

# TRANSIT RIDERSHIP INCENTIVE PROGRAM



Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation

Fiscal Year 2021

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## Introduction

The 2020 General Assembly established the Transit Ridership Incentive Program (TRIP) in *Va. Code §33.2-1526.3*. TRIP was created with two distinct goals: to improve the regional connectivity of urban areas with population in excess of 100,000 and to reduce barriers to transit use among low income communities.



In March 2020, the introduction of COVID-19 delayed program implementation by shifting the needs of transit providers and altering the role of transit throughout the Commonwealth. DRPT utilized this delay to conduct an expansive outreach process to better gauge the needs of transit providers and to appropriately refine TRIP policy materials.

## 2021 Outreach

Throughout fall 2020 and winter 2021, DRPT conducted a multifaceted outreach process to inform the program policy, evaluation, and guidance. This outreach process included working with transit partners and eligible grantees to create a program that most appropriately meets the needs of transit operators.

The first component of the outreach process was distributing a Request for Ideas (RFI). The RFI was coupled with a DRPT hosted webinar on November 18, 2020, to provide a brief overview of TRIP's goals and objectives and to discuss the role of the RFI. DRPT established that the goals of the RFI were to learn more about interest in TRIP and inquire about potential projects for funding. Twelve transit agencies throughout the Commonwealth submitted 23 potential projects for funding.

DRPT reviewed these submissions and created two working groups with interested parties to engage in the development of the program. The working group participants were intentionally geographically diverse and from both rural and urban systems. The working groups were an opportunity for DRPT and its' partners to discuss challenges and opportunities associated with TRIP. The table below details key tasks of the outreach process.

**Table 1: Outreach Process**

<b>Outreach Strategy</b>	<b>Purpose of Outreach</b>	<b>High Level Findings</b>
<b><i>Request For Ideas (RFI)</i></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify potential applicants and stakeholders</li> <li>• Learn about potential projects of interest</li> <li>• Refine key themes for project evaluation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Confirmed statewide interest in both Regional Connectivity and Zero-fare funding</li> <li>• Equal interest in both project types</li> <li>• Initial key themes for project evaluation: well-planned, collaborative, and quickly implementable</li> </ul>
<b><i>Zero-fare Working Group</i></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Refine zero-fare prioritization methodology</li> <li>• Identify challenges in project implementation</li> <li>• Discuss application requirements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discussed concerns surrounding the legitimacy of ridership as a scoring metric -- equity concerns</li> <li>• Refined the importance of applicant commitment- additional scoring points for letters of support and identified partnerships</li> <li>• A multiyear program with a funding step down would appropriately disburse state funds in a way that encourages increased local commitment.</li> </ul>
<b><i>Regional Connectivity Working Group</i></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Refine regional connectivity prioritization methodology</li> <li>• Identify challenges in project implementation</li> <li>• Discuss application requirements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Revised the role of the MPO in the application process—additional points for letters of support</li> <li>• A multiyear program would promote longer term change and would allow for more time to properly measure the success of the project</li> </ul>

## 2021 Transportation Initiative Legislation

After the completion of the initial outreach, it was clear that demand for zero-fare and low income projects would far exceed anticipated funding. Throughout the evolution of COVID-19, transit providers halted fare collection to reduce human bottlenecks, limit interactions with riders and operators, and alleviate the financial stresses associated with transit use for essential workers in a global pandemic.

*Va. Code* §33.2-1526.3 stated that a maximum of 25 percent of TRIP funding could be attributed to zero-fare projects, requiring a minimum of 75 percent of the funds to be attributed to regional connectivity projects. Due to the increased emphasis on equity and accessibility, the 2021 General Assembly allocated \$10 Million in 2021 Transportation Initiative Funding towards zero-fare and low income TRIP projects in Fiscal Year 2022. This additional funding will allow DRPT to fund more zero-fare and low income projects during TRIP's initial year. It is important to note that this additional funding is only allocated for Fiscal Year 2022. Moving forward, there will be more funding allocated towards regional connectivity projects and less funding allocated towards zero-fare and low income projects.

The table below summarizes the anticipated six year total TRIP funding as shown in the Fiscal Years 2022-2027 Six Year Improvement Program.

**Table 2: Fiscal Years 22-27 TRIP Funding (\$ in Millions)**

	FY22	FY23	FY24	FY25	FY26	FY27	Total
<b>Regional Routes</b>	\$7.5	\$11.3	\$16.9	\$16.5	\$18.0	\$18.2	\$88.4
<b>Zero-fare/ Low Income</b>	\$12.5	\$3.7	\$5.6	\$5.8	\$6.0	\$6.0	\$39.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$20.0</b>	<b>\$15.0</b>	<b>\$22.5</b>	<b>\$23.3</b>	<b>\$24.0</b>	<b>\$24.2</b>	<b>\$129</b>

## Public Comment Period and Commonwealth Transportation Board Approval

In spring 2021, after the conclusion of the initial outreach process, DRPT presented the draft policy materials to the Commonwealth Transportation Board (CTB). Following the presentation, DRPT published the draft materials for public comment. This public comment period allowed interested parties 45 days to review draft program materials and provide feedback. DRPT carefully considered each comment and a number of key changes to the program policy in consideration of the comments received. The following table outlines the most common and relevant comments for each program type.

**Table 3: Response to Public Comment**

Comment	DRPT Action
<b><i>Zero-fare and Low Income</i></b> In some cases, ridership is not the most appropriate scoring metric to gauge the performance of equity programs. Often these types of programs do not yield a large ridership increase due to the fact that low income riders have little choice in mobility options regardless of fare collection.	The final scoring criteria and their weights are listed below: 1. Impact on ridership (30%) 2. Implications of equity and accessibility (30%) 3. Applicant commitment (30%) 4. Project readiness (10%)  Impact on ridership weight was decreased to have the same weight as two other vital criteria to provide more balance in the evaluation criteria.
<b><i>Regional Connectivity</i></b> A route may serve regional needs and still fall within one jurisdiction. Routes that may not serve multiple localities but still serve a regional need by accessing large employers and other modes of transportation should still be considered a regionally significant project.	Redefined “regionally significant”- while it is preferred for a route/project to cross jurisdictional boundaries, a project can still be deemed regionally significant if it meets a regional need without serving multiple localities (i.e. connects large regional employment centers, multimodal transportation, and large community centers)

## Fiscal Year 2022 Selected Projects

After reviewing the feedback and considering all comments, DRPT sought and received CTB approval in July 2021. DRPT subsequently hosted an application webinar to review the policy and outline to process to apply for TRIP funding on July 28. The TRIP application period opened on August 2, 2021, and closed

on September 17, 2021. DRPT allowed applicants to provide supplemental documentation until October 1, 2021. In total, DPRT received 14 applications. Three applications were for regional connectivity projects totaling \$2.2 million in Fiscal Year 2022. An additional 11 applications were for zero-fare programs totaling \$11.9 million in Fiscal Year 2022.

DRPT outlined three key themes for project evaluation. The first theme being collaborative; DRPT was looking to fund projects that demonstrate local and community support. This could be exhibited by letters of support from the appropriate jurisdictions, metropolitan planning organizations, and the identification of project partners. Additionally, DRPT was searching for well-planned projects. Ideally, TRIP funded projects would already be identified as a need, and evaluated as such, prior to the TRIP application. The planning process should be completed before applying for TRIP funds. This preference allowed for more thoughtful and deliberate applications. DRPT intended to fund projects that are already in a local or agency level planning document. Lastly, DRPT was interested in funding quickly implementable projects with relatively low startup costs.

Using the aforementioned scoring criteria, DRPT recommended funding for nine total projects: six zero-fare and three regional connectivity projects. The following table outlines the Fiscal Year 2022 funding recommendations:

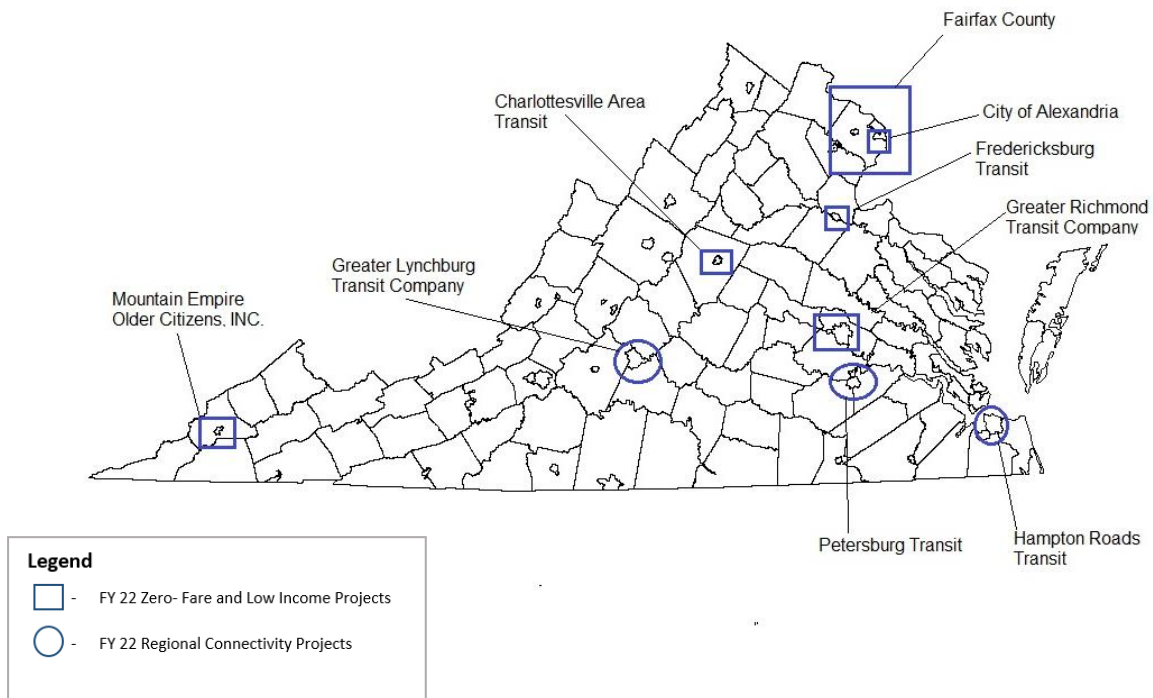
**Table 4: Recommended Fiscal Year 2022 TRIP Projects**

<b>Regional Connectivity Projects</b>	<b>Project Description</b>
Lynchburg Route 4 Expansion	Increase frequencies on GLTC route 4, which operates on a major commercial corridor in the City of Lynchburg. Route 4 accesses the regional airport, train station, Liberty University, and other locations of interest.
Petersburg Southern Express Route	Deploy an express route that connects the City of Petersburg and Emporia, Virginia. This project will also serve Prince George County, Sussex County, and Greenville County.
Hampton Roads Naval Intercirculator	Provide last-mile accessibility to employees within the naval base. This project will incentivize employees to arrive at the base on foot, bicycle, or transit, and then the circulator will provide them with mobility options within the base.
<b>Zero-Fare and Low Income Projects</b>	<b>Project Description</b>
GRTC Zero-Fare Project	Deploy zero-fare operations on all GRTC local routes, express routes, and GRTC Care services (paratransit).
City of Alexandria Zero-Fare Project	Deploy systemwide zero-fare operations for all DASH services.
Fairfax Subsidized Pass Program	Provide half-fare SmartTrip cards for riders with annual income that meets the 225% federal poverty levels by threshold.
MEOC Zero-Fare Project	Deploy systemwide zero-fare operations for all MEOC services.
Fredericksburg Zero-Fare Project	Deploy systemwide zero-fare operations for all FRED services.
Charlottesville Zero-Fare Project	Deploy systemwide zero-fare operations for all CAT services.

CTB approved these projects in December, 2021. TRIP funded diverse multi-year projects throughout the Commonwealth. The grantees are geographically diverse, as noted below. Additionally, the sizes of grantees vary, including large urban, small urban, and rural transit agencies.

With the current funding agreement, DRPT has exhausted all funding for zero-fare and low-income projects for Fiscal Year 2022 through Fiscal Year 2026. DRPT does have additional funding slated for regional connectivity projects and will re-open the application as part of the Fiscal Year 2023 grant cycle.

## **FY 22 TRIP Projects by Geographic Location**



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