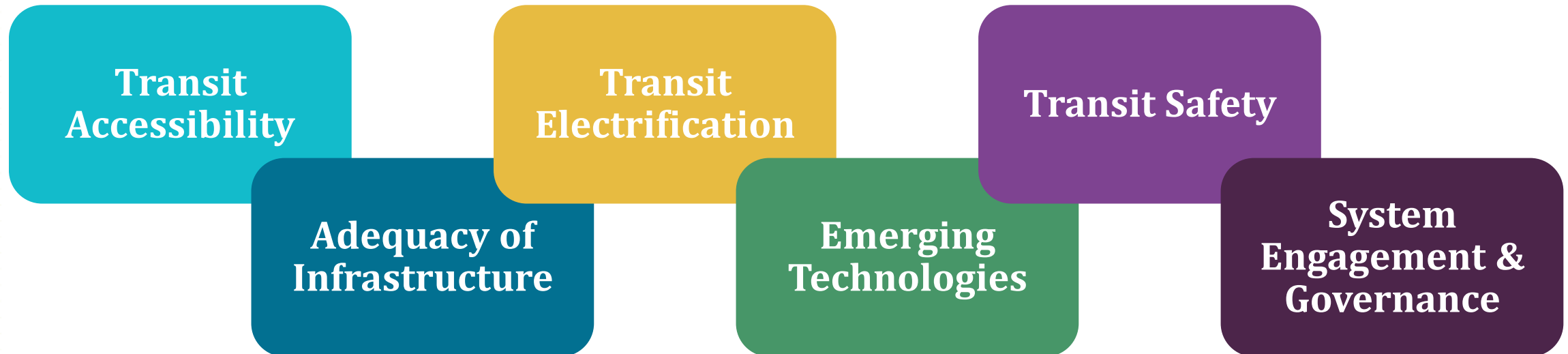# Virginia Transit Equity and Modernization Study

RRTPO Citizens Transportation Advisory Committee
November 18, 2021

Study Overview

How did we get here?

- HJ 542 (2021) bill passed
- The resolution requires exploring a variety of topics that will create recommendations to better equitable transit and forward modernization
- Emphasis on engagement opportunities for underrepresented communities

Transit Accessibility

Adequacy of Infrastructure

Transit Electrification

Emerging Technologies

Transit Safety

System Engagement & Governance

Study Goals

What will this study accomplish?
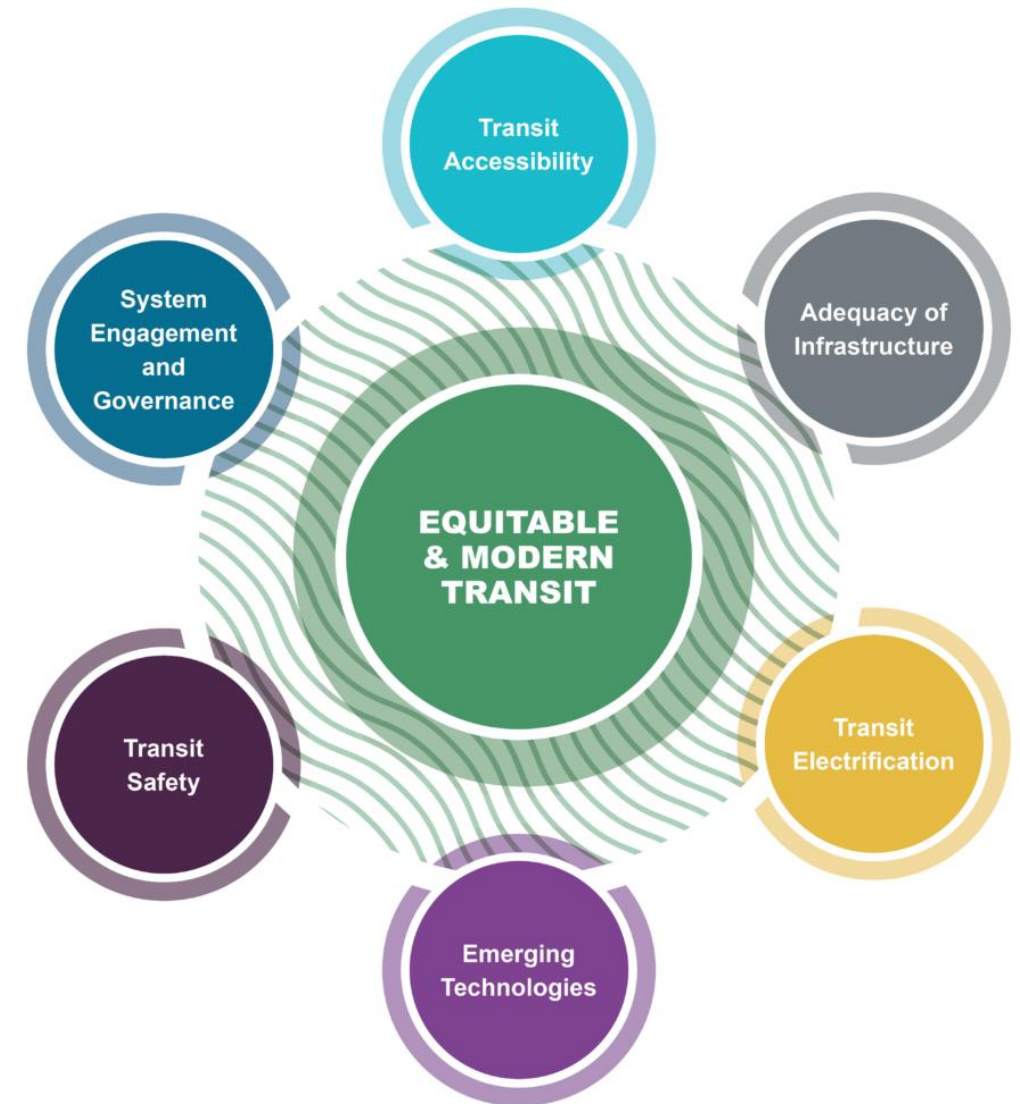
✓ Will identify transit agency, rider, and stakeholder needs

✓ Will develop an action plan to address those needs

✓ Define underrepresented and underserved communities

What will this study <u>not</u> accomplish?

✗ Will not be an asset inventory

✗ Will not single-out transit agencies for poor performance, conditions, etc.
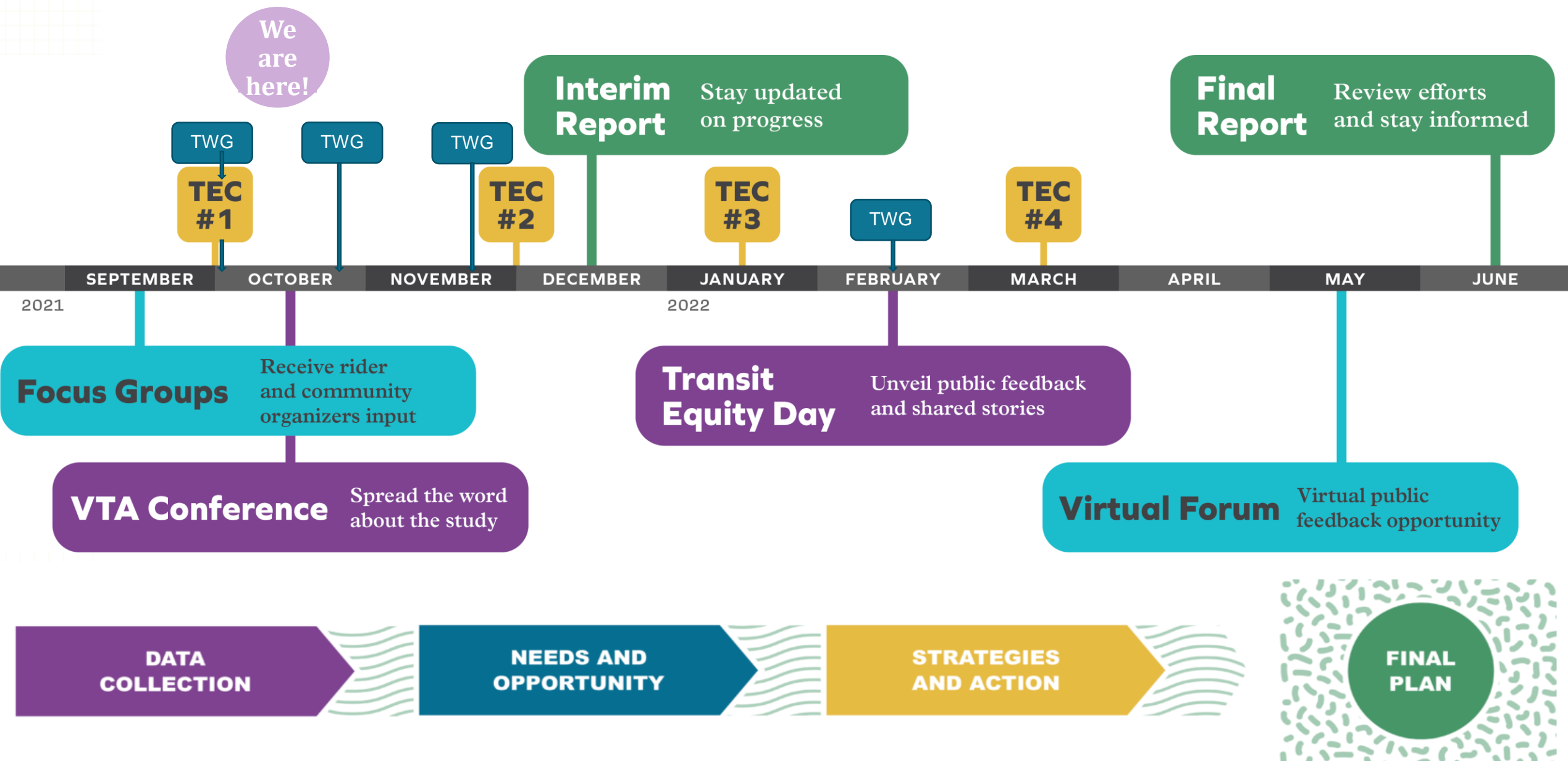
The study will address:

➢ Opportunities or Gap Assessment of Transit Service

➢ Needs and barriers to improve transit infrastructure

➢ Opportunities to reduce carbon footprint through electrification

➢ Strategies to inform priorities of implementing emerging technologies

➢ Framework for identifying and engaging disadvantaged populations and underserved communities

Study Schedule

Virginia Transit Equity and Modernization

We are here!

TWG
TWG
TWG
TWG

TEC #1
TEC #2
TEC #3
TEC #4

Interim Report — Stay updated on progress

Final Report — Review efforts and stay informed

SEPTEMBER | OCTOBER | NOVEMBER | DECEMBER | JANUARY | FEBRUARY | MARCH | APRIL | MAY | JUNE

2021

2022

Focus Groups — Receive rider and community organizers input

VTA Conference — Spread the word about the study

Transit Equity Day — Unveil public feedback and shared stories

Virtual Forum — Virtual public feedback opportunity

DATA COLLECTION

NEEDS AND OPPORTUNITY

STRATEGIES AND ACTION

FINAL PLAN

Study Updates

Data Collection

Transit Agency Survey

- **39** responses from VA Transit Agencies
- 42-question survey
- Technical area data requests
- Agency transportation equity efforts

Transit Agency Data Collection

- GIS layers
- Board requirements
- Agency manuals & outreach plans
- Capital Programs
- National Transit Database
- TransAM

Virginia State Agency Data Collection

- Statewide GIS layers
- Standards, Requirements, and Guidance for Transit Agencies
- Fleet Data
- Title VI Plans
- Transit Strategic Plans
- PTASP

Baseline Conditions Assessment

Note: Data requests included, but are not limited to items listed above

Identifying needs and opportunities:

❖ **Technical Working Groups**

    ❖ Each topic area (6) meets with transit agency leaders and industry partners 4 times at key points in the study for feedback

❖ **Transit Equity Committee**

    ❖ Transit agency executives provide an equity lens on findings

📅 **Technical Area Recommendations & Findings**

    📅 Technical Memos – Fall 2021

📅 **Interim Study**

    📅 To General Assembly – December 2021

✓	Completed
❖	Underway
📅	Upcoming

Community Engagement

✓ **Focus Groups**

    ✓ 7 focus groups – September 2021

    ✓ Riders, Paratransit riders, Rider Advisory Councils, and Community Organizers

✓ **Study Website**

    ✓ Launched on September 20th

✓ **Outreach Kits**

    ✓ Kits include rack cards and window clings for agencies to spread the word

❖ **Open-Comment Database**

    ❖ Allows comments from public through website

🗓 **Virtual Public Forum**

    🗓 Spring 2022

🗓 **Transit Equity Committee**

    🗓 Transit agency executives provide an equity lens on findings

✓	Completed
❖	Underway
🗓	Upcoming

Focus Groups

Focus Groups

- Facilitated virtual small group discussions

- Occurred in early September

- Members included;
  - Fixed Route Transit Frequent Riders (*16 participants*)
  - Fixed Route Transit Infrequent Riders (*15 participants*)
  - Stakeholders and Rider Advisory Council (RAC) Members (*9 participants)*
  - Paratransit and Disabled Non-Riders (*8 participants*)

Focus Groups: Themes

Upgraded infrastructure to enhance overall rider experience & help with safety concerns

Greater effort to seek out underrepresented and underserved voices through use of incentives and virtual meetings

Strong desire to explore and implement emerging technologies to protect the environment

Focus Group Takeaways: Infrastructure and Accessibility

Benefits

- No need to drive or park
- Provides ability to do other things when traveling
- Consensus of good maintenance of buses and stops

Barriers/Challenges

- Familiarity with system
- Safety
- Trip length
- Reliability
- Shelters without covered stops, lighting, crosswalks, and distance from traffic
- Vehicle cleanliness
- Not consistent ADA accessibility on buses/shelters

Focus Group Takeaways: Emerging Technology & Electrification

Benefits

- Desire to move to electric buses and protect environment
- Rider willingness to have higher fares for green buses

Barriers /Challenges

- Concerns about diesel bus emissions and air quality
- Funding
- Electric buses still use resources from powerplants

Focus Group Takeaways: Transit Safety

Benefits

- Feeling that public transit is a safe mode of transportation
- Limited concern for vehicle safety

Barriers /Challenges

- Frequency at night causes crime related concerns
- Always need to be aware of safety, especially if service is free
- Agencies/operators not enforcing COVID-19 requirements
  - Desire to continue COVID-19 enforcements post-pandemic

Focus Group Takeaways: System Engagement and Governance

Benefits
- Agencies care about complaints
- Virtual engagement has helped participation

Barriers/Challenges
- Underrepresented and underserved populations are not sought out for feedback
- Lack of incentive to attend public participation meetings
- Lack of resources to make adequate change
- Unaware of how to participate in RACs or input meetings

Focus Group Takeaways: Equity

Benefits
- Perception that agencies are not putting equity into practice
- Wonder of how and when equitable measures will be put in place

Barriers/Challenges
- Housing prices higher around transit, but the are the most accessible
- Perception of transit riders is negative
- Lack of collaboration with all types of people in the community

Transit Agency Survey

Transit Agency Survey

- **Full Participation**
  - **39** responses from VA Transit Agencies
  - **July 29th to September 1st**

- **Survey Purpose**
  - Input from agencies to inform baseline existing conditions and identify opportunities

Transit Agency Survey: Themes

Funding needed to implement equitable improvements

Desire for **technology** to enhance service

Increased **written policy** guidance needed surrounding equity

Equity

- ## Defining Equity:

  in the context of transit service

Focus on people generators	Ensure fair and equal access to routes
Prioritize accessible design	Identify gaps and needs in current service

7. Does your agency have an equity policy beyond Title VI requirements (such as public-facing transit service goals or an agency mission statement that highlight equity)?

No — 82%
Yes — 18%
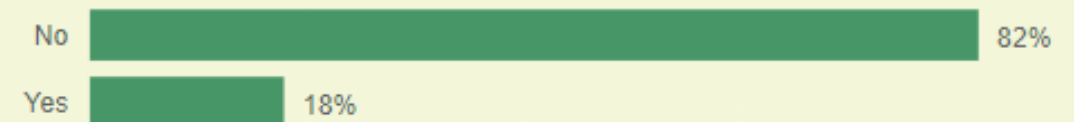
9. Rate your level of agreement with the following statement: The transit service we provide is equitable.

10%
10%
44%
36%

- Agree
- Strongly agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Strongly disagree
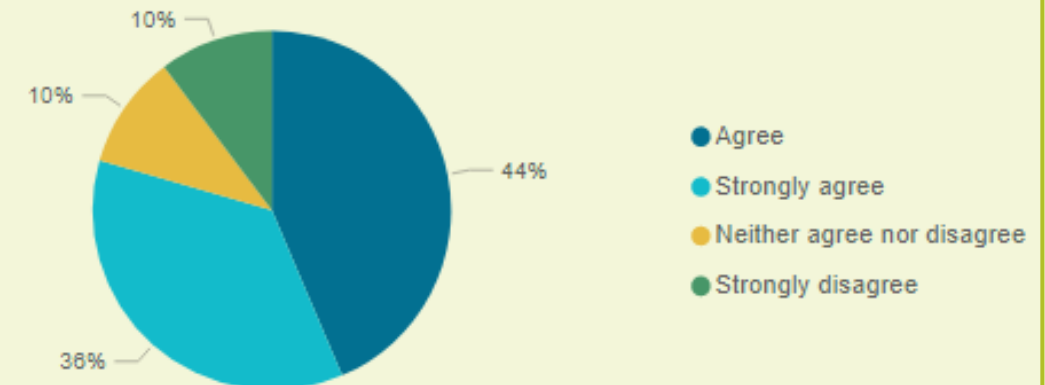
Transit Accessibility and Infrastructure

Agencies track access to destinations via transit through…
Census data, on-board surveys, origin-destination studies, public engagement and surveys
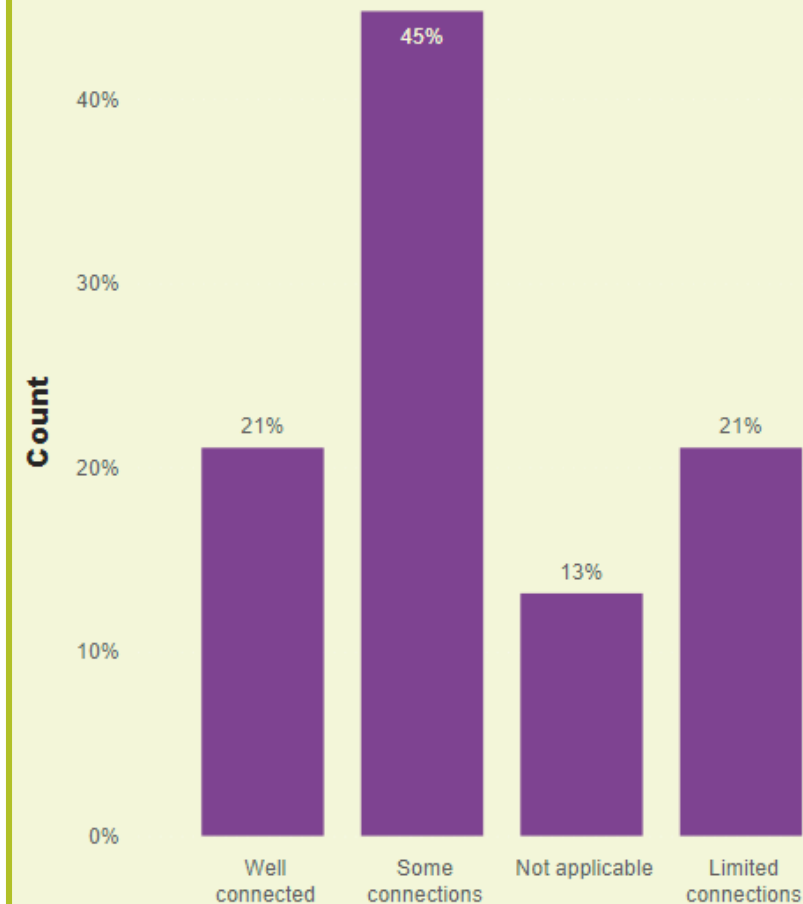
- **Implementation Barriers**
  - Inventory of infrastructure (sidewalks, crosswalks, etc.)
  - Funding to support transit expansion and connection
  - Staff
  - Technology

- **Future Strategy Interest**
  - **46%** interested in service equity analyses
  - **19%** have implemented a zero-fair transit programs

19. How well are the bus stops in your agency's service area connected to pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure?

Bar chart with y-axis labeled "Count" (0% to 40%):
- Well connected: 21%
- Some connections: 45%
- Not applicable: 13%
- Limited connections: 21%

Transit Electrification and Technology

- Interest in emerging and established technologies
  - **33%** have already implemented real-time traveler information
  - **49%** are interested or are actively pursuing contactless fare payment

Other interests include automated vehicle location, scheduling software, and automatic passenger counters

? How can DRPT help modernize transit?
- Technical assistance/training
  particularly for smaller or rural agencies
- State contracts
- Grants and funding for technology and electric bus transition

24. Has your agency defined a goal to convert your fleet to ZEBs?
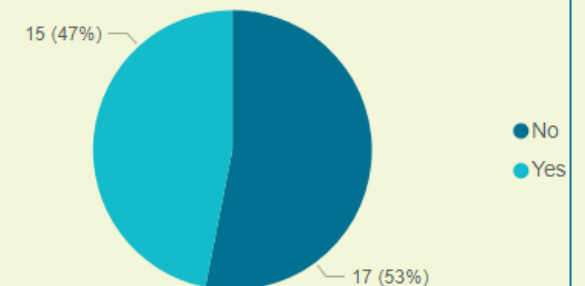
7 (18%)

● No
● Yes

32 (82%)
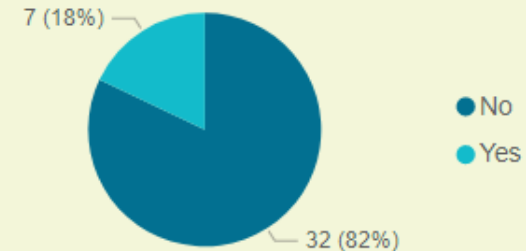
Existing Electric Fleets:
- DASH
- Blacksburg
- Hampton Roads

Funding was the top concern for integrating Zero-Emissions Transit

**24a. If no, is your agency discussing or considering how to approach a ZEB policy?**

15 (47%)

● No
● Yes

17 (53%)

Transit Safety

- **Common Safety Concerns**
  - Traveling to/from facilities
  - Cleanliness of vehicles/facilities

- **Coordination with VDOT**
  - Monthly transit planning meetings
  - On an as-needed basis
  - Through the MPO

30. Does your agency have a current and approved Public Transportation Agency Safety Plan (PTASP)?

- Yes
- No

12 (31%)
27 (69%)
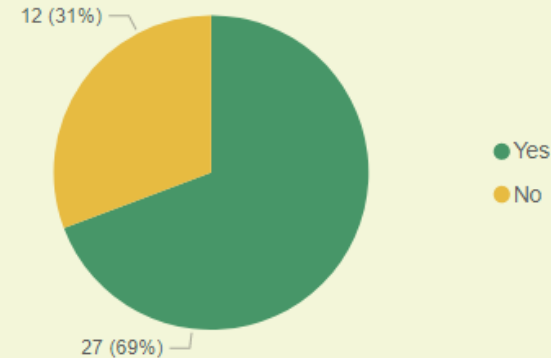
32. Are there plans for any COVID-19 safety measures to continue post pandemic (select all that apply)

● Regular Cleaning of Surfaces ● Distancing ● Mask Requirements ● Increased Air Filtration ● Other

Regular Cleaning of Surfac...

34 · 5 · 11 · 13 · 6
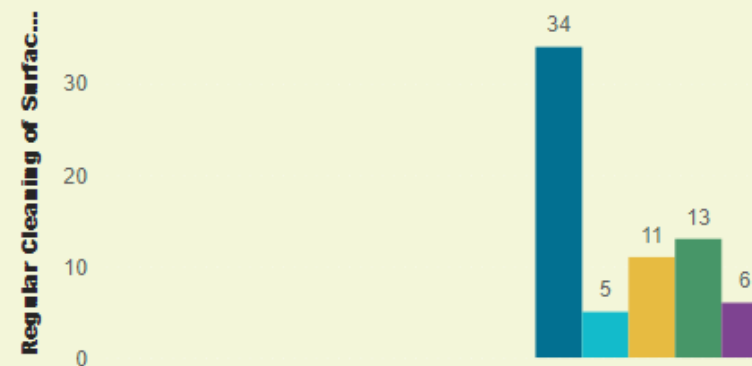
Transit System Engagement and Governance

- **Defining "Underserved" Communities:**
  - Poverty level
  - FTA definition
  - Transit dependent vulnerability factors
- **Successful Engagement Tools:**
  - Engaging with local housing agencies
  - Pop-Up Outreach
  - Online surveys

34. Does your agency have a public engagement plan?

- 15 (38%) — No
- 24 (62%) — Yes
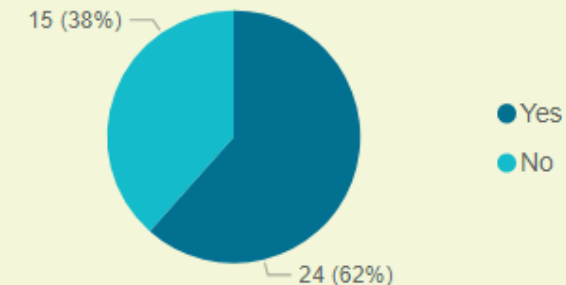
37. What level of influence do disadvantaged communities have on the decision-making process?

- Moderate level of influence: 45%
- High level of influence: 42%
- Low level of influence: 13%
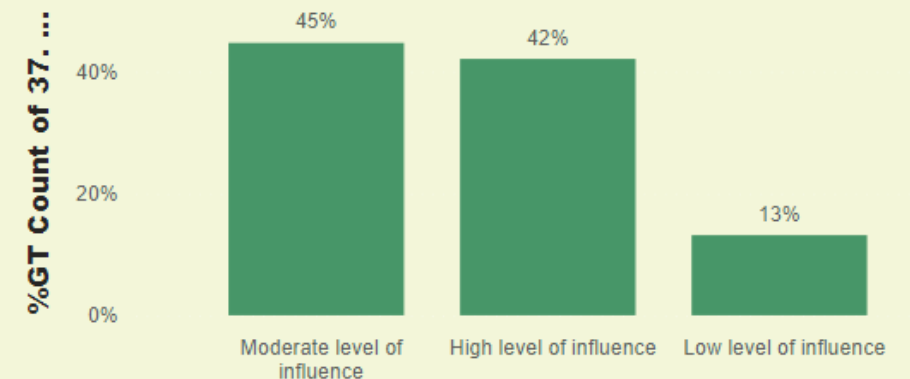
Next Steps

Deliverables

Baseline Conditions Memo

Fall 2021

Interim Report

December 2021

Final Report

Spring 2022

We need your help!

Get Involved

Spread the word to sign up for our email list at:

www.vatransitequity.com

Questions?

Grant Sparks | Grant.Sparks@drpt.virginia.gov

Tiffany Dubinsky | Tiffany.Dubinsky@drpt.virginia.gov