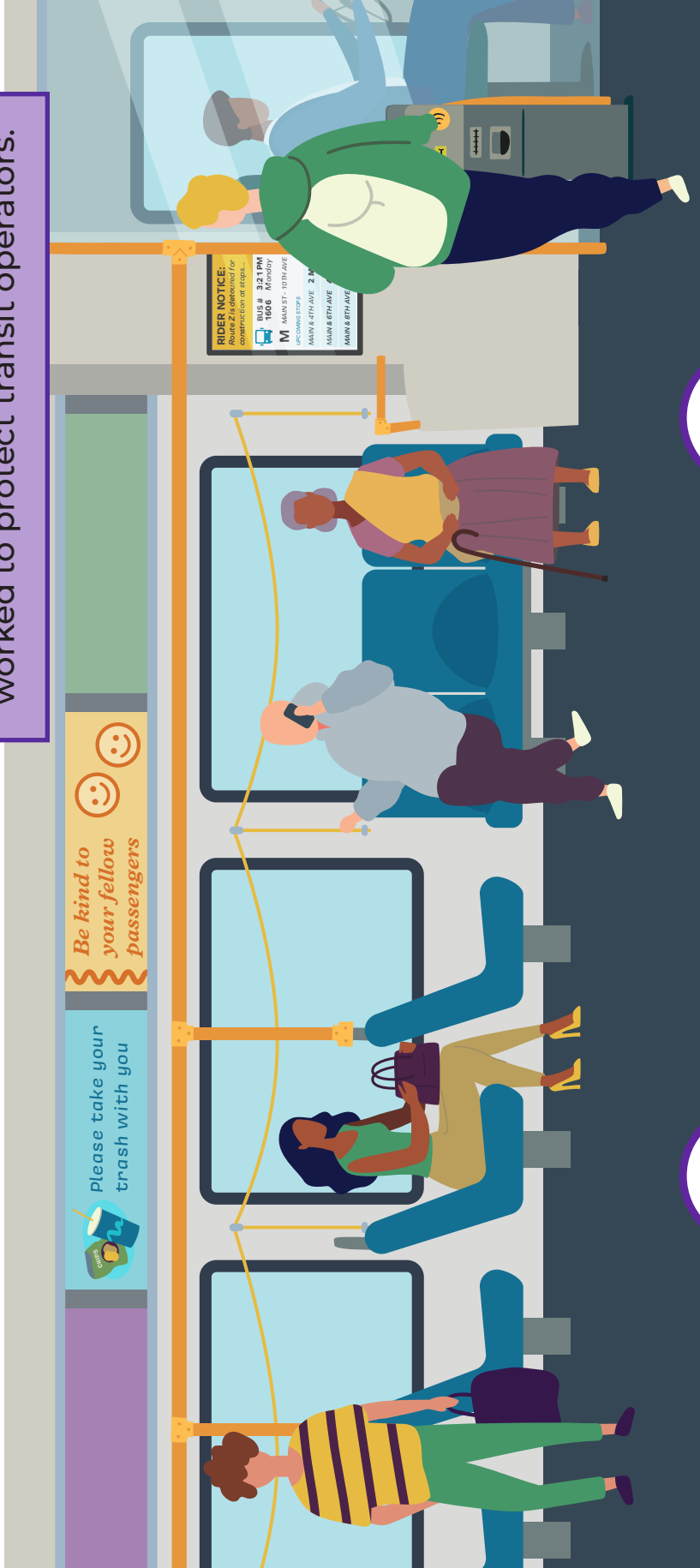
I feel safe in the area that I live, and mostly safe while riding transit, depending on the time of day.”

—FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT

A complete list of actions can be found in the [Final Report here](#).



**Action:** Pursue the completion of a study of safety measures that have worked to protect transit operators.



**Action:** Provide guidance on (1) crime prevention through design and (2) rider safety and etiquette.



**Action:** Develop best practices for safety-related roles to engage with community partners.

# Potential Rider Outcome: Expanded opportunities for rider input to ensure services provided are more closely aligned with desired rider travel patterns

Transit riders come from a variety of backgrounds and utilize transit differently.

We are recommending actions that elevate riders' voices in the decision-making process.

### **Relevant Study Findings**

3. Transit riders have limited opportunities to be part of the decision-making process.



Folks that need to have access to services may be told they have a seat at the table, but I haven't actually seen that be the case."

—FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT

A complete list of actions can be found in the [Final Report here](#).



**Action:** Develop a public engagement handbook that outlines expectations and techniques for more inclusive public engagement at the local level.



**Action:** Create rider advisory councils within local transit agencies.

# Potential Rider Outcome: Improved experience through high quality transit infrastructure

In addition to buses and rail cars, transit infrastructure includes bus stops, bus shelters, ramps, sidewalks, and other infrastructure that directly supports the delivery of transit service.

We are recommending actions that improve the availability and quality of data to be used in agency decision-making as well as increase consistency and safety for riders.

## Relevant Study Findings

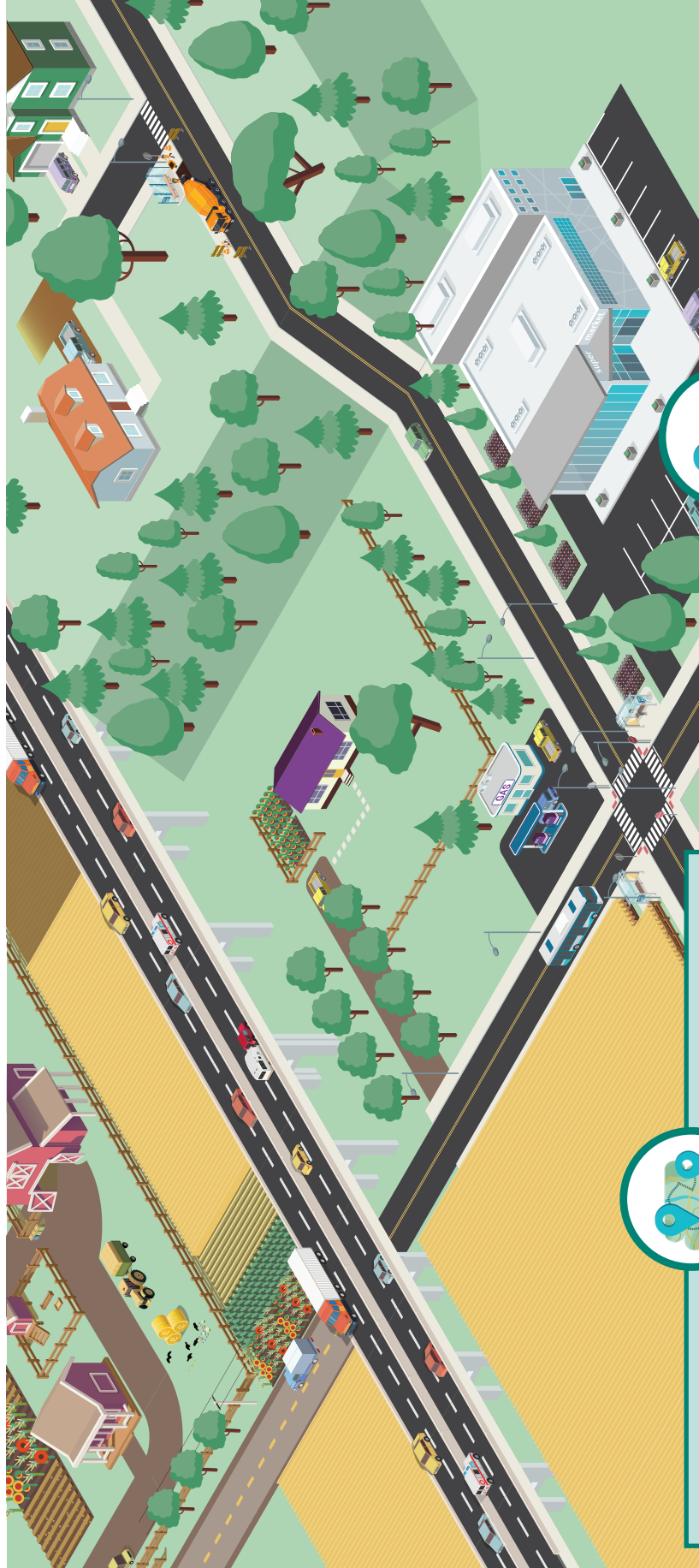
1. Many bus stops are poorly placed and not well-connected to sidewalks
2. Basic transit infrastructure is inconsistent



Connected sidewalks and facilities that get people of all abilities to bus stops safely is important to reduce barriers to transit use.”

— TWG MEMBERS AND PUBLIC COMMENTS





**Action:** Develop technical guidance or policies on bus stop design elements and development.



**Action:** Provide guidance or best practices for more effective stakeholder coordination when prioritizing improvements around bus stops.

## Potential Rider Outcome: New or enhanced transit service

There are a variety of transit types across the Commonwealth, including on-demand transit, fixed-route, and enhanced fixed-route (e.g., bus rapid transit, heavy rail, commuter rail).

We are recommending actions that provide context-sensitive solutions that align the demand and need for transit with the type of service provided.

### Relevant Study Findings

**6.** The availability of transit in Virginia is high, but gaps exist

“

More money and resources need to be invested in current and future rural transit systems.”

— WEBSITE COMMENT

Through the baseline conditions analysis and shown in the Interactive Initial Findings and Opportunities StoryMap, a statewide access to opportunity analysis was conducted. It was found that potential fixed-route transit service gaps (developed based on current service levels and estimated need) affect an estimated 1.1 million Virginia residents and 566,000 jobs.

A complete list of actions can be found in the Final Report [here](#).



**Action:** Identify areas with unmet demand for transit service and provide new or enhanced service.



**Action:** Allocate funding to prioritize expansion or enhancements of transit service to underserved areas and populations.

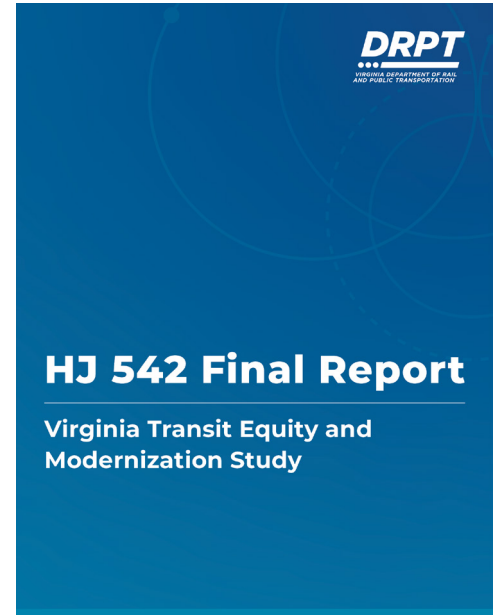
## Advancing the Study

Achieving the goals, objectives, actions, and outcomes of the study will require continuous investment and commitment from Commonwealth leaders as well as support from local and regional partners. For riders, the return on the state's investment in modernization means a dignified and best-in-class transit experience; the ability to access essential locations regardless of time of day; the ability to travel using modern, reliable, effective transit statewide; and access to jobs and opportunities throughout Virginia. For transit agencies, these investments should lead to service and coverage that best serves the people who need it most, with industry-leading operations and financial stability. For industry, these investments increase the size of the workforce pool, improve reliability of employees' transportation, and improve employee quality of life by making their commutes predictable and reliable.

Most critically, the action plan identifies near-term activities for DRPT and transit agencies to work in partnership to implement in the most vulnerable communities. The study findings should be considered in the long-term planning process as well as in updates to funding and guidance such as Transit Development Plans (TDPs)/ Transit Strategic Plans (TSPs), and in coordination with decision-making bodies. These bodies include the Transit Service Delivery Advisory Committee, which advises DRPT on the development of a distribution process for transit capital and operating funds, and the Commonwealth Transportation Board, which oversees transportation projects and initiatives for the Commonwealth.

This report will be submitted to the General Assembly as directed by HJ 542. DRPT will continue to work with Virginia transit agencies and its partners to advance the study findings in the near term. Future steps include identifying funding and partnership opportunities to implement recommendations and then programming the actions. To measure success, DRPT will monitor and evaluate progress toward achieving the actions laid out in this study.

Read the Final Report [here](#).



[www.drpt.virginia.gov](http://www.drpt.virginia.gov)