



COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

The Committee on Environment, Public Works, and Transportation
DDOT Budget Oversight Hearing

Statement of
Monte Edwards

On behalf of
The Committee of 100 on the Federal City
Wednesday, April 25, 2012

The Committee of 100 on the Federal City (C100) requests that the Council include in the budget for the Department of Transportation funds sufficient to study how the expansion of rail freight operations will affect commuter and passenger rail operations over the shared rail facilities in SW Washington, including the Long Bridge. The C100 made a similar request last week in the Office of Planning budget oversight hearing recommending a joint Office of Planning/Department of Transportation (DDOT) study.

Impact of Increased Freight Traffic on Passenger Train Operations

CSX is proposing to reconstruct the single-track freight tunnel that crosses the Capitol Hill Historic District under Virginia Avenue SE from 2nd Street to 11th Street. CSX is seeking approval to widen the tunnel to accommodate two sets of rail tracks, and to increase its clearance to accommodate double-stacked container freight trains. Its goal is to expand its capacity to carry freight through Washington, DC to points south and north.



Currently, the Virginia Avenue tunnel sets the limit on CSX's carrying capacity along this route. But increasing the capacity of the tunnel will simply relocate the route's bottleneck to the Long Bridge, a place where passenger rail competes with freight trains and where CSX, by virtue of its ownership of the bridge, will be in a position to limit the number of passenger trains with access to it. *Given that the Long Bridge is the only Potomac River rail crossing within 70 miles of Washington, DC, restriction of its use by passenger trains is likely to have a devastating impact on commuter rail.*



DDOT has received a grant from the National Capitol Region Transportation Planning Board that includes \$2.9 million from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act and \$100,000 from CSX to examine the structural integrity and feasibility of adding additional capacity to the Long Bridge. The C100 urges that examination include a focus on commuter rail and passenger rail operations, as well as freight operations.

Planning for Imminent Changes in Freight Rail Needs and Their Impacts on Passenger Trains

East Coast freight traffic is expected to increase dramatically starting in 2015 when the widening and deepening of the Panama Canal will result a greater number and much larger container ships being able to use the Canal. This will significantly impact CSX because Norfolk, New York and Baltimore will be the only East Coast ports that can accommodate the larger container ships. Reconstruction of the Virginia Avenue tunnel will enable CSX to transport a greatly increased level of goods. But if the capacity of the Long Bridge isn't expanded as the capacity of the Virginia Avenue tunnel increases, then any major expansion of freight service will inevitably come at the expense of passenger rail service. Already commuter rail capacity is constrained: VRE's Operating Agreement with CSX prohibits any increase in commuter train frequencies until the rail corridor from

Fredericksburg to Washington is triple-tracked: either by adding a third track on the Long Bridge or by constructing an additional Potomac River rail crossing. Currently about 90 trains a day cross the Potomac on the Long Bridge. Twenty-eight of those trains are CSX trains that also use the Virginia Avenue tunnel, and the rest are AMTRAK and VRE trains that end or originate at Union Station.

No one has evaluated the impact of increased freight trains on passenger train capacity. Since the increased capacity of the reconstructed Virginia Avenue tunnel is what will allow the increase in freight traffic, we need a comprehensive evaluation of projected increased CSX freight traffic on the rail tracks in the SW and SE quadrants of our City.

That evaluation needs to examine increasing commuter and passenger rail capacity to reduce dependency on automobiles. That evaluation needs to address the present and projected passenger train operations of AMTRAK and VRE along the rail tracks and the Long Bridge that are shared with CSX, VRE and AMTRAK.

The Need for a Joint Study by DDOT and the Office of Planning

The Office of Planning has developed the Maryland Avenue, SW Plan that examines the rail tracks in that area, a part of which includes an expanded VRE commuter station at L'Enfant Plaza. But increased rail commuting, despite its obvious environmental and social benefits, will not become a reality until VRE is able to increase the frequency of commuter trains. And that number is constrained by the capacity of the Long Bridge. It appears there is an absence of systematic coordinated review and oversight of the Virginia Avenue Tunnel reconstruction, the Maryland Avenue Plan, and now, the Long Bridge Study. The initiatives address different segments of the same railroad tracks. But it's all one transportation system. It needs to be evaluated using the transportation expertise of DDOT together with the planning expertise of the Office of Planning. The issues involve more than transportation – they are about repairing and restoring the urban fabric, advancing the Mayors' 20-Year Vision of Sustainability, as well as a significant economic development investment in the City that requires the expertise of the Office of Planning

DC's ability to remain competitive as a regional job center and to handle the daily influx of workers in a sustainable way depends on our ability to expand commuter rail and specifically commuter rail from Virginia. The study of the Long Bridge requires a careful weighing of the competing interests of passenger and freight rail operations. A coordinated, comprehensive, joint planning effort by DDOT and the Office of Planning is needed to enhance AMTRAK, VRE and CSX rail service and optimize the greatest public benefit from their operations.