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Mr. Vince Urbano, PE
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City of Newport News
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RE: Newport News Transportation Center Project Environmental Assessment

Dear Mr. Urbano:

On behalf of the board of directors of Virginians for High Speed Rail (VHSR), I would like to thank you for the opportunity to offer our public comments regarding the Federal Highway Administration's Newport News Transportation Center Project Environmental Assessment. VHSR is a non-profit coalition of citizens, businesses, localities, community organizations, and economic development agencies founded in 1994 to educate and advocate for the expansion of fast, frequent, and reliable rail service connecting Virginia's communities to destinations along the east coast.

One of our primary objectives is to ensure that any new station that is proposed for intercity passenger rail travel takes into account the future ridership increases that come from expanded service. Over the last decade more than \$438 million has been invested in Virginia's passenger rail network which has resulted in 76% of Virginians and 82% of our jobs having access to new, expanded, and improved passenger rail service. These investments have increased the state's passenger rail service by 20% which has led to a boost in ridership of 77% during that same time period. The current Newport News station itself has seen a 27% increase in ridership over the last decade which is especially impressive given the numerous challenges that you have highlighted in your report as well as the addition of the new Amtrak regional service to South Hampton Roads.

Further, as of this letter, the Newport News Amtrak regional trains operate over the top regional corridor (Boston to Newport News) in Amtrak's entire network. While their on-time performance and reliability has much to be desired, they do make a profit of \$0.056 per seat mile. This opens up the possibility of much more additional service in the future. Today, there are 18 Amtrak Regional trains which stop in Washington and never proceed south into Virginia. We believe that there will be a great opportunity to not only expand a third daily Amtrak regional train down the Peninsula, but increase service even more as customer demand dictates if the capacity is available at the station and the connecting rail corridor.

We view Newport News, along with Norfolk, as the natural southern terminus of the Northeast Corridor which stretches from Boston to New York, Washington, then down to Richmond and Hampton Roads. The portion within Virginia known as the urban crescent has seen its population grow 42% over the last 25 years while their highways have only increased by 34% and the number of flights at their airports has decreased 25%. Additionally, over the last four years congestion has increased 24% with the average commuter along Virginia's urban crescent now wasting 53.7 hours annually traveling to/from work or stuck in traffic.

Looking out over the next 25 years, the urban crescent will add another 1.6 million residents, 1.4 million automobiles, and see vehicle miles traveled projected to increase by 23%. This will leave the state with two choices, attempt to continue to pave our way out of traffic or diversify our transportation network. We believe that passenger rail will continue to provide an important choice to the citizens of the Peninsula, and a multi-modal transportation hub in Newport News will go a long way to providing the connectivity to the Peninsula's citizens.

Therefore, after our review of your environmental assessment, **we support your preferred site at Bland Boulevard and alternative option 7.**

The new multi-modal transportation station at Bland Boulevard will fix a lot of the operational issues that presently plague Amtrak and CSX trains along the Peninsula, it will be ADA compliant, and it will have the onsite waiting space to handle the passenger loads that will come with additional passenger rail service.

Our support for alternative option 7 is because of the additional capacity that comes from a dual-track service area. We believe this is vital for the future of the new station as it will allow for the potential of even more intercity passenger rail service. It is always easier to plan for capacity before the station is built, than try to build it after it is completed. And, limited capacity for servicing trains can be a reason to slow the expansion of service as we've seen in Lynchburg where their 2nd anticipated Amtrak regional train cannot be launched until their 1st regional train is extended to Roanoke. This is due to the lack of space to service multiple passenger trains at the same time, which is something that we don't want to see happen in Newport News.

Thank you again for consideration of our comments. If we can be of any assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me at Danny@vhsr.com.

Regards,



Danny Plaugher
Executive Director