



**Virginia Transit**  
**Equity and**  
**Modernization**

**HJ 542 Interim  
Study Report  
Executive Summary**

January 2022



Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation

## What is the Virginia Transit Equity and Modernization Study?

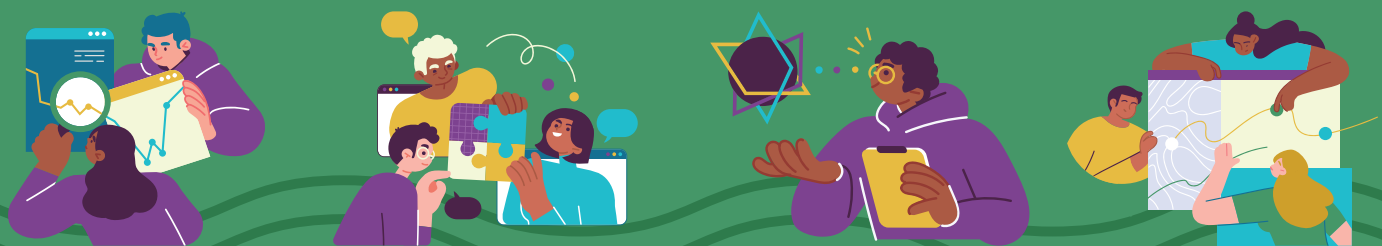
In coordination with Virginia’s transit agencies, the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT) is undertaking a study of transit equity and modernization. The Virginia Transit Equity and Modernization Study is aimed at identifying opportunities to advance equitable access to transit services, infrastructure, and technology within the Commonwealth. This interim study report is intended to identify the challenges to and the opportunity for advancing equitable and modern transit. It documents study progress to date and identifies themes and key observations—providing insight into future recommendations on how to equitably modernize these systems.

### Forming the Study

This study was born out of legislation signed into law in early 2021 that recognized public transit as vital for equitable access to jobs and opportunities, the growth of the Commonwealth’s economy, and efforts related to transportation infrastructure and sustainability. Six areas of focus were identified to evaluate equity issues as DRPT and transit agencies seek to make improvements, increase efficiency, and modernize transit systems. Key deliverables throughout the study include this interim report, several technical memoranda, and the final report, which will be completed in summer 2022.



Listening to a wide range of voices is critical to developing solutions that reflect the varied needs and priorities of transit users in the Commonwealth. Authentic communication and genuine partnership are critical to hearing and understanding diverse lived experiences. The study’s robust and inclusive public participation program fosters open and honest conversations where diverse perspectives are valued and respected.



- ✓ Study Website [va.transitequity.com](https://va.transitequity.com)
- ✓ Virtual Public Forum
- ✓ Rider Focus Group Meetings
- ✓ Transit Equity Committee

## Technical Assessment

In addition to identifying opportunities to enhance equity in conjunction with modernization efforts, the study also explores several technical transit topics. Work within each of these technical topic areas has led to insightful preliminary information and findings and will help inform eventual recommendations and strategies that span all aspects of transit.

### Accessibility



The link between transit supply and need, with an emphasis on underserved populations and the ability of transit to connect people to jobs and opportunities

### Adequacy of Infrastructure



The conditions of existing transit infrastructure and what is needed to bring them to an acceptable minimum standard

### Emerging Technologies



The feasibility of Virginia's transit agencies adopting emerging transit technologies and the associated costs, benefits, and timelines for implementation

### Electrification



A review of the current state of electric, Zero-Emission Buses (ZEBs) operated in Virginia's transit fleet today, and a review of opportunities and barriers to transitioning to ZEBs

### Safety



The safety of all transit passengers and employees on transit vehicles, in operations facilities, and traveling to and from transit stops and stations

### Engagement and Governance



A review of agency practices for engaging with the public, particularly with transportation-disadvantaged communities, and their role in transit agency governance

## Technical Working Groups

Technical Working Groups, comprised of local transit agency staff, stakeholders, and partner agencies from across Virginia as well as national thought-leaders from the transit industry, are being used to solicit diverse perspectives, brainstorm unconstrained ideas, explore feasibility and implementation barriers, and provide input on recommendations for each of the study's technical areas. **Bringing together a group with strong technical knowledge and diverse backgrounds, ideas, and experiences ensures feasible and implementable solutions that contribute to equity and modernization.**

## What We Have Learned

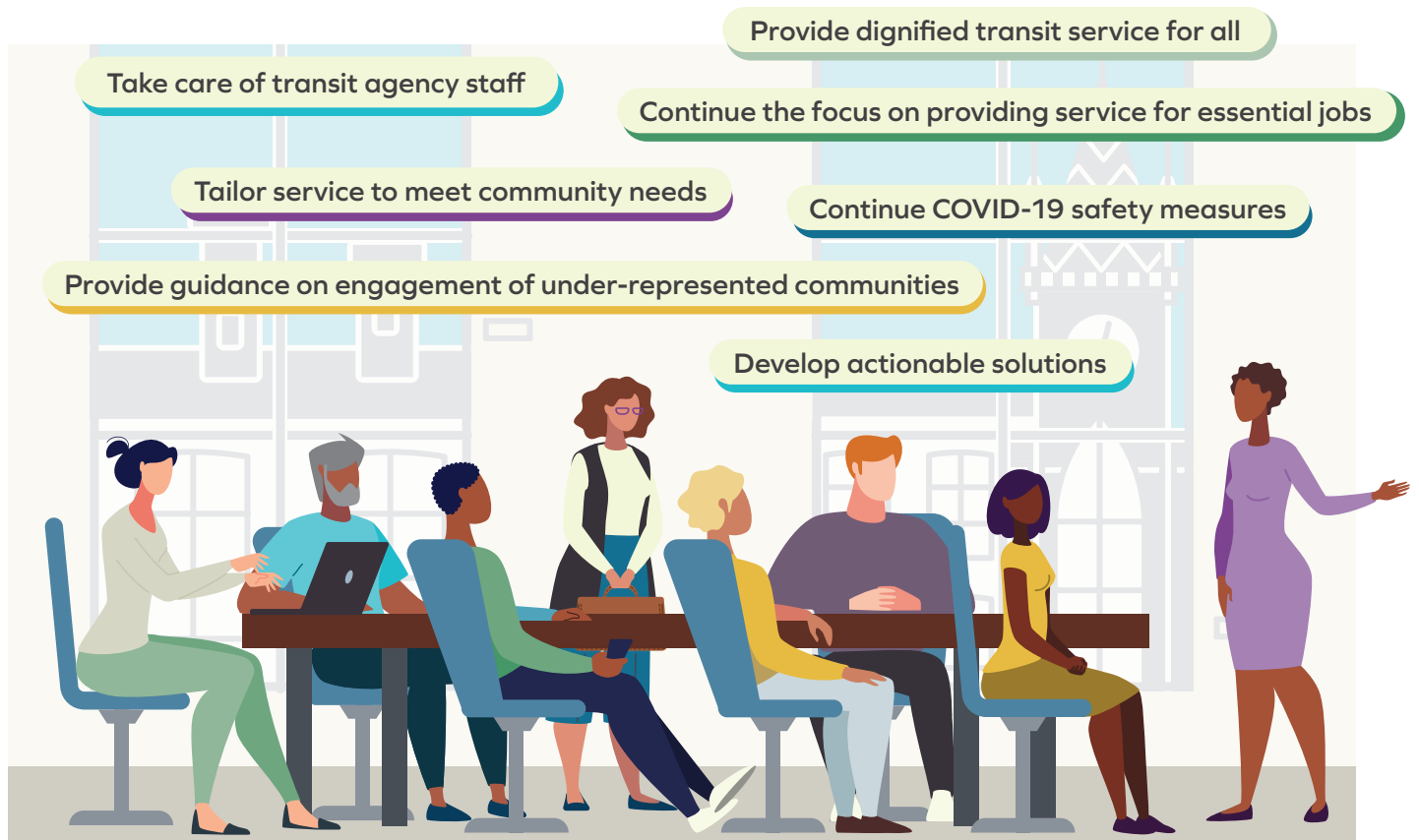
### Transit Equity and Modernization Committee

As part of the study, a Transit Equity and Modernization Committee (TEMC) consisting of transit agency executives has been formed. All committee members are in a unique position to relay their agency and rider experiences. The TEMC will be convened at four major milestones throughout the study process and is advising the study team and informing equity and modernization efforts in a manner consistent with Virginia House Joint Resolution 542.

**The TEMC’s work also will inform the study’s recommendations and action plan, which includes identifying answers to the following:**

- What does “equity” and “modernization” mean for the technical areas identified?
- How do we overcome biases in transit planning and design?
- What are the desired outcomes we’re seeking to advance?
- What resources and processes need to be implemented to ensure equitable outcomes?

### Lessons Learned from the Transit Equity and Modernization Committee





## Rider Focus Groups

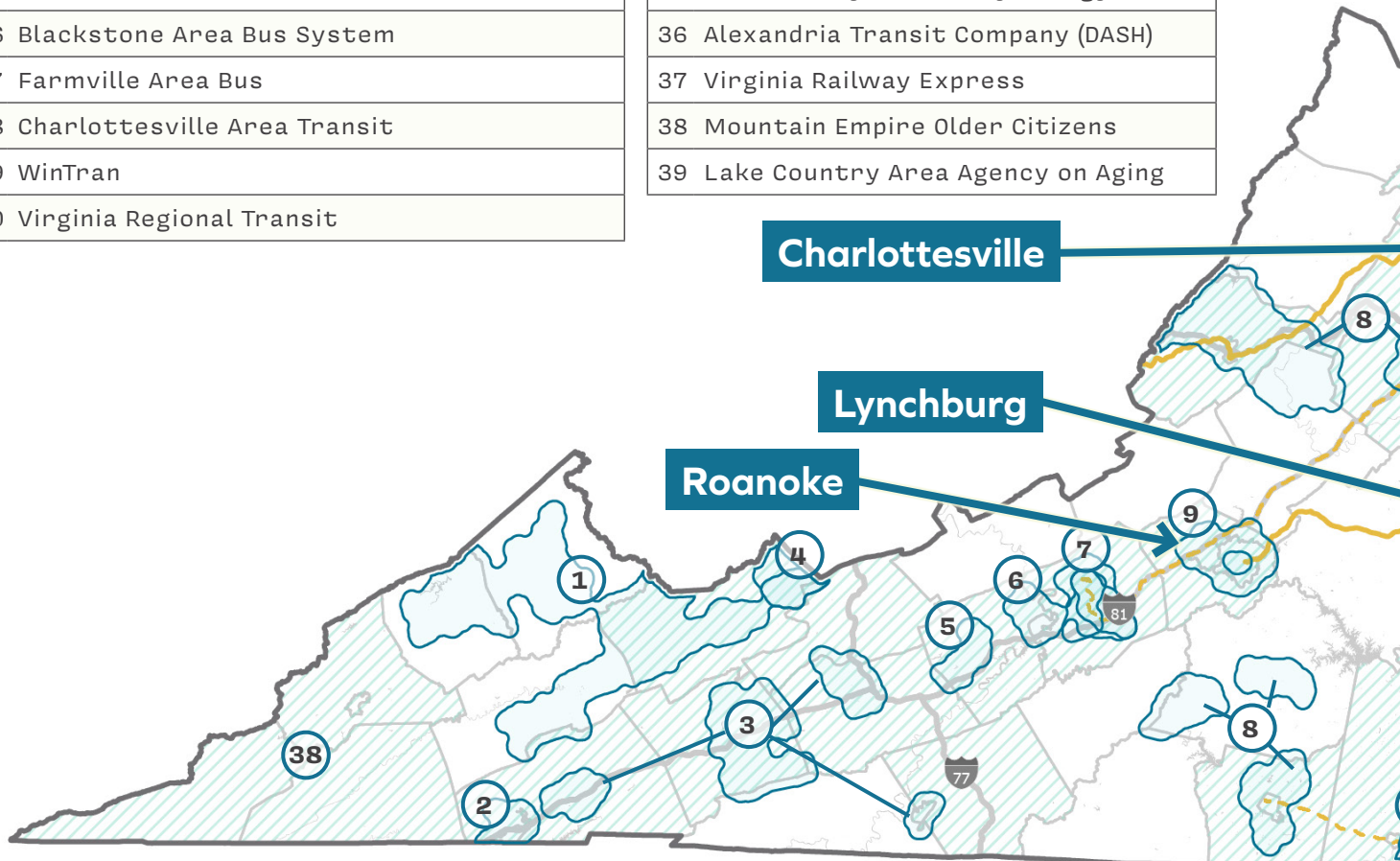
The study team conducted online focus groups in the summer of 2021. The focus groups allowed the study team to engage participants from across the state and the virtual format kept participants safe in light of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. **Forty-eight participants** across **seven focus group meetings** offered a diverse set of perspectives. Key findings from focus group meetings with riders include:

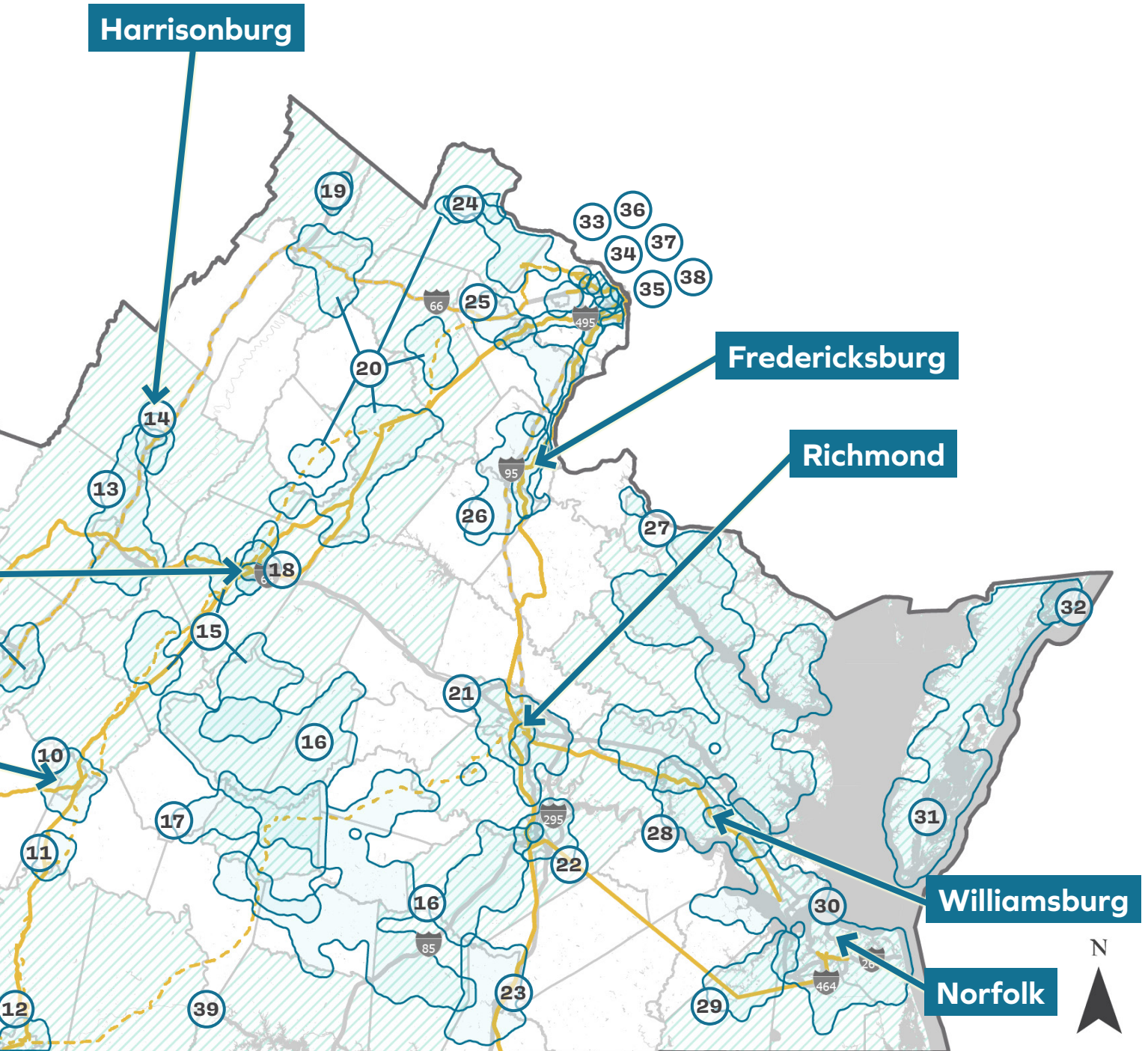
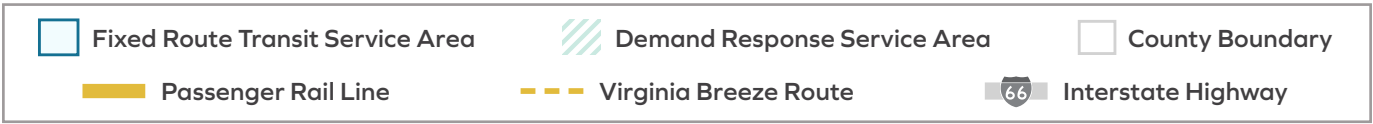
- **There is significant support for the concept of transit equity.** Participants, however, expressed concern and interest for how this will be put into practice at the local level.
- **Several common barriers to using transit exist**, including lack of familiarity with systems, safety concerns, long travel times and trip lengths, access to stops and stations, and overall reliability of services.
- **Basic infrastructure elements are of great concern**, with riders expressing a widespread lack of basic bus stop features such as shelters, seating, lighting, and sidewalk connections.
- **Health and safety of riders and operators is top of mind**, especially in light of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Many riders prefer to avoid crowded spaces and worry that rules around face coverings and social distancing are not being enforced, making the public transit journey an uncomfortable one.
- **The majority of riders do not feel as though they have a voice** in public transit decision-making in their communities, with widespread concern that the voices that are most heard are those that are the loudest and the wealthiest, rather than those of the average rider.



## Transit Agency Key

1	Four County Transit
2	Bristol Virginia Transit
3	District Three Public Transit
4	Graham Transit
5	Pulaski Area Transit
6	Radford Transit
7	Blacksburg Transit
8	RADAR
9	Valley Metro
10	Greater Lynchburg Transit Company
11	Altavista Community Transit
12	Danville Transit
13	BRITE
14	Harrisonburg Dept. of Public Transportation
15	Jaunt
16	Blackstone Area Bus System
17	Farmville Area Bus
18	Charlottesville Area Transit
19	WinTran
20	Virginia Regional Transit
21	Greater Richmond Transit Company
22	Petersburg Area Transit
23	Greensville-Emporia Transit
24	Loudoun County Transit
25	OmniRide
26	Fredericksburg Regional Transit
27	Bay Transit
28	Williamsburg Area Transit Authority
29	Suffolk Transit
30	Hampton Roads Transit
31	STAR Transit
32	Pony Express
33	Arlington Transit
34	Fairfax Connector
35	Fairfax City University Energy Saver
36	Alexandria Transit Company (DASH)
37	Virginia Railway Express
38	Mountain Empire Older Citizens
39	Lake Country Area Agency on Aging





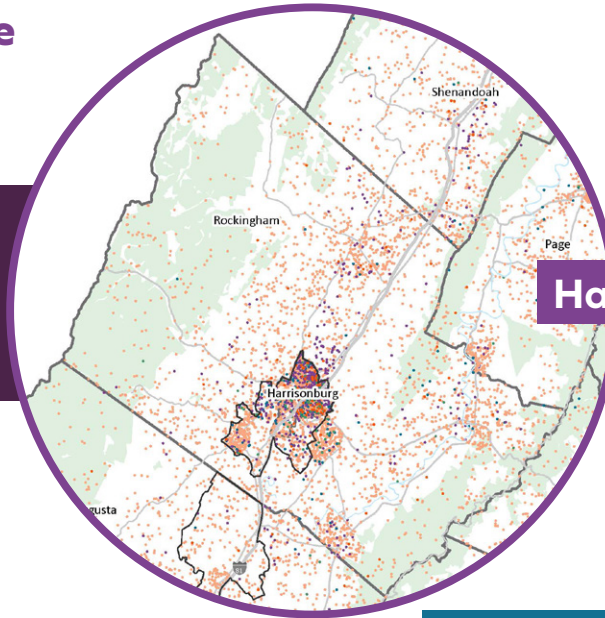


## A Focus on Underserved and Vulnerable Populations

Transit services are a powerful tool that can enhance communities; connect people to jobs and opportunities; and promote healthier, more sustainable lifestyles. The presence of transit options also can contribute to more equitable societal outcomes by providing mobility options to those that otherwise do not have access to reliable means of transportation. This is especially true for historically marginalized

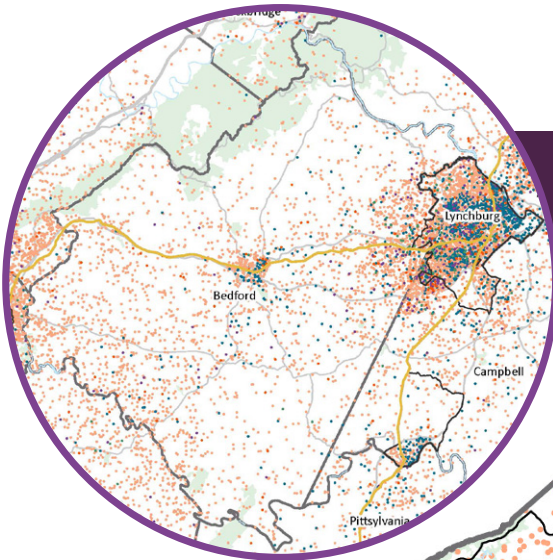
### Population Density by Race

Between 2010 and 2019, Harrisonburg and surrounding Rockingham County saw a 45% increase in People of Color (about 8,500 people).



Harrisonburg

Between 2010 and 2019, Bedford County saw a 49% increase in People of Color (about 3,200 people).



Charlottesville

Lynchburg

Roanoke

1 Dot = 200 Person

Other

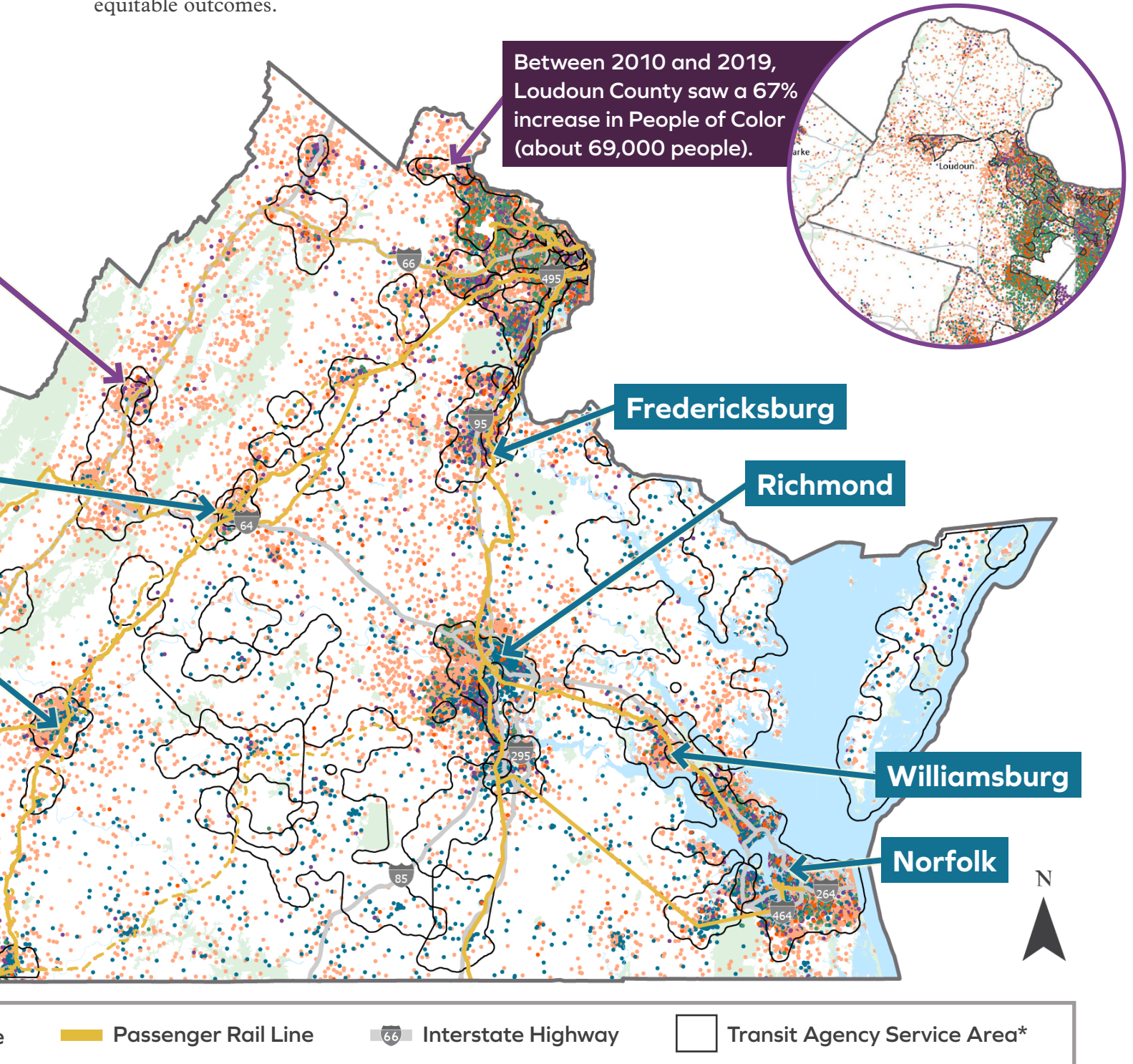
Asian

Hispanic

Black

White

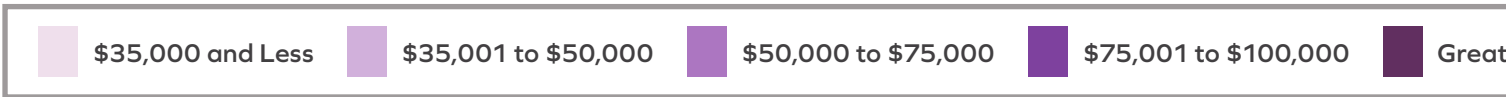
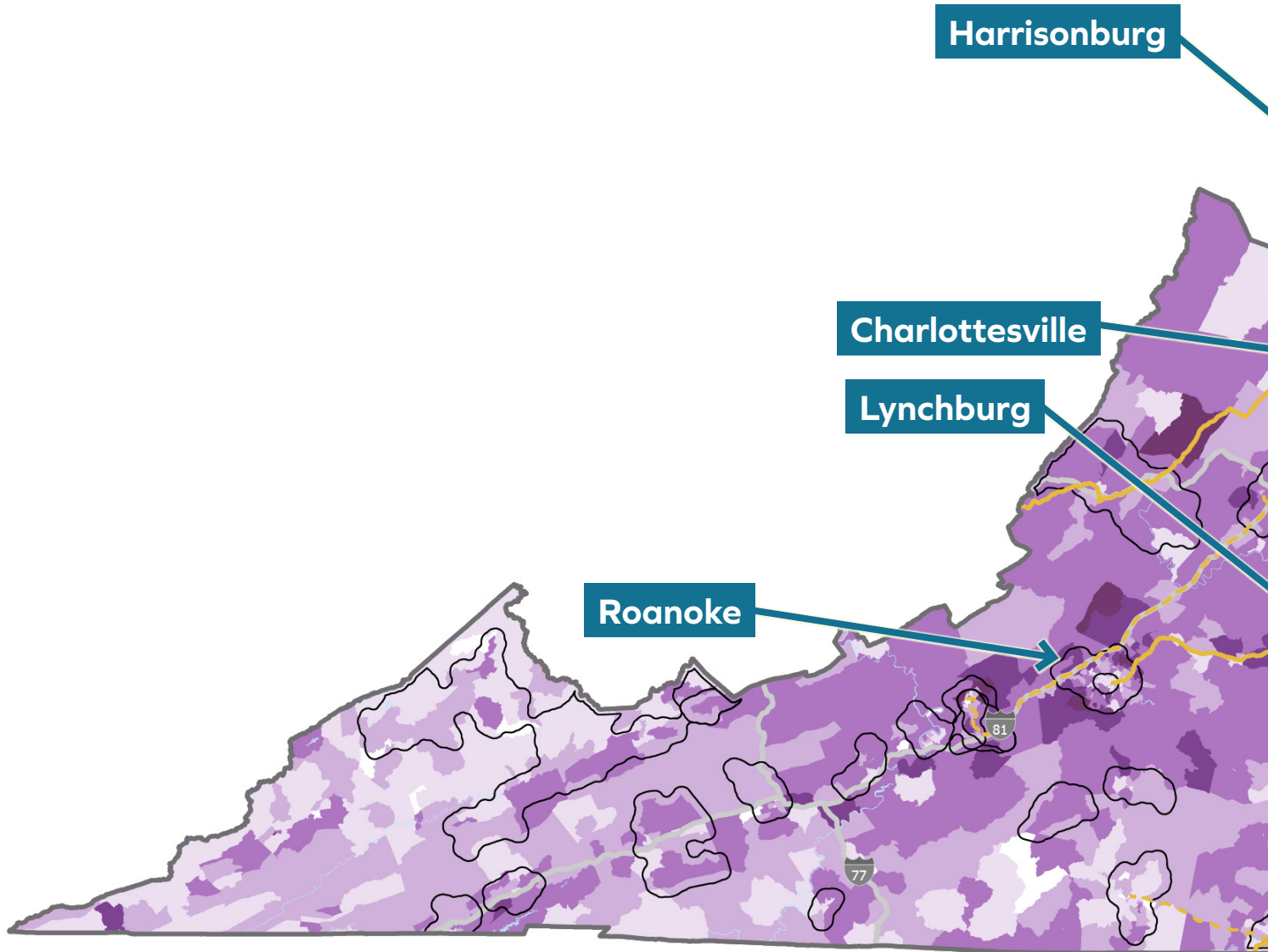
communities, those that remain underserved today, and those that may have been adversely affected by transportation decisions in the past. Particular attention to the needs of vulnerable populations will allow for the study team to link equity considerations to existing demographics in transit service areas across the Commonwealth and develop eventual recommendations and strategies that work towards equitable outcomes.

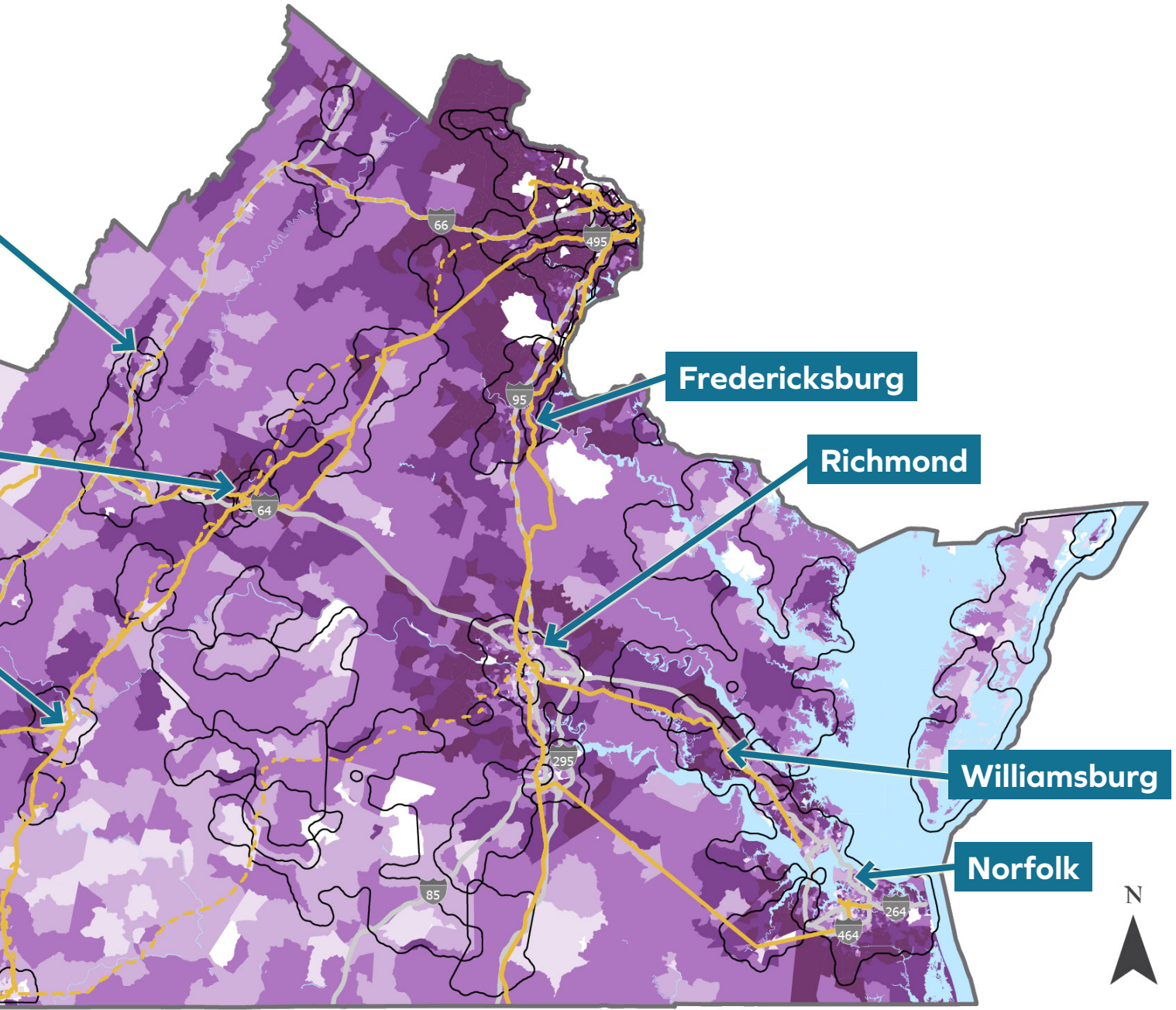




## Median Household Income

Virginia's highest-income areas are most heavily concentrated in Northern Virginia, the suburbs of Richmond, and the Hampton Roads area.





er than \$100,000    N/A    Passenger Rail Line    Interstate Highway    Transit Agency Service Area\*

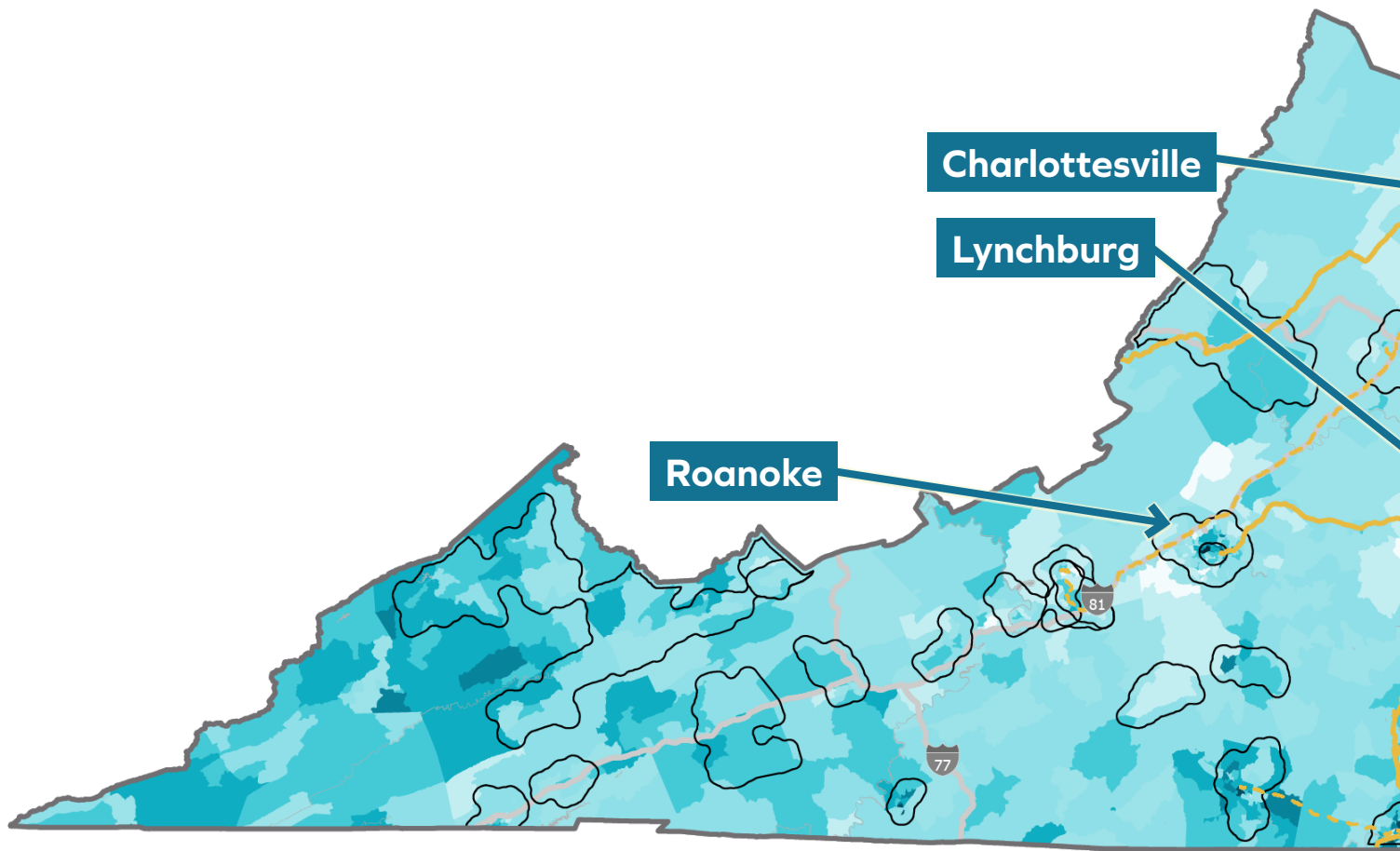
\*excluding demand response service area

## Vulnerable Populations Index

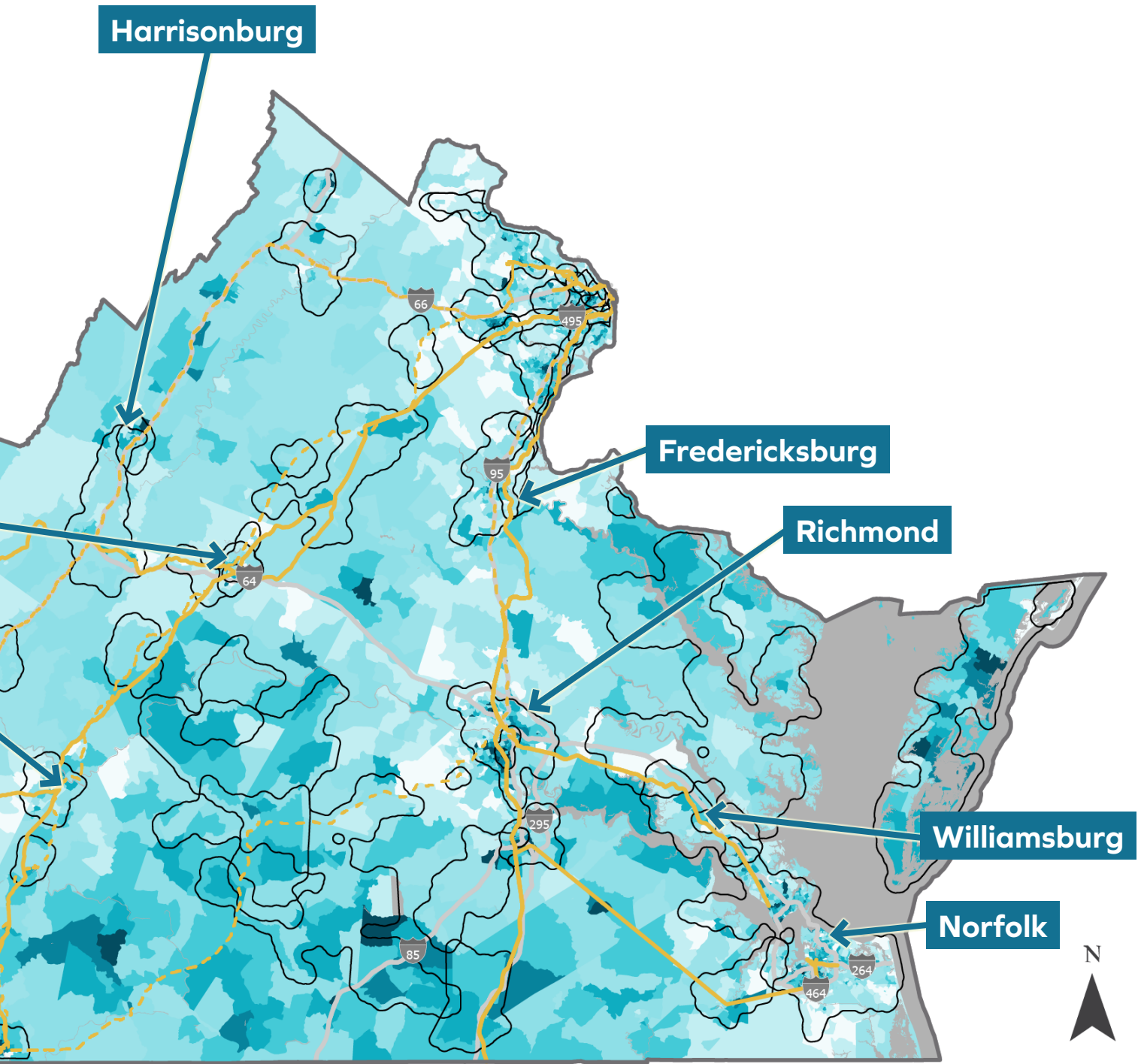


A vulnerable populations index (VPI) was developed using population data from the U.S. Census for seven vulnerable population types. An index score of 0 represents the lowest level of vulnerability while an index score of 9 indicates the highest level of vulnerability.

- Households at or below the poverty line
- Minority populations
- Hispanic populations
- Limited English proficiency (LEP) populations
- People with disabilities
- Persons over age 65
- Zero-car households







\*excluding demand response service area

## Transit Service Coverage



### Enhanced Transit Service

Areas that feature bus rapid transit or rail service, often in addition to conventional fixed-route and demand-response services.

- Bus rapid transit (i.e., The Pulse in Richmond)
- Light rail (i.e., The Tide in Norfolk)
- Heavy rail (i.e., Metrorail)
- Commuter rail (i.e., Virginia Railway Express)



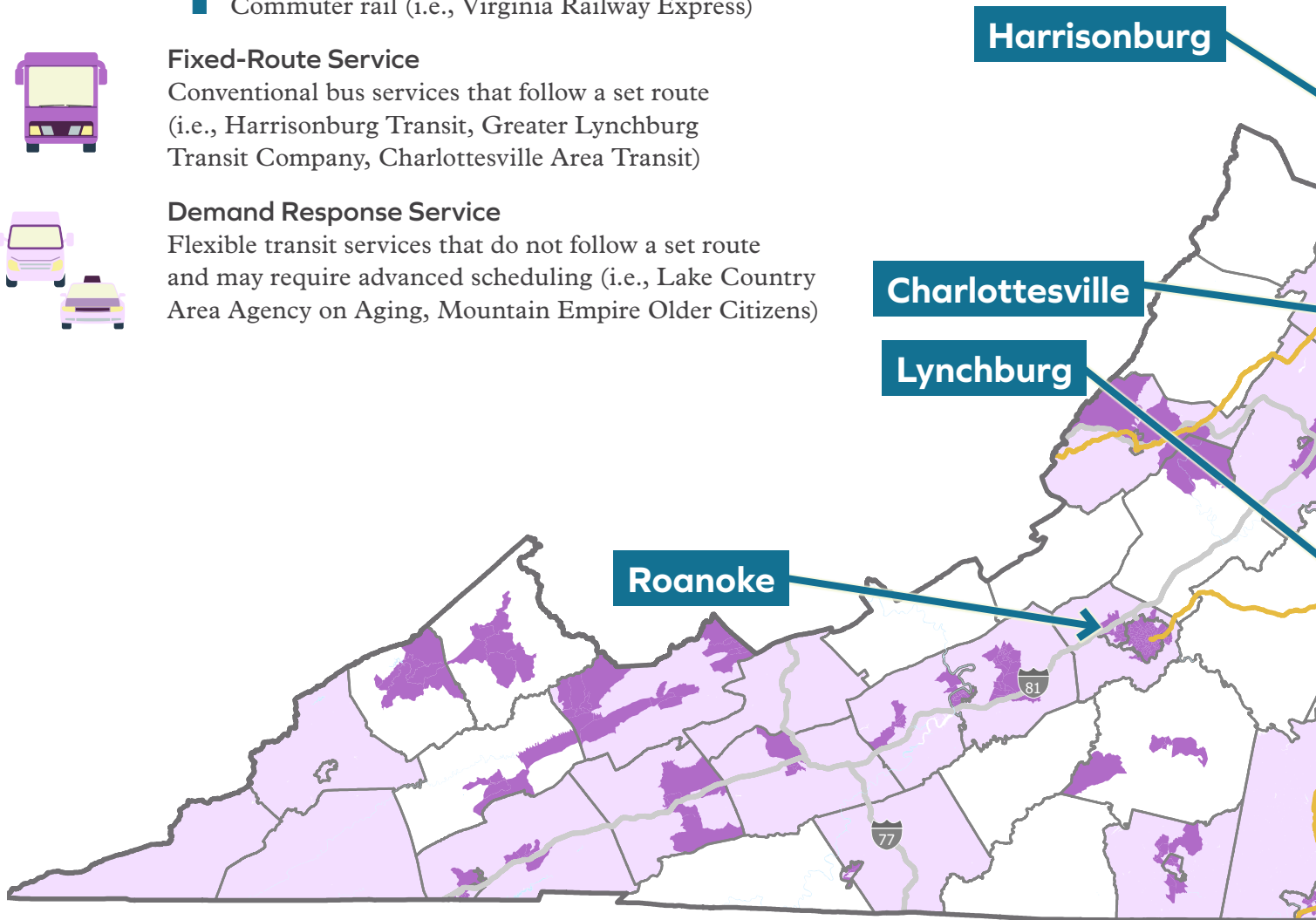
### Fixed-Route Service

Conventional bus services that follow a set route (i.e., Harrisonburg Transit, Greater Lynchburg Transit Company, Charlottesville Area Transit)



### Demand Response Service

Flexible transit services that do not follow a set route and may require advanced scheduling (i.e., Lake Country Area Agency on Aging, Mountain Empire Older Citizens)



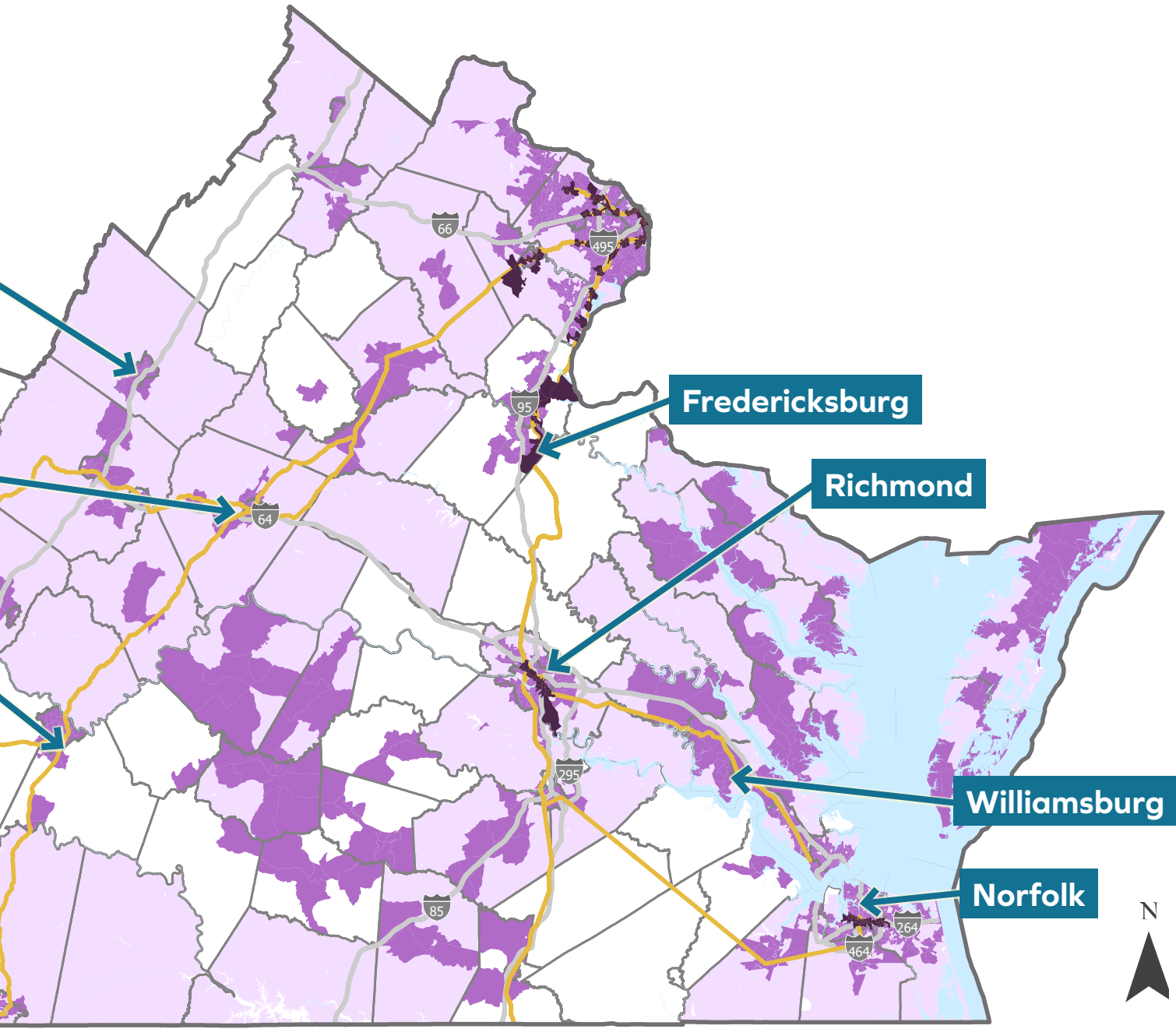
Enhanced Transit Service



Fixed-Route Service



Demand Response Service



## Where is There Opportunity for Improvement?

Through the early stages of this study, several preliminary findings have been identified that account for the current state of transit equity and modernization across the state. These findings present several opportunities that the team will explore further throughout the remainder of this study—many of which will serve as the basis for the study recommendations, actions and strategies, and Final Report.

### ➤ Equity and accessibility must be more heavily considered in guidance, requirements, and funding programs for transit agencies.

Similar concerns were noted in the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission’s Report on Transportation Infrastructure and Funding issued in November 2021. DRPT, in consultation with the Transit Service Delivery Advisory Committee (TSDAC), is required to periodically review both the MERIT Capital and Operating Assistance programs. This periodic review is required in 2022, for implementation with the FY24 application cycle.

### ➤ More and better data is needed to make informed and equitable decisions.

There is an opportunity to enhance and expand the collection and availability of data at the statewide and local levels, so that DRPT and transit agencies can have the tools required to make informed decisions around projects, programs, and investments that can lead to more equitable outcomes.

### ➤ Transit riders have limited opportunities to be a part of the decision-making process.

Transit agencies can establish formal methods to include riders in decision making processes and ensure that mechanisms are in place to engage riders from underrepresented communities, especially for representation on transit agency boards and advisory bodies. Beyond providing ample opportunities to participate and be heard, it is equally important for these voices to reach transit leadership and key decision-makers.

### ➤ Basic transit infrastructure is insufficient.

Elevating the importance of basic infrastructure within existing funding programs, coupled with resources and design guidance, has the potential to address this issue. This should also be addressed in the SMART SCALE program and during the 2022 review of the MERIT Capital program, in coordination with TSDAC.

### ➤ Numerous bus stops are poorly placed and not well-connected to sidewalks.

There are targeted opportunities to provide better and safer access to bus stops, especially for neighborhoods and communities that rely on transit most. Private property owners, State and local agencies that operate rights-of-way, and transit agencies can work together and better coordinate the placement of bus stops, ensuring that they are accessible and comfortable for users of all ages and abilities.



### What’s Next?

Building on opportunities highlighted in the existing conditions assessment and engagement with the public and stakeholders, an Action Plan and Final Report will be developed with the aim to advance the equitable delivery and modernization of transit services in Virginia. With a variety of next steps ranging from developing equitable action items within the six technical areas to a robust public and stakeholder engagement schedule, the Final Report which will be a guide for actionable implementation, is anticipated for summer of 2022.

TEMC #1

SEPTEMBER  
2021

Focus Group

VTA C

➤ **There are unique needs for and barriers to adopting new and emerging technology among Virginia’s transit agencies.**

There remains a significant need and opportunity for transit agencies across Virginia to adopt more industry-standard technologies.

➤ **There is strong interest in fleet electrification across Virginia transit agencies, but more resources are needed.**

There is an opportunity to support the acceleration of electric transit vehicle adoption across the Commonwealth by establishing goals and policies, guidance on appropriate implementation, and other programs or education/technical guidance for transit agencies to address the challenges of pursuing electrification.

➤ **Availability of transit in Virginia is high, but gaps exist.**

Expanding the reach and increasing the frequency of transit services that are available will make Virginia’s economy more competitive and increases access to jobs and opportunities across all industries.

➤ **There is increasing interest in piloting zero-fare service to overcome barriers to transit access.**

The interest in and demand for piloting zero-fare service has greatly outpaced the funding that is available via DRPT’s Transit Ridership Incentive Program (TRIP). Should more funding become available, there is an opportunity to reduce financial barriers to transit for riders across the Commonwealth by increasing the number of agencies that are able to pilot and offer zero-fare service.

➤ **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.**

This presents the opportunity for transit agencies to better communicate how transit provides a safe travel option and increase coordination with local jurisdictions to increase security at and near transit stops.

