

# ON THE MOVE

HAMPTON ROADS TRANSIT'S QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER • WINTER 2025

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# HRT's 2025 Legislative Priorities

## Virginia General Assembly

The 2025 session of the Virginia General Assembly convened on Jan. 8, with a range of legislative and budgetary matters on the docket. Among the key topics of interest is the future of transit funding in Virginia.

Hampton Roads Transit (HRT) will play an active role in Richmond, advocating for critical initiatives to support and enhance regional transportation infrastructure.

HRT has outlined three major legislative priorities for the session:

- **Sustainable and Predictable Light Rail Funding** - A proposed bill seeks to establish stable, long-term funding sources for light rail systems in the region. This would ensure the continued maintenance, operation, and expansion of services critical to connecting Hampton Roads communities.
- **Increased State Transit Funding** - HRT is also pursuing a budget amendment to raise overall state funding for transit operations and capital projects. This effort aligns with broader statewide needs to improve the efficiency and reach of public transit systems.
- **Public Transportation Toll Relief** - HRT vehicles routinely travel through tolled facilities while operating bus and paratransit services in the cities of Norfolk and Portsmouth. HRT is pursuing a budget amendment to help defray public transportation costs on tolled facilities.

While substantial new transportation funding is not anticipated in 2025, HRT is already preparing for the 2026 General Assembly session, which is expected to address the Commonwealth's long-term transportation funding challenges. With growing demands on transit systems, including the need for sustainable revenue sources, HRT plans to collaborate with other regions and transit agencies to push for increased investments in public transportation.

## Federal Advocacy Efforts

On the federal level, HRT is working closely with the Hampton Roads Congressional delegation to secure additional funding for paratransit services. HRT is seeking an earmark in the Transportation, Housing, and Urban Development appropriations bill to expand its fleet of paratransit vehicles, which provide essential services to individuals with disabilities.

While federal funding remains uncertain, advocacy efforts will continue through the winter to ensure these vital resources are secured.

To review HRT's formal 2025 legislative policy statement, please visit <https://gohrt.com/agency/government-affairs/>. Questions may be directed to Noelle Pinkard at [epinkard@hrtransit.org](mailto:epinkard@hrtransit.org). ■



## VB Wave Ridership up by 59%

Ridership on the VB Wave Trolley rose by 59 percent during its 40th summer season, buoyed by enhanced service frequencies, increased marketing, and popular Oceanfront events.

Between May 12 and the Neptune Festival in late September, a total of 277,724 people rode on the three trolley routes as part of the summertime service operated by Hampton Roads Transit, up from 174,212 riders in 2023.

Ridership on Route 35 grew by 178 percent. Route 30 saw an increase of 45 percent. Route 31 was up 67 percent over last summer.

"The VB Wave trolley's 40th anniversary season was a certified success," said William E. Harrell, HRT's President and CEO. "These results demonstrate the convenience and efficiency of the VB Wave to serve the Virginia Beach Oceanfront resort area to help visitors get around while contributing to the region's economy."

The distinctive sky blue and sand-colored trolley buses – augmented this past summer by HRT buses – have carried millions of passengers along the Oceanfront since 1984. ■



# HRT's OnDemand Rideshare Returns

OnDemand, Hampton Roads Transit's ridesharing service, has returned following a successful pilot program that ended in early 2023. Once again, HRT is teaming up with Via to bring the popular service back for another year.

OnDemand is available in Newport News and Virginia Beach, providing an affordable transportation option in two distinct zones. It helps bridge the gap in areas with limited fixed-route bus service.

In Newport News, OnDemand operates within a 20-square-mile zone and connects to six bus routes, including the 757 Express Route 112.

In Virginia Beach, the service operates within a 15-square-mile zone and connects to seven bus routes, including the 757 Express Route 20 and the Newtown Road light rail station.

Fares are \$2 per person per ride and can be booked on the HRT OnDemand mobile app or by calling 757-859-8294. Service is available Monday through Friday from 5 a.m. to 9 p.m. and weekends from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. To learn more, please visit [www.gohrt.com/ondemand](http://www.gohrt.com/ondemand). ■

## 25th Anniversary Celebration

Hampton Roads Transit is celebrating its silver anniversary. On Oct. 1, 1999, Tidewater Regional Transit (TRT) and Peninsula Transit (PENTRAN) joined forces to become HRT, the nation's first voluntary union of transit agencies.

The historic merger was years in the making, bringing together the region's seven largest cities: Chesapeake, Hampton, Portsmouth, Norfolk, Newport News, Suffolk, and Virginia Beach.

Merger talks were spearheaded by public transportation advocates on the Southside and Peninsula who saw the value of uniting the two agencies. They knew the merger would improve connectivity in the region and serve as a model of regional cooperation. Two merged agencies also created opportunities for growth previously stifled by a lack of access to jobs and education.



Many who have been here since the beginning believe the agency has made strides toward the vision for better public transit. A quarter of a century later, our customers benefit from it daily with services such as the Tide Light Rail, 757 Express bus service, Elizabeth River Ferry, Peninsula commuter services, the VB Wave Trolley, Base Express, OnDemand ridesharing, and the goCommute commuter options program with vanpool assistance, carpooling, biking, and other smart commuting options. ■

## HRT, Community Rallies Around Hurricane Victims

Hampton Roads Transit teamed up with Virginia Beach-based Operation Blessing for a donation drive, collecting 2,500 pounds of supplies for victims of hurricanes Helene and Milton.

HRT made good use of its VB Wave Trolleys, placing one outside the administration building in Norfolk and another in front of headquarters in Hampton. Employees volunteered to staff the trolleys from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. on Oct 29 and 30, collecting enough items to fill both vehicles. HRT staff dropped off the donated supplies, including diapers, baby wipes, formula, and feminine hygiene products, at Operation Blessing's warehouse in Chesapeake.

"These supplies will be a tremendous help to fellow citizens in other states who are still struggling after the recent hurricanes," said Gordon Robertson, president of Operation Blessing. "Thank you to HRT for facilitating this community initiative."



The collection drive was an initiative of HRT Cares, an employee group supporting fellow employees and community organizations.

"We are grateful for our employees and the community's overwhelming generosity," said William E. Harrell, HRT's President and CEO. "These results reflect the strength of our HRT team and the communities we serve." ■

# Hampton Roads Transit Earns Six PRSA Pinnacle Awards

Hampton Roads Transit earned six 2024 Pinnacle Awards presented by the Hampton Roads chapter of the Public Relations Society of America.

“This remarkable achievement is a testament to the hard work, dedication, and commitment to excellence our Marketing and Strategic Communications department brings to the organization,” said William E. Harrell, President and CEO at HRT.

HRT received four Excellence Awards and two Merit Awards during the awards ceremony on Nov. 7:

- **Community Relations Campaign:** VB Wave 40th anniversary campaign (Excellence Award). The VB Wave 40th Anniversary campaign supported seasonal trolley service at the Oceanfront and included a community celebration held in July.
- **Community Relations Campaign:** Student Freedom Pass (Excellence Award). The Student Freedom Pass is a free transit pass for students aged 13 to 17. This campaign included two back-to-school bashes where students signed up for a free pass before the beginning of the school year, plus social media posts, postcards and flyers.
- **Content Marketing:** Vanuary and Rideshare the Love campaign (Excellence Award). The Vanuary campaign by HRT’s Traffic Demand Management (TDM) program used a clever play on words to capitalize on the start of a new year and people’s resolve for change. Rideshare the Love was a nod to a social media trend about “romanticizing your life.”
- **Events and Observances (More than 7 days):** Earth Month & Bike Month (Merit Award). Both Earth Month and Bike Month campaigns promoted a host of community focused events and partnerships with various organizations, including a free fare day, bus stop cleanups, Bike to Work Day, and numerous bike rides throughout the region.
- **Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Campaign:** Transit Equity Day and Juneteenth events and promotions (Excellence Award). The Transit Equity Day celebration was held at HRT’s Hampton Transit Center to recognize the achievements of Rosa Parks. More than 100 people attended an event unveiling a plaque to honor Parks. HRT celebrated Juneteenth by offering free fare and encouraging customers and staff to take photos at selfie posters on display at four transit centers.
- **Blogs:** Solving the Ridership Gap: Would Free Fare Be the Solution? (Merit Award). HRT’s blog, On the Move, did a deep dive into the pros and cons of going fare free. The blog post received local and national media attention.



“From development to design to execution, each campaign relied on the talents of every team member to create a winning strategy,” said Alexis Majied, HRT’s Chief Communications Officer.

Entries were submitted by companies and organizations throughout Hampton Roads. The Pinnacle Awards recognize the best public relations programs and tactics in the Hampton Roads region and recognize individuals for professional achievements in public relations. ■

## TRAFFIX is now goCommute

After serving the region for over two decades, Hampton Roads Transit’s Transportation Demand Management (TDM) program just got a facelift. TRAFFIX is now goCommute. The new name, look, and website launched on Nov. 8.

goCommute encourages the community to “Commute Smarter” by using public transportation, carpooling, vanpooling, biking, walking, and teleworking by providing customers with tools to save time and money, reduce traffic congestion, decrease stress, and improve air quality. goCommute offers benefits to commuters and employers, including help setting up a van or carpool, a commuter rewards program, guaranteed ride home, access to free public parking, and discounted farecards.



goCommute serves the cities of Chesapeake, Franklin, Hampton, Newport News, Norfolk, Poquoson, Portsmouth, Suffolk, Virginia Beach, and Williamsburg and the counties of Gloucester, Isle of Wight, James City, Southampton, Surry, and York. ■