

# The Committee of 100 on the Federal City



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January 21, 2014

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Subject: CSX's Virginia Avenue Tunnel project will prevent needed increases in passenger and commuter rail service for Washington, DC

Dear Mayor Gray:

As you requested at the public meeting on the CSX Virginia Avenue tunnel project on January 16, 2014, The Committee of 100 on the Federal City submits the following comments on the **long-term adverse effects this project would have on future expansion of commuter and passenger rail operations to the detriment of D.C. and the region.**

CSX's Virginia Avenue Tunnel project will preclude future needed increases in passenger and commuter rail service for Washington for the following reasons:

1. CSX owns and/or controls both the tracks and the Long Bridge that MARC, VRE and Amtrak must also use to bring commuters and passengers into and out of Washington. CSX will give priority to its own freight traffic that will increase dramatically when the expansion of the Panama Canal is completed. The Metropolitan Washington Transportation Planning Board in its Regional Transportation Priorities Plan adopted last week underscored this point:

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. (RTPP, p. 29)

2. Current transportation plans and policies call for doubling the number of commuter and passenger trains (Union Station Master Plan); expanding the L'Enfant Train Station to serve more commuter trains and "through-running" MARC trains from Union Station to Alexandria (Office of Planning's Maryland Avenue Plan and NCPC's SW Ecodistrict Plan); and expanding the Long Bridge to four tracks (DDOT Long Bridge Study). Yet all trains – freight trains from Virginia Avenue and passenger trains from Union Station – all converge at the

existing three tracks between 12<sup>th</sup> St., S.W and the First Street tunnel that goes to Union Station. These tracks cannot be expanded to accommodate either more freight or passenger rail due to dense abutting development and other physical constraints. Even if CSX were to implement its locally destructive plans, the capacity for significant expansion of freight, commuter or passenger rail will be impossible. **Without new thinking, CSX, the region's commuter rail and the East Coast's passenger rail system are headed for a pile-up in SW Washington.**

The Committee of 100 recommends a win-win solution for all parties to increase future capacity: Separate commuter and passenger rail from freight rail by providing an additional Potomac River rail crossing for freight, and dedicate a rebuilt Long Bridge to commuter and passenger rail. A second rail crossing will eliminate any need for expansion of the Virginia Avenue Tunnel and free up funds to apply to a second crossing.

Sincerely,

Monte Edwards

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