

# INTERCITY PASSENGER RAIL

## Statement of Issue

Increased congestion on our roads and in our airways, vulnerability to volatile fossil fuel prices, dependence on foreign oil, and air and water pollution are just some of the problems with our current transportation system that have led many local, state, and federal officials to endorse more sustainable transportation options. Rail plays a critical part in a more sustainable transportation approach, and increased freight and passenger capacity can help maximize the energy efficiency and competitiveness of Virginia's economy, especially in corridors where additional highway projects are prohibitively expensive and/or environmentally detrimental.

High speed intercity passenger rail could link metro regions under 500 miles apart, with commuter and regional passenger rail feeding those regions and public transit serving those regions, giving people alternatives to driving in and between Virginia's metro areas.

The public demand for improved intercity passenger rail is reflected in the increased ridership on both Amtrak and Virginia Railway Express, as well as the high demand for public transit connections to Virginia's passenger trains. Ridership on Amtrak in Virginia exceeded a million riders for the first time in 2008 and grew 25.35% between 2007 and 2010. Moreover, ridership on Virginia's regional trains grew by more than 20% this fiscal year. Virginia Railway Express, the Commonwealth's commuter rail service, saw its ridership grow by nearly half a million riders and exceed 20,000 daily passengers for the first time in its 20 year history during the current fiscal year. Further, a recently launched bus connection between Roanoke and Virginia's Lynchburg regional train is handling five times as many passengers as originally anticipated.

## Background

In 1992, the United States Department of Transportation (USDOT) designated five high speed rail corridors, including the Southeast High Speed Rail Corridor, which extended from Washington, D.C. to Richmond, Virginia to North Carolina and Georgia. In 1996, the USDOT added a high speed rail link to Hampton Roads, and other modifications have been made to the Southeast High Speed Rail Corridor while other corridors have been identified. However, due to a lack of federal investment, there had been no significant progress made towards the advancement of high speed rail outside of the Northeast Corridor. This changed with the passage of the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act (PRIIA) in late 2008, which created the framework for federal investment in high speed rail and authorized about a billion dollars over six years for high speed rail.



The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) provided \$8 billion for high speed rail, and Virginia received \$75 million for passenger rail improvements to the Washington-Richmond corridor. Congress then included an additional \$2.4 billion for high speed rail in their FY 2011 federal transportation appropriation, of which Virginia received \$44.3 million to complete the environmental process on the Washington-Richmond corridor.

Federal guidelines require that states who receive high speed rail funding locate a long-term,

# PASSENGER RAIL RECOMMENDATIONS

- Provide a dedicated, long-term, sustainable funding source for the Virginia Intercity Passenger Rail Operating and Capital Fund that will allow the Commonwealth to sustain our current services, invest in our rail infrastructure, and match any federal funds that might become available.
- Articulate a long-term vision that integrates intercity rail, freight rail, public transit, roads, and airports to create a sustainable multi-modal system for Virginia's future.

sustainable funding source for passenger rail operations.

Today, Virginia sponsors one daily roundtrip Amtrak regional train along the Piedmont Corridor (Lynchburg, Charlottesville, and Manassas) and one along Virginia's Golden Crescent (Alexandria, Fredericksburg, Richmond, and eventually Norfolk) corridor under a three year demonstration project that ends in October of 2012. In 2013 Virginia will also be required to take over the operational costs of the two Amtrak regional trains serving Williamsburg and Newport News, as well as the two regional trains that initiate and terminate from Richmond's Staples Mill Station in addition to the two daily services it already supports.

However, Virginia does not have a dedicated, long-term, and sustainable funding source to pay for passenger rail operations, which are estimated to cost about \$30 million annually. This lack of funding leaves Virginia vulnerable to losing part or all of its regional passenger rail service.

Nor does Virginia have an adequate mechanism for capital investments in passenger rail. Virginia is investing over \$200 million in state and federal funds to add capacity between Washington and Richmond and to extend Amtrak regional service between Richmond and Norfolk by 2013. Some of the resources currently being invested have come from Virginia's Rail Enhancement Fund- a dedicated source of money for rail infrastructure that receives about \$21 million annually from the car rental fee,

but has a 30 percent match requirement. There currently is no state mechanism to match federal funds with Virginia Rail Enhancement Funds, nor fund the operation and expansion of intercity and high speed passenger rail service.

Realizing the need for funding for Virginia's intercity passenger rail trains, the General Assembly requested that Virginia's Department of Rail and Public Transportation review and recommend funding ideas to ensure the continued operation of Virginia's passenger trains. The study led to the Virginia General Assembly creating the Virginia Intercity Passenger Rail Operating and Capital (IPROC) fund in 2011. However, IPROC lacks any dedicated funding source. Funding is needed to begin to answer the question of how Virginia will keep its regional trains operating, match federal intercity and high speed passenger rail funds, and expand regional passenger rail service.

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