The Committee of 100 on the Federal City

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METROPOLITAN WASHINGTON COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS

Transportation Planning Board

Statement of

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On behalf of

The Committee of 100 on the Federal City

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The Committee of 100 on the Federal City is pleased to present comments and recommendations concerning the importance of commuter rail in alleviating traffic congestion. Everyone can agree that automobile traffic is a problem in DC. Right now, two-thirds of the cars on DC's streets during rush hour are from out of state. As our regional population grows, and as DC gears up to create new jobs, we must find alternatives to move more commuters in and out of the city. Increasing commuter car trips isn't sustainable.[1] DC needs to better accommodate our existing commuters and keep adding jobs without adding cars.

Increasing commuter rail is essential.

One thing that gets overlooked in the discussion of various zoning, transportation and parking proposals is that two-thirds of the cars on DC's streets during rush hour are from out of state and those cars impose increasing demands on parking and pressures on congestion. Of US cities with more than 100,000 residents, DC has the highest daytime percentage increase in population due to commuters, and in terms of absolute numbers of people coming into the city each workday, we're second only to Manhattan. Our car problem is largely a commuter problem and it's not one we can solve simply by helping people move around within the city. Our major challenge is getting large numbers of people in and out of the city efficiently. And it's a problem that will only get bigger if DC continues to add new jobs.

In terms of the percentage of those commuters using cars, trucks or vans, DC again has the highest percentage at 54%, compared to Manhattan at 13% and Boston at 50%. DC is the lowest in the use of commuter rail: DC 2.8%, Manhattan 11% and Boston 8%. Manhattan has just under three times the number of commuters coming in each day as

[1] As the city nears the end of the 11th Street Bridge reconstruction, thousands of additional cars, trucks and vans are already moving into and out of the city each day.

DC does, but more than 12 times as many traveling by commuter rail[2]. The MoveDC initiative recognizes rail, but the focus is on freight, not passenger and commuter rail. That needs to change, and needs to encompass MARC and VRE, as well as Amtrak. [3]

DC can be the regional leader in calling for expanding the capacity of passenger and commuter rail. How can we expand capacity? The obvious way is to separate freight and passenger rail operations in Southwest by building an additional Potomac River rail crossing to route freight traffic around Southwest and thereby enable existing rail facilities to accommodate greatly expanded commuter rail.

Constraints:

The constraints that restrict increasing commuter and passenger rail are considerable:

- River crossings. Currently, freight, passenger and commuter trains compete to use the Long Bridge, the only Potomac River rail crossing within 70 miles, and also compete in sharing rail tracks in Southwest (SW). The proposed rebuilding of the Virginia Avenue Tunnel will greatly increase CSX freight traffic as a result of the expansion of the Panama Canal and the capacity of Norfolk, Baltimore and New York to accommodate those larger container ships. But freight trains will still have to come across the Potomac River.
- CSX Restrictions. The current operating agreement for the Potomac River rail crossing at the Long Bridge precludes any increase in the frequency of VRE commuter trains. In the future, with the increase in freight traffic, that competition will increase, and unless there is a new rail river crossing, commuter rail traffic will be decreased. CSX refuses to disclose their expected increase in freight traffic, so the amount of additional river crossing capacity is not known.
- Electric versus Diesel. MARC's Penn Line is electric, the Brunswick Line (that operates on CSX tracks) is diesel and VRE is diesel (as required by CSX). Because

[2] US Census Bureau, 2007-2011 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates:

	Total Commuters	Work in Place of Residence	Commute by Car/Truck/Van	Commute by Railroad
District of Columbia	773,735	220,409	420,454	21,523
Manhattan	2,334,100	769,884	321,070	270,690
Boston	555,227	209,100	278,990	44,295

[3] The MoveDC Plan Element on Freight, Maritime, and Railroads currently states:
"This element will evaluate the needs of freight in the District, its impacts to the transportation system, and recommendations for freight. In this element, data, facility, and route information will be evaluated to better understand the short- and long-term needs of freight, whether on rail or road. In addition, in the railroads section of this element, passenger as well as freight railroad needs will be evaluated based on Amtrak and freight railroad plans. Recommendations of this element will focus on maintaining efficient and effective freight access in and through the District, whether it is carried on road or by rail. Recommendations also will identify where coordination is needed between this element and others to reduce the impact of freight and other transportation modes on freight, within the transportation system. Freight and rail recommendations will be integrated with other plan elements."

of the lack of electric catenaries in SW, AMTRAK has to change locomotives at Union Station to use diesel to the south and electric to the north. Electrification of the tracks south of Union Station is desirable for passenger and commuter trains, but opposed by CSX because of possible interference with their planned double-stacked container trains.

• Operational Restrictions. CSX designs their rail lines for freight loads, not for passenger loads. Freight operations are typically slower and less time critical compared to passenger rail. As a result, signaling, scheduling, and basically all operations are optimized for CSX's freight operations. Rail operations would avoid conflicts and inefficiencies associated with the Long Bridge and shared rail operations in SW if commuter/passenger and freight rail were operated on separate networks.

Conclusion:

We can't solve our car problem unless we find a different way to get lots of people in and out of the city to work everyday. The congestion of the streets and bridges because of automobiles, trucks and buses is painfully obvious, and Metro is at or near capacity. By removing the constraints now imposed on commuter and passenger rail, we can move a lot more people into and out of the city. The major constraint is the combined freight and passenger/commuter rail operations in Southwest together with the capacity limitations of a single rail river crossing that today precludes any increase in the amount of commuter traffic. In the future, that problem will be greatly magnified, and we know additional commuter rail capacity will be needed.

We need to figure out how to separate passenger and freight rail operation in Southwest and provide an additional Potomac River rail crossing. Most importantly, the study area for the Long Bridge Study needs to be expanded to address separating freight and passenger/commuter rail operations