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Capital Results

*Linking Virginia with **fast, frequent, and reliable** passenger rail service*

December 29, 2015

NEC FUTURE

U.S. DOT Federal Railroad Administration

One Bowling Green, Suite 429

New York, NY 10004

## **RE: NEC Future Tier 1 Draft EIS**

To the NEC Future Project Team:

On behalf of Virginians for High Speed Rail, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to offer our public comments regarding the Federal Railroad Administration's (FRA) NEC Future Tier 1 Draft Environmental Impact Statement.

Virginians for High Speed Rail is a non-profit coalition of citizens, businesses, localities, community organizations, and economic development agencies that educate and advocate for the expansion of fast, frequent, and reliable rail service connecting Virginia's communities to destinations along the east coast for the purpose of increasing the Commonwealth's economic prosperity. We were founded in 1996 as a partnership between the Greater Richmond Chamber of Commerce and the Future of Hampton Roads.

In our previous letter to the NEC Future project team dated April 17, 2013 we stated:

*"...it is imperative that as the NEC Future vision plan is advanced to its Tier 1 completion that it continues to take into account the envisioned service levels included in connected intercity and high speed rail corridors such as the Southeast High Speed Rail Corridor segments extending from Washington to Richmond and Hampton Roads. The Tier 1 E.I.S. for the Richmond to Hampton Roads High Speed Rail Corridor envisions 15 passenger trains initiating and terminating from Newport News and Norfolk connecting Richmond, Washington, New York, and potentially Boston. For the Northeast to get the full benefits of its connectivity to Virginia, any future corridor alignment or enhancements chosen should take into account service levels anticipated by the corridor plans for Washington to Richmond, Richmond to Hampton Roads, and future increases of Regional service to Lynchburg and Roanoke, as well as Raleigh, NC."*

This continues to be our primary focus in submitting comments regarding the draft report.

Virginia's high speed rail corridor which connects Washington, DC; Richmond; and Hampton Roads represents 66.7 percent of the Commonwealth's population; 69.7 percent of our jobs; 49.9 percent of our college students; 9.9 percent of our nation's military personnel; and only 20.4 percent of the state's landmass. The population density along the corridor is nearly 8 times denser than the rest of the state, which has led to numerous transportation issues.

According to the Texas Transportation Institute's 2015 Urban Mobility Report, congestion along the corridor has increased 23.8 percent since 2011. This increase in congestion is partially due to the fact that the corridor has only 33.8 percent of Virginia's road network but 75.4 percent of the state's vehicle miles traveled (VMT). Our air network is not that much better either. The number of flights at airports along the corridor has decreased 39.8 percent since 2000, while the number of passengers per flight has increased 96.7 percent.

This leads me to Virginia's passenger rail network. Over the last decade the number of passengers at stations along the Commonwealth's high speed rail corridor has increased 57.2 percent. Furthermore, the ridership on the Amtrak Northeast Regionals serving the corridor have increased 71.5 percent since 2007. And, in FY 2015 Virginia's Amtrak trains along the corridor have taken an estimated 149 million VMTs off of Virginia's road network.

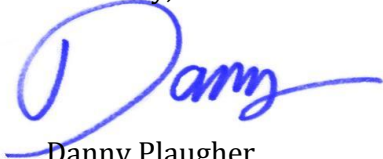
The reason that I provided this data is because Virginians are increasingly left with few options to travel to the Northeast. Our citizens must choose between congested roads, packed flights, and too few trains. With the unlikelihood of major roadway expansions or dramatic increases in the number of airlines and flights serving our airports, high speed passenger rail connecting Virginia to destinations along the Northeast offers our citizens the best opportunity for major improvements.

In regards to the NEC Future Tier 1 Draft EIS, we support **Alternative 3: Transform**. Not only does this alternative move 141 million annual trips from other modes to passenger rail, but it brings the NEC to a state of good repair which is vital to the quality of service to and from Virginia. Further, it "provides excess capacity at all locations along the corridor to accommodate additional off-corridor trips and future growth post-2040."

We believe that Alternative 3 is the best opportunity for not only the currently planned expansion of service along the Washington-Richmond-Hampton Roads higher speed rail corridor, but it will allow for even further growth from Virginia and the Southeast.

Thank you once again for allowing Virginians for High Speed Rail to offer our public comments.

Sincerely,



Danny Plaugher  
Executive Director