

## **MEET FRED, YOUR FREE RIDE. EVERY DAY.**

### **Service helps you get from Point A to Point B in downtown Norfolk**

**By Debbie Messina The Virginian-Pilot Debbie Messina, (757) 446-2588, [debbie.messina@pilotonline.com](mailto:debbie.messina@pilotonline.com)**

#### NORFOLK

Not feeling up to the walk from a parking garage to the show at Chrysler Hall? Call FRED for a ride.

A downpour started while buying groceries and you don't want to wade back to your condo? FRED can give you a lift.

FRED is the newest option for getting around downtown.

Free Ride Every Day is a courtesy shuttle operated by the Downtown Norfolk Council. Basically a road-ready golf cart, FRED can ferry as many as five passengers around downtown.

It's an extension of the escort service already offered by the organization's public service ambassadors through which downtowners can request a walking escort from one location to another.

FRED is a green vehicle – both in its teal color and its environmentally friendly battery power and solar roof.

And it's economical, said Cathy Coleman, DNC president. At less than \$15,000, FRED is half the cost of hiring another ambassador.

"It will be highly visible and will give our workers, visitors and residents an added level of service," Coleman said.

Coleman is aware of only one other U.S. city, Columbia, S.C., with a similar service.

DNC's escort service, which gets about 20 calls a month, started in 1999 mostly for security reasons.

FRED will fill that role but with added convenience, Coleman said.

"We're going to have to monitor and manage this as we introduce it and do our best to meet the needs the people have," she said.

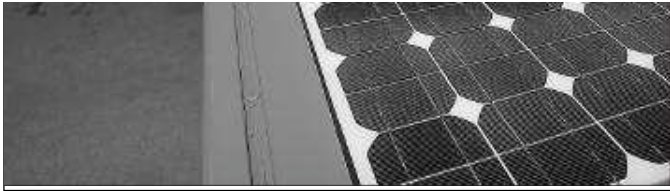
Cathy Grieve, Norfolk Waterside Marriott marketing director, said FRED will be a welcome selling point for convention and leisure customers.

"It's really going to make us stand out against our competition," she said.

The service is available on demand and at no cost by calling (757) 478-7233 from 7:30 a.m. to 10 p.m. Monday to Thursday, from 7:30 a.m. to midnight Friday, from 11 a.m. to midnight Saturday, and from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. Sunday

Trips must originate or end within the boundaries of the 48-block Downtown Improvement District, which is posted on [www.downtownnorfolk.org](http://www.downtownnorfolk.org).





The green vehicles are equipped with a solar panel, above, and are battery operated, at right.



HYUNSOO LEO KIM PHOTOS | THE VIRGINIAN-PILOT Reid Etheridge, left, applies graphics to a courtesy shuttle vehicle as Rod McLeod, director of operations for the Downtown Norfolk Council, reads the operation manual at Ray's Body Shop on Tuesday.



To use FRED to move around downtown Norfolk, just call (757) 478-7233.

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