

POTOMAC AND RAPPAHANNOCK  
TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION (PRTC)

OFFICIAL COMMISSION MEETING

MINUTES

DATE: April 7, 2011  
TIME: 7:00 p.m.  
LOCATION: PRTC Transit Center  
14700 Potomac Mills Road, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor  
Woodbridge, VA 22192-6811

---

1. CALL TO ORDER

In Chairman Jenkins absence, Vice Chairman Way called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m., with a quorum present.

2. ROLL CALL

MEMBERS PRESENT

*Richard Anderson	Virginia House of Delegates (arrived at 7:25 p.m.)
*David Awbrey	Department of Rail & Public Transportation
*Maureen Caddigan	Prince William County
*Fred Howe	City of Fredericksburg
*Michael May, Immediate Past Chairman	Prince William County
*Paul Milde, Treasurer	Stafford County
*Marty Nohe	Prince William County (departed at 8:20 p.m.)
*Frank Principi	Prince William County (arrived at 7:15 p.m.)
*Jonathan Way, Vice Chairman	City of Manassas

MEMBERS ABSENT

Wally Covington	Prince William County
John Jenkins, Chairman	Prince William County
Frank Jones	City of Manassas Park
Jerry Logan, Secretary	Spotsylvania County
Jackson Miller	Virginia House of Delegates
Toddy Puller	Virginia Senate

Gary Skinner  
Susan Stimpson

Spotsylvania County  
Stafford County

ALTERNATES PRESENT

\*William Wren

City of Manassas Park

ALTERNATES ABSENT

Ateeb Ahmad  
Hilda Barg  
Hap Connors  
Harry Crisp  
Mark Dudenhefer  
Brad Ellis  
Darrel Feasel  
Lorraine Lasch  
Suhass Naddoni  
Hal Parrish  
Benjamin Pitts  
Sorine Preli  
Corey Stewart  
John Stirrup

Prince William County  
Prince William County  
Spotsylvania County  
Stafford County  
Stafford County  
City of Fredericksburg  
Department of Rail and Public Transportation  
Prince William County  
City of Manassas Park  
City of Manassas  
Spotsylvania County  
Prince William County  
Prince William County  
Prince William County

\*Voting Member

STAFF AND GENERAL PUBLIC

Nick Alexandrow  
Gina Altis  
Monica Backmon  
Matthew Brown  
Joyce Embrey  
Althea Evans  
Anthony Foster  
Shanta Garth  
Alfred Harf  
Robb Howell  
Todd Johnson  
Ebony Jones  
Ryan Jones  
Bob Liebbrandt  
Mary Marshall  
Eric Marx  
Betsy Massie  
Tim McCann  
Bernadette Peele  
Paul Pitchke  
Marsha Reid

PRTC Transit Project Manager  
PRTC Executive Assistant  
PWC Regional Transportation Planner  
FIRST TRANSIT Temp  
PRTC, Dir., Finance & Administration  
PRTC Dir., Marketing & Communications  
PRTC Transportation Project Manager  
FIRST TRANSIT AGM-Accounting & Admin.  
PRTC Executive Director  
FIRST TRANSIT General Manager  
FIRST TRANSIT Maintenance Manager  
PRTC Customer Service Agent  
PRTC Special Projects Coordinator  
PWC Budget & Analysis  
PRTC Accounting & Budget Manager  
PRTC Dir., Planning & Operations  
PRTC Dir., Grants & Project Management  
FIRST TRANSIT Region Vice President  
PRTC Legal Counsel  
FIRST TRANSIT AGM-Operations  
PRTC Mgr., Personnel & Administration

Christine Rodrigo  
Frank Spielberg  
Chuck Steigerwald  
Claranetta Wyche  
Dale Zehner  
Jim Zumwalt

PRTC Public Relations Specialist  
VHB (Vanasse Hangen Brustlin, Inc.)  
PRTC Mgr., Planning & Quality Assurance  
FIRST TRANSIT Supervisor  
VRE Chief Executive Officer  
MANASSAS PARK City Manager

3. INVOCATION Led by Commissioner May.
4. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE Led by Commissioner Milde.
5. CITIZENS' TIME No citizens came forward.
6. PRESENTATIONS

A. First Transit (FT) General Manager Robb Howell – Employee Recognition and Operations Report.

Mr. Howell noted that the February and March 2011 Operators-of-the-Month are unable to attend the meeting this evening and will be recognized at a future meeting.

Mr. Howell reported 18 commendations (directed to 12 individual operators) were received during the month of March. He went on to report that the accident frequency rate for the month of March is .64 per 100,000 miles -- a 50% percent reduction over the prior fiscal year and a 60% reduction on the “preventable” side. While this is higher than the prior month, the year-to-date is ahead compared to the prior year-to-date.

Moving to another subject, Mr. Howell reported that the “Customer Satisfaction Survey” is complete. The OmniLink bus service saw some notable increases in virtually all categories in terms of “excellent” ratings. The OmniRide bus service satisfaction ratings remained largely the same as they were in the prior survey, a good thing.

Vice Chairman Way asked if “standees” are becoming more prevalent on the OmniRide bus service. Mr. Howell replied “yes.” Elaborating further, Mr. Harf noted that while there wasn’t a higher level of dissatisfaction in the most recent OmniRide bus service ratings, the customer satisfaction survey write-in “comment” section provides another indicator – overcrowding and a plea for more service was the most oft-cited comment. Recent counts indicate that the incidence of chronically overcrowded OmniRide trips has increased perceptibly – from 11% last month to 19%. Mr. Harf went on to say that PRTC management is braced for the overcrowding causing a “satisfaction” downturn in the next customer satisfaction survey.

Commissioner May asked if “standees” are more common on the “one-seat” ride, because of the popularity of those buses as opposed to the buses people transfer to. Mr. Marx explained that a vast majority of PRTC’s commuter services are one-seat rides and only a small amount of transferring occurs. Mr. Marx also observed that the 19% statistic cited

earlier is deceptive in a way because it is an overall average – if mid-day trips and late evening trips are excluded, the incidence of overcrowded trips in the real peak periods is even higher.

Commissioner Howe asked what are most of the complaints about category-wise. Mr. Howell replied that the recent jump in complaints relates to “late” buses, partially correlated to the number of people boarding as it takes longer to load and unload at each bus stop, as well as slower traffic due to the start of the “tourist” season. Other major complaints include “bus maintenance” and “driver proficiency” concerns. Regarding bus maintenance, Mr. Howell explained that the complaints are not “mechanical” breakdown related, but more about heating and cooling temperatures, which is not unusual for “transitional times” of the year.

Vice Chairman Way asked if the weather, route, highway conditions or number of standees create a serious safety hazard for standees and, if so, how is it being managed? Mr. Howell explained that when passengers are standing close to the “passenger boundary line,” safety becomes a factor. Oddly enough, it seems the more standees, the safer. The winter season adds driving risks, but in terms of standees it’s not anymore unsafe when there are ten standees versus 15 standees. Mr. Harf noted that passengers are required to stand behind the passenger boundary line and bus operators are instructed not to allow excessive numbers of standees on board the bus.

Vice Chairman Way asked if the insurance company is satisfied with this operating practice. Mr. Howell replied “yes,” and explained that the manufacturer’s “placard” located inside the vehicles indicates capacity ratings for both seated passengers and standees. It is part of the vehicle design to allow standees if a transit system chooses as a policy matter to sanction this practice.

Commissioner Frank Principi arrived at 7:15 p.m. during “Item 6 – First Transit General Manager Robb Howell – Employee Recognition and Operations Report” and was not absent for the vote on any action items.

B. Special Recognition of Claranetta Wyche, First Transit Supervisor and Ryan Jones, PRTC Special Projects Coordinator.

Mr. Harf announced that the 2011 Virginia Statewide Bus Roadeo was hosted by PRTC April 2-3, culminating in an Awards Banquet on April 3<sup>rd</sup>. The success of the bus roadeo reflects well on the organization, community, and the leadership/organization efforts of Claranetta Wyche and Ryan Jones. At this time, Mr. Howell and Mr. Harf presented Ms. Wyche and Mr. Jones with a certificate and token of appreciation.

Mr. Harf noted that a competition for the “maintenance technicians” also occurred during the bus roadeo event. The maintenance technicians were required to diagnose and fix jury-rigged “engines” on a timed basis.

7. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

RES 11-04-01 Minutes of March 3, 2011.  
[PRTC]

Commissioner Caddigan moved, with a second by Commissioner Nohe, to approve the Minutes, as presented. There was no discussion on the motion. (CADDIGAN/NOHE; WITH MAJORITY VOTE, WREN ABSTAINED)

8. AGENDA APPROVAL  
[PRTC]

RES 11-04-02 Agenda of April 7, 2011  
[PRTC]

Commissioner Milde moved, with a second by Commissioner Howe, to approve the Agenda, as amended. There was no discussion on the motion. (MILDE\HOWE, UNANIMOUS)

9. CONSENT AGENDA APPROVAL  
[PRTC]

RES 11-04-03 Consent Agenda of April 7, 2011.  
[PRTC]

Commissioner Nohe moved, with a second by Commissioner May, to approve the Consent Agenda, as presented. (NOHE\MAY, UNANIMOUS)

RES 11-04-04 A. Treasurer's Report.  
[PRTC]

Accepted the Treasurer's Report for the period ended January 31, 2011, as presented. (NOHE\MAY, UNANIMOUS)

RES 11-04-05 B. AITG Extension.  
[PRTC]

Authorized the Executive Director to extend the AITG, Inc. contract for website design and development, general technical support, and website hosting services through December 31, 2011, as presented. (NOHE\MAY, UNANIMOUS)

10. VIRGINIA RAILWAY EXPRESS (VRE)

A. Operations Board Meeting Agenda and Minutes of March 18, 2011. There were no comments.

B. Chief Executive Officer's Report (03-11).

Mr. Zehner reported that the average daily ridership for the month of March was 19,372 (or some 3,000 more daily trips compared to the prior year). He went on to report that VRE's top ten ridership days occurred in March and April -- over 20,000 riders each time. Ridership continues to grow and "standees" are present on all of the trains. There is a large demand for public transit overall as Amtrak and bus operations (including PRTC) are also experiencing ridership growth. There will be a point when VRE ridership plateaus.

Mr. Zehner went on to report that VRE received approval from CSXT and Norfolk Southern to turn a train around on May 2<sup>nd</sup> and take it back to the Broad Run VRE Station for mid-day storage opening up additional storage space in DC. The shuffling of trains will allow VRE to add five additional cars (700 seats) resulting in about 1,400 more seats on a daily basis. In addition, the VRE Operations Board approved the "buy-down" of the Amtrak fare from \$10.00 per ticket to \$5.00 per ticket, which will probably result in another 150 people riding Amtrak. With the implementation of these changes, ridership could reach over 23,000 in a few months.

Vice Chairman Way asked about the status of the "siding" track storage adjacent to the L'Enfant VRE Station. Mr. Zehner noted that VRE received approval from CSXT today about changing the "lay out" and it is anticipated that it will be available for storage use in about a year.

Vice Chairman Way also asked if the deadhead train will carry passengers. Mr. Zehner replied "no," and explained that the train will be a deadhead move only to avoid interference with the morning northbound service. The deadhead train will be operating against the flow of train traffic allowing the dispatcher to operate the train as he sees fit.

Moving to another subject, Mr. Zehner reported VRE is in receipt of nine of the 20 new locomotives. Six of the new locomotives are currently in service and two of the remaining three that have been delivered will be "tested" this weekend. The ninth locomotive experienced wheel damage in transit, which will be fixed next week. By the end of next week, all nine new locomotives will be in service. VRE is still anticipating all revenue trains (12 trains) to be equipped with new locomotives by the end of May 2011, and the remaining eight locomotives will be delivered by the end of July. VRE has sold all but one of the old locomotives.

Mr. Zehner reported that VRE's annual "Meet the Management" program commenced yesterday at Union Station. These events are an opportunity to show appreciation to VRE riders. The Meet the Management program will follow at the VRE L'Enfant and Crystal City Stations on April 13<sup>th</sup> and April 20<sup>th</sup>, respectively. Representatives from both MotivePower, Inc. and WebTech will be present. Representatives will also be present from both CSXT and Norfolk Southern at the Fredericksburg VRE Station on May 18<sup>th</sup> and the following week at the VRE Broad Run Station, respectively. Despite chronic overcrowding, VRE received compliments regarding the "crews" and "service operation."

Mr. Zehner went on to report that system-wide on-time performance was 89% in March (95% and 82% on the Manassas and Fredericksburg lines, respectively). He stated that the 82% on-time performance on the Fredericksburg line is simply a consequence of ongoing CSX “tie” work during the night resulting in slow speeds in the morning. That work is slated for completion today. Although there have been delays in the morning, there are very few delays on the evening trains.

Commissioner Milde asked about Virginia Secretary of Transportation Connaughton’s commuter parking lot announcement. Mr. Harf explained this is an outgrowth of the FAMPO deliberations in which FAMPO, with CTB Member Cord Sterling’s encouragement, saw fit to designate CMAQ funds allocated to FAMPO for three parking lot projects -- Gordon and the Staffordboro commuter parking lot expansions in Stafford County, and parking at the proposed Spotsylvania VRE Station. All three of the projects have now been designated for CMAQ funds.

Commissioner Milde asked if the future Spotsylvania VRE Station commuter parking lot is a one thousand space parking lot. Mr. Harf replied “yes.” Continuing, Commissioner Milde stated that the VRE Operations Board’s focus is on the message that VRE ridership will peak unless extra railcar capacity and the L’Enfant siding storage track become available. Commissioner Milde also noted that he rode Train #302 and Train #304 (not on a Monday or Friday) the past couple of weeks. Train #304 had seats available, but Train #302 did not.

With the addition of the turn back train at Union Station and the L’Enfant siding storage track, Commissioner Howe asked what VRE anticipates capacity-wise. Mr. Zehner noted that with the addition of the L’Enfant siding storage track, two trains can be added -- two six car trains (12 cars) with 140 seats per car. He went on to note that adding trains has equipment and subsidy implications -- they will cost the local jurisdictions and state more money to operate. Mr. Zehner also observed that the recent trend has been towards less state operating assistance, not more -- the state has reduced VRE’s subsidy by about \$2 million over the last three years on the operating side.

Commissioner Howe stated that he didn’t realize a funding issue existed with regard to purchasing seats and observed that with the addition of 1,000 parking spaces at the Spotsylvania VRE Station, the capacity constraint promises to become more acute. Mr. Zehner explained that as trains are added a net increase in cost occurs to operate the trains.

Commissioner Howe asked how the Amtrak buy-down ticket will affect the “capacity” situation. Mr. Zehner replied that it will help, though continued ridership growth may cause available seats to become scarce again. If this happens after the five additional trains are added and some riders have shifted to Amtrak, VRE would seek further state assistance with regard to the Amtrak buy down as Amtrak is operating trains with lots of empty seats.

Commissioner Howe asked if Amtrak will stop at the Spotsylvania VRE station. Mr. Zehner replied “no,” explaining that the current station design is on a spur (siding), not on the main line. Amtrak will continue to stop at the Fredericksburg VRE station.



At this time, Ms. Rodrigo gave the presentation. A question/answer session followed.

Commissioner Awbrey: Have you encountered any communication issues in the public schools as to whether or not the students understand the program?

Ms. Rodrigo: There haven't been any communication issues with the pre-school and elementary school age program. The new middle school program has not been presented yet.

Commissioner Caddigan: Which middle schools will inaugurate the program?

Ms. Rodrigo: Graham Park and Rippon.

There were no further questions.

[PRTC\Info]            A.     Executive Director's Report.

Mr. Harf reported that PRTC is prepared for a potential government shutdown and noted the presence of a "blue-sheeted" handout that outlines PRTC's plan to transport commuters. Noting that federal government employees fall into three categories – 1) essential, 2) non-essential funded by appropriations, and 3) non-essential funded otherwise – Mr. Harf said that PRTC is awaiting further advice from OPM about the numbers of non-essential employees who will actually go to work in the event of a shutdown. To ensure adequate service for customers, PRTC will operate full service on Monday and Tuesday so there's no service curtailment until a shutdown has assuredly occurred and the facts about how many federal employees continue to go to work under those circumstances are clear. If service is curtailed, that would happen on Wednesday.

Picking up on Mr. Zehner's observations about ridership, Mr. Harf noted that PRTC's ridership has also increased significantly. On the OmniRide side, PRTC is experiencing unprecedented ridership levels, consistently eclipsing 10,000 trips per day and overcrowding on 19% of the trips PRTC is operating. Mr. Harf reiterated that if the mid-day service and later evening service (when ridership levels are not as high) were excluded from the calculation, the percentage of long-distance trips experiencing overcrowding would be far higher.

With regard to the Potomac Mills parking changes, Mr. Harf reported that staff has worked in close concert with Prince William County and the "slug" website manager David LeBlanc the past month to fashion a plan to ease the commuting problems resulting from the loss of parking at Potomac Mills. Prince William County Supervisors Mike May and Frank Principi hosted a second Town Hall meeting on March 23<sup>rd</sup> to invite reactions from the "slug" community on how well they are acclimating to the situation. The number of people in attendance at the second town hall meeting was decidedly less than at the first meeting, evidencing that the parking problem has been eased somewhat – thanks in small measure to the opening of the Baptist Church as an overflow parking lot.

However, those in attendance at the second meeting expressed the belief that the Baptist Church parking lot would be used more extensively if later evening bus service were offered. While all of PRTC's rolling stock is currently in service during the peak of the peak to handle the unprecedented ridership, Mr. Harf said PRTC has the wherewithal to help once the evening peak ebbs and the buses end their service day by deploying buses ending their runs to operate a "shuttle" service. The shuttle service will commence on May 2<sup>nd</sup> operating between both the Horner Road and the Baptist Church "park and ride" lots. Mr. Harf also noted that a major communication campaign will be launched to inform commuters.

In conclusion, Mr. Harf reported that the state's commitment to fund a companion "transit plan" to the revised I-95 HOT Lanes project was part of Virginia Transportation Secretary Connaughton's announcement in February. DRPT has been directed to work with local governments on fashioning a revision and has scheduled an initial meeting for this purpose with the transit systems and jurisdictional representatives on April 12<sup>th</sup> at the PRTC Transit Center.

B. Action Items:

RES 11-04-07            1.        Prince William Area Mobility Management Plan.  
[PRTC]

At this time, Mr. Harf gave a presentation on the "Prince William Area Mobility Management Plan." A question/answer session followed.

Commissioner Milde: Are you suggesting that 3,700 trips that aren't taken to work add to the unemployment situation?

Mr. Harf: Yes.

Vice Chairman Way: Observed that the scope/magnitude of trying to serve as many as 25,000 daily trips, assuming the cost to do so is \$10 per day trip, amounts to \$250,000 per day, a prohibitively large expenditure.

Mr. Harf: Acknowledged how daunting it would be to try to serve all such trips, and PRTC's keen recognition of how "starved" jurisdictions are for resources. Went on to note that this is why PRTC fashioned a staged plan, and with the "early action" steps either costing nothing or a nominal amount.

Commissioner Principi: What is the flip side of that equation, the economic development, and can you quantify the other side?

Mr. Harf: While there has been macroeconomic analysis done elsewhere to quantify the cost of inaction, no such analysis has been undertaken as part of the PRTC work. Mr. Harf went on to say he would be wary about invoking the research done elsewhere because it is

heavily influenced by higher income commuters, meaning it would probably overstate the economic impact of inaction here.

Commissioner May: As Vice Chairman Way stated, the cost is large, but it seems a sensible thing to promote the use of OmniLink inasmuch as it has the capacity to address at least some of these needs.

Mr. Harf: Concurred, observing that this is a central finding/recommendation of the planning study.

Commissioner Caddigan: Are grants being used for this project?

Mr. Harf: Yes, grants have been used and the “early action” recommendations are also grant funded. Not a single dollar in the early action recommendations is either a recurring or local cost. The early action recommendations cover the first two years, and decisions would be made thereafter about the advisability/affordability of moving on to ventures requiring recurring costs. The early action recommendations have been fashioned to be one-time efforts. With regard to the “travel training” aspect of the project, a travel training regimen will be established to train staff already present to fully acquaint them to the services that are available, so they are more informed “call takers” equipped to provide advice. There is no cost other than creating the travel training curriculum.

Vice Chairman Way: Is the grant a “one-time” grant to be used to set up the program?

Mr. Harf: Yes and the grant will also cover training.

Vice Chairman Way: After the program has been set up, will its sustainment entail a recurring additional expense for Prince William County and the Cities of Manassas and Manassas Park?

Mr. Harf: Not necessarily. The call takers already exist and, as Commissioner May stated, the existing OmniLink services have empty seats that can be deployed without additional expense. Other facets of what the plan envisions ultimately, like a sustained voucher program, would be an additional local expense if such new transportation services were sponsored.

Commissioner Caddigan: A few years ago we talked about folks in the Dumfries and Woodbridge areas seeking access to the Fortuna Shopping Center. Would they be included?

Mr. Harf: There are three stages of recommendations -- the near term represents the first two years, medium term represents years three through five, and longer term represents longer than five years out. The recommendations include the gradual implementation of the adopted PRTC bus service plan adopted by the PRTC Board previously, which includes service to the Fortuna Shopping Center between Montclair and Triangle. These services will occur when resources permit, and the plan fashions those expanded OmniLink services not happening until the “longer term” stage.



C. Information Items:

1. Most Recent Bus Customer Satisfaction Survey. Mr. Harf reported that the OmniLink bus service satisfaction is up, but management does not want to read too much into that preferring to await additional surveys before drawing any conclusions about the effectiveness of the remedial action plan the Commission adopted six months ago. Mr. Harf went on to observe that OmniRide satisfaction continues to be high despite overcrowding and reiterated that PRTC management is braced for what could be a downturn going forward. On-time performance continues to be the single most serious criticism about the OmniLink services. Even though the “on-time performance” satisfaction rating improved, it continues to lag way behind the other ratings, a manifestation of the challenges that the proliferation of traffic signals, construction activities, and other issues pose for the local bus operation.

Mr. Harf went on to summarize management’s efforts in digesting the comments section of the “Customer Satisfaction Survey” -- identifying things that require individualized attention and issues that require continuing education and training.

2. Surface Transportation Innovations Issue No. 89 (03-11). There were no comments.
3. Changing Vehicle Travel Price Sensitivities. There were no comments.
4. Broke and Broken – America’s Transportation System Can’t Win the Future. There were no comments.
5. PRTC Service Performance Reports. There were no comments.
6. PRTC Budget-to-Actual Comparison. There were no comments.
7. Communications:
  - a. Related to Funding. There were no comments.
  - b. Related to Jurisdiction. There were no comments.
  - c. General Interest. There were no comments.

8. PRTC’s Expressed Concern about Soaring Fuel Prices. Mr. Harf reported that at the Commission’s direction, a letter was sent to Energy Secretary Chu regarding the rapid rise in fuel prices. A response was received from the Department of Energy’s Director of Oil and Gas Analysis (Mitchell Baer) advising PRTC to contact the Federal Trade Commission (FTC). In contacting the FTC, PRTC management learned of the existence of the FTC Bureau of Competition, which does extensive monitoring and investigative efforts in this area as authorized by the Energy Independence and Security Act of 2007 (EISA). PRTC’s concern is widely shared, and one that Congress has addressed by enacting the EISA and empowering the FTC to regulate and prosecute market manipulators. In light of this fact-finding, further contact with the FTC expressing the same concern isn’t necessary.

13. OTHER BUSINESS/COMMISSIONERS' TIME

There was no other business to come before the Commission.

14. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to come before the Commission, Vice Chairman Way adjourned the meeting at 8:59 p.m.

NEXT MEETING: Thursday, May 5, 2011, 7:00 p.m.

LOCATION: PRTC Transit Center  
14700 Potomac Mills Road, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor  
Woodbridge, VA 22192-6811  
Main #: (703) 583-7782  
Fax #: (703) 583-1377  
[www.PRTCtransit.org](http://www.PRTCtransit.org)