



COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

Committee on Transportation and the Environment

District Department of Transportation Performance Oversight Hearing

Statement of

Monte Edwards

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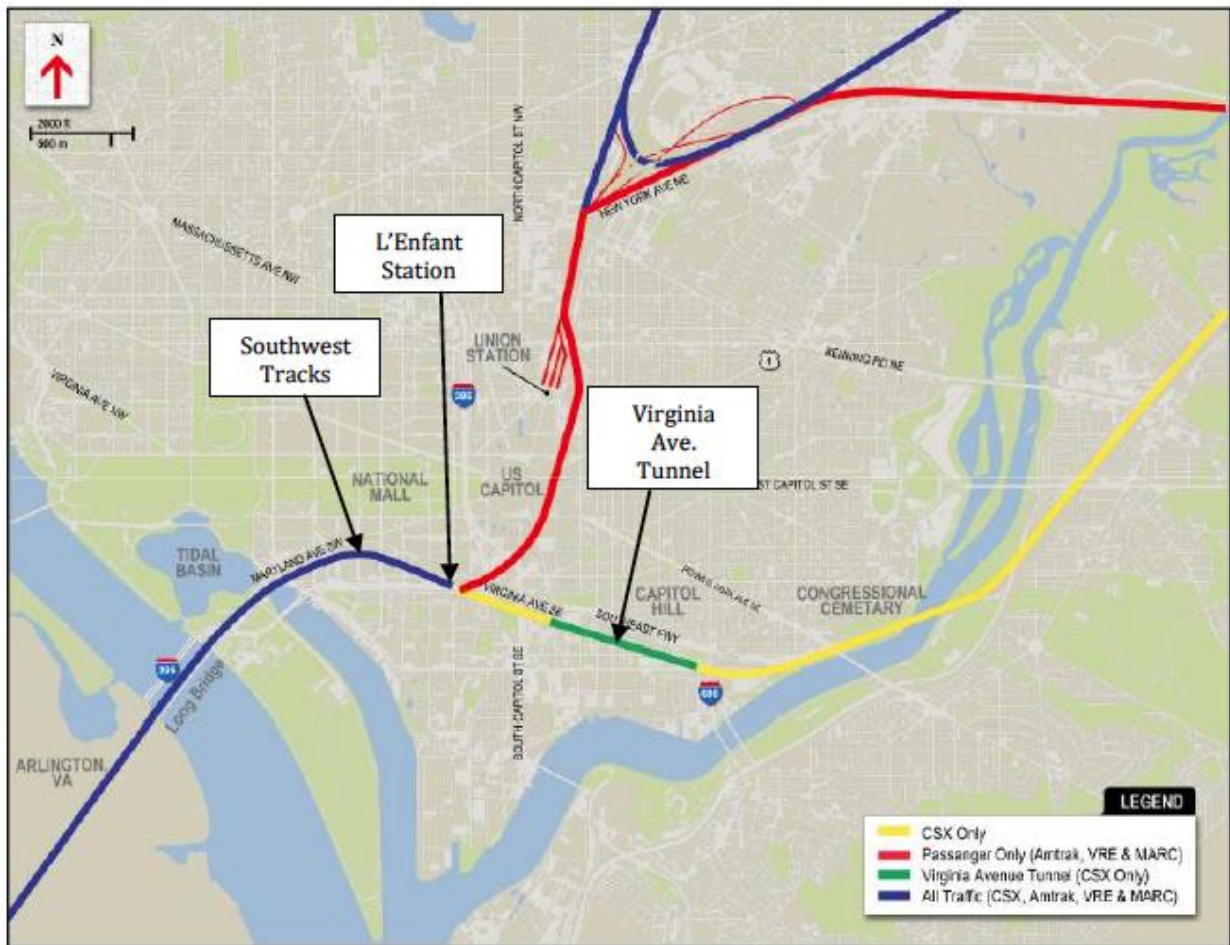
My name is Monte Edwards. I am the Vice-Chair of the Committee of 100 on the Federal City. The purpose of my testimony is to present the Committee of 100's recommendation that a comprehensive freight, passenger and commuter Rail Plan for the District of Columbia be developed. Currently, we are the only state without a Rail Plan, yet we are a growing hub for all kinds of rail transportation. A Rail Plan would help coordinate and plan for implementation of rail projects in the context of other DC issues, such as alternatives to automobile commuting, auto congestion, air quality, parking.

At the present time, DDOT is engaged in three separate studies, all of which affect passenger, commuter and freight rail in and out of the District: the Anacostia Waterfront Initiative, the Long Bridge Study and the Virginia Avenue Tunnel Environmental Impact Statement. Each project has a different Project Manager and each has hired a different consulting firm. None of the studies looks beyond its own narrow perimeters to identify the track bottleneck of the Southwest (SW) tracks that cannot be expanded. This bottleneck threatens to constrain all DC rail expansion in the future¹.

¹ All of the proposals for replacement/refurbishment of the Long Bridge propose four separate railroad tracks, two for passenger/commuter and two for freight rail. The minimum width to accommodate four railroad tracks is 68 feet. If the bridge is rebuilt the bottleneck and rail congestion will be shifted to the SW tracks which can only accommodate 3 railroad tracks. The width of the SW tracks cannot exceed 58 feet (the 1901 statute creating this right-of-way states that the width where the "tracks are depressed on Maryland avenue shall not exceed fifty-eight feet between the inside faces and profiles of the parallel retaining walls, measured at the level of the said tracks") allowing room for only the three sets of tracks that now exist, and requiring that they continue to be shared by freight, passenger and commuter rail. In fact, the design criteria that CSX has proposed in the Virginia Avenue Tunnel DEIS would require a width of 63 feet for 3 tracks.

Currently, CSX uses the SW tracks to access the Virginia Avenue Tunnel. Passenger and commuter trains use those same SW tracks to access Union Station. Passenger and commuter trains branch off to the north from the SW tracks to Union Station through the First Street Tunnel, which provides the only means for passenger and commuter trains to access Union Station from the south, and for trains originating at Union Station to travel south. Rebuilding the Virginia Avenue Tunnel will result in additional CSX trains using the Long Bridge and the SW tracks.

Active Rail Lines within the District of Columbia



In the future, three bold and badly needed rail transportation plans cannot be achieved until the SW bottleneck is addressed. The Union Station Master Plan proposes to triple the number of passengers and double the number of passenger and commuter trains and the Maryland Avenue Small Area Plan and the SW Ecodistrict Plan propose through-running MARC trains to Virginia and increasing the number of commuter trains using L'Enfant Station. An overarching goal (and premise) of these

initiatives is to provide an energy efficient and environmentally friendly alternative to automobile commuting: commuter rail requires about one fifth the amount of energy as a car to transport a commuter.²

However, the combined pressure of increased freight and increased passenger and commuter rail demand will overwhelm the carrying capacity of the Long Bridge and the three SW rail tracks.³ Since CSX owns those facilities, it is likely that CSX will resolve track competition in its own favor and thereby frustrate the proposed increases in Amtrak, VRE, and MARC service⁴. If the number of CSX trains increases substantially, reconstruction of the tunnel may even force a decrease in commuter and passenger rail service. The Committee of 100 has explained this problem to the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments, and its 2014 Regional Transportation Priorities Plan now incorporates commuter rail and

² *The National Rail Plan*, September 2010 Progress Report (<http://www.fra.dot.gov/eLib/Details/L02696>) provides national average energy use for automobiles and commuter rail (page 8) in terms of BTUs per passenger mile. Adjusting that data for VRE's actual numbers of passengers carried on their rush hour trains (<http://www.vre.org/service/consist.htm>) means that VRE requires 694 BTU per passenger mile, compared to 3,538 BTU per passenger mile for cars. That is an energy differential between commuters using cars and using commuter rail of 5.1 to one. Since VRE's passenger cars are bi-level, and probably heavier than the national average commuter rail coach, the actual figure is probably less than a five-to-one ratio.

³ If the Virginia Avenue tunnel project goes forward, CSX's freight carrying capacity will be more than quadrupled. The tunnel will be widened to accommodate two-way rail traffic and increased in height to accommodate double-stacked container trains. In addition the tunnel will accommodate higher speed trains. It is crucial to look at what the tunnel enables CSX to do – not just CSX's immediate plans – the relevant time frame is the effective life of the new tunnel: the next 100 years.

⁴ On March 13, 2014 the National Capitol Region Transportation Planning Board released its 2014 proposed update to the Washington area Long Range Transportation Plan (CLRP) for public comment: http://www.mwcog.org/clrp/projects/new/proposed_2014.asp. It includes \$1.06 billion for MARC for the Washington region through 2040. MARC is a key component of Maryland's commuter network providing rail service for more than 30,000 commuters a day traveling between Washington's Union Station and northern, central and western Maryland. The CLRP also includes \$997 million for VRE expansion through 2040, and that does not include the cost of service enhancements such as reverse-peak service, additional mid-day trains or the future run-through of VRE and MARC trains between Alexandria and Union Station. Those recommendations are included for information purposes. As funding is identified for those initiatives they will be added to the CLRP and air quality conformity analysis.

recognizes the problem of commuter rail competing with CSX.⁵

Greatly increasing the capacity of the Virginia Avenue Tunnel, without coordinated alternatives to the capacity constraints imposed by the Long Bridge and the SW tracks creates the very real possibility that CSX will satisfy its own needs for increased rail capacity at the expense of other rail users. Neither Amtrak nor MARC was included in the Virginia Avenue Tunnel DEIS proceeding. Looking at the Virginia Avenue Tunnel, exclusively from the perspective of freight rail, will jeopardize the ability of commuter and passenger rail to provide practicable alternatives to automobile commuting.

To bring these diverse and segmented plans and perspectives together⁶ our City must have a comprehensive rail plan.⁷ The Committee of 100 requests the Council to authorize a comprehensive Rail Plan that would enhance Amtrak, VRE, MARC and CSX rail service; coordinate the different rail-related projects; and optimize the greatest public benefit from their operations.

Thank you.

⁵ “Freight and passenger trains currently share the two rail tracks on the Long Bridge 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 a demand for freight and passenger traffic increase in coming decades.” (Regional Transportation Priorities Plan, page 29).

⁶ On February 24 DDOT announced the *Anacostia Waterfront Initiative (AWI) Transportation Master Plan 2014 Update* designed to “manage the advance major transportation infrastructure projects near and crossing the river in Wards 5, 6, 7 and 8.” While that Master Plan will produce some coordination benefits of 30 DDOT and external agency transportation studies and projects, it will not provide the rail planning focus that is so badly needed.

⁷ Statewide Rail Plans are required under the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act of 2008 (Public Law 110-432) (PRIIA). PRIIA also requires the inclusion of projects in rail plans for federal funding eligibility. DC has a number of rail initiatives (VAT, AWI and the Long Bridge) but does not have a Rail Plan. A rail plan would help coordinate and plan for implementation of rail projects in the context of other DC issues, such as auto congestion, air quality, parking. While Virginia and Maryland have their own Rail Plans, DC is attempting to approach individual projects without looking at their long range impacts on such issues as encouraging commuter rail as an alternative to people commuting in cars and adding to pollution and congestion.