



WASHINGTON AREA  
**BUS TRANSFORMATION**  
PROJECT

*A better way to get there*

Strategy  
Summary



*“Buses play a critical role in connecting people throughout this region to opportunities. The Bus Transformation Project will identify and implement steps to make local bus a world class travel option for all of the region’s residents.”*



**Executive  
Steering  
Committee  
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# Bus Transformation Project - Executive Steering Committee

To: Residents, Businesses, and Elected Officials of the Washington, D.C. Metropolitan Region

From: Robert Puentes, Chair

## **Subject: Final Strategy for the Bus Transformation Project**

In 2018 a group of leaders from the public, private, and non-profit sectors came together to oversee a bold vision: to highlight the critical role of the Washington region's bus system, and to transform it for maximum impact over the next generation.

This Strategy document is the result of that effort. On behalf of the Executive Steering Committee, we strongly believe it's four key recommendations—make buses faster and more reliable, accelerate investment for prioritizing buses on our roadways, serve customers through safe and easy to use technology, and create a structure to ensure lasting change—contain the seeds for transformation. A detailed action plan will follow this Strategy in the fall of 2019 and illustrate precisely how these recommendations will be implemented.

We call on regional leaders for action now.

From traffic headaches to subway shutdowns, the region's transportation problems are well known. Although good work is underway to address those challenges, buses have largely been left out, unheralded, and deprioritized despite their role as a significant component of the region's transportation system. To better illustrate this importance, buses in the national capital region deliver over 600,000 trips each weekday—almost the same number of trips each day as Metrorail. Unfortunately, buses in the DMV today are relegated to competing with cars for roadway space, angling with ride-hailing companies for curb access, and fighting for attention as new mobility options pop up seemingly every day.

The result? Unhappy bus riders getting more unhappy. The most recent regional survey of commuters found that those who take the bus are significantly less satisfied than they were just three years prior. While this is a challenge to retaining riders and attracting new ones, it is especially harmful for customers who are bus-dependent with few alternatives for how they get around the region. During the extensive outreach conducted to inform this Strategy we heard loudly from the riding and non-riding public, across all demographics and parts of the region, an unequivocal call for better bus service. Not surprisingly, what they wanted was a radical recommitment to fixing the basics: speed, frequency, reliability, affordability.

The Bus Transformation Project set out an ambitious notion of “transforming” bus and a big piece of that is rethinking policies, practices, and attitudes. It will require the region's bus providers to work with their employees and focus on quality and customer service. The perspectives of front line workers will come from treating the unions as partners and can propel this critical work forward.

This strategy is not an unattainable wish list of what the Executive Steering Committee would like to see, nor would we be remotely satisfied with a report that sits on the proverbial shelf. With that in mind, we considered financial stewardship throughout this project. This does not mean investments are not needed—they absolutely are—but what we recommend is keenly aware of budgetary constraints at all levels of government. We also strongly believe that since ridership will increase once these strategies are implemented, there is a strong return on investment for what we have proposed.

We recognize that transforming the Washington region's bus system will not be easy. It will not happen without tough decisions, strong advocates inside and outside government, and a clear voice for current and future riders. But the public has spoken loud and clear. It is past time for state, regional, and local leaders to do what many other places are already doing: making bus the mode of choice on the region's roads. It is critical to the Washington region's prosperity.

Sincerely,



# Prosperity in Peril



Congestion, affordability, and mobility are major problems in the Washington Region that will only continue to grow as 40,000–60,000 jobs and households are added each year. Meanwhile, our regional bus system is not keeping pace with this growth and riders’ needs for frequent, reliable, and fast service.

## THE CHALLENGE

Growing congestion results in poor access to jobs, higher costs of living, and decreased economic growth and competitiveness. Time spent in congestion takes away from family, friends, faith, and fitness; suppresses income potential; adds to stress and frustration; and lowers the overall quality of life.

The vast majority of the region’s 20 million daily trips occur in personal vehicles on already gridlocked roads.

Rail transit emerged as an effective tool to combat congestion in our region, but its effectiveness has limits. Metrorail’s high-speed, high-capacity network only reaches about a quarter of the region’s land area, and any rail system expansion is many billions of dollars and decades away.

## THE BUS TRANSFORMATION PROJECT

Other regions nationally and globally have transformed their bus systems to address similar challenges, decreasing congestion, improving reliability, and operating efficiently with frequent and fast service. It is past time for us to do the same: **rapid, effective surface transportation is critical to our region’s prosperity.** Buses have a vital role to play because they make efficient use of roadways by transporting large numbers of riders safely, conveniently, and affordably, and they provide service in areas not accessible by Metrorail.

Over the course of the project, the region’s residents and civic and advocacy groups were loud and clear on how to transform the bus system: **Transformation means fast, frequent, reliable, affordable service that feels like a unified system,** and isn’t beholden to geographic or funding boundaries. The Bus Transformation Strategy provides a path forward as a coordinated regional strategy that addresses customer needs, leverages innovative technology, and proposes an approach to regional governance to make the strategy a reality.

This Strategy Summary introduces four key recommendations that have been shaped by a broad range of stakeholders and the public from across the region. These recommendations focus on actions that ensure frequent and reliable bus service on a consistent basis across the region, with improved speed and efficiency for riders. They push forward innovation in operations, institutions, and technology that will position the region to transform the bus system.

Visit [bustransformationproject.com](http://bustransformationproject.com) to read more about the project and the Strategy in full.



# A better way to **GET THERE**

## THE VISION

Bus will be the mode of choice on the region's roads by 2030, serving as the backbone of a strong and inclusive regional mobility system that will support a growing and sustainable economy.

### A Regional Strategy

This strategy focuses on riders' needs by examining how quality bus service works to best support various types of users across different areas within our region and how the region's bus operators can best interact with each other and with other users of the roadways.

The strategy recommends concrete actions to transform existing bus services into a truly integrated, accessible regional bus network that is part of the larger regional mobility system.

### Collaboration

Collaboration across regional and political boundaries can produce solutions that facilitate fast, frequent, affordable, and seamless travel connections for customers; connect people with jobs, services, and opportunity in our region; provide access to more affordable housing options; align the high-frequency and high-capacity regional bus network with roadways where buses are given priority; clearly delineate and effectively coordinate regionally provided services and locally managed bus systems; and empower organizations to coordinate functions, leverage transformative technologies, and transparently track progress.

*The bus network of tomorrow can achieve performance outcomes and transportation objectives that will make the region more competitive, sustainable, and equitable.*

## VISION TO GOALS

From its vision, the Bus Transformation Project set out five goals to guide the transformation of bus across the District of Columbia, State of Maryland, and Commonwealth of Virginia:

**Regional connectivity:** Provide reliable on-street transit options that efficiently connect people to places and improve mobility.

**Rider experience:** Ensure a convenient, easy-to-use, user-centered travel choice.

**Financial stewardship:** Maintain a transit mode that is financially sustainable in the long term.

**Sustainability:** Encourage vibrant, economically thriving and sustainable communities.

**Equity:** Create a bus system that is affordable and equitable.

To meet these goals, the project developed dynamic recommendations based on stakeholder collaboration, public engagement, and world-wide best practices. These recommendations directly address the core challenges. While buses are a space- and cost-efficient means to move large numbers of people, they are currently not being used to their potential.

## INNOVATION AROUND THE REGION

The Bus Transformation Strategy isn't starting from scratch. A selection of what jurisdictions across the region are already taking action to improve the bus system include:

Flexible service pilot in Montgomery County

Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) in Montgomery County and Northern Virginia

Evaluating opportunities for joint storage / maintenance facilities between Montgomery County and WMATA

Electric buses in DC Circulator and RideOn fleet

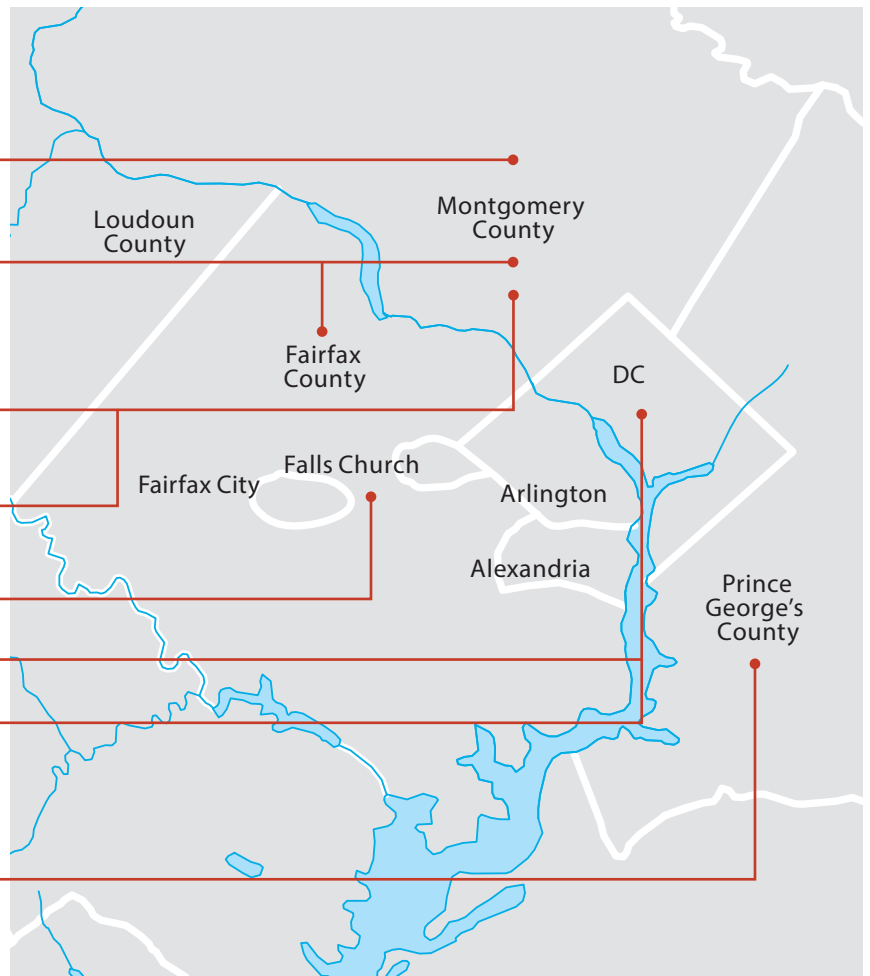
AV Shuttle Pilot in Fairfax County

Dedicated bus lanes in DC

Microtransit service in DC

New storage/maintenance facility with room to expand. Making more bus stops accessible and with real time information

Transit signal priority across the region



# Recommendations

Authored in partnership with stakeholders across the region, the Bus Transformation Strategy sets out an ambitious path forward. The strategy makes four key recommendations to achieve the goals of this effort.

1



**Provide frequent and convenient bus service** that connects communities and promotes housing affordability, regional equity, and economic growth.

2



**Give buses priority on roadways** to move people quickly and reliably.

3



**Create an excellent customer experience** to retain and increase ridership.

4



**Empower a publicly appointed task force to transform bus** and lead the implementation of a truly integrated regional system.

*Learn more about how the project developed into a strategy and read the strategy at [bustransformationproject.com](http://bustransformationproject.com)*

# 1



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## Provide frequent and convenient bus service that connects communities and promotes housing affordability, regional equity, and economic growth.

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- A. Establish regional standards** across bus systems to provide consistent bus service, tailored by location and time of day.
- B. Collect and share standardized bus operations and performance data** across agencies to improve transparency and better plan bus service.
- C. Collaboratively restructure the region's bus network** to create the most efficient and customer-focused bus system. [\*Mass Transit Plan as defined in the WMATA Compact]
- D. Cooperatively assess Metrobus' current service definitions and funding allocation formula** using the WMATA Board's Authority.
- E. Leverage existing efforts by transit providers to operate flexible on-demand services** to supplement the fixed route network where and when warranted.





### ***A modern bus system must...***

- ✓ *Recognize that one size does not fit all, and that service decisions must be guided by demand, land use, and equity.*
- ✓ *Share operations and performance data in a standardized format.*
- ✓ *Coordinate service provided across multiple agencies.*
- ✓ *Balance the operating and funding conditions that make sense for regional bus operations with those that make sense for individual jurisdictions.*
- ✓ *Offer a better choice in the growing market of resource intensive options that people have at their disposal today.*

### ***Implementing these recommendations will result in...***

- ✓ *Consistent and appealing service across the region as a result of cohesive planning, operations, and performance.*
- ✓ *Greater communication among agencies and customers.*
- ✓ *Increased number of customers who use bus region-wide to access key destinations—regardless of where they live and what times they travel.*
- ✓ *Greater transparency associated with “regional” services—where riders benefit from the clearer distinction of how services are planned and allocated.*
- ✓ *Meeting riders’ growing expectations of transit and travel across the region through forms of bus that are flexible and cost-effective.*
- ✓ *Stronger connections between bus and land use, where people can access employment centers, key goods and services, and amenities and live affordably.*

# 2



## Give buses priority on roadways to move people quickly and reliably.

- A.** Obtain commitments from state and local agencies (including roadway owners) to **adopt consistent guidelines**, bolster jurisdictional capital spending, and expedite coordinated implementation of bus priority.
- B.** Implement enforcement policies that **establish bus priority** and result in reliable and fast service.
- C.** Establish a capital program at WMATA that **supports accelerated implementation of bus priority projects**, including BRT.
- D.** Support regional congestion mitigation efforts that bolster bus priority and **move more people more efficiently**.





### **A modern bus system...**

- ✓ *Cannot be burdened by the high levels of congestion that single-occupancy vehicles cause.*
- ✓ *Maximizes the people-carrying capacity of the region's roads and infrastructure.*
- ✓ *Effectively uses limited resources from across the region to combat congestion with fast, frequent, and reliable service.*
- ✓ *Attracts and benefits more riders, whereas, without intervention, bus runs the risk of becoming the mobility option only for those who have no other choice.*

### **Implementing these recommendations will result in...**

- ✓ *Predictable and reliable bus service that customers can trust.*
- ✓ *Moving more people in the most efficient way - giving people more time to work, learn, and play.*
- ✓ *A myriad of benefits across the region, including increased access to jobs and tourist attractions, enhanced economic competitiveness, reduced emissions, and promotion of a healthier natural environment.*

# 3



## Create an excellent customer experience to retain and increase ridership.

### A. Equip riders with high-quality, accurate, and easily accessible information to plan a trip.

- A1: Ensure that accurate, real-time service information for all providers is available in one place
- A2: Make bus service easy to understand with legible maps and customer-friendly route names across providers
- A3: Expand marketing efforts to enhance visibility of bus options and benefits

### B. Make paying bus fares easier.

- B1: Provide free transfers between bus and rail
- B2: Provide reduced fare options for low-income riders
- B3: Create a mobile solution to plan and pay for trips in one place
- B4: Develop new regional passes that work across all providers, and make bus fares clear and understandable
- B5: Incentivize more employers to offer transit benefits

### C. Make it safer and more pleasant to ride the bus.

- C1: Make bus stops and shelters safe, comfortable, accessible, and technology-enabled
- C2: Advance technology and programs that improve the safety of everyone on board by partnering with riders, bus operators, and unions
- C3: Empower front-line staff to provide exceptional customer service
- C4: Ensure that all buses meet the highest standards of comfort and cleanliness

### D. Pursue innovation and bus improvement.

- D1: Advance new vehicle technologies to improve bus' environmental footprint and efficiency, such as electric buses and automation
- D2: Establish a Regional Mobility Innovation Lab to systematically share knowledge and accelerate improvements such as service provision, customer experience, and bus operator and passenger safety



### **A modern bus system must...**

- ✓ *Be legible for all users and provide one-stop information that includes trip planning and real-time status.*
- ✓ *Provide a range of payment options that are functionally and financially efficient, and meet the diverse needs of customers.*
- ✓ *Be a convenient, safe, easy-to-use, user-focused mobility option for all riders.*
- ✓ *Capitalize on innovations that reduce negative environmental impacts.*

### **Implementing these recommendations will result in...**

- ✓ *Increased ridership and improved perception that bus is an appealing and desirable mode of travel, becoming an easy choice for all users, regardless of age, ability, or income.*
- ✓ *Reshaped travel choices that help people choose where they live and work.*
- ✓ *A safer and more comfortable system for customers and employees.*
- ✓ *Positive impacts to the built and natural environment that create a more livable and sustainable region.*

# 4



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## Empower a publicly appointed Task Force to transform bus and lead the implementation of a truly integrated regional system.

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- A.** Convene a Task Force to **oversee implementation** of the Strategy **and provide long-term leadership** for the regional bus system with membership as follows:
  - The Governors of Virginia and Maryland and the Mayor of the District of Columbia each nominate one person (three members total)
  - The six principal members from the District of Columbia, Maryland, and Virginia on the WMATA Board collectively nominate one person (one member total)
  - Bus Transformation Executive Steering Committee nominates three people (three members total)
  - The Task Force itself may nominate up to two additional people (up to two members total)
  
- B.** Facilitate an independently published **annual progress report** on Bus Transformation Strategy implementation and a **bus performance scorecard** to track the level of service delivered to customers
  
- C.** **Develop a platform for rider feedback**, administered by the task force, and an ongoing mechanism for incorporating feedback into regular revisions of the Strategy recommendations.

### **Because...**

- ✓ *People from across the region have said the current disjointed bus system is not meeting their needs - and driving them to other modes.*
- ✓ *Immediate and sustained action is needed to implement recommendations to transform the bus system. A task force will have the authority to set the agenda and coordinate actions to achieve real progress.*
- ✓ *Responsible agencies must be held accountable for the goals, priorities, and performance of bus across the region.*
- ✓ *Direct feedback from riders is essential to the continued improvement of bus service in the region.*

### **Implementing these recommendations will result in...**

- ✓ *Stronger governmental entities that have responsibilities for bus, and who collaboratively implement strategy recommendations.*
- ✓ *A unified regional program; otherwise, the status quo will remain, and the region will likely continue to face the same problems.*
- ✓ *Regular reporting by independent organizations that increases the visibility of bus transformation and yields measurable improvements for customers.*
- ✓ *A clear mechanism for riders to influence changes to bus service in the region.*





# Collaboration

Engagement has been a cornerstone of this project from the beginning! Engagement activities include:

- 140** Participants at the Kickoff Summit
- 8,800** Survey responses to date
- 13** Metrobus division engagement events
- 4** Focus groups
- 23** ESC meetings
- 12** Technical Team meetings
- 7** SAP meetings
- 45** External project briefings
- 3** Public open house events
- 33** Pop-up events
- 13** WMATA Leadership Team briefings
- 243** Social media postings
- 185,750** People reached via social media

Creating a sustainable surface transportation future depends on collaboration between bus operators, cities, counties, and states that own the roads.

It also depends on input from the broader community – from businesses, non-profits and community organizations, thought leaders, the public, and many more!

## WHO IS DRIVING THIS BUS?

Tapping into the immense expertise within this region has guided the development of this strategy, and this strategy has relied on the input of many from across the region.

### Executive Steering Committee

Committee members, who hold various leadership positions in the business community, with regional organizations and non-profits, or are unaffiliated transit experts or labor representatives, have been closely involved with developing the strategy and played an important role in ensuring transparency, independence, and consideration of the needs of the region's travelers and bus service providers.

### Strategy Advisory Panel (SAP)

Panel members, who hold leadership positions in local and state governments, community-based organizations, businesses, minority and disability groups, labor organizations, think tanks, and the education community, represent a variety of regional perspectives and provide critical insight into issues that affect bus.

### Technical Team

Team members are recognized discipline leaders within WMATA and senior jurisdiction transit staff who review technical aspects and analyses throughout the project.

### WMATA Leadership Team

Team members are decision-makers within WMATA who oversee those parts of the project that affect organization and operations.

### General Public

A broad sample of bus riders and non-riders have shared their priorities through various media, including almost 9,000 survey responses, both on-line and on-site at locations throughout the region.

### Key Stakeholders

Other stakeholders from across the region have provided input that represents the perspectives of broad constituencies. These stakeholders include transit and transportation leaders, and elected and appointed officials.



# Public Engagement

The Bus Transformation Strategy is the result of extensive public feedback and significant collective effort. From when the Draft Strategy was released in Spring 2019, a regional, inclusive public engagement effort brought thousands of voices to the project and helped clarify the strategy's focus and final recommendations.

## HOW IT HAPPENED

### Went Where People Are:

Held bilingual pop-up events at Metro stations, bus transit centers, grocery stores, and shopping areas in Maryland, Virginia, and DC, where people could learn about the project and take a short survey.

**Promoted the Survey:** Used in-person, print, radio, and digital platforms to promote a short bilingual survey about the Draft Strategy.

**Hosted Open Houses:** Held three public open houses in central locations in Virginia, Maryland, and DC to obtain feedback about the Draft Strategy.

**Used Social Media:** Used Instagram and Facebook ads to publicize the survey and outreach events – and many of our social media posts were re-posted by regional transit agencies and other critical stakeholders.

## PUBLIC SURVEY RESULTS

– Top recommendation preferences, across all jurisdictions:



**Free transfers between bus and Metrorail**



**Build dedicated bus lanes**



**Run more buses on busy routes**

- Safe, accessible bus stops and discounted fares for low-income riders were high priorities for people aged 65 or over, Spanish-language survey respondents, and low-income respondents.
- People across all demographic groups believed recommendations could transform bus in the region, and strongly supported public funding for implementation.

## WHAT THE COMMENTS SAID

from the survey and open houses. Yes the comments were read!

“Free transfers to Metrorail is critical. The region’s transit system is built around being multi-modal. Why penalize people for using the system as designed?”

“Frequent needs to be reliably frequent. The bus needs to arrive when it’s supposed to arrive. The failure to do so is probably the most frustrating thing about riding the bus, and the thing that keeps some people from doing it at all.”

“Yes yes yes to dedicated bus lanes. Yes and more yes.”

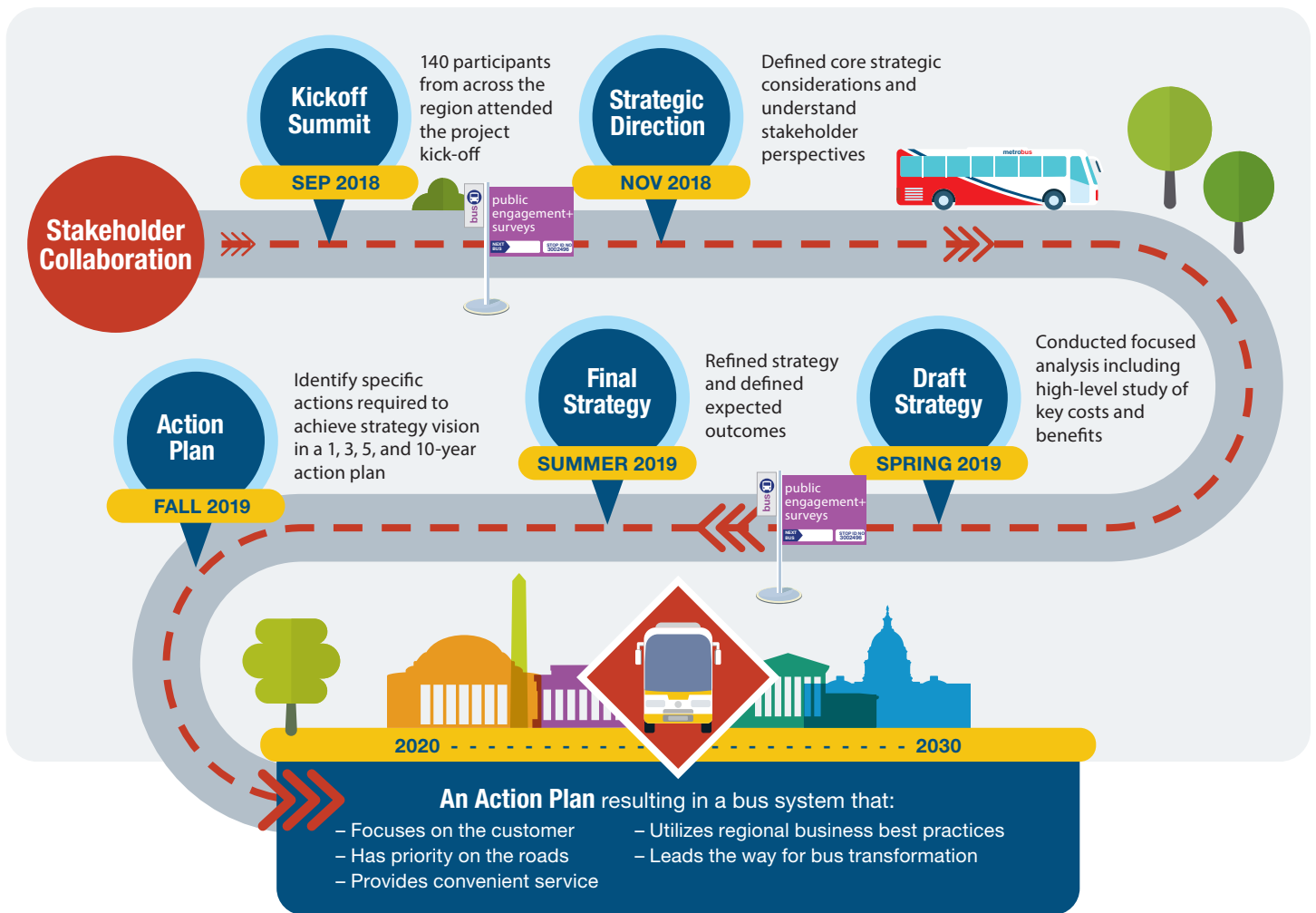
“Enforcement programs for bus lanes are critical!”

## Highlights from Draft Strategy Public Outreach

- 39 Spanish-language radio ads on El Zol
- 1,500 emails to partner and stakeholder organizations
- 16,900 SmarTrip users reached by email blast
- 10,900 postcards distributed
- 1,300 clicks on Facebook and Instagram ads
- 492 comments received

# Next Steps

This Strategy and its recommendations are the result of extensive stakeholder insights, clear feedback from the public, best practices from other regions, and comprehensive analysis of the region's bus system.



*The Bus Transformation Project's action plan will chart the implementation of this Strategy over the next 10 years. Stay tuned as we release this important plan by the end of 2019!*

## EXECUTIVE STEERING COMMITTEE

Rob Puentes, Chair	Nat Gandhi	David Richardson
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# This project will transform bus service...

from

Wondering when the bus will come



**MAKE BUS THE EASY FIRST CHOICE**



to

**Frequent and predictable**

from

Slow and stuck in traffic



**PRIORITIZE BUSES ON MAJOR ROADWAYS**



to

**Fast trips where you want to go**

from

Last resort



**FOCUS ON THE CUSTOMER**



to

**Appealing and desirable**

from

Region divided



**STRENGTHEN REGIONAL COOPERATION TO TRANSFORM THE BUS SYSTEM**



to

**Stronger together**

## LEARN MORE ABOUT THE REGION'S BUS SYSTEM

Draft Strategy and Recommendations  
Bus System Today  
Public Input Survey Report  
Project Overview  
Strategic Considerations

[bustransformationproject.com/resources/#documents](http://bustransformationproject.com/resources/#documents)

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