

**Transit Service Delivery Advisory Committee**  
**VIRTUAL MEETING**  
**August 27, 2025**  
**10:00 a.m.**

## **Meeting Minutes**

### 1. Members and Staff Present

TSDAC members present: Chair McGlennon, Dr. Smoot, Ms. Mattice, Ms. Pinkard, Ms. Jackson, Ms. Mester, Mr. Booth.

DRPT Staff Present: Director Robinson, Mr. Sparks, Ms. Dubinsky, Ms. Foster, Ms. Mayton, Ms. Parker, Mr. Sonenklar, Mr. Sparks, Mr. Trogdon.

### 2. Call to Order/Introductions (Chair McGlennon)

At 10:00 AM on August 27<sup>th</sup>, Mr. McGlennon called the TSDAC meeting to order.

### 3. Approval of July 29, 2025 Meeting Minutes (Chair McGlennon)

On the motion of Ms. Mattice, seconded by Ms. Mester, the approval of the July 29, 2025, meeting minutes was deferred to the next meeting, pending amendments. Motion passed unanimously.

### 4. MERIT Review Findings (Consultant Staff)

Director Robinson began the MERIT Review presentation with an introduction. Mr. Macek began the MERIT Review Finding presentation, beginning with the MERIT Operating Assistance Program.

Mr. Macek reviewed the current funding approach, the goals of the MERIT Operating Formula evaluation, and a summary of the annual variation in MERIT operating allocations by construction district. Ms. Mattice inquired about volatility in funding allocations pre-pandemic compared to currently. Mr. Macek said that recent years have normalized compared to the pandemic but there is still noticeable variation occurring in the years analyzed for this review.

Mr. Macek presented a slide summarizing results of the proposed formula and sizing and performance adjustment scenario on allocations by construction district. Ms. Mattice inquired about which types of transit services may benefit from the proposed formula. Mr. Macek answered that agencies that have high ridership, higher VRHs and VRMs, while those that have higher operating costs may see a lower allocation. Mr. Macek noted that all transit services are included in the formula such as fixed-route bus, paratransit, light rail, and commuter bus.

Mr. Macek introduced several other scenarios that were under consideration but not recommended. These include changes to sizing adjustments only, removing cost from sizing, adding an additional performance allocation, and capping funding growth.

Mr. Macek presented the estimated allocations from the scenario that would only change the sizing adjustment. Mr. Macek noted that this would result in some minor changes to allocations and makes the formula more outcome-focused, but does not address any of the other goals of the review.

Mr. Macek presented a scenario that would remove operating costs from the sizing adjustment and make sizing completely based on ridership and VRH and VRM. Mr. Macek noted that it is an outcomes-based sizing approach, but does not account for higher costs of certain services or regional variations in labor and living costs, and is a major change from the current approach. The scenario would see a significant shift in allocations away from systems serving major urban centers.

Mr. Macek presented a scenario that would add an additional performance allocation to the current formula. The additional performance step would take place of the iteration that is part of the current formula to allocate remaining funds. Mr. Macek noted that the results of this scenario are small, and it does not simplify the funding approach and adds complexity to the current approach.

Mr. Macek presented the final scenario that involves a capped funding growth approach. Mr. Macek noted that a growth ceiling disconnects the formula from the sizing metrics and performance artificially. Mr. Macek noted that this scenario does not account for external factors that may warrant a greater increase such as greater ridership or costs.

Mr. Macek presented on the performance trend adjustment used in the current formula versus direct performance measurement proposed in the new approach. Ms. Mester asked if agencies used in illustrating differences in the trend adjustment versus direct performance adjustment were specific agencies. Mr. Macek said that they were representations of agencies that illustrate how an agency that is a strong performer may lose due to the trend approach and that an agency that is not as high-performing, but has better trends can gain. Mr. McGlennon clarified that one agency is robust and maintaining that level, while one agency has the opportunity to gain and expand from its current level and gain more according to the trend approach. Ms. Mattice inquired if the proposed approach that would allocate 5% of operating allocation funds for performance make a significant enough difference to funding for the work involved. Mr. Macek referred back to information from earlier in the meeting that summarized other scenarios that were considered. The scenario that would only change the sizing metric and keep the current Step 2 can be compared to the recommended scenario that allocates 5% in a new Step 2 to get an idea of the differences.

Ms. Mester inquired about the impact of extending performance trends to include pre-pandemic years on the trend adjustment. Mr. Macek answered that certain data were not considered in these scenarios and so while it could, he could not be sure. Mr. Booth inquired if the trend metric would benefit urban agencies over rural agencies due to the riders per hour metric. Mr. Macek said that may be true for this metric but could be different for other metrics.

Mr. Macek presented a slide explaining the differences between the current trend adjustment approach and the proposed set-aside performance allocation. Mr. Macek noted some of the attributes of the new approach are it is based on a reduced number of metrics, uses a single year of data, and is easier to communicate and allows agencies to more easily track metrics. Mr. Macek said that one of the questions that had been asked was why 5% of funds are being set aside for performance and not some other amount. Mr. Macek noted that sensitivity testing was done with percentages as high as 10% and 15% and the results showed that the degree of

adjustment at 5% was the best balance between an agency's size and its performance. Ms. Mattice inquired about the data presentation in terms of figures that are presented as red or green. Mr. Macek said that formatting in the spreadsheets was set to appear a certain color if was over a certain value such as \$250,000. Ms. Mattice suggested formatting based on percentage rather than dollar value and Ms. Jackson agreed.

Mr. Macek presented a graph demonstrating the average FY 2024-2026 estimated allocations by district under the new proposed sizing + performance approach compared to the current approach. Mr. Macek followed with graphs demonstrating FY 2024-2026 allocations by agency under the sizing + performance metric compared to the current approach.

Mr. Macek summarized the key findings of the sizing and performance adjustment scenario. These include simplifying the formula by removing trend adjustment and making the formula more outcome-focused and performance-oriented while also maintaining enough weight on operating costs to account for disparities in agency size.

Mr. Macek presented a chart demonstrating that the recommended scenario, Sizing plus Performance, meeting at least 3 out of the 4 goals established for the review while the other scenarios presented at today's meeting each only meet one of the goals.

Mr. Macek next presented a number of alternative approaches that had been discussed at some point during the review, but were not feasible at this time due to current data or program limitations. These alternative approaches include Tiered Allocations by Mode (paratransit, fixed route, commuter, etc.), Tiered Allocations by Agency Type (Large Urban, Rural, etc.), inclusion of data for Passenger Miles Traveled, and inclusion of data for Locally Derived Income. Mr. Macek concluded the presentation.

Ms. Mattice requested the backup information used to develop the proposed scenarios be shared with the TSDAC members. Director Robinson stated that the background data will be shared and also extended the offer for follow-up meetings in smaller groups or one on one. Mr. Booth inquired about allocations over a three-year average, and specifically about the volatility within the three-year average. Mr. Macek

referred the Committee back to an earlier slide that summarized annual variation in allocations at the district level for FY 23-24, FY24-25 and FY25-26. Mr. Macek said that he believed the volatility in the current formula is likely similar to what will be seen in the proposed formula. Dr. Smoot shared that dollars should be spent to benefit the greatest need, but that a difficulty inherent to the formula must treat all passengers as having equal need and it is not possible to account for individual needs. Dr. Smoot provided an example of a passenger using transit for medical appointments versus for recreational travel. Mr. McGlennon commented that speaks to an alternative approach mentioned earlier that may consider an allocation that considers service by mode, which is not currently part of the program. Dr. Smoot commented that transit is often perceived as inefficient and Mr. McGlennon added that it is important for transit stakeholders such as TSDAC members to tell the story of how transit benefits communities and is essential.

Ms. Jackson inquired if the funding update is making a significant enough difference or “moving the needle” enough to make it necessary at this time. Ms. Jackson commented that she looks forward to seeing the data as well so that agencies are able to understand what causes allocations to shift in the formula. Ms. Jackson also commented that moving away from a trend is counterproductive, noting specifically that zero-fare impacts on ridership may be negatively or positively impacted during the one-year trend.

Chair McGlennon moved the presentation along to the Capital Program Review and turned over to Ms. Sciarrino.

Ms. Sciarrino summarized the three current categories of capital assistance projects and then moved on to the proposed new MERIT Capital program subcategories. The two proposed subcategories under the State of Good Repair umbrella are to better demonstrate how scoring is handled when an asset has an Asset Condition Score and when one does not. The proposal to add an SGR subcategory under the Major Project category will require a policy change by the CTB at the appropriate time. Ms. Sciarrino presented a table that shows the number of projects that will be subject to these proposed subcategories.

Ms. Sciarrino presented on the proposed incentive scoring changes and summarized projected impacts on project scoring. Ms. Mattice asked for an example of an SGR project that would not have an Asset Condition Score and how it would be evaluated. Mr. Sonenklar stated that such assets may lack an in-service date or an established useful life and an example is maintenance equipment. Ms. Mester inquired about whether the proposed changes would actually change which projects are funded or would the results be virtually the same as the current program. Mr. Sonenklar noted that the changes would not significantly change which projects are awarded but will allow greater transparency and address current practices. Chair McGlennon inquired if incentive scores would apply to major expansions and Ms. Sciarrino noted that incentive scores do not apply to major expansion capital projects. Chair McGlennon inquired if incentive scores for managing grants in timely manner is due to transit agencies capacity for managing them or due to some outside factors such as supply chain problems. Mr. Sparks acknowledged that DRPT will work with agencies in terms of projects that are delayed due to factors outside the control of the agency.

Mr. Booth inquired about major expansions and the proposal to remove major expansion vehicle projects from the category. Ms. Sciarrino acknowledged that moving the expansion vehicle projects from Major Expansion to Minor Enhancement was still being proposed but was not included in this presentation as there were not questions about that item at the previous meeting. Mr. Sonenklar noted that SGR projects are for all vehicle replacements, and that fleet expansions will all be moved under minor enhancements.

Ms. Sciarrino turned the presentation over to Mr. Trogdon. Mr. Trogdon discussed the agency survey that was sent out in August 2025 to all thirty-eight transit agencies. Mr. Trogdon said the survey went out in early August and agencies were given two weeks to respond and that 32 responses were received. The survey included only two questions around grant application timing. One question was whether grantees would support the grant application period being moved up and closing two months earlier on December 1. The second question was whether grantees would support accepting applications for major capital construction projects only on an every-other-year basis. Mr. Trogdon said for the first question that a majority were Yes or No

Opinion, but that even those respondents had expressed concerns. Respondents that did not express support had concerns centered around the timing of external budgets and funding partner processes. Mr. Trogdon said for the second question that a majority were Yes or No Opinion, but that they did not express reasons for why they were supportive. The No respondents had concerns such as loss of momentum and project support from longer funding timeframe. Ms. Mester asked to clarify whether multi-year projects would need to be applied for each year and Mr. Trogdon confirmed that those projects do not have to apply for funding each year. Ms. Mester said moving the application cycle up two months could work for many agencies that do their financial planning for a 5-year period or the like. Mr. Trogdon said his read is that some agencies are positioned to have their local budget commitments ready in time to move the application cycle up, but many agencies also have a good deal of concern about the timeline. Ms. Mester said she looks forward to potentially fleshing these ideas out further. Dr. Smoot inquired about looking out what is estimated to be the funding for major expansion projects and Mr. Trogdon stated that the program sets the threshold for funding available to the Major Expansion program at 20% of the entire capital allocation and that for the current program this would be around \$16 million. Dr. Smoot said that he understood that would mean that a two-year capital cycle would potentially have \$30 million available at application time under current funding levels.

#### 5. Open Discussion

Chair McGlennon opened the meeting to open discussion. Ms. Mester commented that she was looking at proposed changes as to how they will impact localities. She also mentioned that we are entering a time of potential federal impacts that will be felt statewide and not just in Northern Virginia. Ms. Mester expressed concern about the process, noting in previous iterations from 2013 and before COVID there was a longer period of review and had the data. Ms. Mester inquired about whether TSDAC was going to be asked to take a vote on these changes as she does not believe she has enough information to vote on the changes and represent her constituents at VML. Ms. Mester stated she had asked Ms. Robinson and Mr. Trogdon to provide her with a chronology of past review timeframes. In terms of the content of the proposed changes, Ms. Mester did not have major concerns MERIT Capital

proposed changes as they are documenting current practice and being more transparent.

Ms. Mester stated that she is struggling to support the changes to the MERIT Operating program. One concern is whether it is worth doing only the 5% set-aside for performance as it appeared from the presentations that there is not a tremendous difference in the scenario when 10% is set-aside. Given the goals of the review to place more emphasis on performance, Ms. Mester wondered whether 5% is the right percentage. Ms. Mester said she appreciated the presentation of the other scenarios that were under consideration as they provided context as to why the recommended scenario is being put forward. Ms. Mester concluded by asking what may be the next steps.

Mr. McGlennon recognized Director Robinson who commented that DRPT will share a history of the TSDAC process that was used in past reviews. Director Robinson then outlined the role of TSDAC in the process and said that further meetings will be scheduled. Director Robinson further noted that the MERIT Operating process requires a 45-day public comment period, but MERIT Capital changes can be made internally and/or with a policy proposal to the Commonwealth Transportation Board. Director Robinson spoke to Ms. Mester's comment about only a 5% performance set-aside and that during the analysis by DRPT consultants and staff, that split had emerged as that which had the least disruptive impact the foundations of the program while still improving performance outcomes for the MERIT Operating program. Director Robinson noted that the percentages in the sizing adjustment step of the formula were also adjusted to make them more performance-based.

Ms. Mester commented that a 95/5 split does not appear performance-driven to her but perhaps this could be a question of messaging. Ms. Mester noted that in a previous review in 2013-2014 there were seven TSDAC meetings, in 2016 there were three meetings in the fall, and then there was a two-meeting cycle for a few years. Ms. Mester noted that there have been two TSDAC meetings since April and she feels there is a need for at least one more meeting. Ms. Mester recalled that in the past, TSDAC had a recommendation go to CTB and has either presented a consensus opinion, or

presented a majority-minority/dissenter recommendation and she feels strongly that TSDAC needs to have a recommendation put on the record. Chair McGlennon expressed agreement that TSDAC has traditionally offered a recommendation to the CTB. Ms. Mattice noted that each TSDAC member represents an entity and some have a Board they report to and need to get guidance from about decisions under consideration, which can be a challenge during times like summer. Ms. Mattice expressed support for receiving data and having the chance to come back and meet again to have a more informed dialogue and after receiving appropriate guidance from any governing body as appropriate. Ms. Pinkard expressed agreement with Ms. Mester's and Ms. Mattice's comments about the need for additional time for consideration of these changes.

Director Robinson commented on next steps and that a meeting with VTA has been requested and agreed to, and the offer for meeting with every agency is on the table. Director Robinson then reviewed the timeline for the MERIT review program. Ms. Mester asked if there will be a time for a TSDAC meeting to come back and make a recommendation as there is no specific meeting mentioned in the current timeline. Chair McGlennon stated that everyone in the process has the same goals to promote and sustain public transit and thanked all involved. Ms. Mester concurred. Director Robinson expressed thanks to TSDAC, especially for taking time during the summer months to be engaged.

Chair McGlennon moved the presentation on to public comments.

#### 6. Public Comment

Chair McGlennon moved the presentation on to public comments. Chair McGlennon requested that public comments be kept to a relatively brief period of time and that if more substantive comments should be followed up by an email to TSDAC so they can be kept in order.

Chair McGlennon recognized Dr. Bob Schneider of PRTC. Dr. Schneider informed the TSDAC board that he will email the TSDAC board and DRPT staff with his comment. Dr. Schneider noted that a short turn-around time was part of the MERIT development process in 2018 and the same issue is occurring for the current MERIT

Review Process. Dr. Schneider noted that DRPT is still lacking the data that it needed in 2018 to develop an adequate formula and this is also being repeated again. Dr. Schneider noted that he requested data from DRPT, but the timing of when the data was received did not leave enough time to analyze the information. Dr. Schneider criticized that the State may be undermining the Commuter Choice and similar programs, which utilize monies that are not taxpayer funds but are user fees generated by toll payers. Dr. Schneider stated that the State funding process has benefited transit agencies that are not able to fully sustain themselves. Dr. Schneider requested more transparency in data and referred the Committee to his fuller comments that were sent by email.

Mr. Mitchell Smiley of VML expressed that it would be appropriate to have additional meetings or webinars with VML/VACO or TSDAC/MTA and others to dive deeper into metrics and data used in the MERIT Review Process. Mr. Smiley expressed that it is important to get these metrics correct, to maximize limited transit dollars to benefit the most transit riders.

Mr. James Hutzler of VACO echoed the sentiments of Mr. Smiley at VML. Mr. Hutzler expressed concerns that VACO has about winners or losers in the MERIT Process, and if there is a way to hold harmless those agencies that may lose funding during a time that funding is tight.

With no more public comments, Chair McGlennon closed public comments.

#### 7. Wrap Up/Next Steps

Director Robinson commented that DRPT does not and has not denied access to data and noted that meetings reviewing the data have been consistently offered. Director Robinson mentioned that the potential of hold harmless funding is something that has come up if appropriate and noted that the potential proposed MERIT changes would not go into effect until FY 2028.

#### 8. Adjourn

On motion of Dr. Smoot, seconded by Ms. Mattice, the August 27<sup>th</sup> TSDAC meeting adjourned at 12:36pm. Motion passed, unanimously.

