

Stories of the week

NATIONAL: Enrique Tarrío, Proud Boys leader, sentenced to 22 years for Jan. 6 attack.

INTERNATIONAL: South Korean holding mass protests after a teacher's suicide highlights the country's high pressure work environment.

Richmond GRTC plans on expanding bus routes, services

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"I don't have a car on campus, so I'm pretty reliant on public transportation," said political science student Samantha Mendoza-Hernandez.

Mendoza-Hernandez said she takes the VCU/VUU Eastbound bus route to get to where she needs. VCU/VUU bus route is one of the two buses that goes through the Monroe Park campus.

"I take the bus two to three times a week. It is really useful to get groceries and go to Target," Mendoza-Hernandez said.

Mendoza-Hernandez said the app is useful, but needs some changes because arrival times on the app are often inaccurate.

"The bus stops need a couple of upgrades like more benches, maybe a better sheltering system because I know sometimes when it rains, that thin bar doesn't do enough or do what it is supposed to," Mendoza-Hernandez said.

Fashion design student Franchesca Claros said she used to ride the bus when she didn't have a car on campus.



"I used to work at Jimmy John's downtown, it [the bus] was an easier way for me to transport there," Claros said. "The bus was comfortable, it got me to work and back home, I felt safe taking it."

Claros also said the bus shelters need to be improved.

"There would be a lot of people at the medical [MCV] stop, where people would be waiting in pouring rain and there would not be enough room," Claros said.

Claros said many of her friends do not know that the GRTC is free nor do they have information on how to take the bus.

"I found out [bus route information] from a friend that taught me. I also learned searching for arrival times on my phone," Claros said.

The nonprofit RVA Rapid Transit released its annual State of Transit report, which

Photos by Arrick Wilson

underlines the needs of public transit riders, stakeholders and infrastructure.

"Only 26% of bus stops out of 1,600+ have a bench or shelter," according to the report.

The group advocates for more frequent and expanding routes following the blueprint of the Greater RVA Transit Vision Plan to reach communities in Henrico, Chesterfield and surrounding areas, according to the report.



RVA Rapid Transit wants "every green line to have 15 minute bus service" and two out of five sections have been completed, according to the report.

The Richmond Regional Transportation Planning Organization approved the plan "to create a vision for transit development in the region through 2040," according to the RVA Rapid Transit website.

Keeping the bus lines, or GRTC, free is a major aim, said Richard Hankins, programs and communications manager at RVA Rapid Transit.

"One of the biggest things that they

pointed out is zero fare," Hankins said about bus riders' concerns.

The state provided a grant to the city to support zero fare until 2025, "but it is contingent on a yearly local match" that brings uncertainty every year before its renewal, Hankins said.

Hankins is still optimistic that zero fare is here to stay due to the high cost of maintaining payment infrastructure. The organization's positive

relationship with localities and government entities is encouraging to Hankins, he said.

"I think in so many ways they see us as an arm that we can speak up and provide a voice from a rider's perspective," Hankins said. "We can provide energy and momentum in a way that maybe a governmental organization cannot, highlighting the fervent need for more public transportation across our region."

RVA Rapid Transit has outreach and education programs, including Mobility University, a free, five-week course to "educate and empower bus riders to self-advocate for better public transportation," according to Hankins. Sessions include free dinner and begin Wednesday, Sept. 6 from 5:30 p.m. to 8 p.m. at the Richmond Public Library.

Ashland

Its mission is to advocate "for frequent and far reaching transit in the Richmond region," the website states.



Photo Illustration by Victor Romanko



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