



# DONNA SHAUNESSEY

**Title:** Executive Director  
**Organization:** JAUNT  
**City:** Charlottesville, Va.

A MOTHER WITH MECHANIC'S certification, Donna Shaunesey always had an interest in rural planning — an interest that shifted slightly when she got into transportation. As executive director for 14 years at the award-winning JAUNT, which makes more than 300,000 trips a year in central Virginia, Shaunesey's career evolved out of her planning skills and appreciation for the environment.

With a master's degree in planning from the University of Virginia, Shaunesey wanted to get a job associated with her concern for the environment in relation to planning. During her job hunt, JAUNT was hiring an assistant director who could also serve as a planner since rural Charlottesville, Va., was evolving into a small urban area.

When hired for the assistant director position, Shaunesey won the position over a man from M.I.T. — partially thanks to her auto mechanic's certification from a local vocational school. After 12 years, she then went into city planning for Charlottesville. But, she didn't stay away long. She says that the citizen complaints were too much of a common occurrence.

In 1996, Shaunesey was hired back to JAUNT as executive director.

"At that point, transit was in my blood," she says. "It's a fascinating area, especially for what we do here, because ig and move the page we really are the lifeline for tons of people. About half the people have disabilities and can't get to work or nursing homes, so it's really clear that it's an important function for us — and they're great people to work with."

Shaunesey has nurtured quite the growth for JAUNT. When she was hired, JAUNT owned 12 vehicles that ran Monday through Friday, serving Charlottesville and two counties. Now, with

70 vehicles in its fleet, the organization covers an additional three counties, — totaling around 2,500 square miles — seven days a week.

JAUNT also manages its own facilities and maintenance. "It took us a while to get to this point, but we're grateful," says Shaunesey, who is also president of the **Community Transportation Association of Virginia**.

Despite the recent economic downturn and having to stall pay raises,

the customers at the call center are getting dealt with fairly. Click to drag and move the page

"Some of our folks, our passengers, they call just to talk," she says. "So, we have to find a way to gently deal with that. We have some people who call three times a day."

JAUNT also deals with some unique problems that urban agencies don't have to worry about: tough terrain.

But, enjoying Virginia's outdoors is Shaunesey's pastime. The environment



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JAUNT services have grown in the last couple years. Shaunesey recently hired a new assistant director, who has taken some of the load off her many tasks that range to virtually every end of JAUNT. Sometimes, she is even down in the maintenance shop talking with the mechanics. The tricky part of Shaunesey's job is dealing with six local governments, where each has its own transit focus, such as the seniors in one county and after-school programs in another.

Shaunesey produces board packets for each of the monthly board meetings, supervises the finances and makes sure

is an important aspect to her life, where at one point she canned her own vegetables, raised a dairy cow and made her own cheese. And, mass transit is certainly a preferred form of transportation in keeping a low carbon footprint, which suits Shaunesey well. "You can really help out the environment through transportation," she says. "I've spent so many years telling people to get out of their cars and ride the bus."

One would guess that with her outlook she probably rides public transit to work, but she doesn't. She rides her bicycle.