

NORTHERN VIRGINIA TRANSPORTATION AUTHORITY**MEMORANDUM**

FOR: Chair Phyllis J. Randall and Members
Northern Virginia Transportation Authority

FROM: Monica Backmon, Chief Executive Officer

DATE: October 6, 2022

SUBJECT: TransAction Update and Public Comment Report

- 1. Purpose:** To update the Northern Virginia Transportation Authority (NVTA) on the status of the TransAction update including public comments and testimony received during the public comment period, and potential enhancements to the draft TransAction Plan and Project List.
- 2. Background:** The public comment period commenced on August 1, 2022 and ended on September 18, 2022. Citizens were invited to provide comments on the 24-page draft TransAction Plan, and associated Project List comprising 429 candidate projects. English, Spanish, and Korean versions of the draft TransAction Plan were made available online.

While various options to comment were provided, the primary mechanism for submitting comments was via an online comment form, also in English, Spanish, and Korean. The Public Hearing was held on September 8, with options to provide testimony in person and remotely.

TransAction is updated on a five-year cycle and, when adopted, provides a legislatively mandated eligibility filter for candidate projects to be included in subsequent Six Year Program updates. For example, the current TransAction, adopted in October 2017, provided the eligibility basis for projects included in the FY2018-2023, FY2020-2025, and FY2022-F2027 Six Year Programs.

TransAction is a fiscally and geographically unconstrained plan, meaning that projects are not required to have any reasonable expectation of funding to be included, nor do they have to be physically located in Northern Virginia. Similarly, inclusion of any project in TransAction does not represent a funding commitment from NVTA or any other government or corporate entity.

TransAction does not recommend specific projects or project types, nor does it seek to provide funding prioritization for any projects or project types. TransAction does, however, provide information that will potentially be relevant to the project selection process for future Six Year Program updates.

The draft TransAction Plan provides analysis on the likely transportation challenges and opportunities that Northern Virginia will face in 2045, including the extent to which it may help to accomplish NVTA's vision and goals (mobility, accessibility, and resiliency) while embracing NVTA's three core values (equity, safety, and sustainability). Several pages describe a Regional Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) System which, along with complimentary technology and other projects, is included in the draft Project List. Three pages address the challenges associated with uncertainty in long-range transportation planning and describe NVTA's approach to addressing uncertainty using a technique called scenario analysis.

3. **Discussion:** 223 comments were received from 201 unique commenters. This is approximately one third of the 663 comments received from 656 unique commenters for the current version of TransAction adopted in October 2017.

NVTA staff and the consultant team have prepared a draft summary of public comments attached to this memorandum, which summarizes comments under the following topics:

- a. Common themes heard – this includes support for increasing/improving transit and bike-pedestrian facilities, opposition to roadways, and environmental and safety concerns;
- b. Type, direction, and geographic distribution of feedback;
- c. Specific comments on the Plan;
- d. Specific comments on the goals and core values;
- e. Specific comments on the scenarios;
- f. Specific comments on the public participation process; and,
- g. Specific comments on the projects;

The full set of comments, along with the summary report, will be published on TransAction website after formatting for ease of reading.

During September and early October, NVTA's two statutory committees (Technical Advisory Committee and Planning Coordination Advisory Committee), together with the Planning and Programming Committee, discussed TransAction public comments, modeling results and scenario analysis. These discussions provided additional feedback to NVTA staff.

4. **Potential TransAction Enhancement:** Based on public comments and feedback from the three committees mentioned above, NVTA staff is currently working with the consultant team to identify potential enhancements to the draft TransAction Plan and Project List. These enhancements embrace the following:

- a. Draft TransAction Plan
 - i. Review the content of sections 6 and 7 (Impacts and Uncertainty), to clarify the analyses that have been conducted and focus more on findings and outcomes rather than technical details.
 - ii. Review the content of section 8 (Benefits), to reinforce key messaging regarding how TransAction will be used to support future regional revenues approvals.

- iii. Review the entire document to ensure content is communicated clearly and concisely.
 - iv. General 'beautification' to enhance the overall readability and aesthetics of the document.
- b. Draft Project List**
- i. No projects are proposed to be removed from the project list, but several potential duplicate projects have been identified. Duplicate projects will be removed after consultation with relevant project sponsors.
 - ii. During the development of TransAction, some projects appear to have advanced to construction or a fully funded status. Any such projects will be effectively transferred from the project list (referred to as the 'Build Network') to the baseline component of the computer model used for TransAction (referred to as the 'No-Build Network').
 - iii. Other minor corrections will be made for projects with the incorrect sponsor or project location.

After reviewing these proposed enhancements with the Technical Advisory Committee and Planning Coordination Advisory Committee at their respective meetings in October, NVTA staff will prepare a final draft for endorsement by all three committees in the November meeting cycle.

5. Next steps:

- a. October 19, 2022:** Briefing on enhancements to Technical Advisory Committee.
- b. October 26, 2022:** Briefing on enhancements to Planning Coordination Advisory Committee.
- c. November 2022:** Release of NVTA staff recommendations for review and endorsement by TAC, PCAC, and PPC; and
- d. December 8, 2022:** Anticipated Authority adoption of TransAction.

Attachment: Draft Summary of Public Comments

Draft TransAction Plan

Overview of Public Comments Received

September 2022

I. Background

The public comment period for the Draft TransAction Plan and associated Project List opened on August 1, 2022 and closed on September 18, 2022. The public was able to submit comments through several channels including an online comment form made available on the [TransAction participate webpage](#), voicemail via a dedicated phone line, postal mail, or at the public hearing either in person or by phone.

Materials that were released for public comment include:

- TransAction Plan 2022 Update –Draft Summary
- TransAction Plan 2022 Update –Draft Project List, containing 429 projects
 - PDF version
 - Online sortable version of the list
- Interactive Map of Draft TransAction Project List
- Detailed online comment form

The Draft TransAction Plan and online comment form were released in three languages – English, Spanish and Korean.

The Public Hearing was held on September 8, 2022. Online testimony required pre-registration. The Public Hearing was livestreamed on YouTube, where a recording has been archived. NVTA accepted written comments submitted via other channels if they were received prior to the September 18th deadline.

The public comment opportunity was promoted in multiple ways, including features in NVTA's newsletters, #TransActionThursday digital campaign which included short videos, paid (multi-language) and free campaigns on NVTA's social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn), published legal notices in the Washington Post, El Tiempo and Korea Times, and more. Additionally, leveraging ambassador kit templated content, several Authority members included brief excerpts on the opportunity for public comment in their own newsletters and shared posts on social media. Jurisdictions and agency partners also shared the information to large audiences on social media channels. Several news outlets, including WTOP, InsideNoVA, Washington Business Journal and others covered the opportunity. Also, the TransAction consulting team went to four physical locations and handed out cards (English, Spanish and Korean) with details about the public comment opportunity to increase the potential for participation from underserved communities. Translators were on location as well. The selected locations included:

- Wiehle-Reston East Metro Station (8/25/2022);
- Dollar Tree at Little River Turnpike Shopping Center (8/27/2022);
- Eden Center (8/28/2022); and
- King St. Metro Station (8/29/2022).

In total, 14 media placements were secured during the TransAction public comment period. The estimated audience reach through news coverage is 16,320,514, with Washington Business Journal running two stories. The total reach for the paid multi-language social media campaign was 206,812. The ad ran in English, Spanish and Korean, with five placements each on Facebook and Instagram.

II. Total Responses Received

A total of 223 comments were received during the comment period. Some commenters submitted a comment to the online form and also provided testimony at the public hearing. There were also some duplicate comments submitted by the same person. Of the 223 total comments, 215 are unique comments (not submitted through another method), and 201 were submitted by unique individuals. The total number of comments received are summarized below based on how they were received. Comments received to the online comment form do provide detailed responses to specific questions which are summarized later in this report.

Comments Received	Raw Count
Comment Form	193*
Public hearing	21
Letter	6
Email	2
Voicemail	1
Total	223

* Includes one comment received in Korean.

III. Overview of Comments Received

Themes

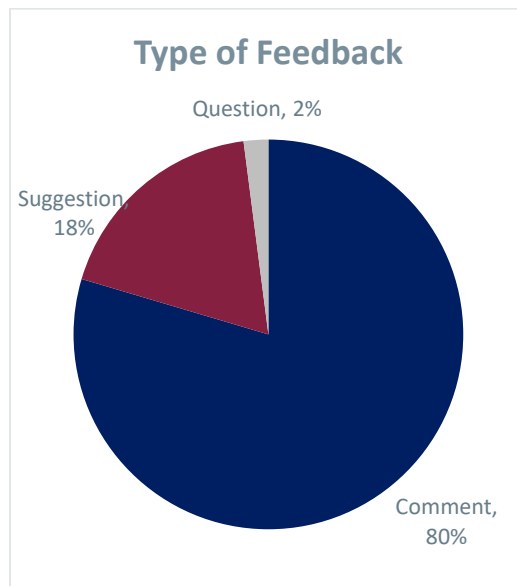
The most common themes and example comments seen were:

Common Theme	Example Comment
Against Roadway or Widening	We must shift the scoring for NVTA projects to reward those that reduce Vehicle Miles Traveled if we are ever going to meet our climate goals.
Environmental Concern	I am a resident of [jurisdiction], and ask you to reject the proposed TransAction 2045 plan. Northern Virginia needs a plan that will keep its residents safe from disastrous climate change. We should be working towards resilience and emissions-curbing solutions, not business-as-usual and increased driving. From what I have read, the list of projects in 2045 far exceeds what Northern Virginia can afford, fails to address the land use policies and lack of affordable housing at the root of our transportation problems, and largely ignores urgent climate goals.
Increase/Improve Transit	As a resident of the City of Falls Church, I would like to voice my support for this NVTA TransAction vision, and for the City projects contained within the draft project list. Investments in pedestrian, bicycle, transit projects help to relieve congestion and increase connectivity and accessibility.
Improve Bike-Ped Routes	
Safety	Safety: Driving is the most dangerous thing most of us do all day; this plan's continued focus on driving will harm safety, not improve it. Increased VMT will cause more crashes, injuring more drivers, more passengers, and more people walking & biking.

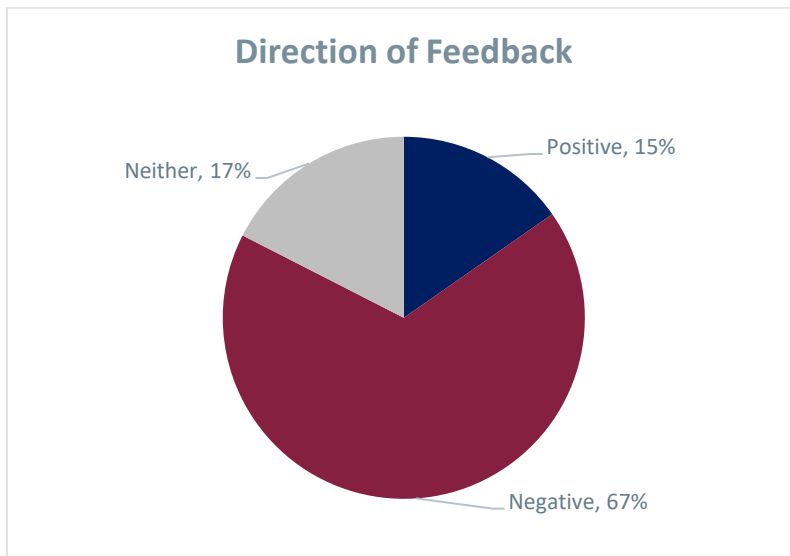
Type and Direction of Feedback

Feedback was evaluated to determine the public's overall opinion of the plan. This was done by checking the types of feedback (comment, suggestion or question) and the direction of the feedback (positive, negative or neither).

The type of feedback was classified as either a comment, suggestion or question. 80% of survey responses were considered as comments; 18% were suggestions; and the rest were questions. "Comment" meant the respondent was providing their own opinion on the matter without an actionable component. "Suggestion" meant that the respondent was providing an actionable component for NVTA to include in the TransAction plan. "Question" meant that the respondent submitted an inquiry as part of their response.

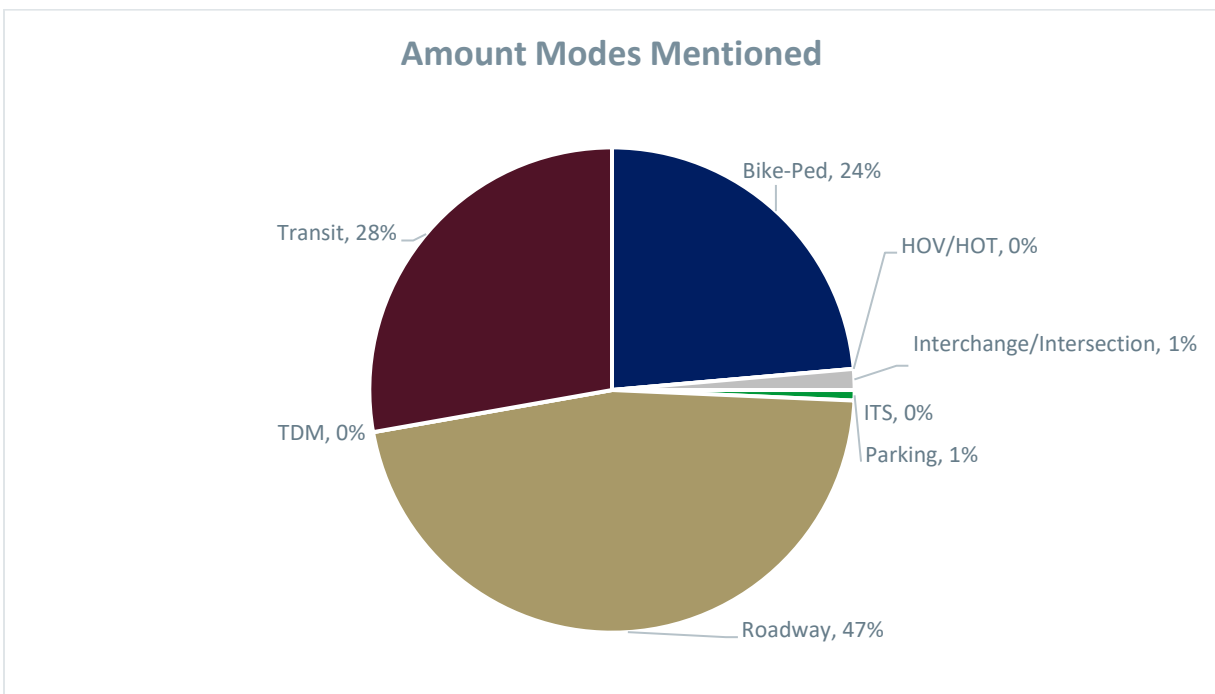


The direction of feedback was identified as a positive, negative or neither response. Roughly 70% of responses were negative and the rest were either positive/neither. A negative response was an indication that a respondent was not completely satisfied with the plan. Responses could include multiple directions if there were varying points made. In one example, an individual had positive feedback for transit projects, but negative feedback on a handful of roadway/widening projects.



Modes Mentioned

A summary of modes mentioned was evaluated to help identify the priorities of respondents. The most common modes mentioned were roadway, transit and bike-pedestrian.



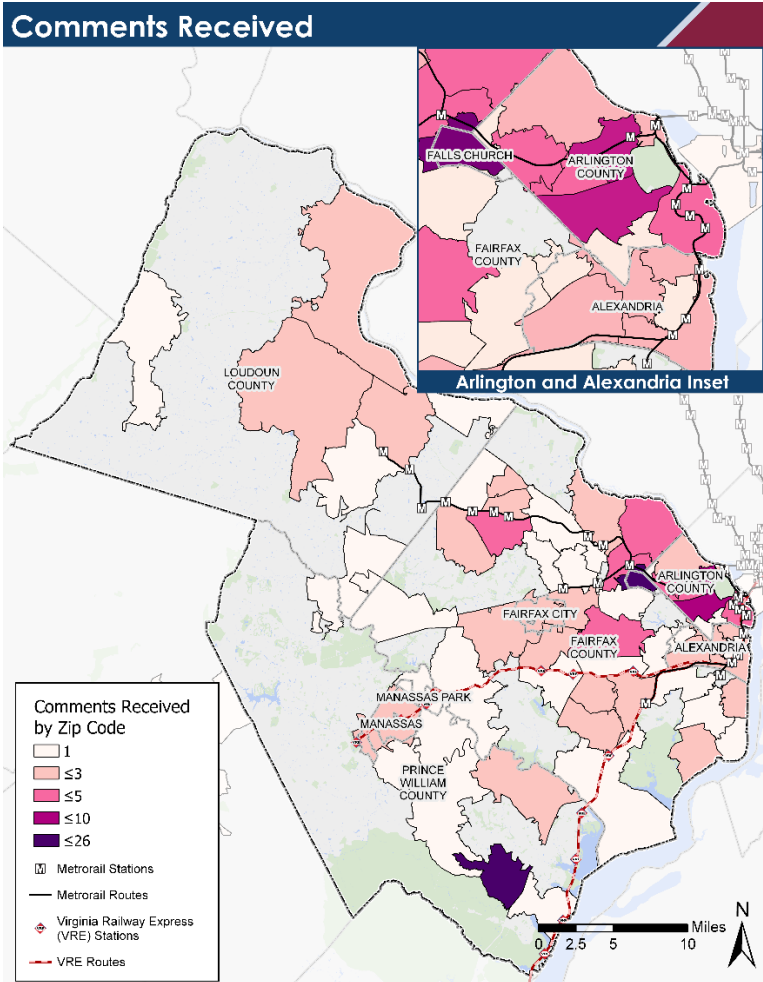
Geographic Distribution of On-Line Commentors (ZIP code map)

The comments received by ZIP code are shown on the map below. The map shows more comments received from inside the Beltway. Two ZIP codes were responsible for the most comments:

- ZIP code 22025 (Four Seasons, Prince William County) – multiple comments were received regarding the Van Buren Road Extension
- ZIP code 22046 (City of Falls Church) – multiple residents of the city submitted comments, including use of a standard text response

In addition to comments from Northern Virginia, a few were received from outside the region from the District of Columbia, Maryland and other parts of Virginia.

Figure 1. Comments Received by ZIP Code



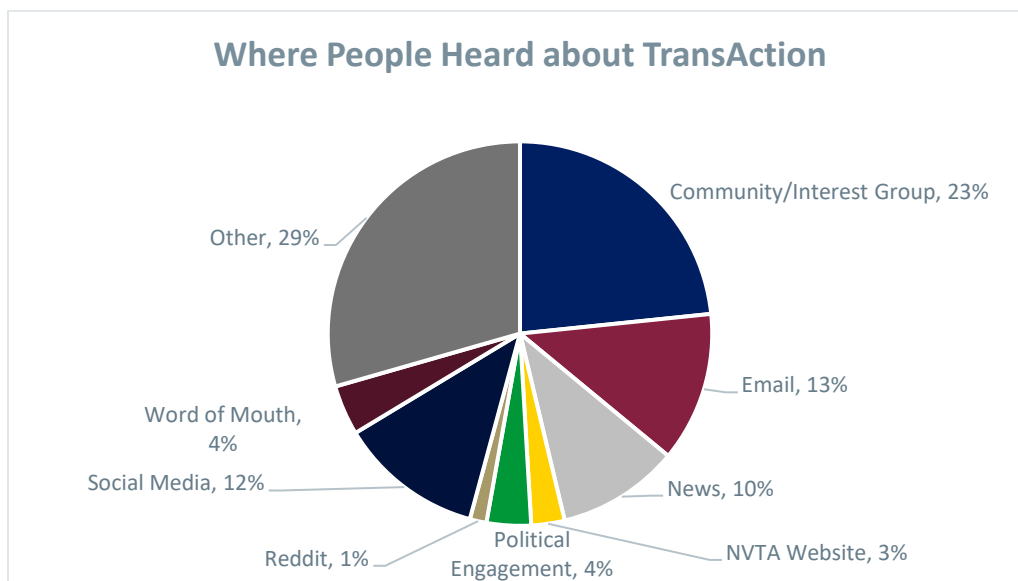
IV. Comment Form Responses

Q1 - How did you hear about TransAction, Northern Virginia's long-range transportation plan?

When asked how respondents heard about the plan, the most common sources were:

- Community/interest groups – included HOAs, neighborhoods, housing advocacy groups, churches, local environmental/sustainability groups, biker associations, and other similar groups
- Email
- Social Media – including Facebook, Twitter and other social platforms
- News

Other sources are identified in the chart below.



Q2 - Please provide any comments you have about the TransAction Plan document, which summarizes travel conditions, challenges and opportunities in 2045, as well as the plan's impact on the region and what it means for travelers?

Comments on the plan ranged on a variety of topics, however the most common themes were as shown in the table below.

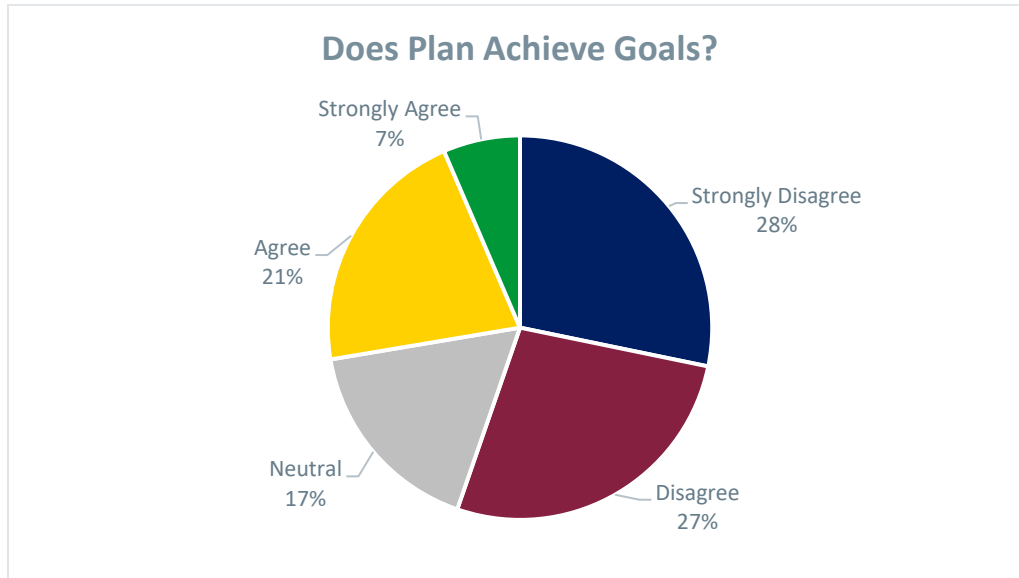
Common Themes of Question 2	% of Responses
Against roadway/widening	25%
Environmental concern	21%
Increase/improve transit	16%
Improve Bike-Ped Routes	15%
Plan process	5%
Other	18%

Although a range of comments were received, some comments were repeated by multiple respondents. Recurring comments are likely due to coordination amongst individuals and their communities or organizations. Often commenters who entered recurring responses had heard about TransAction from news articles, political engagement and local advocacy groups.

Q2 Example Comments	Count	Context
As a resident of the City of Falls Church, I would like to voice my support for this NVTA TransAction vision, and for the City projects contained within the draft project list. Investments in pedestrian, bicycle, transit projects help to relieve congestion and increase connectivity and accessibility.	7	Positive
I am a resident of [jurisdiction], and ask you to reject the proposed TransAction 2045 plan. Northern Virginia needs a plan that will keep its residents safe from disastrous climate change. We should be working towards resilience and emissions-curbing solutions, not business-as-usual and increased driving. From what I have read, the list of projects in 2045 far exceeds what Northern Virginia can afford, fails to address the land use policies and lack of affordable housing at the root of our transportation problems, and largely ignores urgent climate goals.	14	Negative
I could not possibly provide LOUDER or stronger support for the transit system changes than I am currently feeling. These are life-giving pieces of connectivity that have been needed for eons, and they'll make a mountain of difference for disabled and low-income travelers.	1	Positive
The resulting project proposals suggests a big disconnect between goals and priorities and underlying assumptions, resulting in continued prioritization on roads rather than transit and multimodal options that would achieve goals for mobility, sustainability and equity.	1	Negative
I love seeing that we will spend more on transit and non-car compared to roadway improvements and widenings. An improved car-free transit system will alleviate stress on our roadways. I would encourage against widening projects since an increase in supply will lead to an increase in demand which will put you in the same situation later down the line. I love building a BRT and any "road-diet" projects to make non-car travel more comfortable and enjoyable.	1	Positive

Q3 - NVTA has identified three goals for TransAction and the future of transportation in Northern Virginia. Do you think the TransAction Plan achieves the goals of Mobility, Accessibility, and Resiliency?

A majority of respondents felt the TransAction Plan did not achieve the goals of mobility, accessibility and resiliency.

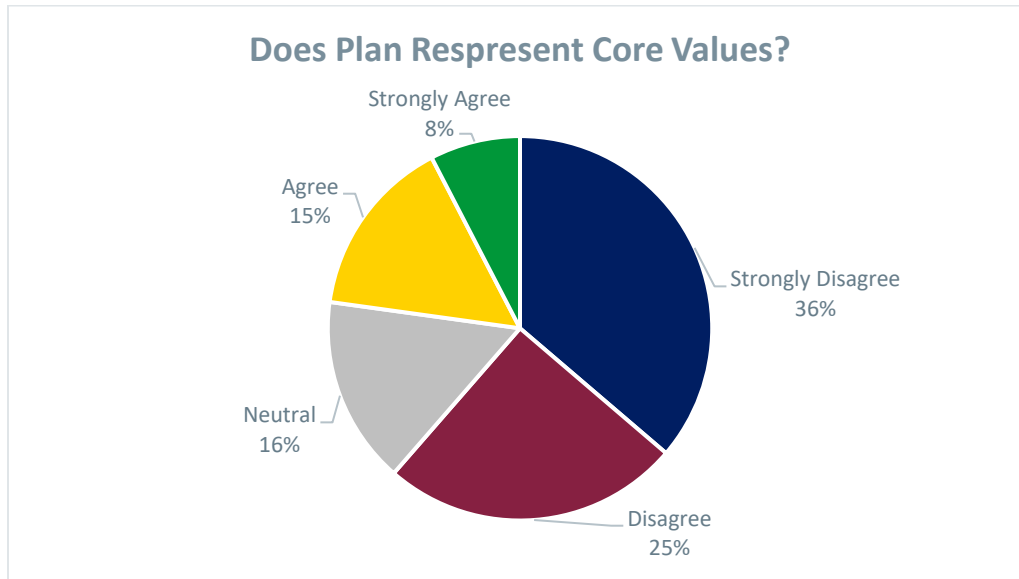


In many cases, respondents who disagreed with the plan’s ability to achieve its goals were indicating dissatisfaction with the plan process, being against roadway/widening projects, or wanted to see more emphasis on bike-pedestrian infrastructure.

Q3 Example Comments	Count	Context
The BRT plan definitely increases mobility, accessibility, and resiliency.	1	Positive
Mobility & Accessibility: A plan that would do little to improve mobility without the massive financial outlay of a car cannot achieve true mobility in the region nor improve accessibility for those who need it most. Resiliency: A plan that fails to reduce vehicle miles traveled and greenhouse gas emissions cannot be a resilient plan; it dooms us to more and more of the disruptive severe weather we have been seeing over the last few years.	12	Negative
It is a start, but there is so much more to be done to actually achieve those goals.	1	Neutral
Continued dominance of car-centric investment is a band aid that may help these goals in the immediate term, but long term will make the region less mobile, less accessible, and less resilient.	1	Negative
I often use the Burke VRE trail to travel from the GMU area to West Springfield. I'm glad to see you are extending the trail out to Manassas. Please continue to expand these types of trails, keeping cyclists and pedestrians as far away from busy roads as possible.	1	Positive

Q4 - NVTA has identified three core values that shape how TransAction should achieve its goals: Safety, Equity and Sustainability. Do you think that the TransAction Plan represents those core values?

A majority respondents did not feel that the TransAction Plan met its objective to achieve its three core values of safety, equity and sustainability.



In many cases, respondents who disagreed with the plan’s ability to reflect its core values were indicating safety and environmental concerns as common themes.

Q4 Example Comments	Count	Context
The goals are reasonable to meet the core values of safety, equity, and sustainability.	1	Positive
Safety: Driving is the most dangerous thing most of us do all day; this plan's continued focus on driving will harm safety, not improve it. Increased VMT will cause more crashes, injuring more drivers, more passengers, and more people walking & biking.	11	Negative
A plan that anticipates such a large increase in VMT for a majority of the region cannot reasonably be called sustainable.	1	Negative
More bus services (including BRT) for underserved communities. People shouldn't have to take three buses to get to work.	1	Neutral
NVTA and TransAction continue to advocate for roadway widening. Nearly 1000 people die every year on Virginia roads, and a non-insignificant cause of some of these crashes are roadway design and roads meant to speed up cars.	1	Negative
Expanding transit options can build up lower-income and minority communities by providing needed access to public goods, employment, and amenities. Additionally, the expansion of public transit would reduce cars on the road, reducing carbon emissions without creating more impervious surface. When there are fewer cars on the road, there are also far fewer vehicular injuries and fatalities.	1	Positive

Q5 - If you have any feedback on specific TransAction projects that you would like to share, please include the project ID number from the project list with your comments.

Feedback was provided on specific TransAction projects in question #5, but also to question #2. The combined project references are shown in the table below. 79 different projects were mentioned, but the project mentioned the most was Project ID 273: “Construct Van Buren North Road: Cardinal Drive to Dumfries Road” which was mentioned 29 times. In this instance, the Four Seasons Community felt very passionately that the project would be a detriment to their community for environmental and safety concerns.

There were also a series of Falls Church projects that were mentioned 8 times. In this case, respondents from Falls Church were in favor of these projects. These respondents shared a similar comment which is shown in the recurring comments.

Project ID	Project Name	Mentions	Positive	Negative	Neutral
273	Construct Van Buren North Road: Cardinal Drive to Dumfries Road	29	1	24	3
31	Route 7 Transit: Tysons to Mark Center	14	9	4	1
118	East Falls Church Bikeshare Connections	12	12	0	0
67	Route 29 Trail	11	7	2	2
356	City of Falls Church Greenway and Parkway Network	10	9	1	0
133	Falls Church Enhanced Bus Service	9	7	2	0
18	Seven Corners Ring Road Improvements	8	7	1	0
66	Falls Church Multimodal Improvements	8	8	0	0
72	Arlington Regional Trail Network	8	3	5	0
334	Falls Church Metro Station Access	8	7	1	0
406	W&OD Regional Trail Capacity and Connectivity Enhancements	8	2	6	0
21	Bike Lanes on Route 7: Alexandria to Seven Corners	7	6	1	0
62	East Falls Church Metrorail Station Second Entrance	7	7	0	0
71	Route 29 Bus Improvements	7	7	0	0
302	Fredericksburg Line Peak Period Service Expansion	7	6	1	0
303	Manassas Line Peak Period Service Expansion	7	6	1	0
333	Transit Boulevard along Sycamore Street and Roosevelt Street: East Falls Church Metrorail to Seven Corners	7	7	0	0
335	Falls Church Regional Bicycle Connections	7	7	0	0
357	Bicycle Facility Route 7 - City of Falls Church	7	6	1	0
360	City of Falls Church Safe Routes to School	7	7	0	0

Q6 - Because there is uncertainty associated with predicting the future, TransAction considered multiple ways that the future of Northern Virginia could unfold. These scenarios were: Post-Pandemic ‘New Normal’, Technology, and Incentives/Pricing. Please share any comments you have on the TransAction Summary Report.

Most common themes of additional comments were as follows:

Common Themes of Question 6 (79 completed responses)	Number of Responses	Positive	Critical	Neither
Specific strategies or types of projects	26	31%	35%	34%
Scenario definition	21	5%	14%	81%
Thoughts on future travel	20	5%	5%	90%

Q6 Example Comments	Count	Context
“It sounds as though the region is preparing for multiple scenarios, which is encouraging to see.”	1	Positive
“Post-Pandemic 'New Normal' -> need to focus on transit and non-car travel across the region, not just connections to DC”	1	Neutral
“Technology - With automated vehicles, there should probably be fewer cars on the road: if people can rent cars out to ride-share services while they aren't using their own cars, then it will decrease the reliance on owning a car”	1	Neutral
“Incentives and pricing are one of the most effective ways to alter behavior, but NVRTA needs to support such a policy with the appropriate infrastructure to give people a real choice. Without that infrastructure, it will be nothing more than a tax on the poor.”	1	Neutral

Q7 - If applicable, please provide comments on anything you would like to see in the long-range plan that was not included.

Most common themes of responses to what was missing from the plan was as follows:

Common Themes of Question 7 (78 completed responses)	Number of Responses
Increase/Improve Transit	22
Environmental Concern	18
Improve Bike-Pedestrian Routes	12

No recurring comments were identified.

Q8 - Please share any comments you have on the TransAction planning process and/or public participation.

The most common theme of these was that there wasn't enough public engagement to notify people of the survey. A table showing common themes is below:

Common Themes of Question 8 (37 completed responses)	Number of Responses
More publicity and options are needed to increase public engagement	8
2021 TransAction survey responses not fully incorporated	3
Environmental concern	3
Against roadway/widening	3

Q8 Example Comments	Count	Context
Very encouraged and impressed with these plans especially making things easier for electric vehicle owners.	1	Positive
It feels as though the NVTA appears to have not fully incorporated the public responses from the 2021 survey.	3	Negative
NVTA has done a robust analysis of the projects under consideration using its existing congestion reduction model. It also has an excellent public outreach program for communicating the results of its modeling. However, until/unless NVTA incorporates an environmental cost/benefit analysis into its planning process, it will be unable to determine the long term impact of its transportation program.	1	Neutral
I'm concerned that public participation puts too much weight on the desires of existing residents with the time and money to devote to participating, and doesn't do right by those who don't have time to participate or who don't even live here yet.	1	Neutral
Appreciate the effort made to secure public input.	1	Positive

Q9 - Please let us know how NVTA could make the review and public participation process easier for you.

For this question there were 43 responses of a large variety of themes. Of these, most comments were related to the desire to see improved communication/engagement with the public. Suggestions from this theme included other media outlets such as Discord or Twitter, and providing earlier and more frequent communication. A table showing common themes is below

Common Themes of Question 9 (33 completed responses)	Number of Responses
Improve communication	15
Plan Process	6

Q10 - If you have any other comments, please share your feedback below.

For this question there were 53 responses of a large variety of themes. Of these, most comments were of environmental concern. Most of these comments were recurring and is shown below.

Q10 Example Comments	Count	Context
NOVA is such a great place to live and work...We're lucky to have so many amenities. Keep up the good work in improving our area!	1	Positive
We must shift the scoring for NVTA projects to reward those that reduce Vehicle Miles Traveled if we are ever going to meet our climate goals.	16	Negative
I think progress is being made. Please improve pedestrian safety at every opportunity.	1	Positive