

**Transit Service Delivery Advisory Committee
VIRTUAL MEETING
July 29, 2025
1:00 p.m.
600 East Main Street, Suite 2102
Richmond, Virginia 23219**

Meeting Minutes

TSDAC Members Present

Chair McGlennon, Ms. Mattice, Ms. Jackson, Ms. Pinkard, Mr. Dyke, Ms. Mester, Dr. Smoot

DRPT Staff Present

Director Robinson, Ms. Mayton, Mr. Trogon, Ms. Parker, Mr. Sparks, Mr. Price, Mr. Sonenklar, Ms. Garbarini, Ms. Husain, Ms. Stankus, Ms. Dubinsky, Ms. Monaco, Mr. Tuten, Mr. Mucha, Ms. Lazar

Call to Order/Introductions (Chair McGlennon)

Chair McGlennon called the meeting to order at 1:00pm on July 29th. At 1:01pm, Chair McGlennon recessed the meeting due to technical issues.

At 1:32pm, Chair McGlennon called the meeting to order. TSDAC members introduced themselves.

Approval of May 13, 2025 Meeting Minutes (Chair McGlennon)

On motion of Mr. Dyke, the May 13 meeting minutes were approved, unanimously.

MERIT Review Findings (Consultant Staff)

Mr. Macek, DRPT Consultant, began the presentation on the MERIT Review Findings.

Ms. Mattice noted that operating expenses are utilized in the MERIT formula as a proxy for a cost-of-living expense and even for passenger miles traveled or the amount of service provided by an agency. Ms. Mattice inquired if Petersburg Area Transit saw an operating cost decrease due to service reductions. Director Robinson said she understood that Petersburg Area Transit maintained service levels but saw a decrease in its state operating assistance allocation. Mr. Sparks confirmed that to be the case.

Mr. Macek continued his presentation. Mr. Macek presented on findings of the MERIT Operating Program review, and findings from tested scenarios. Mr. Macek presented the Sizing + Performance Adjustment Scenario and noted it is 65% service or outcome measures, and 35% input/cost measures. It also removes the performance trend adjustment.

Mr. Macek presented the impact on operating funding of the Sizing + Performance Adjustment approach. Ms. Mattice inquired about commuter bus service, especially given dead-head service, and how it factors into the scenario. Mr. Macek notes that, under the scenario, deadhead miles count towards VRH and VRM. Ms. Mattice inquired about whether the passenger ridership on commuter buses would skew performance under the scenario and whether commuter buses have a sunk cost and that she would appreciate if the analysis would keep that under consideration.

Mr. Macek continued the presentation. Mr. Macek noted that out of the 4 goals for the review, three were met but no tested scenario was able to adequately address the goal of predictability since events transit agencies all across the Commonwealth impact the formula allocation. Mr. Macek summarized potential alternative approaches but also noted the subsequent limitations. Mr. Macek concluded his presentation.

Chair McGlennon opened for questions. Ms. Mester asked for a clarification that the proposal is to keep Step 1 of current formula and change percentages, remove Step 2 of current and replace with new proposed Step X and remove current iterative process after Step 2. Ms. Mester also asked about the analysis of how the trend adjustment did not help predictability of formula outcomes as there was lot of work during formula development in trying to accomplish that. Mr. Macek confirmed that Ms. Mester was correct about proposed changes. He also noted that some of the unpredictability in the trend adjustment approach was caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the wild swings in costs and ridership resulting from that time. Ms. Mester said that the fact that the unpredictability was caused mostly by the pandemic may not mean that the proposed approach of only using one year of data for the performance adjustment is an improvement. She asked if a scenario had been run using data from before the pandemic and Mr. Macek said that no scenarios were run with data from that time.

Ms. Mattice inquired about ridership impacts due to uncontrolled events (natural disasters or labor strike) and how trend data was meant to smooth out changes that may result from such events. Mr. Macek noted that big changes to budgets or ridership will mostly be felt in the sizing adjustment portion of the formula and not the performance trend factors. Ms. Mester inquired about what other potential recommended scenarios were given serious consideration for putting forward. Mr. Macek said one was making proposed changes to the sizing percentages without changing the current performance allocation methodology. Ms. Mester said she would like to see what the allocation results are from that scenario from comparison.

Ms. Jackson noted that modest changes could differ depending on the size or location of each agency and for all involved to be mindful of that. Ms. Jackson said she believes the trend approach to be preferable and that there is not enough information yet to say that approach is not the most beneficial. Mr. Sonenklar provided additional context to why the proposal considers moving away from trend adjustments by noting a scenario in which a high-performing transit agency with flat trend lines and stable operating characteristics that will lose funding due to the performance adjustment. Ms. Mattice commented that TSDAC should have the opportunity to delve into the data and Ms.

Mester agreed. Ms. Mattice asked if trends that compared a transit agency with itself, as opposed to statewide trends, were looked at. Mr. Macek said no it was not looked at as part of this analysis.

The presentation moved on to the MERIT Capital section with Ms. Sciarrino first summarizing the current scoring and prioritization process and criteria. Ms. Sciarrino then introduced potential improvements to the MERIT Capital Program that include adding subcategories to the the SGR and MAJ project categories, changing the scoring criteria for vehicle expansions of more than 5 vehicles or 5% of fleet, and tweaking incentive scoring categories. Chair McGlennon inquired about the accountability criteria that was being added in the incentive scoring proposal. Mr. Trogdon noted that there has been improvement in accountability, but it is something DRPT wants to continue to stress and incentivize.

Chair McGlennon opened for questions. Dr. Smoot commented on one of the major concerns of the CTB being for agencies to have a right-sized fleet, using the example of buses either being over-crowded or under-utilized. Dr. Smoot noted members of the CTB have suggested there is little the Commonwealth can do to address service over/under capacity issues. Ms. Sciarrino noted that transit agencies have different scenarios and capacity at different times of day. Mr. Trogdon suggested that a dialogue will be opened with the operators regarding transit vehicles and what the future of fleets should be.

Ms. Mester commented on the suggestion of moving the MERIT Capital program to a two-year cycle and suggested that the MERIT Capital process may not be ideal for the right-sizing of vehicle capacity/fleet size but that the Transit Strategic Plan/Transit Development Plan process would be better. Ms. Mester inquired about the impact of the current incentivization scoring and Ms. Sciarrino said had only seen minor shifts in it leading to a project being awarded versus not. Ms. Sonenklar noted that the agency accountability incentive item had been around in terms of whether agencies had submitted required data and reports as needed and was not only about grants management. Ms. Mester inquired about previous funding rounds and how those would have been impacted. Ms. Sciarrino and Mr. Sonenklar said that there would not have been significant impacts as these proposed changes are largely trying to formalize existing practices and provide consistency and transparency.

Chair McGlennon asked for clarification about projects that would not cleanly fit into the current SGR program. Mr. Sonenklar said that some assets do not have an established useful service life and that agencies sometimes do not have a definitive in-service date for an asset and that these are cases that do not fit neatly into SGR scoring.

Ms. Mattice said that the idea of a two-year cycle is intriguing if it would maximize the ability of staff to do their jobs. She stated that examples are that SMART SCALE is a two-year cycle, Commuter Choice is a two-year cycle, and NVTa also uses a two-year cycle in Northern Virginia. Ms. Jackson commented that costs and needs of transit agencies may pose challenges in changing to a two-year cycle.

Open Discussion

Ms. Pinkard thanked DRPT and the consultant team on behalf of the Virginia Transit Association.

Director Robinson thanked the group and suggested collecting members pros and cons. Director Robinson noted that the MERIT Program's funding formulas should not be static.

Chair McGlennon noted that without new funding being made available at the state or Federal level, localities seeking transit may require localities to put up more funding themselves.

Public Comment

No public comment.

Wrap Up/Next Steps

Mr. Trogdon discussed the next steps of the MERIT Review Process. Director Robinson suggested the members provide feedback as they can and discussed scheduling the next meeting.

Adjourn

At 3:23PM, Chair McGlennon adjourned the meeting.