Innovative Coordinated Access and Mobility

Virginia Transportation and Mobility Directory: Final Report
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Executive Summary

The goal of this project was to develop and implement a one-click directory of public, human service, and specialized transportation; mobility management; travel training; and transportation-supportive programs and services, and was successful in achieving its goal. The Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT) has developed Transportation Navigator, a set of resources aimed at providing the public with comprehensive information about the transportation providers that serve Virginia. This project included development of a central database of providers, presentation of that information through websites and a widget, and development and sharing of General Transit Feed Specifications for public fixed-route transit.

This project has been a great success for DRPT, and, to date, has won two awards. WTS International – Central Virginia Chapter awarded the Transportation Navigator project its 2022 award for “Innovation Transportation Solution,” specifically for a woman-led project. The Richmond Technology Council has awarded the Transportation Navigator project its 2022 rvatech/ award for “Technology Innovator – Public Sector.” The Virginia Information Technologies Agency used Transportation Navigator as its first example of a constituent/customer-centric accomplishment for the Commonwealth of Virginia in response to the Digital States Survey, and featured the project on the Virginia.gov website. At a regional level, the Richmond Human Services Transportation Coordination Entity is working to promote Transportation Navigator and provide the resource across myriad community websites.

Ultimately, this project is aimed at supporting riders in connecting with transportation providers that are able to meet their needs. Continued engagement with the resources and, hopefully, increased ridership across Virginia will continue to show the value of the resources DRPT and its partners have created.

DRPT appreciates the Federal Transit Administration’s award of the Mobility for All grant that supported this project, and the grant administration support provided by the National Aging and Disability Transportation Center, a partnership of Easterseals, Inc., and USAgeing.
Introduction

When the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT) began updating its Coordinated Human Services Mobility (CHSM) Plan in 2018, the commonwealth’s mobility managers voiced a need for a central source of information about transportation providers. Until that time, the mobility managers for each locality or region had been compiling analog lists of information, keeping track through handwritten or word processing lists. As the consultant working on DRPT’s CHSM Plan gathered feedback from various stakeholders and riders, the need for a one-call/one-click system continued to come up. DRPT then decided to incorporate a GIS map of transportation providers in Virginia as part of the CHSM Plan update task order, and the consultant delivered the map in 2019. Due to the amount of information and the navigability of the GIS platform, DRPT determined that this application would meet several internal planning and programming needs, but would not be a useful resource in its current structure. Further, there was a broader need for members of the general public to have access to this information, and the GIS platform was not user-friendly.

When the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) announced the availability of the Access and Mobility for All funding, the timing was perfect to support DRPT’s efforts to provide an accessible, user-friendly list of transportation providers to the residents of Virginia. The renewed effort focused on leveraging existing structures to communicate key information to the riding public.

Project Description

DRPT developed an online directory of transportation services throughout Virginia, including public transit and human services transportation, volunteer and voucher programs, travel training, mobility management, and other transportation services and programs. The project will covered the whole state, including its rural, small urbanized, and large urbanized areas, and all populations, including individual with disabilities, seniors, veterans, and individuals with opioid use disorder as well as the general public. There are myriad websites providing transportation information, but each contains different information to fulfill the host’s mission.

This project sought to combine existing transportation listings under a set of new resources, called Transportation Navigator. The project resulted in Virginia’s most thorough online directory of transportation information provided on the VirginiaNavigator.org platform – including its sub-sites SeniorNavigator, disAbilityNavigator and VeteransNavigator – as well as a widget housed on DRPT’s and other websites and a repository of General Transit Feed Specifications (GTFS) which support travel planning on fixed-route public transit.

By leveraging the existing structure of VirginiaNavigator, DRPT has reached tens, if not hundreds, of thousands of individuals and their caregivers who have needs for specialized services. Between April 1 and July 21, 2022, users have accessed 91,610 transportation resource listings through Transportation Navigator, at a rate of nearly 23,000 views per month.

DRPT also sought to improve transit service coordination and communication in rural and small urban areas by developing a process and tools to publish and maintain statewide GTFS data. While many of Virginia’s transit agencies had service data published in GTFS format, 13
agencies did not have the capacity or skills to develop or maintain such a dataset and the absence of GTFS service data in those areas presented a challenge for potential customers and mobility managers. DRPT worked with a vendor to develop and maintain GTFS data for areas of the state where this information did not previously exist, stored the data in a central database, and published it through Google Maps.

Key Partnerships

This project involved a partnership among DRPT, Kimley Horn, VirginiaNavigator, and Trillium Transit, with additional input and assistance from several external groups.

Organization Overview: Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT)

DRPT was the lead agency for implementation.

DRPT is the Virginia transportation agency responsible for the receipt, allocation, and management of Federal Transit Administration (FTA) formula funding programs that flow through states. It is the direct recipient of FTA Section 5310 funding for the rural and small urbanized areas within the Commonwealth of Virginia, and is the designated recipient through mutual agreement for FTA Section 5310 funding for the Hampton Roads, Richmond, and Roanoke large urbanized areas. DRPT works collaboratively with the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments, which administers FTA Section 5310 funding for the Northern Virginia urbanized area. DRPT oversees more than 40 transit agencies and 80 human service agencies that provide more than 80 million passenger trips per year (Fiscal Year 2022). DRPT maintains the Statewide Transit Six-Year Improvement Program (SYIP). The Fiscal Year 2023 SYIP programmed more than $6.2 billion in state and federal funds to transit, rail, and transportation demand management projects and programs.

Organization Overview: VirginiaNavigator

VirginiaNavigator is a non-profit organization that provides free resource information associated with general health, aging, disabilities, and post-military life to all Virginians. The information focuses on issues such as health, financial concerns, legal questions, health facilities, housing options, transportation, exercise programs, advocacy, and more. Content is organized on VirginiaNavigator.com, SeniorNavigator.com, disAbilityNavigator.com, and VeteransNavigator.com, with all sites displaying resource information from a single core database. Individuals may access information by searching using a city, county, or ZIP code to return resources available within the selected community. The organization also collaborates with 742 navigator centers, including local libraries, area agencies on aging, transit providers, and other locations, where individuals without computer access may use a computer free of charge to access the directory or work with a staff member at the center to utilize the websites.

VirginiaNavigator receives support from dozens of state and local governments, public organizations, non-profits, health care systems and hospitals, public utilities, private businesses, and financial institutions. VirginiaNavigator has contractual relationships with two other Virginia state agencies that were key supporters for this project proposal: The Virginia Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS), which administers funding from the U.S. Administration for Community Living, and the Virginia Department of Behavioral Health and
Developmental Services (DBHDS), which administers funding from the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

**Organization Overview: Trillium Transit**
Trillium Transit was identified as a key partner to develop and maintain GTFS data for 13 fixed-route public transit agencies that did not have this data or the capacity to maintain it. Trillium also provides assistance in getting GTFS data published to third-party mapping systems, such as Google Maps and Apple Maps. Trillium also developed the Commonwealth’s first GTFS clearinghouse to store all GTFS.

**Organization Overview: Kimley Horn**
Kimley Horn is one of DRPT’s bench contractors and served as the convener for the subcontractors performing work for this project. Kimley Horn did not provide any direct deliverables, but did coordinate project check-ins and billing.

**Additional Key Partners: Virginia Association of Mobility Managers**
The Virginia Association of Mobility Managers and the individual mobility managers funded through DRPT’s Section 5310 program were key partners for this project. They provided the initial request for a similar resource, and helped guide DRPT’s approach to delivering this project. Many of the mobility managers are employed by area agencies on aging, which are already using VirginiaNavigator as part of their daily work.

**Additional Key Partners: Statewide Human Services Transportation Consortium**
When DRPT began updating its CHSM Plan, it convened a consortium of state agencies to guide the process, with participation from the Department of Medical Assistance Services (DMAS), which administers Medicaid, Department of Veterans Services (DVS), Virginia Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (VDDHH), the Virginia Board for People with Disabilities (VBPD), Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS), Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services (DBHDS), Virginia Department of Health (VDH), Joint Commission on Health Care (JCHC), and Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (MWCOG). The group reviewed the final coordinated plan at a meeting in December 2019 and fine-tuned its process for future connectivity, and was involved in the process of developing the Transportation Navigator resources. The consortium has continued to meet quarterly to improve understanding of each agency’s function and maximize federal funds across programs. DRPT provides Section 5310 funding to area agencies on aging supported by DARS and community services boards supported by DBHDS. Through these awards, local agencies coordinate federal dollars to maximize transportation options to the eligible populations. DRPT is endeavoring to build upon the work at the local level and the federal level’s Coordinating Council on Access and Mobility (CCAM) by ensuring that state agencies coordinate transportation dollars, administration and support.

**Additional Key Partners: Transit Agencies**
Staff at VirginiaNavigator, DRPT, and other state agencies will have the ability to add, edit, and categorize transportation resources as part of this project, but so too will transportation
providers. This maximizes opportunities to provide robust and comprehensive information about transportation services and resources in Virginia. Staff at VirginiaNavigator are then responsible for verifying and editing information submitted by providers before publishing it to the webpages. The number of partners for this project becomes endless: as a new transportation service is established, its staff may add it to the website. For the public transit GTFS data, 13 public transit agencies will become partners in the project as they work with the selected contractor to develop the data. Google, a silent partner, has provided the public with a mapping platform that will amplify the available information and enhance the success of this project.

Implementation

For the public-facing listing of transportation resources and the Virginia Transportation Finder widget, DRPT leveraged the structure of an existing website with 481 current transportation listings, and sought to expand the directory of services and streamline cataloging for improved search results. DRPT contributed additional transportation information on 40 public transit agencies and 80 human service agencies to be added to the database. VirginiaNavigator managed the data work and developed the widget, which is housed on DRPT’s website as well as other community partner sites.

The GTFS component of the project was completed by Trillium Transit in partnership with the smaller fixed-route public transit agencies for whom the data was developed. In total, 13 agencies benefited from the GTFS component, which covered approximately 60 transit routes.

The project progressed as planned and did not require any adjustments to the process or scope.

Performance Measures

Project Goals and Performance Measures

Goal 1: Develop a single platform to promote as Virginia’s go-to source for transportation information.

Performance Measures:
1. Publish Transportation tab across all existing VirginiaNavigator websites.
2. Monitor engagement with transportation resources through VirginiaNavigator.
3. Transportation Navigator widget placed on DRPT’s site as well as several community partner sites.
4. Monitor engagement through the widget on DRPT’s site.

Goal 2: Improve transportation resource information on TransportationNavigator.

Performance Measures:
1. Decreased webpage bounce rates, as measured in Google Analytics.

Goal 3: Improve online trip planning for 13 public transit agencies that do not have GTFS data.
Performance Measures:
   1. Develop and host GTFS data on a new webpage for DRPT, and push GTFS data to Google Maps.

**Goal 4:** Through TransportationNavigator, improve access to information about human services transportation resources for individuals in rural areas, veterans, seniors, individuals with disabilities, and individuals with opioid use disorder.

Performance Measures:
   1. Monitor engagement with transportation resources through VirginiaNavigator.

## Outcomes

DRPT met all three goals and the respective performance measures outlined above.

For the purposes of reporting to the National Aging and Disability Transportation Center, DRPT developed five performance metrics and one outcome. Results below are from the project launch in October 2021 through July 2022.

**Metric 1.** 5% of overall site visits to SeniorNavigator, VeteransNavigator, and disAbilityNavigator go to one of the Transportation pages created as part of this project.

DRPT reached less than 1% of this goal over the course of the project. However, this goal was tied to a specific page and did not account for overall engagement with the transportation resources, which are more useful to a rider than the Transportation pages. With the lessons learned through this project, DRPT would have set a different goal that truly measured engagement with the project resources.

**Metric 2.** Record at least a 10% exit rate from the transportation listings, which are correlated as visits to transportation provider sites for more information.

DRPT exceeded this goal and recorded a 43.4% exit rate.

**Metric 3.** Record a decreased bounce rate of 25% over the life of the project, which indicates engagement with the resources rather than a viewer exiting the website without engaging in a resource.

DRPT is currently at 14.3% of goal for this measure and is continuing to track engagement.

**Metric 4.** Record at least 100 searches through the Virginia Transportation Finder widget housed on DRPT’s website.

To date, 577 searches through this widget have been recorded, which is nearly six times the goal.

**Metric 5.** Record at least 20,000 views of transportation resources through VirginiaNavigator per month.
DRPT is seeing an average of approximately 23,000 views per month and has exceeded this goal.

**Outcome:** At least 65% of Virginia’s mobility managers are satisfied with the transportation information provided on the new Transportation Navigator.

**Result:** DRPT conducted a survey in January-February 2022, shortly following the launch of Transportation Navigator, to gather the mobility managers’ initial impressions. Of the responses,
- 89% were familiar with the Transportation Navigator tools and resources
- 50% were using Transportation Navigator in their work
- 75% said that Transportation Navigator contained comprehensive information about the transportation services in their area

Some of the written feedback we included was:
- “Great information to share with clients and other newly [assigned] Mobility Managers”
- “Is great for all [transportation] resources to be in one place.”
- “It is a good resource.”
- “I think it will be a very useful tool.”

Following the survey, we conducted several outreach and training events on Transportation Navigator to promote understanding of the platform and how it could be used, and are continuing to conduct presentations on the platform.

The Transportation Navigator project won the WTS International – Central Virginia Chapter award for “Innovative Transportation Solution” by a women-led project management team. Additionally, Transportation Navigator is a finalist for an rvatech/ award through the Richmond Technology Council in the category of “Technology Innovator – Public Sector.”

**Moving Forward**

Our project is sustainable for as long as there is funding available to support the operating costs. This project included development of a set of digital resources that have an ongoing maintenance cost, but the expense is minimal. We secured funding for an Innovative Coordinated Access and Mobility project to expand upon the work built with the support of this award, and plan to continue to maintain the resources we created.

**Lessons Learned**

There is a continuum of technical expertise among transit agencies. Therefore, the GTFS technical assistance had to be individually tailored to each agency’s needs; there was no one-size-fits-all approach to take on this work. Continued communication and coordination can be a challenge with working with multiple external partners, particularly as our transit partners were struggling with short staffing and ongoing turnover.
When dealing with digital products, it is extremely important to develop clear deliverables and expectations. The digital landscape is rapidly changing, and each organization with a digital footprint has to evolve to keep up with security requirements, public need and interest, and its own business needs, while balancing user experience and demand.

**Impacts of COVID-19**

Due to the nature of this project with its focus on developing electronic resources, COVID-19 had little impact on our ability to deliver the project on time, on budget, and on scope. Working with external partners, we were able to utilize virtual meeting platforms to coordinate our primary and subcontractors. The utilization of this type of technology certainly increased due to COVID-19, so that was a positive benefit to our project.
Appendices

Transportation Page on SeniorNavigator.org
Transportation

Transportation helps people get where they need to go. There are a wide variety of transportation services available in the Commonwealth of Virginia, including local public transit and paratransit, long-distance transportation, human services transportation, and transportation provided by private companies such as taxis and ride app services.

Visit our Transportation Guide to read a brief description of the various transportation options available.

Explore the various topics below or search the 'Virginia Transportation Finder' to locate transportation providers near you.

Features
- AARP Getting Around Guide
- DRPT Commute VA
- How to Ride the Bus (VTA)
- Rediscover Your Ride
- Virginia Mobility Management Directory

Home / Transportation

Public and Commuter
- Public Transportation
- Long-Distance Transportation
- Commuting and Ride Sharing

Human Services Transportation
- Non-Emergency Medical Transportation
- Veterans Transportation
- Opioid and Substance Use Transportation

Private Providers
- Long-Distance Transportation
- Ride App Services
- Taxi Services
Transportation Page on VeteransNavigator.org

Supporting Virginia Veterans and their families.
Transportation

Transportation helps people get where they need to go. There are a wide variety of transportation services available in the Commonwealth of Virginia, including local public transit and paratransit, long-distance transportation, human services transportation, and transportation provided by private companies such as taxis and ride app services.

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Explore the various topics below or search the 'Virginia Transportation Finder' to locate transportation providers near you.

Public and Commuter
- Public Transportation
- Long-Distance Transportation
- Commuting and Ride Sharing

Human Services Transportation
- Non-Emergency Medical Transportation
- Veterans Transportation
- Opioid and Substance Use Transportation

Private Providers
- Long-Distance Transportation
- Ride App Services
- Taxi Services

Features
- DRPT Commute VA
- How to Ride the Bus (VTA)
- Rediscover Your Ride
- Virginia Mobility Management Directory
Transportation Page on disAbilityNavigator.org
Transportation

Transportation helps people get where they need to go. There are a wide variety of transportation services available in the Commonwealth of Virginia, including local public transit and paratransit, long-distance transportation, human services transportation, and transportation provided by private companies such as taxis and ride app services.

Visit our Transportation Guide to read a brief description of the various transportation options available.

Explore the various topics below or search the Virginia Transportation Finder to locate transportation providers near you.

Features:
- DRPT Commute VA
- How to Ride the Bus (VTA)
- Rediscover Your Ride
- Virginia Mobility Management Directory
Virginia Transportation Finder Widget

Virginia Transportation Finder

SERVICES
- Select a Topic

SERVICE AREAS
- Select an Area

Find the Transportation Service You Need.

Our Virginia Transportation Navigator provides complete information about transportation services in the Commonwealth of Virginia. The Transportation Navigator is Virginia’s most thorough directory of public transit, human service, and specialized transportation providers, programs, and services.

Virginia Transportation Finder

SERVICES
- Select a Topic

SERVICE AREAS
- Select an Area

Commuting and Ride Sharing
Inter-City Transportation
Non-Emergency Medical Transportation
Opioid and Substance Use Transportation
Veteran Transportation
Public Transportation
Ride App Services
Taxis
GTFS Clearinghouse

About this site

The Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation supports the creation and maintenance of GTFS for many transit agencies in Virginia. Several other transit agencies maintain GTFS outside of this effort. This website contains download links for GTFS feeds in Virginia.

What is GTFS?

GTFS, an acronym for the General Transit Feed Specification, defines a common standard for public transportation schedules and associated geographic, fare, and service calendar information. Learn more by reading the documentation for GTFS.

GTFS data is used in many applications that present public transportation information, such as trip planners and maps. The data is also analyzed by transportation planners and researchers.

More information:

- The [gtfs.org best practices page](https://www.gtfs.org) provides recommended practices for describing public transportation services in the General Transit Feed Specification (GTFS).
- MobilityData is the organization that facilitates ongoing development of GTFS. The [Slack space](https://www.mobilitydata.org/slack) is a space for spec and industry discussion.
- The [GTFS-changes email list](https://lists.gtfs.com) is a discussion forum regarding the GTFS and proposed modifications.
- The [GTFS Github site](https://github.com/TransitData) is a repository to discuss the spec, suggest changes, or raise issues.
- [The Mobility Database](https://www.mobilitydatabase.com) and [TransitLand](https://www.transitland.com) provide download links for GTFS data for public transportation agencies worldwide.

Mapping with GTFS

GTFS data includes files that contain geographic information that can be imported into and used in a variety of geospatial analysis platforms. There are several tools and websites available that allow one to convert these text files into more common geometry formats.

- Command line tools
  - [TransitFeed Library](https://github.com/transitfeed/transitfeed) contains several tools for working with GTFS files. One of which, KMLWriter, is great for quickly generating a KML file from a feed.
- Web tools
  - [TransitLand](https://www.transitland.com) includes both a map to see, select, and export routes and stops from GTFS files aggregated from around the world. Their API allows for querying and downloading of results.
- Geospatial analysis platforms
  - Plugins
    - Esri has a wide variety of tools and plugins that use GTFS data, including visualizing schedule data.
    - In QGIS, [GTFS-OGO](https://www.esri.com) and [GTFS Loader](https://github.com/TransitData/gtfs-loader) allow you to visualize routes + stops within the platform.
  - [Tutorials](https://www.mobilitydata.org/categories/tutorials)
    - See the tutorials below for instructions on how to set up GTFS data in Microsoft Excel and visualize stop- and route-level daily frequencies in GIS programs without downloading any additional plugins or tools.
      - Setting up GTFS Data for GIS in Excel
      - Opening and Visualizing Stops.txt in QGIS
      - Opening and Visualizing Shapes.txt in QGIS
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