

Chapter 6

Next Steps and Conclusion

Next steps should include, in addition to those below, recrafting this document to reflect a vision for rail in Virginia, policy guidelines as to the public interests and a rubric for prioritizing funding opportunities ...both those developed by rail operators and those developed by DRPT.

This draft Statewide Rail Plan identifies high priority projects. It does not recommend funding allocations or provide an implementation plan. Funding and the implementation plan for short term projects will be defined in the Rail Action Plan, currently in development and scheduled for publication in September 2008. The Rail Action Plan will outline a strategy for the allocation of resources between passenger and freight rail projects statewide, with a focus on identifying specific projects for funding and implementation over the next six years. Projects will be narrowly defined, with anticipated funding sources for both public and private sector investment. The six-year selection of projects for implementation will be guided by the evaluation of projects based on the achievement of state transportation goals and the determination of public benefits to be achieved through each project.

Key actions between July and November 2008 include the following:

- ❖ Responding to the General Assembly directive defined in the 2008 Appropriations Act for the establishment of a resource allocation strategy for freight and passenger rail initiatives through the development of the Rail Action Plan.
- ❖ Working with potential project partners to further define funding strategies, project scopes and schedules for specific rail improvement projects.
- ❖ Identifying potential federal funding sources and ensuring that the appropriate resources are in place at the state and local levels to advance projects that could receive federal funding.
- ❖ Finalizing the Statewide Rail Plan document.

Public Involvement

DRPT recognizes the importance of public comments in the development of state planning documents, and the Statewide Rail Plan has a clearly defined public involvement process.

April-May 2008 Comments accepted on the public's priorities for passenger and freight rail improvements in Virginia as part of six public hearings held statewide on the Six-Year Improvement Program.

July 2008 The Draft Statewide Rail Plan will be issued for public comment. The draft Plan will be shared with the Commonwealth Transportation Board and the Rail Advisory Board, and five public meetings will be held statewide. The draft plan will be available online at DRPT's website and at DRPT's Richmond headquarters.

September 2008 The Rail Action Plan will be issued, to include funding strategies and the proposed allocation of resources for freight and passenger rail initiatives statewide. Public comments will continue to be accepted.

November 2008 The Statewide Rail Plan will be finalized, based on comments received and the funding priorities identified through the Rail Action Plan.

Future Rail Plan Updates

It is DRPT's intent that the Statewide Rail Plan will be updated every five years. The Six-Year Improvement Program will be reviewed on an annual basis to:

- ❑ Evaluate rail transportation changes in the context of a multimodal transportation system – particularly passenger rail services (including high speed rail) and intermodal movements through the Ports of Hampton Roads.
- ❑ Respond to any Commonwealth or federal legislation with respect to rail funding programs, safety and security, reporting, environmental and funding program changes.
- ❑ Review implementation of rail plan priorities based on the following transportation goals:
 - > Safety and Security
 - > Preservation and Management
 - > Mobility, Accessibility and Connectivity
 - > Economic Vitality and Development
 - > Land Use and Quality of Life
- ❑ Evaluate new technologies that could be implemented for rail improvements.

Conclusion

As the preceding chapters have pointed out, rail is vital for the Commonwealth's economy, connecting Virginia to the global marketplace both overseas through connections at the Ports of Hampton Roads and in North America through rail connections that extend to the nation's East and West Coasts, north to Canada and south to Mexico.

Virginia's rail system faces a challenging future. This is due to several factors:

- ❑ Population in the U.S. is growing, and the Commonwealth's economic viability is drawing an even larger percentage increase than that of the nation overall. This means more crowded roadways, greater need for increasingly expensive fuel, increased demand for goods and services and a concern for maintaining natural resources and the environment.
- ❑ Passenger rail is seeing increasing demand in Virginia, particularly in its major metropolitan areas (Northern Virginia, Richmond and Hampton Roads), as congestion, fuel costs and environmental concerns make commuter and inter-city train travel a more attractive option.
- ❑ There is also increasing demand for freight rail. Partly this is due to the overall increase in demand for goods, such as coal, that currently use Virginia's rail system. Partly this is due to a desire to move freight from trucks to rail to obtain greater fuel efficiency, address roadway congestion and improve CO₂ emissions.
- ❑ Passenger and freight rail share tracks that are owned by private freight railroads. The dual demands of increased passenger and freight rail — which can have competing needs for track availability — have to be managed strategically in order to support and sustain the growth and quality of life to which the Commonwealth is committed.

By thinking in terms of an integrated multimodal transportation corridor network, the Commonwealth has accomplished much to meet these challenges, from rail line improvements and expansion to the establishment of a dedicated funding source. This Statewide Rail Plan presents rail needs for the future that build on past achievements, with a focus on identifying key corridors and potential investments.

Given the costs of projects and limited public funding available, partnerships and collaboration will be key to moving projects from dreams to operation. The Commonwealth is committed to enhancing partnerships with the private sector, including railroads, local governments and regional planning organizations, to attract private capital and to achieve its strategic goals.

Virginia has an ambitious rail agenda of alleviating congestion and creating a rail system appropriate for future passenger and freight growth. The Commonwealth cannot choose between freight or passenger rail. We need to focus on multimodal solutions for both that support our desire to reduce congestion, support economic prosperity and enhance the quality of life for all Virginians.

Thank you for your interest
and support.

