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VHSR SUPPORTS EMERGING HIGH-SPEED RAIL TO NORFOLK AND NEWPORT NEWS

Richmond, Virginia – Virginians for High Speed Rail (VHSR), the Commonwealth’s leading rail advocacy group, is urging federal and state rail authorities to improve and expand conventional rail service to both sides of Hampton Roads as the first step towards upgrading both Hampton Roads corridors to Emerging High Speed Rail.

VHSR, a non-profit coalition of citizens, localities, economic development agencies, community organizations and businesses, has been reviewing and helping to lay the groundwork for improved rail service in the state since the mid-1990s.

The organization’s Board of Directors, made up of community and business leaders, including former executives from four different railroads, unanimously approved the following statement:

Virginians for High Speed Rail supports the improvements necessary to upgrade both Hampton Roads Corridors (Richmond-Newport News and Richmond-Norfolk) to Emerging High-Speed Rail status of 90 mph track speed, a minimum 90 percent on-time performance level, and increased passenger rail service to both corridors that can be done incrementally; with the first steps being expanding conventional passenger rail service to Norfolk via the Route 460 rail corridor and improving the on-time performance of the passenger trains currently serving Williamsburg and Newport News.

The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) has defined Emerging High-Speed Rail as reasonably expected to reach 90 mph and a 90 percent on-time performance with increased service on a shared use corridor including both freight and commuter rail service.

“The FRA has stated the need for regional cooperation and support for any high-speed rail corridor plan for federal funding,” stated Meredith Richards of Charlottesville, President of Virginians for High Speed Rail. She continued: *“Our plan supports reasonable improvements along two corridors that would vastly improve transportation options for their citizens. High-speed rail is about more than just speed, it is about fast, frequent, and reliable passenger rail service from Richmond to Newport News and Norfolk that will serve all of Hampton Roads.”*

“The current passenger rail service along the Peninsula averages less than a 50 percent on-time performance level,” said former VHSR President Thomas G. Tingle, who is the President of Guernsey Tingle Architects in Williamsburg. *“As a business owner, that is unacceptable. Our plan brings improved reliability and increased service to both sides of the James, allowing the best use of limited resources.”*

“Increased reliability and frequency is key, we need passenger rail service that runs on time more than 50 percent of the time and runs when the public needs it to run” observed Hampton’s Ann Hunnicutt, VHSR’s Vice-President and President of Westwood Contractors, Inc.

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*“It’s about jobs. We need better transportation options for both our tourist community and our citizens to promote economic development,” commented Henry “Sandy” Harris III, Chairman of the Norfolk Economic Development Authority, VHSR Director, and portfolio manager at Palladium Partners. “*South Hampton Roads is the most populous region in Virginia not served by passenger rail. We need to extend intercity passenger rail service from Richmond to Norfolk to manage future growth. It’s clear that our highways cannot do the job alone.*”*

*“Tourism is very important for the local economy of Greater Williamsburg” stated Robert “Bob” Hershberger, Executive Vice-President of the Greater Williamsburg Chamber & Tourism Alliance and VHSR Director. “*We need fast, frequent, and reliable passenger rail service to Williamsburg so that people can visit all the attractions throughout their destination without the hassle of driving and parking. It will do wonders for our economy.*”*

*“There are currently a dozen Northeast Regional Amtrak trains that begin in Washington and head north which could be extended to serve Virginia” said former State Senator Wiley F. Mitchell Jr., who just completed his term as Chairman of the Commonwealth’s Rail Advisory Board and serves as a VHSR Director. “*I can imagine one day having both Norfolk and Newport News the terminals for improved passenger rail service in the northeast corridor. A high-speed rail corridor is nice, but first we need increased service that is reliable to get a true public benefit for our investment.*”*

Virginians for High Speed Rail (VHSR) is a non-profit 501(C) (3) coalition of citizens, localities, economic development agencies, community organizations, and businesses that educate and advocate for the improvement and expansion of rail service in Virginia. For more information visit www.vhsr.com.

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