

National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board

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December 16, 2009

Secretary Ray LaHood
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Ave, SE
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Secretary LaHood,

The National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board (TPB), which is the federally designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for Washington, D.C., Suburban Maryland, and Northern Virginia, is pleased to have the opportunity to provide comment on the Norfolk Southern Crescent Corridor Intermodal Freight Project. On October 2, 2009, the TPB received a request from Norfolk Southern Corporation for an official letter of support for the Crescent Corridor Project.

In its regional transportation planning role, the TPB is concerned about regional transportation flows for all modes, including freight rail. The TPB recognizes the need to address projected rapid growth in freight rail traffic in the coming decades, and appreciates the importance of an efficient freight rail system in supporting the economies of both the Washington metropolitan area and the nation as a whole. The Crescent Corridor parallels several interstates along the East Coast and provides many opportunities for domestic container and trailer-to-rail diversions—884,000 and 878,000 annual truck diversions from Maryland and Virginia respectively, according to a Cambridge Systematics analysis for Norfolk Southern. These reductions will directly benefit metropolitan Washington roadways, particularly I-95 and other nearby routes. In addition to congestion benefits, the TPB is also interested in potential reductions in vehicle emissions from moving a greater share of freight by rail instead of by truck.

The TPB is pleased to join the Governor of Virginia, six other Governors, and numerous other public officials and agencies in support of the Crescent Corridor Intermodal Freight Project in the upcoming Surface Transportation Authorization. We welcome the leveraging of significant private investment in this project, along with potential funding from the new federal transportation authorization (recognizing that this does not include the current federal TIGER competitive grants, for which the region has identified other priorities).

The TPB notes that the Crescent Corridor projects will be built in three phases. The final 2,500 mile network will link the supply chain from the South to the Northeast. As this project moves forward, we urge Norfolk Southern to coordinate closely with TPB, Virginia Railway Express, Amtrak, the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority, and state and local governments in the region to:

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- ensure that local impacts, including noise, safety, and hazardous materials considerations, are adequately addressed as these projects are developed; and
- continue and expand upon actions to relieve current and potential future bottlenecks and conflicts between rail freight traffic and the passenger rail services provided by the Virginia Railway Express and Amtrak.

The TPB agrees that the Crescent Corridor will enhance the nation's ability to handle projected increases in freight traffic, reduce overall freight shipping costs, ease congestion and emissions, and minimize highway and road maintenance costs and delays. We look forward to working with Norfolk Southern as the Crescent Corridor advances.

Sincerely,

Charles Jenkins
Chairman
National Capital Region
Transportation Planning Board

cc:

Darrell L. Wilson, Assistant Vice President, Norfolk Southern
Joseph Boardman, President and Chief Executive Officer, Amtrak
Pierce Homer, Secretary, Virginia Department of Transportation
Gabe Klein, Director, District Department of Transportation
Beverly Swaim-Staley, Secretary, Maryland Department of Transportation
Paul Wiedefeld, Administrator, Maryland Transit Administration
Dale Zehner, Chief Executive Officer, Virginia Railway Express