

Commuter Choice

2020 ANNUAL REPORT







OVERVIEW



Annual Report Fiscal Year 2020

Commuter Choice, a trailblazing, innovative and competitive grant program, invests toll revenues in public transit and other multimodal projects along two expressway corridors in Northern Virginia.

A partnership between the Northern Virginia Transportation Commission (NVTC) and the Commonwealth of Virginia, Commuter Choice improves the reliability and efficiency of commuting along some of the most congested interstate corridors in the nation. By offering more options, toll road users and transit riders can choose the mode that gets them to the places that they want to go. Projects are selected through a competitive process that considers each project's ability to: move more people, support diverse travel choices and enhance transportation safety and travel reliability.

By moving people more efficiently, congestion is lessened, and toll road users experience more consistent travel speeds. Access to transit, roadway operations, transportation demand management (TDM) and other multimodal projects encourage different travel modes and add resources for commuters who seek alternatives to driving alone.



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Letter from the Executive Director

To say that the Commuter Choice program grew exponentially in fiscal year 2020 would be quite an understatement. While continuing to administer projects on I-66, the Northern Virginia Transportation Commission (NVTC) launched the inaugural round of funding on the I-395/95 corridor. Though the reach of the overall program has expanded, the program goals remain the same. The Commuter Choice program maximizes the number of people traveling through each corridor and adds multimodal improvements that promote mobility, support new, diverse travel choices and enhance transportation safety and travel reliability.

In FY 2020, an additional 22 projects were funded that, when fully implemented, will move another 3,800 people through both the program's expressway corridors each day. The Commuter Choice program provided over \$37 million in grant funding to support new and enhanced bus services, transit incentives and alternative travel options to eligible municipalities, transit agencies and regional organizations. NVTC, through the Commuter Choice program, continues to innovate and facilitate the best use of toll revenues in a manner that connects Northern Virginia residents to the places that they want to live, play and work.

When the first round of projects began moving people in 2017, we knew that this innovative idea to utilize toll revenues for increased transit and multimodal projects would influence travel. In our foremost five-year look back, we took a deep dive into the data and measured the impact for the first time. Through the analysis of the NVTC team of experts, we now know that more people are moving in fewer vehicles. Throughout this report and the more detailed review online, we'll highlight the payoffs of the toll revenue investments that have increased travel options and enhanced connectivity for commuters and ultimately moved more people.

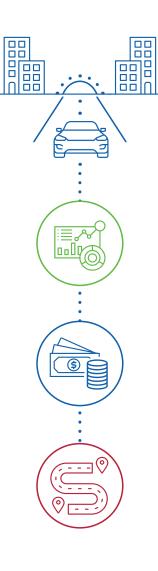
Of course, the COVID-19 public health emergency disrupted transportation just as it interrupted daily life in many other ways. By monitoring trends and working closely with our jurisdictional partners across the region, we're ensuring that Commuter Choice funded projects remain adaptable and ready to respond to riders as needed. When Northern Virginia fully returns to work, the Commuter Choice program will continue to move people and improve the reliability and travel efficiency on both the I-66 and the I-395/95 corridors.



Kate Mattice

Executive Director





"In our foremost five-year look back, we took a deep dive into the data and measured the impact for the first time."



Commonwealth Transportation Board approved the **\$19.6 million slate of 12 projects** recommended by NVTC



87% of the \$18.9 million in approved grant funding supported new or enhanced bus service

Commuter Choice on the I-66 corridor in FY 2020

In June 2019, the Commonwealth Transportation Board (CTB) approved the \$19.6 million slate of 12 projects recommended by NVTC for Round Three (FY 2020). An overwhelming majority of the approved projects added or continued bus service to the region while the remaining projects supported transit incentives and alternate travel options. Of the 12 projects, seven have launched as of the printing of this report.

In November 2019, the Commuter Choice team launched the Round Four (FY 2021-2022) Call for Projects with an application deadline in January 2020. Midway through the evaluation process for Round Four, the world began to face a global pandemic. Due to restrictions that limited public outreach and a sharp and sudden decrease in I-66 Inside the Beltway toll revenue collections, the process was paused until Fall 2020. NVTC anticipates presenting a recommended program to the CTB by the end of 2020, after resuming the public outreach period and gaining clarity around the availability of revenues.

Commuter Choice on the I-395/95 corridor in FY 2020

The Commuter Choice on the I-395/95 corridor program received approval by the CTB for its first round of projects in October 2019, ahead of the 395 Express Lanes opening. As toll day readiness was one of the evaluation areas for potential projects, nine of the ten total projects were operational by toll day one in mid-November 2019. Around 87% of the \$18.9 million in approved grant funding supported new or enhanced bus service, including the purchase of new buses and other capital updates. The remaining funds supported additional multimodal improvements.

The Commuter Choice program on the I-395/95 corridor is the result of a 68-year Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between the Northern Virginia Transportation Commission, the Potomac and Rappahannock Transportation Commission (PRTC) and the Commonwealth of Virginia authorizing NVTC to use required annual payments from Transurban, the 395 Express Lanes concessionaire, to fund multimodal transportation projects. NVTC plans to open the Round Two (FY 2022-2023) Call for Projects in November 2020.

A Global Crisis Hits Home

Since toll revenues support transportation infrastructure across Virginia, the immediate decline of toll road users on the region's major thorough fares had an unprecedented impact on the transportation network.

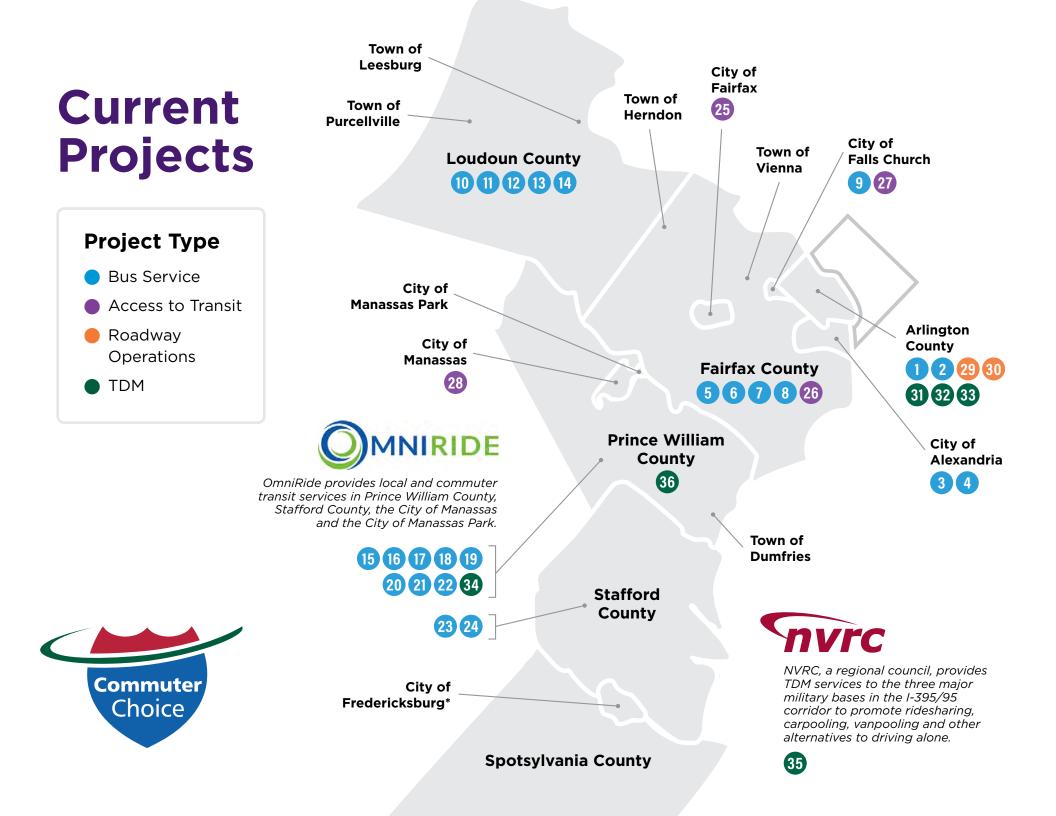
Before the COVID-19 public health emergency and the resulting orders to shelter in place, Commuter Choice on the I-66 corridor anticipated a \$25 million grant cycle for Round Four (FY 2021-2022). However, with a nearly 50% decrease in tolled trips on the 66 Express Lanes Inside the Beltway, NVTC worked closely with partners at the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) to evaluate the pandemic's effect on the program.

Due to anticipated shortfalls, NVTC postponed the recommendations for final awards until the available amount of funding could be confirmed. Fortunately, the program has sufficient revenue from prior years to continue funding existing projects. NVTC expects to present a recommended Round Four program to the CTB in the fall based on conservative revenue assumptions. NVTC also plans to apply unused funding balances from projects completed under budget to the Round Four program.

the lengthy duration of the phased safer at home restrictions will likely affect travel volumes and behavior in the region for the foreseeable future, particularly for the public and shared transportation options Through the final months of FY 2020 and the safer at home orders, NVTC worked with jurisdictional partners, transit agencies and other regional partners to ensure that existing toll revenues managed by the organization were used efficiently, effectively and within the guidelines of the program. As stakeholders faced service suspensions, outreach disruptions, temporary reductions and delays, and began to plan their returns to service, our team remained available to provide guidance and oversight. We will continue to work with grant recipients to ensure resilience and adaptability around programming and project performance as issues arise.

Notably, the COVID-19 public health emergency reached full force in Northern Virginia after much of the performance data presented in this report was collected. However, the lengthy duration of the phased safer at home restrictions will likely affect travel volumes and behavior in the region for the foreseeable future, particularly for the public and shared transportation options that Commuter Choice supports. Future reports may present a markedly different picture of travel patterns on the two corridors.





NEW OR ENHANCED BUS SERVICE PROJECTS

Arlington County -Bus Stop Consolidation and Accessibility Improvements, Lee Highway and Washington Boulevard 1-66

Funding: \$462,000

2 Arlington County -Enhanced Bus Service on Metrobus 3Y: Lee Highway-Farragut Square 1-66 Funding: \$1,040,000

3 City of Alexandria/DASH -Enhanced Bus Service on AT-1 Plus: West End to Van Dorn Metro 1:395 Funding: \$3,040,000

City of Alexandria/DASH -Enhanced Bus Service on AT-9: Mark Center to Potomac Yard 1-395 Funding: \$1,949,000

- 5 Fairfax County New Bus Service from Stringfellow to L'Enfant Plaza 1-66 Funding: \$4,326,000
- 6 Fairfax County -New Bus Service to the Pentagon with Gambrill and Backlick North Park and Ride Improvements 1-395 Funding: \$3,540,903
- 7 Fairfax County -Fairfax Connector Express Bus Service between Vienna/ Fairfax-GMU and Pentagon Metrorail Stations 1-66 Funding: \$3,452,618
- Fairfax County Fairfax
 Connector Government Center
 Downtown DC, Route 699 [1-66]
 Funding: \$5,276,336*

- 9 City of Falls Church -Metrobus Route 3T Extension and Service Expansion 1-66 Funding: \$845,754
- 10 Loudoun County -Loudoun County Transit Metro Connection from New Purcellville Park and Ride [-66 Funding: \$1,065,960
- Loudoun County -Loudoun County Transit Metro Connection Route 88X Extension to Dulles South 1-66 Funding: \$1,706,040

Loudoun County Stone Ridge Enhanced
 Transit 1-66
 Funding: \$2,472,970*

- 3 Loudoun County -New Bus Service from Purcellville to DC 1-66 Funding: \$949,482
- Loudoun County New Bus Service from
 Stone Ridge to Pentagon 1-66
 Funding: \$1,257,226
- 15 OmniRide -Gainesville to Pentagon Commuter Service 1-66 Funding: \$5,559,600*
- 6 OmniRide OmniRide Linton Hall Metro Direct Bus Service Enhancement [-66 Funding: \$134.200
- 7 OmniRide On-Demand Commuter Lot Shuttles in Prince William County 1-66 Funding: \$1,087,796
- 18 OmniRide -Enhanced Bus Service from Gainesville to DC [-66 Funding: \$1,519,100

- 9 OmniRide New Bus Service from Haymarket to Rosslyn 1-66 Funding: \$776,700
- 20 OmniRide Enhanced Bus Service from Dale City to Ballston 1-395 Funding: \$251,600
- 2) OmniRide -Enhanced Bus Service on Prince William Metro Express 1-395 Funding: \$562,400
- 22 OmniRide Enhanced Bus Service on Route 1 Local 1-395 Funding: \$1,133,500
- 3 OmniRide New Bus Service from Staffordboro to Downtown D.C. 1-395 Funding: \$3,569,200
- 24 OmniRide New Bus Service from Staffordboro to the Pentagon 1-395 Funding: \$3,495,300

ACCESS TO TRANSIT PROJECTS

- 25 City of Fairfax CUE Access and Technology Improvements 1-66 Funding: \$965,000
- Fairfax County I-66 Corridor Vienna/Merrifield
 Bike Share Expansion I-66
 Funding: \$497,100
- 27 City of Falls Church -Expanded Transit Access, Bike Share 1-66 Funding: \$500,000

7

28 City of Manassas -Bicycle Parking Improvements at Manassas VRE Station 1-66 Funding: \$55,000

ROADWAY OPERATIONS PROJECTS

Arlington County -I-66 Corridor Intelligent Transportation System Enhancements I-66 Funding: \$400,000

30 Arlington County -Traffic Management Center 1-66 Funding: \$400,000

TDM PROJECTS

- 3) Arlington County -Commuter Store at the Pentagon Transit Center 1-395 Funding: \$211,962
- 32 Arlington County -Expanded TDM Outreach to the I-66 Corridor I-66 Funding: \$2,050,000*

33 Arlington County -Multimodal Real-Time Transportation Information Screens 1-66 Funding: \$250,000

34 OmniRide - Flexible Vanpool Program 1-66 Funding: \$317,600

NVRC - New TDM
 Outreach Campaign for
 Military Facilities 1-395
 Funding: \$396,184

36 Prince William County -New TDM Outreach to the I-66 Corridor I-66 Funding: \$200,000

*denotes the total funded amount for projects funded in multiple rounds

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

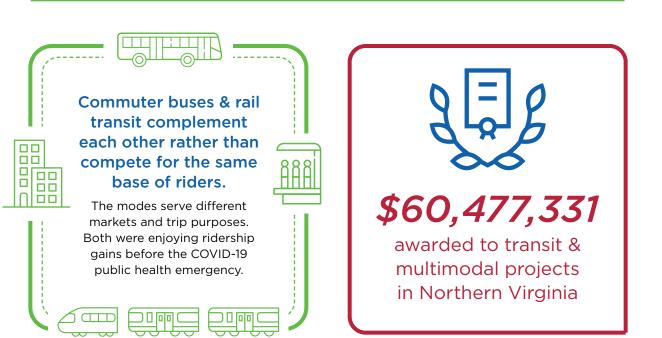
Since Commuter Choice funding began in 2017 on the I-66 corridor Inside the Beltway, **more people have moved in fewer vehicles.**



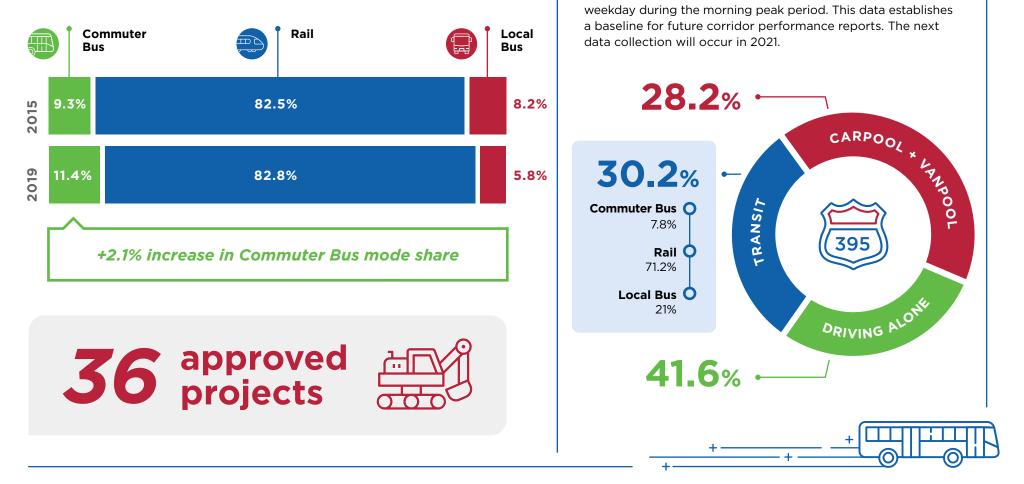
Each morning in 2019, **700 more people** and **750 fewer vehicles** moved through the corridor than in 2015. More people used transit, carpools and vanpools to travel along the I-66 corridor during the morning peak period in 2019 than in 2015.

	TRANSIT	CARPOOL/VANPOOL	DRIVING ALONE
2015	41.1%	22.5%	36.4%
2019	41.5%	23.7%	34.7%

-1.7% decrease in the mode share of people who drive alone in 2019



When using transit to commute, most people use Metro and VRE. More people, however, are adopting the long-haul Commuter Bus as their preferred travel mode.



 additional commuter buses move through the I-66 corridor each day with Commuter Choice funding +26% Growth in commuter bus ridership since 2015

Establishing a Baseline on the I-395 Corridor

The 2019 data estimates that 93,000 people and 44,000

vehicles move inbound through the I-395/95 corridor each

Lessons Learned

NVTC ensures that the Commuter Choice program delivers projects with substantial benefits to toll payers by moving more people and fostering viable, attractive alternatives to driving alone.



We're advocating for a more diverse set of projects that advance Commuter Choice goals.

So far, we've mostly supported new and enhanced bus services that have helped move many more commuters efficiently through the I-66 Inside the Beltway and I-395/95 corridors. However, the near-term demand for additional transit services is likely to be modest due to travel pattern changes brought about by the COVID-19 public health emergency. Though transit services will continue to be an indispensable part of the program, we are now encouraging a broader array of proposals, including large infrastructure projects that could shape commuting for decades. We'll also be working more closely with applicants to help them identify and develop project proposals that fit within the goals of Commuter Choice.



We're ensuring that project benefits are readily measurable.

The Commuter Choice program framework emphasizes projects that deliver measurable and relatively quick benefits to toll payers in both corridors. We're approaching transportation demand management efforts in a new way and focusing on discrete activities that deliver rapid, easily measurable benefits.

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We're encouraging applicants to coordinate project ideas with other agencies in the region.

Transportation improvements do not align neatly within jurisdictional boundaries, and it is vital to evaluate project impacts through a regional lens. Our scoring process now encourages applicants to coordinate their project proposals with neighboring jurisdictions. Many projects that we support involve multifaceted government agencies like the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) or the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) in their execution. We now require clear upfront documentation of third party support to ensure successful implementation within the five-year expenditure deadline for Commuter Choice funds.

Performance Look Back

Commuter Choice offers a broad range of project categories that can be customized to fit the region's needs. NVTC provides this conservative approach to the performance analysis look back using data collected from local government and transit agency partners. As Commuter Choice is a relatively new program, it will continue to remain innovative and adaptive by ensuring that approved projects are measurable and provide tangible benefits to the region's toll road users.



Operational & Completed Transit & Access To Transit Projects

Commuter Choice's **24** operational and completed transit and access to transit projects move about **2,200** more people through the I-66 Inside the Beltway and I-395/95 corridors each morning.

The number of trips provided by these projects is **86% of the total target** that was the basis for the projects' selection.



In the **I-66 corridor,** 16 projects move almost **1,500 people each morning,** within a reasonable range (77%) of their target.



meet or exceed the target

Eleven of the 16 projects in the **I-66 corridor** meet (within 30%) or exceed their ridership targets.

70 PEOPLE

In the **I-395/95 corridor,** eight projects move about **700 people each morning,** substantially outperforming their target (117%).



meet or exceed the target

75%

Six of the eight projects in the **I-395/95 corridor** meet (within 30%) or exceed their ridership targets.

Leading the Way

SUCCESS STORIES ON THE I-66 CORRIDOR

ARLINGTON COUNTY

Bus Stop Consolidation and Accessibility Improvements, Lee Highway and Washington Boulevard

During Round One (FY 2017-2018) of Commuter Choice on the I-66 corridor, Arlington County received funding to improve and combine 30 bus stops along Lee Highway and Washington Boulevard, parallel roads to I-66 Inside the Beltway. Served by both Metrobus and Arlington Transit (ART) routes, the two major thoroughfares connect riders with Metrorail stations and job centers.

All improved stops received Americans with Disabilities Act-compliant sidewalks and boarding areas for enhanced access for people with disabilities. Some stops also received upgraded passenger amenities such as shelters, benches and lean bars to create a more pleasant walking and waiting environment. The added amenities will quicken bus service, attract new riders and elevate the experience of existing riders for years to come.

Due to efficient project management, three extra stops were added, bringing the project total to 33. Arlington County had completed 32 of the 33 as of June 2020. Early in the same year and before the COVID-19 public health emergency, ridership was trending upward at several of the improved bus stops.





FAIRFAX COUNTY

Fairfax Connector Government Center – Downtown DC, Route 699

With free parking at the Fairfax County Government Center and a hassle-free, nonstop express bus ride into downtown Washington, D.C., the Fairfax Connector's Route 699 is one of the Commuter Choice program's most successful transit services. Service began in December 2017 with 10-morning inbound trips and 10-afternoon outbound trips under Round One (FY 2017-2018) funding from Commuter Choice on the I-66 Corridor. Continued support under Round Three (FY 2020) provides the resources to expand service to 13 trips in each direction. Using the program's support, Fairfax County has also purchased five new buses to support the expanded service. Some of the buses feature memorable branding to spread the message of the route's ease and convenience.

Even in the early days of service in 2018, the 699 route demonstrated strong patronage with around 200 daily riders. Ridership grew steadily to an average of nearly 600 daily passenger trips in February 2020, with morning ridership more than double Fairfax County's original target.

Leading the Way

SUCCESS STORIES ON THE I-395/95 CORRIDOR

OMNIRIDE

New Bus Service from Staffordboro to the Pentagon

For the first time in OmniRide's 33-year history, the transit agency launched a bus service with an origin outside of Prince William County and in Stafford County. With approved funding under Round One (FY 2020-2021) of Commuter Choice on the I-395/95 Corridor, OmniRide implemented the new commuter bus service from the Staffordboro Park and Ride lot, near the intersection of Route 610 and I-95, to the Pentagon. Most of the nonstop trip journeys through the free-flowing 95 and 395 Express Lanes creating a quick, reliable ride for commuters. Besides supporting the operational costs for the four-morning inbound trips and four-afternoon outbound trips, Commuter Choice backed the capital costs for four new motorcoaches to support the service.

OmniRide began its new Staffordboro service in November 2019, just before the 395 Express Lanes opened, and offered free rides for the first two months. The very first trip on the first day of service attracted about 30 passengers that had previously made their commute via casual carpool. By early March 2020, ridership on the route had reached an average of 200 daily passenger trips. Morning ridership on the bus service was almost two times OmniRide's proposed ridership target listed in the grant application.





CITY OF ALEXANDRIA/DASH

Enhanced Bus Service on AT-1 Plus: West End to Van Dorn Metro

DASH and the City of Alexandria received Round One (FY 2020-2021) funding from Commuter Choice on the I-395/95 corridor to improve service on the AT-1. This local bus route parallels I-395 in Alexandria. The City of Alexandria plans to develop the route into a bus rapid transit line over the next several years, with dedicated bus lanes, priority for buses at traffic signals and other passenger amenities. Commuter Choice funding supports the interim improvements, branded as the 'AT-1 Plus,' to help build ridership when more significant capital improvements become operative in the corridor.

DASH expanded service every day of the week, which is permitted for Commuter Choice projects in the I-395/95 corridor since tolls are always active on the 395 Express Lanes and installed real-time bus arrival information displays at several stops. Additionally, DASH incorporated specially branded buses, a common feature of bus rapid transit lines, on the expanded AT-1 Plus service to increase recognition and champion the diversity of Alexandria's West End.

DASH implemented the AT-1 Plus service enhancements in October 2019, and ridership responded well over the first few months. Overall weekly ridership on the route increased by nearly 40% between early March 2019 and early March 2020. Sunday ridership more than doubled as buses increased frequency from every 60 minutes to every 30 minutes. DASH has maintained limited service during the safer at home orders, with temporarily suspended fares, to support essential trips.

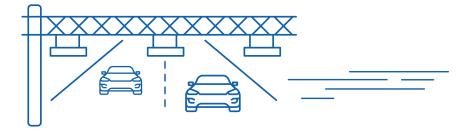
Toll Revenues at Work

The new, popular travel options created by Commuter Choice have reduced traffic congestion and fuel consumption while improving Northern Virginia's air quality. Since peak-period tolling on the I-66 Inside the Beltway corridor began in 2017, more people traveled through the corridor using public transportation, including new and expanded bus services funded by Commuter Choice. More people also moved using carpools and vanpools, which Commuter Choice funding has helped promote since the program's inception.

As the program continues to grow, NVTC will analyze future traffic and transit ridership counts and capture the impact of added multimodal investments in the I-66 corridor and the expansion of Commuter Choice on the I-395/95 corridor.

Across the I-66 Inside the Beltway corridor: More travelers, fewer vehicles, more use of alternatives to driving alone.

Between 2015 and 2019, people traveling east into Arlington each morning along I-66 Inside the Beltway, parallel roads and transit lines grew by about 700. Simultaneously, the number of vehicles used for those trips decreased by about 750. Due to expanded travel options, more commuters used public transportation, carpools and vanpools for their journeys into and through the corridor in 2019 than in 2015. Overall, the total share of corridor trips by these means grew to 65% from 63% between 2015 and 2019.



Commuter Choice funding fueled a sharp growth in commuter bus options and ridership.

Commuter Choice funded an additional 56 daily Fairfax Connector, Loudoun County Transit and OmniRide commuter bus trips on the I-66 Inside the Beltway corridor in 2019 relative to what was in place in 2015. Total morning ridership on the corridor's commuter and express bus routes grew by nearly 26% over the same period due to this expanded service. Ridership on Metrorail on the I-66 corridor grew as well, indicating that the expanded bus services complement rather than compete with rail.

Commuter Choice funding for outreach and incentive campaigns supported growth in travel by carpools and vanpools.

Over 900 more people moved through the I-66 Inside the Beltway corridor each morning in carpools or vanpools in 2019 than in 2015. Several projects funded by Commuter Choice supported outreach and incentive campaigns and helped to spread the message of carpooling, vanpooling, and using alternatives to driving alone.

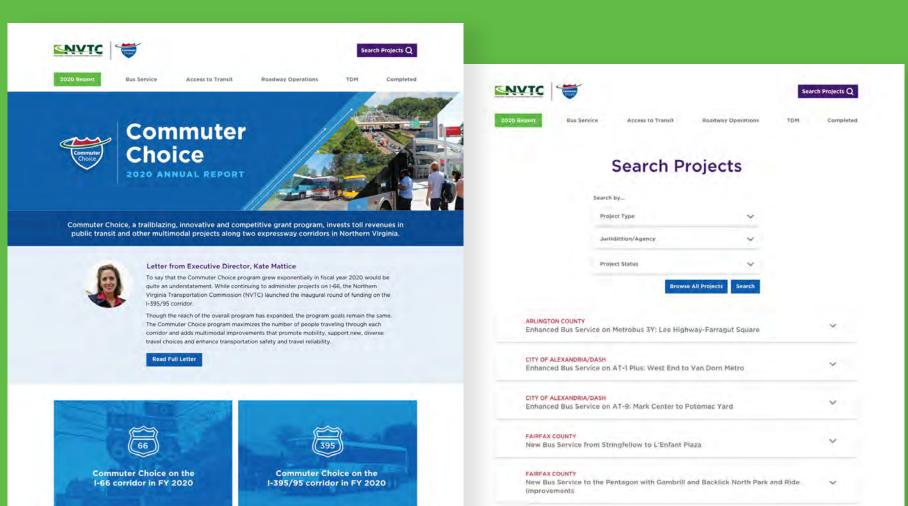
More travel options led to less driving on major parallel commuter routes.

The total number of morning inbound vehicle trips along major parallel commuter routes to I-66, such as Lee Highway, Wilson Boulevard and Arlington Boulevard, dropped by about 6% between 2015 and 2019. Most of these were drive-alone trips that shifted to other means of travel rather than on I-66, which only recorded about 300 more vehicles. The Commuter Choice program funds attractive alternatives to driving alone that helps to reduce traffic diversions onto parallel routes and local roads, most notably when toll rates are high.

To read the full 2020 annual report with detailed project information, visit

CommuterChoiceAR.org





CTB approved the \$19.6 million slate of 12 projects recommended by NVTC... Read More 87% of the \$18.9 million in approved grant funding supported new or enhanced bus service... Read More

