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**NEWS RELEASE
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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Transit Operators and Mechanics Show Off Their Skills at Annual Bus Competition

At the Virginia State Bus Roadeo, held Sunday, July 18th, in Alexandria, 47 of the best drivers and mechanics from transit systems across the state competed in this spirited battle of the buses. According to officials at the Virginia Transit Association, the purpose of the event is to provide a forum for showcasing the people that keep Virginia moving and to provide an opportunity for operators and mechanics to display their skills and knowledge. The VTA has sponsored this annual event for 11 years.

The components of the roadeo include a written safety exam, professional appearance, and an obstacle course driving test. Operators are given just seven minutes to quickly maneuver a bus through a 12-station course of closely placed cones, tight corners, reverses, and more. As competitors complete each stop, judges measure, evaluate, and give a score to each contestant. According to Sandy Modell, general manager for the Alexandria Transit Company, "The roadeo offers operators a chance to test their professional driving skills that they use every day. It's really a tough course... even for the best of Virginia's best."

In the mechanics competition, engine and air brake skills are tested as well as overall bus maintenance. Eight teams, consisting of three members, compete to diagnose and repair various mechanical problems. For the inspection category, a special "defect bus" is rigged with broken lights, missing wipers, graffiti on seats, loose lug nuts, and the like to see if teams can identify the problems. One member from each team also drives the bus through the obstacle course.

For the 35-foot bus operator category, the winners are: First Place -- Joe Smith, Alexandria Transit Company; Second Place -- James Creamer, Greater Lynchburg Transit Company; and Third Place -- Clarence Jackson, Alexandria Transit Company. For the 40-foot bus operator category, the winners are: First Place -- Herbert Lofton, Tidewater Regional Transit; Second Place -- Calvin Parker, Tidewater Regional Transit; and Third Place -- John Samuel, Peninsula Transportation District Commission. The top scoring operator in the overall competition is Herbert Lofton of Tidewater Regional Transit. The Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation (VDRPT) will sponsor Lofton in the American Public Transportation Association's International Bus Roadeo. It will be held this fall in Orlando, Florida.

The maintenance award winners are: First Place -- Roger Hicks, Kenneth Gore, and Raymond Hicks from Tidewater Regional Transit; Second Place -- Donald Birch, Gene Kennedy, and Johnnie Birch from Greater Lynchburg Transit Company; Third Place -- Steve Fisher, Douglas Agee, and Wayne Thompson from Greater Roanoke Transit Company.

The top scoring team award winners are: Combined Operator and Maintenance Team -- Tidewater Regional Transit; Operator Team -- Alexandria Transit Company; and Maintenance Team -- Tidewater Regional Transit.

"Operators and maintenance employees look forward to this competition every year," states Sandy Modell, ATC general manager. "It provides a great opportunity for them to display their skills and have some fun at the same time. They all work very hard to be eligible to compete in this event."

Participating transit systems included: Alexandria Transit -- DASH, Fairfax Connector, Blacksburg Transit, Charlottesville Transit Service, Greater Lynchburg Transit Company, Greater Richmond Transit Company, Greater Roanoke Transit, Harrisonburg Transit, Peninsula Transportation District Commission -- PENTRAN, Potomac Rappahannock Transportation Commission -- OmniRide, and University of Virginia Transit.

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VTA is a trade association based in Richmond, VA representing transit agencies of all sizes throughout Virginia and businesses that support public transportation. VTA's members provide a wide range of services to the communities in which they operate. www.vatransit.com