



July 16, 2010

The Honorable Matt Strader
Assistant Secretary
Office of the Secretary of Transportation
Commonwealth of Virginia
P.O. Box 1475
Richmond, Virginia 23218

Dear Asst. Secretary Strader:

Let me begin by thanking you for the opportunity to comment on your administration's Transportation Government Reform Initiatives. Per the comment form that was included in your packet, you will find the initiative number, title, and our comments regarding the various proposals that we would like to formally comment on.

Re: State Initiatives

Initiative 102: Rail Advisory Board, statute §33.1-391.3:1

We support giving the Rail Advisory Board (RAB) more authority to develop and prioritize projects in partnership with the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation and in formulating the Virginia State Rail Plan. We believe these changes are vital to the continued progress our Commonwealth is making towards advancing intercity and high speed passenger rail.

Initiative 103: Rail Enhancement Fund, statute §33.1-221.1:1.1

We support expanding the opportunities by which Virginia's Rail Enhancement Fund (REF) can be used to better invest public dollars in public-public partnerships. Giving the Commonwealth Transportation Board (CTB) the authority to waive or reduce the 30 percent local match requirement will allow for the construction of rail projects that solely focus on improving and expanding intercity and high speed passenger rail. Furthermore, giving the CTB the ability to leverage bonds against the REF will allow Virginia to match the 80 percent federal high speed funding grants to advance high speed and intercity passenger rail without the need for new or expanded taxes or fees. Lastly, we support amending of the REF to allow for the operation of intercity passenger trains.

Re: Federal Initiatives

Initiative 22: Repeal §209 of Public Law No. 110-432, Division B

We support the repeal of section 209 of the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act of 2008 that would force states such as Virginia to pay for all existing Amtrak regional intercity passenger rail service that is currently covered by Amtrak. This forces an undue burden on the states during difficult economic times. Only future expansions of regional corridor intercity passenger rail trains should be supported by state-federal partnerships.

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Once again, thank you for the opportunity to comment on these potential statute changes. I appreciate your consideration of these comments. If I can be of any assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Daniel L. Plaugher
Executive Director
Virginians for High Speed Rail