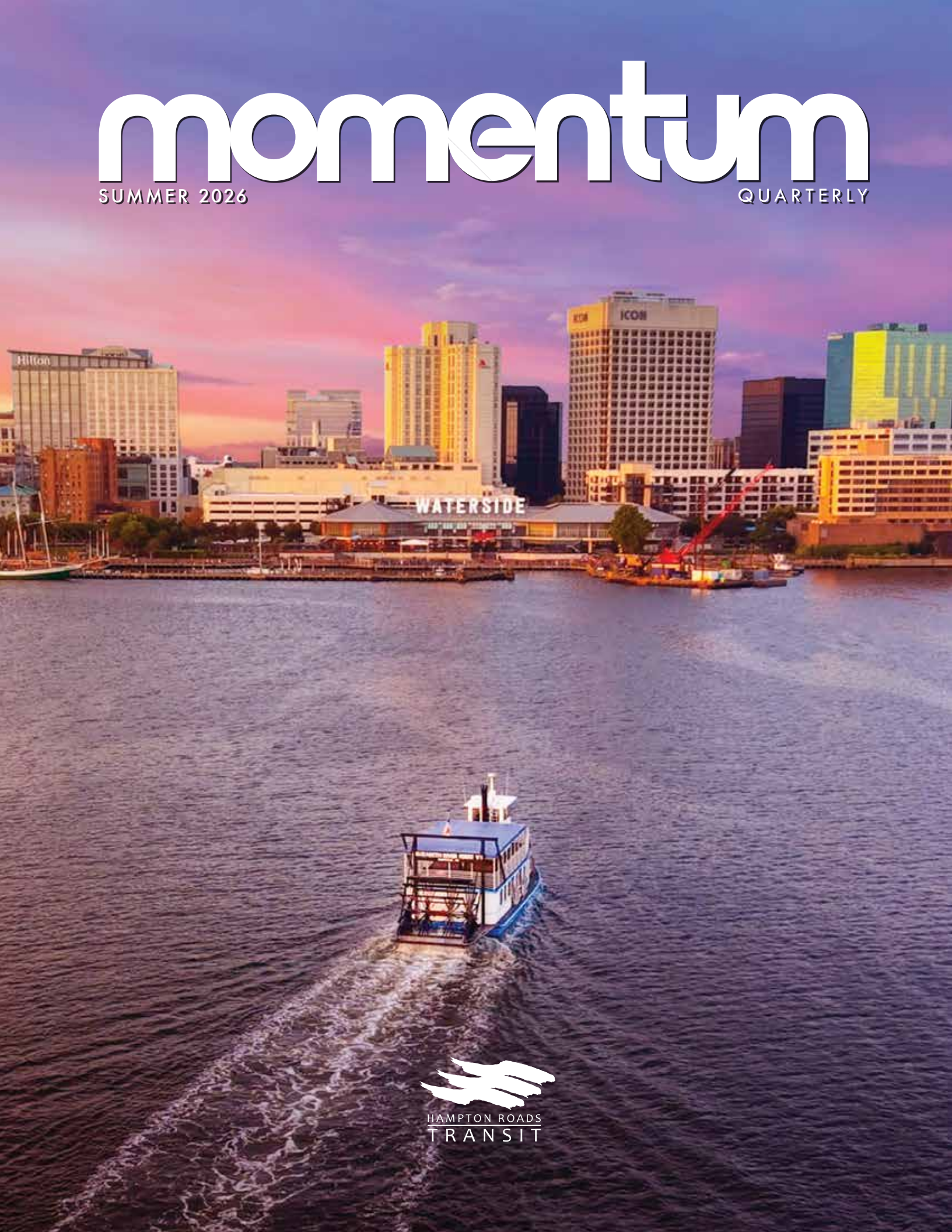
momentum

SUMMER 2026

QUARTERLY



HAMPTON ROADS
TRANSIT

William Harrell Retires After 14 Years

William E. Harrell retired July 31 as President and CEO after 14 years leading HRT and 40 years of distinguished public service. Employees and former employees, elected officials, community leaders and transit advocates gathered for festive celebrations to wish him all the best in retirement. ■



Advocacy Group Helps Celebrate the Tide's 15th Anniversary

Members of the Tidewater Transit Advocacy (TTA) joined HRT's outreach team for a round-trip light rail ride to celebrate The Tide's 15th anniversary. At each stop, HRT staff surprised commuters with mementos and party favors marking the start of light rail service in 2011. The TTA is a local community organization that advocates for improved public transit in Hampton Roads. ■



Brian C. Smith Returns to HRT as President and CEO

Dr. Brian C. Smith, a former Hampton Roads Transit executive, is returning to become the agency's next President and CEO.

Smith, president and CEO of GoTriangle in North Carolina since June 2025, previously served in numerous roles at HRT over 16 years, including as Deputy CEO from 2020 to 2025.



"We are delighted to welcome Brian back to HRT," said Hope Harper, chair of the Transportation District Commission of Hampton Roads (TDCHR). "Commissioners were impressed with his extensive transit experience, previous contributions to our agency, and knowledge of the Hampton Roads market. We are confident that his leadership and proven record of success will deliver results for our customers and the communities we serve."

"I'm grateful to Chair Harper and the Board of Commissioners for this opportunity," Smith said. "As a Hampton Roads native and former HRT employee, this place and its people hold a special place in my heart, and I'm excited and humbled to return in this leadership role. Providing safe and reliable public transportation across Hampton Roads is as important now as ever. Our customers are counting on us, and I look forward to advancing HRT's mission and vision for the future."

Smith will begin his duties on Oct. 12.

He succeeds William E. Harrell, who retired July 31 after 14 years leading HRT and 40 years of distinguished public service. Noelle Pinkard, HRT's Organizational Advancement Officer, will continue to serve as interim President and CEO until Smith's return to HRT.

The national search for a new agency leader attracted more than 80 applicants. The commission's Executive Committee reviewed the applicant pool, narrowed the field to a smaller group of qualified candidates, and conducted interviews prior to the final recommendation and vote by the full Commission.



Smith returns to HRT from leading GoTriangle, the regional transit authority serving the Raleigh-Durham-Chapel Hill region of North Carolina. He previously worked in several capacities at HRT beginning in 2008, including as manager of community relations, interim chief communications officer, chief of staff and, most recently, Deputy CEO.

He oversaw the agency's capital plan and grants administration and organized HRT's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Smith also provided instrumental support for the debut of The Tide light rail, which this month celebrates its 15th year of service. ■

Student Pass Celebrates a Decade of Freedom

Hampton Roads Transit has changed the way teenagers get around the region. The Student Freedom Pass is celebrating its 10th anniversary this school year.

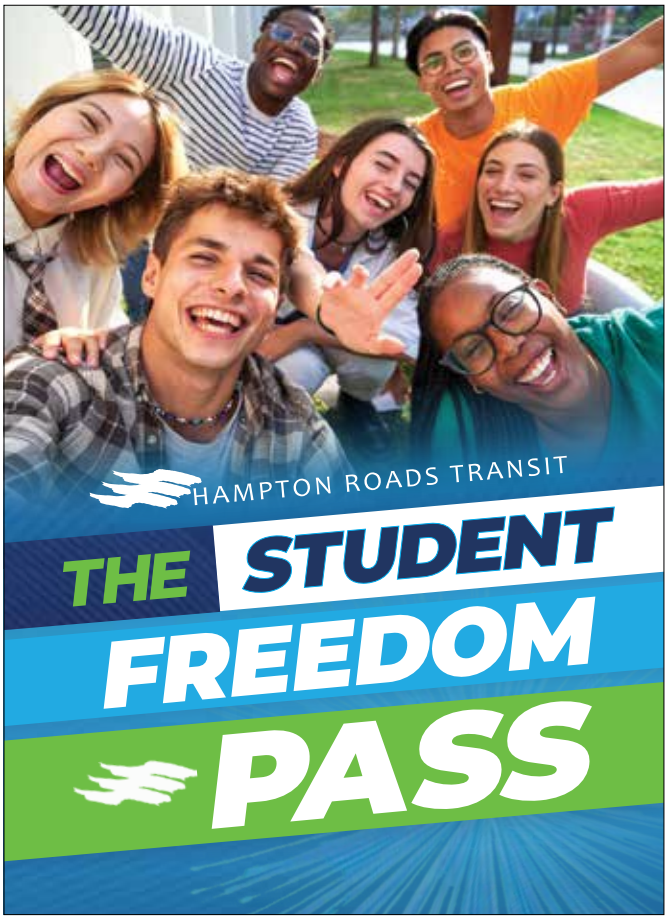
The free pass offered to high schoolers has introduced thousands of students to transit while providing them with safe and efficient transportation to and from after-school activities, jobs, and other destinations. Parents like the pass, too – less driving their teens around.

Over the past decade, 14,866 Student Freedom Passes have been distributed in all six cities served by HRT. Last year alone, more than 2,000 passes were created while hundreds of additional students signed up ahead of this school year.

HRT's Student Freedom Pass provides riders ages 13-17 years old in Chesapeake, Hampton, Newport News, Norfolk, Portsmouth and Virginia Beach with unlimited rides on all HRT modes of transit. Best of all, there's no cost to the passholder.

"The Student Freedom Pass was designed to introduce the next generation of riders to transit," said Alexis Majied, Chief Communications Officer. "It began as a way to teach teens how to navigate transit independently and give them the freedom to get where they needed to go."

Passes are available by filling out the online application and then visiting one of HRT's transit centers in Hampton, Newport News or Norfolk. ■



HRT Welcomes Transit Study

A General Assembly subcommittee is evaluating the long-term operating and capital needs of Hampton Roads Transit as well as our regional partners Suffolk Transit and the Williamsburg Area Transit Authority. House Joint Resolution 28 (HJ 28), passed during the 2026 Virginia General Assembly, establishes a two-year joint subcommittee to examine sustainable funding options, regional transit priorities, and cost containment strategies. The legislation is similar to a recent study of transit in Northern Virginia.

HRT continues to work closely with our state and federal advocacy consultants to monitor legislative activity and advocate for policies and funding that support the region's largest public transportation system. ■



Festival Ridership Shows Value of Transit





Free fares for Juneteenth and the convergence of Sail250 Virginia and Harborfest in Norfolk led to a sharp increase in ridership across Hampton Roads Transit. On June 19, one of four annual fare-free days, HRT carried 50,876 customers, an increase of 58 percent from the same day last year, across all modes of transit.

Much of the growth was driven by events that included Juneteenth celebrations, Sail250 Virginia and the 50th anniversary of Harborfest in downtown Norfolk, along with the Portsmouth Seawall Festival. Bus ridership grew 9 percent on June 19, with Paratransit up 11 percent from the previous year. Meanwhile, festivalgoers took advantage of free fares on light rail and ferry.

Light rail traffic rose 336 percent and ferry service increased 945 percent on June 19 compared to a year earlier. The light rail and ferry saw heavy traffic throughout the three-day festival weekend:

- **June 19:** 10,217 on the Elizabeth River Ferry and 8,547 on the Tide light rail.
- **June 20:** 14,778 on the ferry and 10,973 for light rail.
- **June 21:** 6,883 on the ferry and 4,268 on light rail.

An additional 1,629 customers sailed on the ferry on June 22, when that service was free on the last full day to visit tall ships and military vessels celebrating the nation's 250th anniversary. Total ferry ridership over four days – 33,507 – reached numbers not seen since OpSail in 2012. ■

System Optimization Plan to be Implemented Starting May 2027



Hampton Roads Transit's System Optimization Plan is taking shape, with changes to the bus network starting in May 2027.

Introduced in stages starting through May 2029, the System Optimization Plan, or SOP, will lead to dozens of route changes, including schedule and route adjustments, discontinued routes, and additional OnDemand Ridesharing services.

HRT's existing bus network is largely the same since the voluntary 1999 merger of Tidewater Regional Transit and PENTRAN to create Hampton Roads Transit.
Changes will affect local bus routes in HRT's member cities of Chesapeake, Hampton, Newport News, Norfolk, Portsmouth and Virginia Beach. HRT gathered feedback and comments at more than 20 pop-ups and open houses in six cities, leading to 150 interactions and more than 150 survey responses, 1,000-plus webpage impressions and more than 3,000 social media clicks.

Surveys conducted on site and online found that 90 percent of respondents support a more reliable and efficient network.

"HRT is proactively building a more efficient bus network for the future—one that preserves customer access and mobility while better aligning service schedules with operator and vehicle availability," explains Karen Kitsis, HRT's Chief Planning and Development Officer. "By increasing service on the most popular routes, ensuring our availability of operators matches our network, and growing OnDemand Ridesharing, we are building the blueprint for the future of efficient transit for all in Hampton Roads." ■

HAMPTON ROADS TRANSIT

3400 Victoria Blvd.
Hampton, VA 23661

Ride the Tide for Free to NSU Home Football Games

Once again this football season, Hampton Roads Transit (HRT) is teaming up with the City of Norfolk and Norfolk State University (NSU) to provide free transit options for fans. The Tide light rail will be free two hours before and after each of the five home games at William “Dick” Price Stadium.



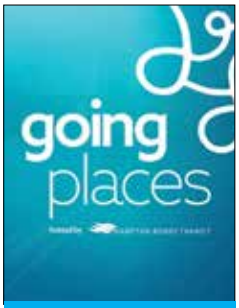
Fans can catch the Tide from one of two free park-and-ride lots – Newtown Road Station or Military Highway Station – or from MacArthur Square Station near free parking available at MacArthur South and North Garages. The closest station to the stadium is Ballentine/Broad Creek, which now includes a new walkway to enhance pedestrian access and safety.

Stay Connected

Want to learn more about HRT? Check out our social media, Beyond the Bus Stop blog, On the Move YouTube show and Going Places podcast.



ON YOUTUBE



ON SPOTIFY & APPLE


BLOG.GOHRT.COM