

ON THE MOVE

HAMPTON ROADS TRANSIT'S QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER • FALL 2025

Paul Skoutelas

President and Chief Executive Officer,
American Public Transportation
Association (APTA)



HRT Connects 1,000+ Teens to Free Transit in Record Time

Hampton Roads Transit is on a mission to help more young people take advantage of FREE public transportation. In the first three months of fiscal year 2026, HRT's public outreach team already distributed more than 1,000 student freedom passes. For comparison, the team gave out about 2,000 passes during all fiscal year 2025.

The Student Freedom Pass enables teens to ride the bus, light rail, ferry, and OnDemand ridesharing, for free. Anyone aged 13 to 17 is eligible for a pass. They can use it to get to school, extracurricular activities, a part-time job, or to meet up with friends.

Public outreach made a big push at the beginning of the school year, hosting two Student Freedom Pass Paloozas. The annual events are always a big success. It's an opportunity for teens to pick up their pass, ask any questions, and learn how to plan a trip.

Since that initial push, the team has been busy visiting schools across the Southside and Peninsula, putting even more Student Freedom Passes into the hands of young riders.

Speaking of young riders, the new Student Transit Riders Commission (STRC) is helping bridge the gap between HRT and young riders. The Commission was created earlier this year and began meeting over the summer to share suggestions and feedback about HRT and its service to young riders.

If you know a teen who is interested in public transit and wants to serve their community, an application is available online at gohrt.com/agency - look for STRC under the Governing Boards tab. ■



A Mini City for Safety's Sake

Tucked away next to a golf course in a residential neighborhood along Deep Creek Boulevard in Portsmouth lies a city built for kids.

Safety Town mimics a real cityscape – complete with commercial buildings, houses, traffic signals, police and fire stations, and even a sliver of the Downtown Tunnel. For 50 years, it's been the go-to place where Portsmouth grade-schoolers have learned to ride bikes, use crosswalks and more.

“Whether it's pedestrian safety, how to walk on the street safely, bicycle safety, or learning about stranger danger, we want you to be a kid too and have fun, but it's about safety and keeping you and your whole family safe,” says Bruce LaLonde, president of the Safety Town Advisory Committee.

Safety Town is a partnership between Portsmouth's education, law enforcement, and legislative communities. Using age-appropriate, hands-on interactive experiences, children learn lifesaving behaviors and practices in a controlled environment while engaging with Portsmouth police officers.

Some 4,000 Portsmouth Public Schools students visit Safety Town every year. The latest addition to this mini city? An HRT bus stop sign, bench and trash bins to eventually teach kids how to get on a bus.



During its 50th anniversary celebration on Oct. 22, HRT was recognized for its service by the Safety Town Committee. Commissioner Tony Goodwin accepted the award on behalf of HRT. ■

Sustaining the Future: Focus of Biennial State of Transit Summit

In October, Hampton Roads Transit joined Williamsburg Area Transit Authority (WATA) and Suffolk Transit for the biennial State of Transit Summit. The focus this year was sustaining the future of public transit. More than 200 people attended the event at the Hampton Roads Convention Center, including federal, state, and local lawmakers, business leaders, and community partners.

The summit included a CEO panel discussion with William Harrell, President and CEO at HRT, Matt Scalia, President and CEO at WATA, and Maria Ptowski, Transit Manager at Suffolk Transit. Attendees also heard from Del. Jackie Hope Glass (93rd District) and State Sen. J.D. “Danny” Diggs (24th District) during a legislative panel discussion.

Paul Skoutelas, President and CEO of the American Public transit Association (APTA), was the keynote speaker. Skoutelas said that while the industry is recovering “extraordinarily well” following the pandemic, agencies need to be more aggressive in talking about their successes in innovation and investment.

“To be at 85 percent and still growing, I think is a great accomplishment for the industry,” Skoutelas said. “Unless we take the initiative to share, to explain what is going on, how we’re doing it, what the impacts are going to be, and what improvements are happening, chances are others aren’t going to say it either.”

Skoutelas acknowledged an ever-changing environment and the challenge of adapting to a “new set of priorities.” However, he suggested, public transit “shouldn’t be a political issue.”

“[Public transportation] should be what’s good for our communities and our cities,” Skoutelas said. “And we know that that investment is vital.”

According to APTA, every dollar invested in public transit generates about \$5 in economic returns. Passengers rely on public transit for access to jobs, education, medical care, and other essential services. Public transit is a critical component to the workforce and economic development of Hampton Roads.

In a crowded field of causes vying for resources, Skoutelas said public transit advocates must make a “compelling” case – and that means showing the benefits of transit and what it means for our communities. ■



HRT Hosts Transit Leaders from Across the Commonwealth

Hampton Roads Transit hosted the Virginia Transit Leadership Institute (VTLI) as it kicked off its class of 2026. During the all-day session, participants visited the Tide Light Rail facility, rode the light rail from Newtown Road Station to EVMC Fort Norfolk Station, and toured the Norfolk maintenance facility. The day concluded with remarks from HRT President and CEO William Harrell, who talked about his own leadership journey.

VTLI is sponsored by Virginia Transit Association (VTA) and was created by the Commonwealth’s transit systems and the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT) to engage, elevate, and cultivate the next generation of public transportation leadership in Virginia.



This year’s class includes 15 transit leaders from agencies across the state. It’s only the third class to be selected for the program. The cohort covers a broad range of transit careers, including communications, finance, and operations. The nine-month program culminates in a graduation ceremony, held during VTA’s annual conference next May. ■

757 Express Service Continues Growth

Hampton Roads Transit (HRT)’s 757 Express bus service is showing steady growth following an increase to 15-minute, peak-period service frequencies.

Route 112, which runs from Lee Hall to Newport News Shipbuilding via Jefferson Avenue in Newport News, saw ridership grow by an average of 76 percent between April 2022 and August 2025.

Route 114, serving Mercury Boulevard and Downtown Hampton, was up 59 percent between June 2023 and August 2025.

Route 20, connecting downtown Norfolk with the Virginia Beach Oceanfront via Virginia Beach Boulevard, saw a 37 percent monthly average ridership increase between December 2023 and August 2025.



Routes that share stops with 757 Express buses also are seeing ridership growth due to increases in transfer opportunities: 27 percent for routes connecting with the Route 20, 54 percent for routes aligned with Route 112, and a 49 percent increase for other bus service connecting with Route 114.

The 757 Express will eventually consist of 13 bus routes connecting the highest densities of people and jobs in the region. Buses arrive every 15 minutes during the weekday peak hours of 6-9 a.m. and 3-6 p.m. ■

Election Day Ridership

Ridership on the off-year Election Day in '25 was comparable to ridership on Election Day in '24 when there was a presidential election.

Mode	11/5/2024	11/4/2025
Bus Ridership	30,544	30,263
Light Rail Ridership	2,457	2,536
Ferry Ridership	520	386
Paratransit	1,420	1,541
Totals	34,941	34,726

Stay Connected

There’s a lot of exciting work happening at Hampton Roads Transit! While you wait for the next issue of On the Move, there are several easy ways you can stay connected and informed:

- Subscribe to the **Community Connector** – our monthly newsletter featuring community partnerships and details on how you can get involved.
- Read the **HRT blog** – get industry insights and thoughtfully curated articles you won’t find anywhere else.
- Listen to the **Going Places** podcast – hear from experts, thought leaders, community trailblazers, and everyday transit users.
- Watch **On the Move** on YouTube – our show featuring local leaders who are helping to move the region forward.



Find links to all of this and more in the HRT Online Newsroom.



We’re proud to announce the Hampton Roads Transit FY2025 Annual Report is available. We can’t wait for you to explore a year of transformation. From innovative new technologies designed to enhance the customer experience to revitalized efforts to build a stronger workforce, this report highlights our ongoing commitment to the communities we serve and building a better public transit – together. If you haven’t already received a copy, you can request one via email at communications@hrtransit.org. The Marketing & Strategic Communications team also produced a terrific video to accompany this year’s annual report.

