



Position on the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation's Draft Recommendations for the Washington, D.C. to Richmond Corridor

Executive Summary

Virginians for High Speed Rail (VHSR) strongly supports the objectives of the DC2RVA study.

VHSR also supports the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation's draft recommendations overall, and specifically the recommendations for the Arlington, Northern Virginia, Fredericksburg, and Central Virginia segments of the corridor. We also support the recommendation of further study of the Hanover/Ashland segment to ensure every option is fully evaluated.

VHSR did offer the following recommendations of their own including that Virginia should not cede access to the "A" line around downtown Richmond, which would provide much needed redundancy in the network; and that when the final set of recommendations are released for the DC2RVA corridor that those recommendations list specific near- and intermediate-term projects, along with their anticipated benefits and projected costs to allow for incremental improvements as funding becomes available.

The Commonwealth has been successful in expanding its passenger rail network because of its focused, incremental approach which wisely balances public benefits with public investments. Until such a time that there is a federal rail program with adequate, sustainable, long-term funding, Virginia should maintain this strategy. We believe that the DC2RVA study offers us an opportunity to continue our progress building out our passenger rail network while establishing priorities for when we have an equal and willing federal funding partner.

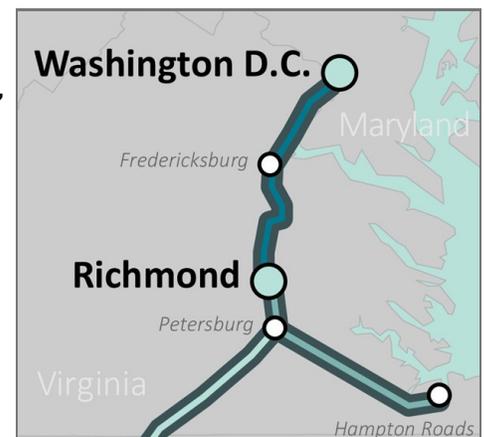
Full Position

The Washington, D.C. to Richmond corridor is critical for the movement of people and freight throughout Virginia and along the entire eastern seaboard. It is a crucial segment of the Southeast High Speed Rail Corridor as well as an important connector to the Northeast Corridor. Improving the Washington to Richmond corridor to high performance rail standards must be a transportation priority for the Commonwealth.

The DC2RVA study is an important part of that process, and **Virginians for High Speed Rail strongly supports the objectives of the DC2RVA study. We also support the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation's draft recommendations overall.**

We support VDRPT's recommendations for the Arlington, Northern Virginia, Fredericksburg, and Central Virginia segments of the corridor. Additionally, we support the recommendation of further study of the Hanover/Ashland segment to ensure every option is fully evaluated.

However, we would like to offer several suggested modifications pertaining to the recommendations for the Richmond region. As a starting point, we understand that service in the Richmond region may never be considered "high-speed," but it should certainly be "high-performance"—meaning that there is reliable, highway-competitive passenger rail service available to multiple types of travelers.



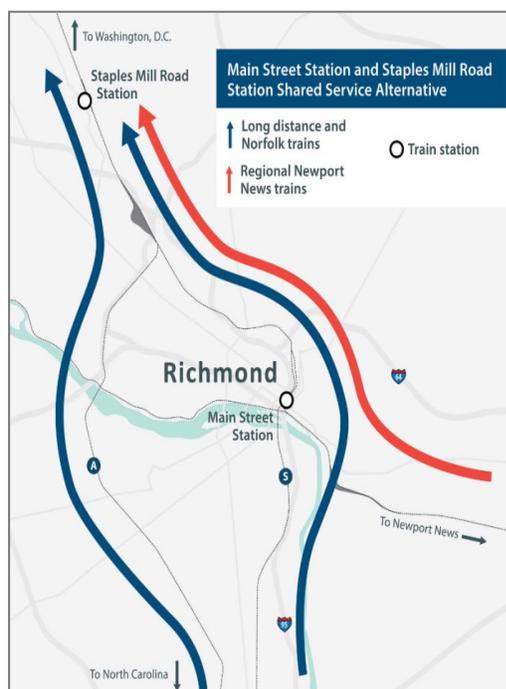
DC2RVA/VDRPT graphic

As a result, we believe that the state should not cede access to the “A” line around downtown Richmond, as the draft recommendations suggest. Keeping access to the “A” line serves three significant purposes.

- First, it offers much needed redundancy in our passenger and freight rail network should some unforeseen occurrence inhibit the movement of trains via the “S” line.
- Second, with a passenger train envisioned to stop at Main Street Station every 38 minutes or so, it may not make sense to route all trains through downtown. Maintaining access to the “A” line will allow the state to incrementally increase routing via the “S” line to Main Street Station for Regional trains heading to Hampton Roads and Southeast Corridor trains. Amtrak’s Auto-train and Long Distance trains are better suited to “A” line routings until the “S” line proves itself from both marketing and operating perspectives. Furthermore, we must resolve conflicts with freight traffic.
- Third, the right to use of the “A” line for passenger trains is grandfathered by the Rail Passenger Service Act of 1970 and is memorialized in 49 USC §24309, which requires CSX maintain the “A” line to the original level of utility and if passenger service is to be relocated upon CSX initiative, the costs of relocation must be fully borne by CSX. If Amtrak voluntarily cedes use of the “A” line, even if at Commonwealth request, CSX no longer has this statutory obligation.

Additionally, we recommend that when the final set of recommendations are released for the DC2RVA corridor that those recommendations list specific near- and intermediate-term projects, along with their anticipated benefits and projected costs. This will help to lessen the sticker shock from the price tag of the overall package of recommendations, highlight opportunities for valuable improvements that can be made without waiting for funding for the entire package, and allow for the completion of discrete pieces of the entire project as funding becomes available. In general, funding for projects should have criteria that can be prioritized, giving preference for safety-related or regulation mandated changes that may have enhanced opportunity for federal partnerships, followed by other factors such as improved on-time performance, passenger travel time savings, and financial performance that considers capital cost, annual operating cost, and increased ridership revenue.

One focal point in the Richmond region should be restoring the “S” line, Centralia to “AY” (Acca Yard), to the level of utility that existed when the former Seaboard Air Line and the Atlantic Coast Line railroads merged and it operated up-to 79 MPH. This project would include considerable new rail, high count crosstie replacement, and surfacing of all existing track; restoration of some track since removed; a new universal crossover in the vicinity of Bells Road; necessary maintenance on the existing James River Bridge; a new crossover in the vicinity of Bone Dry/ Amtrak junction, north of Main Street Station; installation of new signal system with positive train control; replace the grade crossing protection at eleven locations; construction of an adequate platform on the west side of Main Street Station; and direct access of the former Seaboard Air Line, now CSX Bellwood Subdivision, running (2) tracks into the west-side Acca by-pass tracks approaching Staples Mill Station. We anticipate that this project would cost in the range of \$250 million and greatly enhance passenger rail service while continuing toward our objective of high-performance, higher speed rail. All of this would advance the ultimate DC2RVA plan and preclude nothing in the future.



DCRVA/VDRPT Graphic.

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