

**Transit Service Delivery Advisory Committee
January 20, 2026 - 10:00 a.m.
600 East Main Street, 21st Floor
Richmond, VA 23219**

Meeting Minutes

Attendance

TSDAC Members

Chair McGlennon, Vice-Chair Mester, Dr. Smoot, Ms. Mattice, Ms. Pinkard, Mr. Booth, Ms. Melester, Mr. Dyke, Director Zimmerman

DRPT Staff

Jennifer Mayton, Zach Trogdon, Grant Sparks, Dan Sonenklar, Jayla Parker, Jordan Chapman, Avery Daugherty, Katy Miller, Grace Stankus, Paige Lazar, Raquel Aguirre, Gabriel Ortiz, Jennifer Monaco, James Boudreau, Kyle Trissel, Grant Sparks, Deanna Oware, Beth Levermore, Aaron Clark, Jess Maffey, Jacob Hotinger, Wood Hudson, Evan Tuten

DRPT Consultants

Nathan Macek, Sarah Sciarrino

Others

Jeff Raliski, Stephanie RiCharde, Phillip Parella, Francis Vance, James Hampton, Danny Plaughter, Joe Stainsby, Billie Darlington, Bruce Simms, Will Heller, Jodi Winship, Molly Gale, Coleman Burke, Queenie Byrd, Ron Parker, Paula Benke, Devon Thompson, Taylor Jenkins, Bob Schneider, Owen Williams, Michael Duncan, Will Wright, Micah Bray, Joe Dillard, Caleb Smith, Phil Thompson

Call to Order/Introductions (Chair McGlennon)

At 9:30 AM on January 20th, Chair McGlennon called the meeting to order.

Director Zimmerman began the meeting and introduced herself. Ms. Mayton introduced new TSDAC Member Paula Melester.

Approval of November 24, 2025 Minutes

On motion of Vice Chair Mester, seconded by Ms. Mattice, the November 24, 2025 TSDAC minutes were approved. Motion passed unanimously.

MERIT Capital and Operating Assistance Review (DRPT and Consultant Staff)

Ms. Mayton began the presentation on the MERIT program review. Ms. Mayton reviewed what DRPT staff and consultants heard from TSDAC during the MERIT review process.

Ms. Mayton reviewed the meeting agenda. Ms. Mayton reviewed the policy considerations and policy goals of the MERIT process. Ms. Mayton reviewed the responsibilities and roles of the CTB, DRPT, and TSDAC. Ms. Mayton reminded TSDAC of the adopted resolution regarding the MERIT Review Process and the context of the resolution. Ms. Mayton reviewed the subsequent recommendations made by the CTB at the January CTB meeting.

Ms. Mayton reviewed the summary of public comments, noting both the supportive comments and comments expressing concerns. Ms. Mayton noted the recommendations for administrative changes to the MERIT program to address commuter bus funding concerns.

Ms. Mayton began the presentation on the timeline for applications for the FY28 funding round. Mr. Sonenklar noted that the first funding round affected by the proposed MERIT changes would be for Fiscal Year 2028. Mr. Sonenklar noted the timeline for adopting any changes to DRPT's funding programs, including noting the deadlines for program guidelines and codified deadlines for adopting program policy.

Chair McGlennon noted previous discussion about why some entities and the public requested additional time to review the proposed changes to the MERIT Program, stressing that there was need for more time to understand the changes. Ms. Mattice noted that there is an opportunity to re-examine how TSDAC is used. Ms. Mattice agreed that there was a need for more time to understand the proposed changes. Ms. Mattice asked what priorities may shift given the new Governor's administration.

Ms. Mester commented on the timeline of the MERIT review process.

Ms. Mayton began the presentation on the MERIT Capital Assistance program proposed changes. Ms. Sciarrino began the presentation. Ms. Sciarrino reviewed the key findings from the review process. Ms. Sciarrino reviewed the proposed capital program improvements. Chair McGlennon noted it is not the formal charge of TSDAC to review the capital program, but noted it is a key area for transit operations. Ms. Mester agreed. Dr. Smoot notes that the desire of the CTB is to provide the maximum benefit to the public. Chair McGlennon inquired if SGR scoring had been developed. Ms. Sciarrino noted that it is still being developed.

Chair McGlennon inquired of the TSDAC members if there are any concerns or questions about the MERIT Capital program evaluation. Ms. Mester noted that with the delay in the review process there is more time to identify any concerns.

Mr. Sonenklar delivered the presentation on the MERIT Operating Assistance performance measures methodologies administrative changes. Mr. Sonenklar noted the changes include adjusting metrics to remove deadhead miles from the performance measures. Ms. Mattice inquired how many services report deadhead miles. Mr. Sonenklar responded that three services do, as determined by NTD classification. Mr.

Sonenklar noted that DRPT is proposing the Operating Cost for Performance Metric for both sizing and performance set aside in the MERIT Operating Assistance formula. Ms. Mattice inquired about the reasoning for these changes. Mr. Sonenklar explained. Mr. Trogdon noted an example of where this proposed change would make a difference. Mr. Sparks noted an area of confusion about what qualifies as a DRPT program, noting that DRPT passes through federal funds. Chair McGlennon inquired about public comments on this change. Ms. Mayton noted the only comment on this change. Mr. Sonenklar explained that this change simplifies processes and makes funding fairer. Ms. Mester inquired if these changes may lead to any delays due to data collection. Mr. Sonenklar noted that the data collection process won't impact it. Mr. Trogdon noted that it is the same overall financial data. Dr. Smoot noted it would be helpful to note how these changes would impact service efficiency.

Mr. Macek began the presentation on the MERIT Operating Assistance review. Mr. Macek explained the metrics in the current formula. Dr. Smoot inquired how DRPT defines deadhead miles. Mr. Macek provided the definition with an example. Dr. Smoot inquired if a return trip with passengers counts as deadhead miles. Mr. Macek noted any carrying of passengers counts as revenue miles. Dr. Smoot noted that operating costs are the same, whether it has only a few people or a lot of people on it, noting that a bus in deadhead miles would improve the metrics in this formula. Director Zimmerman commented on deadheading. TSDAC members requested that Mr. Sonenklar explain the changes again. Mr. Macek continued the presentation. Mr. Macek noted the MERIT formula challenges and proposed solutions. Ms. Mattice commented that the MERIT formula has been impacted by the volatility of the transit industry since 2018. Ms. Mattice noted that the operating cost as data is used as a proxy for size of the transit agency, noting that it is not just benefitting the large agencies from having a large budget. Mr. Macek noted the proposed solutions. Mr. Macek noted the conflict between formula incentivizing performance vs year-to-year funding stability.

Mr. Macek presented on the MERIT Operating assistance challenges to be resolved, noting the variability of the transit community in Virginia. Mr. Macek noted examples of when cost savings lead to reductions in State funding. Mr. Macek presented the performance trend basis and related challenges. TSDAC members discussed the changes to the performance trend basis. Mr. Macek noted that the proposed change would apply an absolute measure of performance, as opposed to trends within performance metrics. Ms. Mattice noted that this metric is not an easy one to understand. Mr. Trogdon noted that under the old trend metric, good but stable performers could be punished, while poor but trending upwards performers could benefit from the program. Director Zimmerman suggested that the current formula is not achieving the goal of the program. Ms. Melester inquired about the average statewide absolute performance year after year, as opposed to the trend. DRPT consultants provided an answer. Ms. Mayton noted that DRPT evaluated the sensitivity and predictability of the MERIT changes, noting that there are still funding swings no matter if it uses a one- or three-year average. Chair McGlennon inquired if there has been any discussion about including a floor for funding decreases. Mr. Sparks noted that incorporating a floor has been technically impossible to this point. Mr. Sparks noted that

the sizing metrics are the key metric for costs, and that is what drives most of the variability. Ms. Mester noted her support for the 95-5 split. Mr. Booth asked for clarification between the performance trend vs the absolute performance measures, and the 95-5 split. Mr. Booth noted that the proposed changes effectively create a floor. Ms. Mattice inquired if transit agencies have changed their behaviors depending on these funding formulas and their metrics. Mr. Trogdon noted that transit agencies are doing system optimization plans and seeking to maximize performance metrics. Ms. Pinkard noted that HRT is doing its system optimization plan to get maximum benefits. Mr. Sonenklar noted that it is hard to predict if a transit agency improving its metrics leads to an increase in funding. Mr. Sonenklar noted that impacts to service impacts overall ridership, as well as revenue miles and hours, and thus sizing metrics. Mr. Sonenklar noted that this can impact smaller agencies the most. Ms. Melester commented that it might help to look at sizing and performance separately. Ms. Melester suggested moving away from the trends.

Mr. Macek continued the presentation, reviewing the MERIT program's formulaic complexity. Mr. Macek noted that the current funding formula has significant mathematical complexity, but the proposed changes simplify the formula and reduce the number of variables by reducing the number of performance metrics included in the formula. Mr. Macek provided an example of a negative impact on the current performance because of the formulaic complexity.

Mr. Macek presented the current limitations of the MERIT review process, noting the current data DRPT can and does collect, as well as potential data that could be collected. Potential data includes Passenger Miles Traveled (PMT), Locally Derived Income (LDI), and Cost of Living. Mr. Macek noted that other states use these data but noted that TSDAC members and the public have commented on what local funding could or should be included in any LDI data. Mr. Macek noted that DRPT is studying potential additional data points. Ms. Mayton noted that DRPT would likely not have the results of the study until the end of the year and may require certain technology and data upgrades. Ms. Mester noted that the potential new data would only be available after this current MERIT review process was over.

Dr. Smoot inquired what the metrics of a highly performing transit system look like. Mr. Macek noted that college towns, in the current MERIT formula, perform very well, because they tend to have lower operating costs and denser ridership. Dr. Smoot inquired what the metrics are of stronger performance. Mr. Trogdon noted that riders per revenue hours, riders per vehicle miles, for example. Dr. Smoot inquired specifically how do we know if we are doing well or not. Ms. Mattice noted that the challenge this whole time is comparing what "doing well" is, as transit agencies will have varying goals, whether it's a dense urban transit provider, college town, or rural provider. Dr. Smoot noted that defining need or relative merit is difficult, citing the example that transit use for a medical appointment versus recreational use has different needs, but there is no way to assess those different needs. Mr. Macek noted that determining that is impossible at the rider level but is why revenue hours and miles are utilized as well. Mr. Sonenklar added that there is no one performance metric that defines good

performance, noting different agencies have different goals. Mr. Sonenklar noted that is why the current formula utilizes numerous performance metrics. Mr. Sonenklar noted that using five metrics is an attempt. Dr. Smoot inquired what the five metrics are used. Mr. Sonenklar answered riders per hour, riders per mile, cost per hour, cost per mile, and cost per passenger. Dr. Smoot compared the situation to SMART SCALE, where rural counties are disadvantaged because of less congestion. Ms. Mester noted that is why performance metrics are used as proxies. Staff noted that transit agencies are being compared to statewide averages. Mr. Macek noted that the current study is limited to what data is available. Mr. Booth asked if this current study will produce a recommendation about what new data will be collected and used. Ms. Mayton noted the goal of the study is to find out what DRPT can collect and then have recommendations on which ones should be utilized in the formula.

Mr. Macek continued the presentation, presenting conceptual clarifications, including trend analysis and trend adjustments for size. Ms. Mester inquired why in the current formula the performance set aside is 5%. Mr. Macek noted that there are graphics that show this and noted that if the performance set aside was increased, it began to distort outputs. Ms. Mester asked if, given the ongoing study and legislation, if there should even be any changes at this time. Ms. Mester expressed concern about unintended consequences without new data. Ms. Mayton noted that these changes are needed as the current formula is complex and produces strange anomalies. Chair McGlennon noted that there have been a few instances of bad outcomes in the formula, but there is at least one comparison to work with. Mr. Sonenklar noted that, even when the data study is complete, DRPT may still need time to procure, collect, and process that new data. Ms. Mester noted that transit operators may need new training to collect any new data.

Mr. Macek continued, presenting the impacts between one year and three-year performance data scenarios. Mr. Macek noted the advantages and disadvantages of each in the event of a “catastrophic event”. Ms. Mattice inquired about the different fare structure factors in the current formula. Mr. Trogdon noted it is not specific, with Mr. Macek only noting that its impact on ridership may be factored in. Mr. Sparks noted that if an agency reduces service to become fare free, that a transit agency would be impacted by budget and ridership decreases.

Mr. Macek continued with presenting on the scenario evaluation process. Mr. Macek reviewed the 30 scenarios developed and evaluated. Mr. Macek noted that each scenario evaluated was rated according to policy goals.

Mr. Macek presented on the scenarios tested and each approach to revising the scenarios. Mr. Macek presented on the MERIT formulas and how they evolved over time through the review process, noting the ways the formulas varied. Mr. Macek presented the other key scenarios proposed. Ms. Mattice inquired about the discussions around certain sizing weights. Mr. Macek noted that specific scenario was to see a balanced approach, with a third of each metric impacting the overall sizing weights. Mr. Trogdon noted that any further decrease to sizing metrics began to break the formula.

Mr. Macek continued and began to present on the proposed formula methodology's policy goals. Mr. Macek noted the objectives that meet the policy goal of delivering the most value and best outcomes. Mr. Macek noted that predictability is not addressed under this policy goal. Dr. Smoot inquired about what metrics will determine if the funding formula is meeting its policy goals. Mr. Macek explained the proposed MERIT Operating Assistance Formula.

Mr. Macek explained the key changes to the Step 1 metrics. Ms. Mester asked for clarification if the metrics are still using one year of data, noting it has not changed, and asking what has changed with the performance metrics. Mr. Macek confirmed that it is one-year of data.

Mr. Macek continued and presented the key changes to the Step 2 performance evaluation, noting the trend-based adjustment would be replaced with a 5% set-aside. Ms. Mattice noted that the 30% cap on operating costs is policy and not a legislative limit, and that legislative changes may cause a revisit to that policy. Chair McGlennon inquired how many transit agencies hit the 30% cap. Mr. Trogon answered only a handful do, around four to six a year.

Mr. Macek continued with the changes on the Step 2 performance evaluation, explaining why the direct performance measurement works compared to the trend adjustment. Ms. Mester asked for an example of the approximate impact of a one versus three-year data comparison, asking for what the difference would be. Mr. Macek explained the difference, with neither case using trend adjustments, and explains how transit agencies would be impacted depending on if the one- or three-year data comparison is used. Dr. Smoot inquired about a situation in which a transit provider stops service on a low ridership day, thus decreasing ridership, but increasing riders per mile, and whether that situation would lead to an increase or decrease in funding. Mr. Macek noted that on the sizing metrics, a transit provider may likely see a decrease in funding, especially if that provider's spending goes overall. Mr. Macek noted that on the performance side, funding may go up if it has better ridership per operating hours or operating mile. Ms. Mester asked for clarification if current work is being done with current data. Mr. Sonenklar answered that the upcoming FY27 SYIP will come out at the end of April and will provide more information about funding outcomes under the current formula, and more data will be released then. Ms. Mester noted that DRPT must comply with existing CTB policy. Mr. Macek noted that the list of wanted data would not be available by April.

Mr. Macek continued and presented on Step 3 of the funding formula, which is the redistribution of the 30% funding cap. Ms. Mattice inquired what the financial impact of that is. Mr. Macek noted that under the current formula, only about two or three percent of funds are redistributed due to exceeding the 30% cap. Mr. Sonenklar explained that extra funding from the 30% cap goes through the formula again until it is all allocated.

Mr. Macek presented on the estimated allocation impacts using historic data. Mr. Macek noted that the example provides average allocations for a three-year period and explained that future allocations may differ due to varied changes. Mr. Macek demonstrated the impacts by construction district and by individual transit provider. Ms. Mattice noted that these funding impacts are a snapshot in time and inquired if there is an opportunity to inform transit agencies about what behavior leads to the best outcomes. Chair McGlennon inquired if localities increasing contributions to public transportation would benefit transit providers by increasing the 30% cap. Director Zimmerman supported the importance of communicating the changes, noting that the takeaway should not be the changes benefiting one transit provider or another. Ms. Mattice echoed that communication should emphasize that the outcomes presented are one-year examples, and that outcomes may be different in the future, and transit agencies should work to improve outcomes in the future. Mr. Sonenklar noted that though improvements should be rewarded in the formula, that all transit providers are competing for the same money in the same pool. Chair McGlennon also emphasized the commitment to having more transit, not less.

Mr. Macek continued, presenting the alternative approaches for future consideration. Mr. Macek noted alternative approaches such as tiered allocations by mode, by transit agency type, or incorporating additional data. Mr. Macek noted the needs, potential advantages, and potential drawbacks of each. Ms. Mattice noted that many of these approaches had been evaluated in 2017 and suggested there may be valuable information from those prior conversations. Mr. Macek noted that many changes have occurred since 2017, including WMATA and VRE being removed from the MERIT Operating Assistance.

Open Discussion

Ms. Mayton moved the conversation to discuss current legislation. Chair McGlennon requested that the TSDAC members get questions or requests for information early, ahead of a future TSDAC meeting date.

Chair McGlennon asked Ms. Mattice to present on recently introduced legislation. Ms. Mattice began noting that the legislation provides funding for transit across the Commonwealth. Ms. Mattice noted that the legislation comes from a SJ28 study working group and produced two different pieces of legislation. Ms. Mattice explained the details of the two-transit funding legislation, including how revenues are generated and how they are distributed. Ms. Mattice noted she had no position on which legislation she preferred. Ms. Mester noted that localities, VACo, and VML will be taking a position on the bills and noted that the technical impacts and fiscal impacts will be very important.

Public Comment

There were no public comments.

Wrap Up/Next Steps

Chair McGlennon noted that there is consensus regarding the MERIT Capital proposed changes, but TSDAC is still open to thoughts or concerns. Ms. Mayton asked TSDAC members to provide questions ahead of the next TSDAC meeting. Ms. Pinkard reminded TSDAC of the VTA Transit Advocacy Day. Ms. Mester thanked staff for having materials on the website.

Adjourn

Without objections, Chair McGlennon adjourned the meeting.