The Committee of 100 on the Federal City

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COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

Committee on Public Works and Transportation
MoveDC Multi-Modal Long Range Transportation Plan

Statement of Monte Edwards

On behalf of The Committee of 100 on the Federal City
June 27, 2014

I am Monte Edwards, Vice Chair of the Committee of 100 on the Federal City. I appreciate this opportunity to comment on the transit and freight chapters of the draft *MoveDC Multi-Modal Long Range Transportation Plan.*

The moveDC draft provides no evaluation of the capabilities of the different transit modes to serve projected growth in ridership. This is essential, particularly for commuter rail. MARC, VRE and Amtrak-Virginia are the commuter rail services operating between DC and communities in Maryland and Virginia. According to moveDC, MARC serves about 30,000 daily passengers and VRE has 16,000 daily passengers (page T-10). The document understates the current number of VRE passengers by 20 percent and understates current MARC passengers by a similar factor. In fact, in 2012, VRE carried upwards of 19,000 passenger trips per day, not the 16,000 as stated in the draft (page 3-25,*Virginia State Rail Plan*, November 2013). MARC's ridership has doubled in the past 15 years, and in 2012 amounted to 36,000 daily riders, not the 30,000 stated in the moveDC draft (*MARC Growth and Investment Plan Update 2013 to 2050,* September 9, 2013). While the Maryland and Virginia communities have similar characteristics in terms of commuters who work in DC, the two-to-one difference in MARC versus VRE ridership is not discussed in the Plan.[1]

The Long Bridge and SW track problems are ignored in the draft.
The Long Bridge and the SW tracks leading into Virginia are major reasons that commuter ridership in Maryland is greater than in Virginia. These bottlenecks to commuter, passenger and freight rail that cross the Potomac River are insufficiently

[1] The transit operations in DC, listed at page T-2, also fail to list Amtrak-Virginia, a recent emerging partnership between Virginia and Amtrak to provide commuter service for Virginia residents coming into DC.[1] In the Policy and Planning Framework section of the MoveDC draft the term "commuter rail" occurs only once, as a component of "Transit" page 76).[1]

recognized in the moveDC draft. If the Virginia Avenue Tunnel enlargement goes forward, CSX's freight carrying capacity will greatly increase and will force passenger and commuter rail to compete with an even greater number of freight trains for use of the SW tracks and the Long Bridge, both of which are owned and controlled by CSX.[2]

The moveDC draft assumes that expansion of the Long Bridge and the provision of four tracks in SW for freight and passenger rail will accommodate freight, passenger and commuter rail (page F-7), that rail movement of freight can be increased by eliminating bottlenecks (Virginia Ave Tunnel and low overhead clearances – page F-4) and significant investments in the Long Bridge and Maryland Ave., SW Plans will solve the freight, passenger and commuter congestion (page F-7). But the current two-track Long Bridge is at capacity today and a new four-track bridge shared by passenger, commuter and freight rail as proposed in the Long Bridge Study will be at capacity by 2040.

If the Virginia Avenue Tunnel is enlarged to two tracks, then freight will also use two of the three tracks in SW. Those SW tracks connect the Long Bridge to the First Street tunnel, the only connection to Union Station from the South. Passenger and commuter rail will need at least two tracks, thus the unfounded assumption that freight and passenger rail will operate adequately if the three SW tracks are increased to four tracks.

The draft does not discuss the fact that because of the narrow width of the depression in which the tracks are located along Maryland Avenue, the three SW tracks cannot be expanded to four tracks. Dense surrounding development makes widening the depression and adding a fourth track impossible. Additionally, the concepts for adding a fourth track are based on the 160-foot original width of Maryland Avenue, but a section of the 160-foot original right-of-way of Maryland Avenue is currently closed. The *Maryland Avenue Plan* explained at page 1-8:

> The Avenue right-of-way has been formally closed between 9th and 12th Streets SW. Reestablishing the 160' wide Avenue will require the cooperation of multiple property owners.

No one has completely unraveled the adjoining multiple property ownerships in this section of Maryland Avenue, but this drawing illustrates the complexity of property

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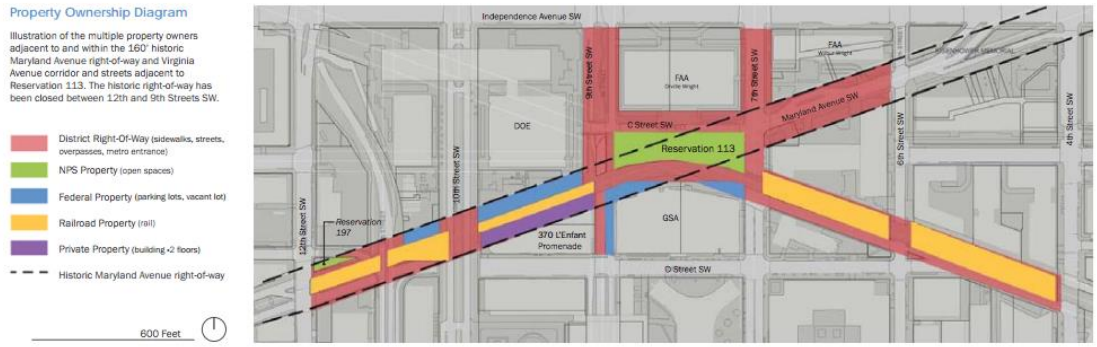
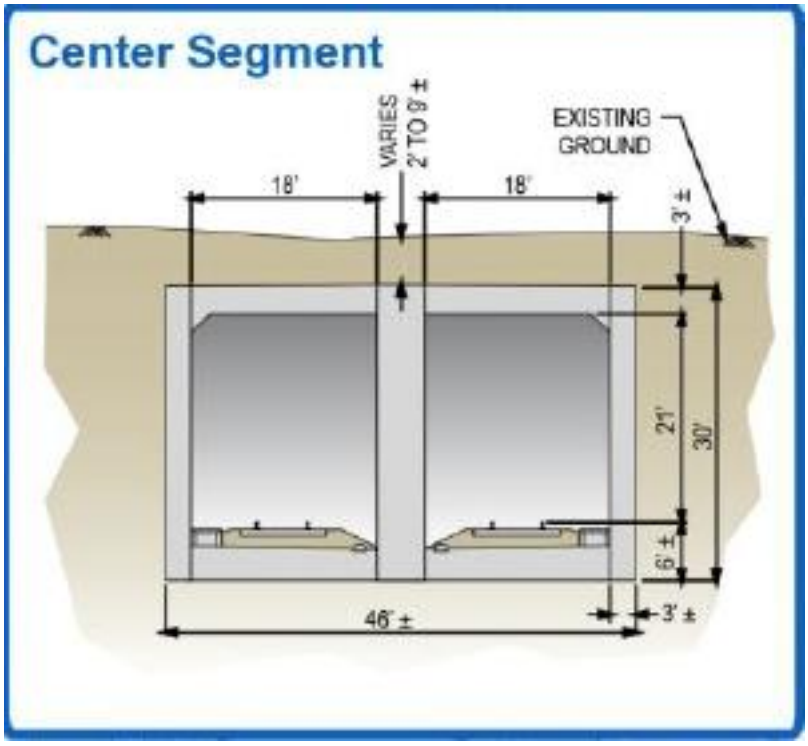
[2] The Metropolitan Washington Transportation Planning Board in its *Regional Transportation Priorities Plan* (RTPP) adopted on January 15, 2014 underscores this point (RTPP, p. 29):

> Freight and passenger trains currently share the Long Bridge's two tracks, which is nearing its practical capacity during rush hours. The bridge's private owner, CSX, maintains the right to give priority to freight traffic over passenger traffic, limiting the scheduling ability and frequencies of passenger trains using the facility. This issue will only get worse as demand for freight and passenger traffic increase in coming decades.

ownership (*Maryland Avenue Plan*, page 1-9):



In evaluating the width required to add an additional SW track, the criteria presented in the Virginia Avenue Final Environmental Impact Statement is relevant. Below is the center section of the proposed configurations of the Preferred Alternative for the rebuilt and enlarged Virginia Avenue tunnel (*Virginia Avenue Tunnel FEIS*, page 3-6 and 3-7).



Applying this design criteria to the triple SW tracks would mean the current three track configuration, with its width of 58', does not have sufficient side clearance to meet current design standards (46 feet for two tracks, plus 3 feet, plus 18 feet, plus 3 feet for the third track equals 70 feet). To add a fourth track would require a width of 92 feet (46 feet for two tracks times two for four tracks). Using current CSX design criteria, the existing width of the right-of-way for the SW tracks cannot accommodate a fourth track. If CSX needs this width for its Virginia Avenue tunnel, why doesn't this same width

requirement apply to the SW tracks?

The expansion plans and capabilities of MARC and VRE are not discussed in the draft.

The potential to expand commuter rail through MARC and VRE are considerable and could significantly reduce crowding and congestion on other forms of transit.[3]

VRE's ridership growth has averaged 6 percent annually between 2002 and 2012 and VRE is predicted to grow between 60 and 85 percent by 2025. (p. 3-25, *Virginia State Rail Plan*, November 2013). By 2020, Phase I of the VRE System Plan calls for maximizing the number of trains VRE can operate under existing agreements, which effectively limits VRE capacity to about 25,000 weekday passengers. Railroad capacity investments proposed for Phases II and III will provide the additional capacity needed to enable VRE to carry up to 50,000 weekday passenger trips by 2040, which is consistent with identified demand. (page 3, *Virginia Railway Express System Plan 2040 Brochure*, March 27, 2014).

MARC's plan shows that ridership has doubled in the last 15 years to 36,000 daily riders and will increase to 75,000 daily riders by 2040. MARC has instituted reverse commute and weekend service. In the future, MARC plans to "thru-run" trains from Maryland, through Union Station to L'Enfant Station and on to Virginia. (*MARC Growth and Investment Plan Update 2013 to 2050*, September 9, 2013).

In order to provide service to 125,000 commuter rail riders by 2040, the operations of VRE, MARC, and Amtrak will have to be separated from the operations of CSX. The moveDC Plan needs to address how to best accomplish this separation.

The moveDC draft ignores key components of our transit infrastructure and fails to deal with how to remedy deficiencies in transit intermodal centers.

The moveDC draft points out that Union Station is an intermodal transfer point, providing connections to Metrorail, Metrobus, bicycle sharing (CaBi), the Circulator, intercity buses, and commuter buses (page T-14). Amtrak has published the *Union Station Master Plan* that calls for a doubling of Amtrak and commuter trains, tripling the number of passenger carried, and expansion of the intermodal capability of Union Station.

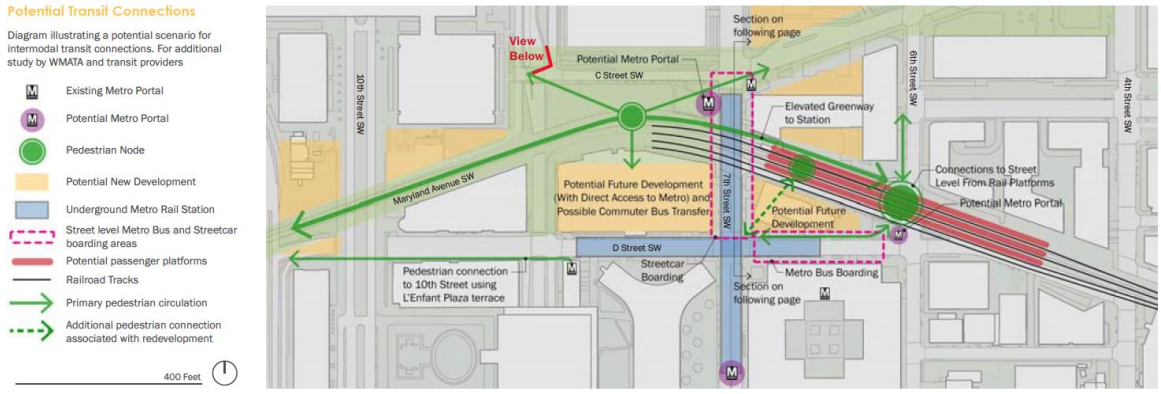
Likewise, L'Enfant VRE Station has the capability of becoming an even more capable intermodal center, but L'Enfant is not discussed in the moveDC draft. Now,

[3] In May of this year MARK and VRE announced they are planning a true regional rail partnership to thru-run MARC to L'Enfant Station and on to Virginia and to extend VRE from Union Station into Maryland (http://www.nbcwashington.com/news/local/MARC-VRE-Discuss-Regional-Rail-Partnership-259

VRE riders have to make a lengthy walk to transfer to L'Enfant Metrorail Station to access the Blue/Orange and Green/yellow Metro trains. It is VRE's busiest station. Transfer activity at L'Enfant is expected to double by 2030 (T-15). It urgently needs expansion and upgrading. The *SW Ecodistirct* and *Maryland Avenue Small Area* Plans have specific recommendations to accomplish that, but those plans are not discussed in the draft. The description and the maps in the document should include L'Enfant Station as well as a description and evaluation of the improvements to L'Enfant proposed by the *Maryland Avenue and SW Ecodistrict Plans* (*Maryland Avenue Plan*, page 3-12):

> Enhance multi-modal transit connectivity by linking pedestrians to a reconstructed intermodal L'Enfant commuter rail station that integrates VRE, Metrorail, and Metro Bus services, and envisions accommodating MARC, Amtrak, commuter/tour/inter-city buses and the Streetcar system in the future as benefits to the facility.

Those improvements to L'Enfant VRE Station consist of adding an additional rail track, lengthening the train platform and providing a new portal to access the Metro station from the VRE station (*id.*, page3- 13)[4]:



But the moveDC draft completely ignores the proposed L'Enfant improvements . Another part of the draft that indicates the problem of not addressing the *SW Ecodistrict Plan* are the changes in population density depicted on Figure 2.2. The success of the *SW Ecodistrict Plan* is premised on bringing 28,000 new people into the Study Area (north of the Southwest Freeway, between 12th and 4th Streets, south of the Mall) over a 20-25 year build-out. Despite this significant change in population density from implementing the *SW Ecodistrict Plan*, page 22 of the moveDC draft, claims there would be minimal change in population in this area between 2010 and 2040.

[4] In the section on Policy and Planning Framework, Union Station improvements, WMATA's Momentum Plan and a new Potomac River Metrorail tunnel and downtown Metro loop are mentioned (pages 88, 91), but there is no mention of L'Enfant VRE Station improvements, Long Bridge or SW track improvements.

The importance of Union Station and L'Enfant VRE Station need to be prominent in the moveDC Plan. The draft must incorporate the recommendations of the *Maryland Avenue Small Area Plan*, the *SW Ecodistrict Plan*, the *Union Station Master Plan* and the long-range plans of MARC and VRE and the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transit.[5]

Conclusion

Providing practical alternatives to automobile commuting should be the overriding theme of the moveDC Plan. Commuter rail is the most efficient and cost-effective means of doing so. Seventy five percent of the cars on DC streets during the day are non-DC residents. Metrorail stations in downtown DC are at or near capacity and even with planned improvements, their capacity will be exceeded by 2020 (Figure T-2, page T-4). The bridges that bring Metrobuses, commuter buses, intercity buses and private vehicles in from Virginia are badly congested during rush hour.

Unless the moveDC Plan includes the potential of commuter rail to provide a practicable alternative to Metrobus, Metrorail and vehicular commuting it will not be worth the paper on which it is written.

[5] Page T-19 of the draft Plan describes five regional transit projects where investment is ongoing. Commuter rail not mentioned. The plans of MARC, VRE, and Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation are not mentioned.