



August 20, 2008

Matthew O. Tucker
Director
Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation
PO Box 590
Richmond, Virginia 23218

Dear Director Tucker:

We would like to congratulate you and your staff for putting together the first Statewide Rail Plan (Rail Plan) in many years. This is a huge step in the right direction. With record fuel prices and capacity limitations on our aging and under invested in infrastructure across all modes of transportation, now is the time to begin investing in our rail network.

Virginians for High Speed Rail believes the Rail Plan is a good first step forward; however without a funding strategy or action plan its ability to further the public conversation is limited. With that being said, we will make some suggestions for the next draft of the Rail Plan. First, is the lack of a clear vision for Virginia and second, is the use of various facts, figures, and data.

With the project driven nature of the Rail Plan, it does not create a vision of what Virginia imagines rail will look like or should look like in 2035. While the draft Rail Plan does a good job of compiling the various studies that have been released over the last several years it does not give a long term vision for rail in Virginia. With a 2035 outlook it should create a goal or carrot for our fellow citizens and elected leaders to follow.

Since the Rail Plan has a 27 year time frame, it needs to address how best to connect Southern Hampton Roads by passenger rail. With around 1,067,739 Virginians (13.97% of Virginia's population) living in the greater Southern Hampton Roads area, connecting them to the Urban Crescent Express should be a top priority.

Finally, in terms of vision, how does our Rail Plan fit into the broader picture? How does it work with the state rail plans of our neighboring states? Does Virginia envision extending the TransDominion Express into North Carolina? Does the expansion of the Virginia Railway Express (VRE) take into account the potential capacity limitations of Union Station in Washington, DC and the possible expansion of MARC in Maryland? Does Virginia's plan fit into a national vision for rail? These are important questions that future versions of the Rail Plan should answer.

As for the use of facts and figures in the Rail Plan, in **figure 3-14** on page 35 the Amtrak statistics for FY 2007 ridership are cut exactly in half from 929,594 to 464,797. Our assumption

is that the Rail Plan assumes that every Amtrak trip is a round trip and that no other method of transportation is used for to or from travel. We are wondering if the statistics in **figure 2-3** on page 9 regarding usage of Virginia's interstates have been altered as well? Does that graph and data assume that every vehicle heading one direction on the interstate must return along the same route and are those numbers reflective of that assumption? If not, we suggest that all figures and data be comparable across all modes of transportation so that apples can be compared to apples.

In the estimates of needed investment for the various facets of Virginia's rail system, \$1.8 billion is attributed to freight rail, \$67.8 million for the Virginia ports, and the largest sum \$2.9 billion for passenger rail and high speed rail.

Of the \$2.9 billion in needed investment for Virginia's passenger and high speed rail corridors, \$759.25 million is directly attributed to VRE based projects. However a quick calculation actually suggests that only between \$80 to \$100 million is related to VRE owned infrastructure, primarily the building or upgrading of rail stations. The remaining \$659 to \$679 million is needed to upgrade freight rail owned infrastructure. While we believe that these investments are needed, we see attributing such a large cost primarily to a commuter rail service that runs several hours a day for only five days a week as misleading.

Similarly, the Urban Crescent Express and TransDominion Express and their respective \$757 and \$206 million in needed investment should be broken down into what is invested in the freight rail owned infrastructure and what is directed to infrastructure and equipment that will be owned by the Commonwealth.

We understand that the Rail Plan states that there are some investment overlaps in various corridors and that the figures represent the higher end of the ball park estimates, however a true accounting will give our fellow citizens and our elected leaders the ability to properly discern where our tax dollars are being invested.

We again congratulate you and your staff on your hard work compiling this Rail Plan and your shovels in the ground philosophy. We look forward to continuing to work together to promote the expansion of rail in Virginia.

Sincerely,

Virginians for High Speed Rail