

Transit Service Delivery Advisory Committee
May 13, 2025
10:00 a.m.
600 East Main Street, Suite 2102
Richmond, Virginia 23219

Meeting Minutes

Members Present

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

Staff Present

Director Robinson, Mr. Sonenklar, Mr. Trogon, Ms. Parker, Ms. Dubinsky, Ms. Oware, Mr. Price.

1. Call to Order/Introductions (Chair McGlennon)

At 10:18 AM on May 13, Chair McGlennon called the meeting to order.

TSDAC members provided introductions.

2. Approval of April 1, 2025, Meeting Minutes (Chair McGlennon)

On motion of Ms. Mester, seconded by Ms. Mattice, the meeting minutes were approved, unanimously.

3. FY26 MERIT Operating Assistance – Recommended Allocations (Transit Staff)

Mr. Sonenklar delivered his presentation on the FY26 MERIT Operating Assistance Program.

Chair McGlennon commented on the data in the presentation.

Ms. Mattice inquired about the major drivers that changed the DRPT operating assistance. Mr. Sonenklar noted that the major changes are different for each transit provider. Mr. Sonenklar provided specific examples of how performance and sizing metrics impacted funding levels.

Mr. Sparks provided an additional example of how metrics impact funding levels.

Ms. Mester commented on the data visualizing funding changes. Ms. Mester notes that TSDAC members should note the ultimate goal and impact of the review.

4. FY26 MERIT Capital Assistance – Recommended Awards (Transit Staff)

Mr. Sonenklar delivered his presentation on the FY26 MERIT Capital Assistance Program.

Dr. Smoot inquired about funding for rail car replacement. Mr. Sonenklar noted that VRE's railcars are ineligible for MERIT funding. Mr. Sonenklar noted that HRT's light rail cars are receiving funding through the MERIT Minor Enhancement program.

Ms. Mester inquired about the threshold for scoring a project. Mr. Sonenklar noted that applications are often screened out first for not being ready, ineligible, or not needed. Mr. Sonenklar noted that projects that score low but are otherwise eligible could have been funded if there were additional funds available.

Ms. Mester inquired about the Transit Ridership Incentive Program and its funding for capital projects. Ms. Mester noted she wonders why it is separate. Mr. Sonenklar notes that this is only the second year of dual TRIP/MERIT eligible projects, so those capital projects are still being sorted out.

Chair McGlennon inquired about the number of applications going to Capital vs TRIP. Mr. Sonenklar noted that DRPT staff flag dual-eligible projects. Chair McGlennon inquired if projects apply for both programs. Mr. Sonenklar and Mr. Trogdon answered that DRPT ensures fairness in the application process and ensure that applications are worthy. Director Robinson noted that DRPT does not penalize applicants for applying for the wrong program, and works with applicants to ensure that worthy projects can be funded.

Ms. Mester inquired about projects that applied to the TRIP program but were not funded. Ms. Mester inquired about seeing which projects applied to one program were shifted to others. Ms. Mester inquired about the unobligated balance in the TRIP program. Mr. Trogdon noted that the TRIP program has seen a large balance as a result of pandemic impacts, but the funding is moving.

Ms. Mattice inquired about non-capital projects in the TRIP program. Mr. Sonenklar provided an answer, and that the zero and reduced far projects are by nature non-capital projects.

Ms. Mester noted that the TRIP program does not fall under TSDAC's scope, but knowing how projects are transferred from MERIT to TRIP would provide valuable information.

Ms. Jackson commented on the threshold for applying for TRIP and MERIT projects.

5. MERIT Operating Assistance – Program Summary and Projections (Transit Staff)

Mr. Sonenklar continued the meeting and presented on the MERIT Operating program. Mr. Sonenklar noted that in past years, one time revenues and transfers bolstered the funding in the MERIT Operating programs. Mr. Sonenklar noted that the overall revenues are lower in FY26.

Ms. Mattice inquired about whether it is code or whether it is CTB policy that determines how much funding goes to Operating vs Capital. Ms. Mattice inquired about the overall economic health of the revenues going into the overall Commonwealth Transportation Fund. Ms. Mattice noted that VDOT has an easier ability to transfer funds than DRPT. Ms. Mattice noted that there is a disconnect between CTF revenues and transportation costs, including highway maintenance and construction.

Mr. Dyke inquired about federal impacts on transportation funding.

Mr. Sonenklar continued the presentation on anticipated revenues of the MERIT Operating program. Mr. Sonenklar noted that the growth in operating costs exceed expected new revenues.

6. MERIT Capital Assistance – Program Summary and Projections (Transit Staff)

Mr. Sonenklar continued the presentation, moving on to the MERIT Capital Assistance Program. Mr. Sonenklar noted that industry pressures are increasing costs for the Capital programs. Mr. Sonenklar noted that changes to the federal rural transit funding add additional pressure to the program. Mr. Sonenklar additionally noted that future capital needs are anticipated to exceed available capital funding.

Ms. Mattice inquired about how DRPT projects future capital needs. Mr. Sonenklar noted that it is guided by the strategic plans of each transit agency and their planned capital needs for upcoming years. Ms. Mattice noted that upcoming updates to strategic plans may change anticipated capital requests.

Dr. Smoot inquired about what is the implication of a budget gap. Mr. Sonenklar noted the options are either find funding locally, or cut back services.

Mr. Booth noted that the economic trends could force transit into a death spiral, due to cuts in operations, then performance, then funding. Mr. Booth noted that this would be very impactful on smaller agencies. Mr. Sonenklar provided an example of this happening.

Ms. Mester noted the importance of telling the story is important. Mr. Trogon noted that, no matter the increase in costs, anticipated costs will exceed anticipated revenues.

7. MERIT Capital and Operating Assistance Program Review (Transit Staff)

Director Robinson provided an update on the ongoing review process of the MERIT program.

Chair McGlennon noted that the needs of transit are growing and that the state of funding is in constant flux.

Ms. Mattice inquired about if there is an opportunity for transit systems to be in a listening session during meetings of the MERIT Program Review.

Mr. Trogdon noted that it is in discussion. Mr. Trogdon noted that the transit community is always looking for opportunities to collaborate. Director Robinson noted that the entire agency is looking for greater opportunities for stakeholder engagement in DRPT's work.

Director Robinson noted that another TSDAC meeting will be held in the summer.

Mr. Dyke noted the opportunities for VTA and CTAV to collaborate and be involved during the TSDAC review process.

Mr. Booth noted that the CTAV conference is still being developed.

8. TSDAC Annual Public Hearing

Chair McGlennon opened the meeting to public comment. There was no public comment.

9. Open Discussion

Ms. Mester requested that upon the TSDAC body producing recommendations, that the TSDAC hold an open meeting and public comment at that time as well. Mr. Trogdon noted that can happen.

10. Wrap Up/Next Steps

Ms. Mattice commented on scheduling for summer TSDAC meetings. Director Robinson provided an answer.

Ms. Mester inquired about the timeline for TSDAC to produce a recommendation. Director Robinson provided an answer to the timeline.

Ms. Mattice and Director Robinson noted that the recommendations will only be able to be implemented in FY28, due to timing with the DRPT grant funding process. Director Robinson also noted that a recommendation could involve a phased in approach or temporary hold harmless as changes are implemented.

Mr. Dyke noted that a General Assembly session may provide an opportunity to provide information to the elected officials. Mr. Dyke additionally noted that an incoming new Governor's administration would need to be briefed.

11. Adjourn

Director Robinson provided some closing remarks.

At 11:41 AM, Chair McGlennon adjourned the meeting.