



# EXPANDING VIRGINIA'S PASSENGER RAIL CONNECTING THE BLUE RIDGE TO THE BEACH WITH THE COMMONWEALTH CORRIDOR

Passenger rail offers a number of important benefits, including reducing congestion, giving Virginians greater transportation choices, increasing energy efficiency, cutting pollution, and improving economic competitiveness. Recognizing the many benefits of passenger rail, Virginia became the first state in the nation with a dedicated passenger rail fund with strong bipartisan support. Rail ridership has increased significantly over the past decade, demonstrating that Virginians want more train service.

Virginia currently is served by 13 Amtrak regional and national trains that connect 21 rail stations, along with two bus-to-train stops, and it hosts some of the best financially performing regional corridors (corridors of 750 miles or less) in Amtrak's entire network.<sup>1</sup> However, rail travel within Virginia is limited by the lack of east-west routes, which not only prevents passengers wishing to travel across the state but also prevents many people who want to travel north-south from using rail.



## THE COMMONWEALTH CORRIDOR & VIRGINIA'S PASSENGER RAIL NETWORK



### A VISION FOR THE FUTURE

It is crucial to build upon recent success by improving and expanding Virginia's passenger rail service. Over the next decade, we recommend tripling the amount of passenger rail service we have, reducing trip times by up to 35 percent, increasing on-time reliability to over 90 percent, and expanding passenger rail service to reach 85 percent of Virginians.<sup>2</sup>

One of the most important opportunities to expand Virginia's passenger rail is to provide intra-state service along a proposed Commonwealth Corridor that would run from the Blue Ridge to the Beach.

**“To travel by train from Roanoke to Norfolk today would take 16 hours—including a 6-hour layover in Washington, D.C.”**



### WHAT IS THE COMMONWEALTH CORRIDOR?

The Commonwealth Corridor is primarily an east-west passenger rail route that would link Christiansburg and the New River Valley with Hampton Roads, through Roanoke, Lynchburg, Charlottesville and Richmond.

More specifically, we envision trains using the Norfolk Southern corridor from Christiansburg to Charlottesville, then the Buckingham Branch railroad to Doswell, where they will shift to CSX's tracks through Richmond. From there, some of the trains would continue down the Peninsula to Williamsburg and on to Newport News to complete the 305-mile northern route. Other trains would continue on to Petersburg and from there to Norfolk (and a bus connection to Virginia Beach) on Norfolk Southern's Route 460 corridor for the 340-mile southern route.

In addition, riders can transfer in Charlottesville or in Richmond to catch Virginia's north-south trains running to a total of 10 other stations in Virginia, to Washington DC and the northeast, or on to the Southeast—connecting to the numerous destinations along those routes.

This proposal is a first step. In the future, additional stops (e.g. Bower's Hill or Bedford) may be added or the corridor may be extended (e.g. to Bristol), as this vision is turned into reality.

## WHY LAUNCH THIS NEW SERVICE?

### **It would provide needed east-west passenger service**

Over the last two plus decades, Virginia has increased passenger rail service by 69 percent, which has resulted in ridership growing by 75 percent.<sup>3</sup> However, almost all of the additional service has been on our north-south corridors. Expanding service on a cross-state corridor would be a boon for passenger rail, and would likely grow our annual ridership by upwards of 20 percent.<sup>4</sup>

### **It would harness changing demographics and demand**

Transportation choices are shifting with certain key demographic trends. One in four millennial Virginians (those born between 1981 and 1996) who are eligible to drive do not have a driver's license. And the millennials who do have a license are driving less than previous generations. On the other end of the age spectrum, nearly 13 percent of Virginians over the age of 65 no longer possess a driver's license and need more transportation options.

### **It would connect 65 percent of Virginia's higher education students**

The Commonwealth Corridor would directly connect 35 higher education institutions and 330,000 college students. Further, it would connect an additional 105,000 students via a simple transfer to one of our other trains.

### **It would make our higher education institutions more attractive**

Attendance at our higher education institutions has declined over three percent during the last five years.<sup>5</sup> Increasing passenger rail service to our educational centers would give our colleges and universities one more selling point. And with nearly 1 out of every 5 higher education students coming from out of state,<sup>6</sup> the service would give those students without an automobile greater access to the rest of the Commonwealth.

### **It would serve millions of Virginians and jobs**

The corridor would serve nearly 3.7 million Virginians who live within 20 miles of a rail station and improve transportation connectivity to more than 45 percent of the Commonwealth's jobs.

### **It would expand connectivity to our state's military bases**

The corridor would improve transportation connectivity for 17 of Virginia's military installations and over 240,000 members of the military and support staff.<sup>7</sup>

### **It would be an economic boon for tourism**

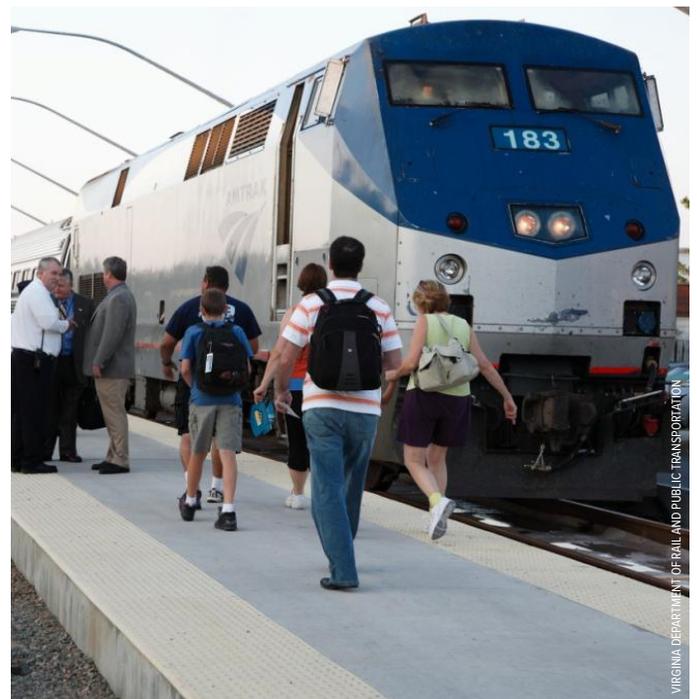
The average tourist spends over \$533 during their visit.<sup>8</sup> The expansion of a cross-state passenger rail corridor would encourage Virginians and out-of-state tourists to visit other parts of the state that are not easily accessible by train today, generating increased leisure and economic opportunities.

### **It would benefit Virginia's environment**

Each year, the Commonwealth Corridor could eliminate the need to drive over 37 million passenger miles,<sup>9</sup> cut fuel consumption by nearly 800,000 gallons<sup>10</sup> and reduce airborne carbon pollution by 15.4 million pounds.<sup>11</sup>

### **It would decrease traffic on our roadways**

By moving thousands of cross-state trips from the automobile to the train, the Commonwealth Corridor would help reduce traffic on our roadways and save Virginia taxpayers and drivers millions of dollars in reduced roadway and vehicle maintenance costs.<sup>12</sup>



## WHAT WILL IT TAKE?

The last cross-state train, Amtrak's Hilltopper, stopped service nearly four decades ago. Since then, every intercity passenger train in Virginia has primarily operated on a north-south route. To travel by train from Roanoke to Norfolk today would take 16 hours—including a 6-hour layover in Washington, DC.

The defining feature of the Commonwealth Corridor is its cross-state nature. To make this proposed service a reality, we would need to use some segments of railroad that don't handle passenger traffic today, including the Norfolk Southern segment from Roanoke to Christiansburg and the Buckingham Branch segment from Charlottesville to Richmond.

These segments of track would have to be upgraded to passenger rail standards, which can be expensive. In addition, on all of the segments owned by private railroads—including those that do not require upgrades—we would need to "purchase" train slots to reserve space on those corridors. Negotiating with the private railroads to obtain such slots can sometimes be challenging.

Furthermore, due to the limited amount of equipment Amtrak currently has, Virginia may need to purchase its own train sets or partner with Amtrak to purchase and/or rehabilitate enough engines and passenger cars to operate the service. The Commonwealth has partnered with Amtrak to rehabilitate unused train equipment in other instances, which has so far been successful.

## MOVING FORWARD

There is pent up demand for cross-state passenger rail service.

To move forward to address this demand, the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation needs to do a feasibility study of a cross-state corridor and determine both the anticipated demand for such service and the likely steps and costs to launch and operate the Commonwealth Corridor service.

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### FOR MORE INFORMATION & UPDATES

Visit [CommonwealthCorridor.com](http://CommonwealthCorridor.com) or contact:

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<sup>1</sup><https://www.amtrak.com/content/dam/projects/dotcom/english/public/documents/corporate/monthlyperformancereports/2018/Amtrak-Monthly-Performance-Report-September-2018.pdf>

<sup>2</sup>See, *Virginia's Passenger Trains: Building on Success*, [http://www.vhsr.com/sites/default/files/2018-01/VA\\_Rail\\_Report\\_Print.pdf](http://www.vhsr.com/sites/default/files/2018-01/VA_Rail_Report_Print.pdf)

<sup>3</sup>As measured by route miles, mapped by Virginians for High Speed Rail.

<sup>4</sup>Based on estimates utilizing ridership statistics from North Carolina's intra-state Piedmont trains, we estimate that the baseline ridership would be 200,000 annual trips.

<sup>5</sup>[http://research.schev.edu/enrollment/E2\\_Report.asp](http://research.schev.edu/enrollment/E2_Report.asp)

<sup>6</sup>[http://research.schev.edu/enrollment/E19\\_Report.asp](http://research.schev.edu/enrollment/E19_Report.asp)

<sup>7</sup><https://download.militaryonesource.mil/12038/MOS/Reports/2016-Demographics-Report.pdf>

<sup>8</sup>[https://www.vatc.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Leisure\\_TripProfile\\_FY2018.pdf](https://www.vatc.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Leisure_TripProfile_FY2018.pdf)

<sup>9</sup>We estimate that the average trip on the Commonwealth Corridor would be 186.5 miles.

<sup>10</sup>According to Amtrak and the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Amtrak trains use 2,406 fewer BTUs per passenger mile than the average automobile. The average gallon of gas equals about 114,000 BTUs.

<sup>11</sup>According to the U.S. Energy Information Administration, 19.6 pounds of carbon pollution are released by burning a gallon of gas (See [https://www.eia.gov/energyexplained/index.php?page=gasoline\\_environment](https://www.eia.gov/energyexplained/index.php?page=gasoline_environment)).

<sup>12</sup>[https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/policyinformation/statistics/2016/AAA\\_Your\\_Driving\\_Costs\\_\(2018\)\\_https://exchange.aaa.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/18-0090\\_2018-Your-Driving-Costs-Brochure\\_FNL-Lo-5-2.pdf](https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/policyinformation/statistics/2016/AAA_Your_Driving_Costs_(2018)_https://exchange.aaa.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/18-0090_2018-Your-Driving-Costs-Brochure_FNL-Lo-5-2.pdf)