



Final Town of Ashland/Hanover County Area Community Advisory Committee (CAC) Summary Report

October 2017



TOWN OF ASHLAND/HANOVER COUNTY AREA COMMUNITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE SUMMARY REPORT

Foreword

On behalf of the Commonwealth of Virginia and the Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT), I would like to personally thank the members of the Ashland/Hanover Area Community Advisory Committee (CAC) who participated in the review of alternatives for the Washington, D.C. to Richmond Southeast High Speed Rail Project (DC2RVA).

The Committee's review of alternatives and identification of a range of "least objectionable" alternatives will inform the final determination of a preferred alternative for the Ashland/Hanover County area by DRPT, the Commonwealth Transportation Board (CTB), and ultimately, the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA). Committee members put in long hours of hard work to understand the DC2RVA Project's need for additional rail capacity, to evaluate the many local alternatives, and to weigh each alternative's potential community effects. I greatly appreciate the Committee members' service to their communities and their assistance to DRPT on the DC2RVA project. I also want to recognize the support provided by members of the general public and from affected communities, whose participation, questions, comments, and advice were instrumental to the success of the CAC. I recognize the difficulties that property owners face, and pledge to move the process forward to a Record of Decision by the FRA that is informed by our collaboration.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Mitchell, Director

Department of Rail and Public Transportation



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Summary Presented to Commonwealth Transportation Board, September 19, 2017

MEMORANDUM

TO: Members of the Commonwealth Transportation Board

FROM: Jennifer Mitchell, Director
Department of Rail and Public Transportation

DATE: September 19, 2017

SUBJECT: Summary of the Town of Ashland/Hanover Area Community Advisory Committee review of alternatives for the Washington, D.C. to Richmond Southeast High Speed Rail Project (DC2RVA)

DRPT convened the Community Advisory Committee (CAC) to take an additional look at all previous options for greater rail capacity in the Ashland/Hanover County area, and to identify potential options that could meet the purpose and need of the DC2RVA project, while also minimizing or avoiding potential impacts to the community. The CAC met five times in the Ashland/Hanover area. All meetings were open to the public, and Meeting #3 in July 2017 set aside time for public comments.

After careful and deliberate consideration of the options for increased rail capacity in the Ashland/Hanover area, the CAC agreed that the following are the least objectionable options for each category of alternatives. The identification of these least objectionable alternatives by the CAC does not in any way imply an endorsement of any of the alternatives by any member of the CAC.

Least Objectionable Alternatives

- The 3-2-3 option is the least objectionable option for adding rail capacity through the Town of Ashland at-grade. In this option, a third track would be added to the existing CSX right-of-way north and south of the Town of Ashland, while the existing two tracks would remain in service through Ashland. The downtown Ashland station would be closed, and road overpasses would be added at Vaughan Road and Ashcake Road. The crossing at England Street would remain at-grade.
- A three-track trench through the Town of Ashland is the least objectionable option for adding capacity below-grade. A trench would be constructed through Ashland approximately 50 feet wide and 33 feet deep, extending from north of Vaughan Road to south of Ashcake Road. The two existing tracks through the Town of Ashland, along with



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a third new track, would pass through Ashland within the trench. The trench would be provided with strategically placed covers interspersed with open areas, allowing motor vehicle and pedestrian crossings, landscaping, and other amenities. Details associated with the placement and length of covered spaces would be determined in final design. The downtown Ashland station would be closed.

- The western bypass closest to the Town of Ashland, identified as AWB 1, is the least objectionable option for adding rail capacity outside the Town of Ashland – with the provision that the alignment would be adjusted to avoid directly impacting a commercial facility, and to minimize impacts to residential properties. In this option, a two-track bypass approximately seven miles long would extend around the Town of Ashland to the west. Roads bisecting the new bypass would be modified to avoid creating any new at-grade road/rail crossings. The Ashland station could remain in service.

The following list includes all of the other alternatives that were considered by the CAC, but not identified as least objectionable alternatives.

Other Build Alternatives Considered by the CAC

Through Town Alignments At-Grade Options:

- Add one track on the west of existing tracks
- Add one track on the east of existing tracks
- Add one track and shift existing two tracks to center the three tracks
- Add one track and shift existing two tracks to center the three tracks AND remove station

Elevated Options:

- Elevate 1 track above existing two tracks
- Elevate 2 tracks above existing two tracks
- Elevate 3 tracks above existing right-of-way and remove at-grade tracks

Below-Grade Options:

- 1-track tunnel – Cut and cover tunnel east of existing two tracks
- 1-track tunnel – Bore tunnel
- 1-track tunnel – Deep bore tunnel
- 2-track tunnel – One east and one centered
- 3-track tunnel – Cut and cover continuous cover below existing right-of-way and remove at-grade tracks
- Shallow bore 1-track tunnel for passenger trains only (proposed through CAC)

Eastern Bypass Alignments:

- Ashland East Bypass (AEB 1)
- Ashland East Bypass to BBRR (AEB 2)
- Ashland East Bypass That Does Not Cross I-95 (AEB 3)
- Ashland East Bypass in the I-95 Median (AEB 4)
- Ashland East Bypass White Paper Route (AEB 5)



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Buckingham Branch (BBRR):

- Freight Diversion onto BBRR
- Passenger Diversion onto BBRR

Doswell Area Connections to Buckingham Branch Railroad:

- Wye Options #1 - #5

Western Bypass Alignments:

- Ashland West Bypass Revision #1 (AWB 2)
- Ashland West Bypass Revision #2 (AWB 3)
- Ashland West Bypass Revision #3 (AWB 4)

DRPT would like to recognize the long hours and hard work put forth by the members of the CAC. I greatly appreciate their service to their communities and their assistance to DRPT on the DC2RVA project. I also want to recognize the support provided by members of the public and affected communities, whose participation, questions, comments, and advice was instrumental to the success of the CAC.

Please reference the project website, www.dc2rvarail.com, for additional information about the Town of Ashland/Hanover Area CAC, including meeting videos, handouts, presentations, and meeting minutes.



Introduction

The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) and the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT) are working to improve intercity passenger rail service in the north-south corridor between Washington, D.C. and Richmond, VA through the Washington, D.C. to Richmond Southeast High Speed Rail (DC2RVA) Project. The purpose of the DC2RVA Project is to increase capacity to deliver higher speed passenger rail, expand commuter rail, and accommodate growth of freight rail service in an efficient and reliable multimodal rail corridor. Potential alternatives to meet the DC2RVA Purpose and Need are evaluated in the DC2RVA Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), approved by FRA for public release on September 8, 2017. The DC2RVA Draft EIS includes DRPT recommendations for a preferred alternative for most of the 123-mile DC2RVA rail corridor. However, in the Town of Ashland/Hanover County area (referenced as Alternative Area 5 in the Draft EIS), DRPT did not recommend a preferred alternative. Rather, the Draft EIS evaluates a no-build alternative and four build alternatives with several station location options for the Ashland/Hanover County area. In addition, the Alternatives Technical Report, Appendix A of the Draft EIS, describes DRPT's evaluation and screening of 29 possible alternatives for the Ashland/Hanover County area.

While the DC2RVA Draft EIS was being prepared, DRPT recognized that many of the alternatives for greater rail capacity in the Town of Ashland and Hanover County area generated community concerns. As a result, DRPT recommended a community-based effort to FRA to supplement DC2RVA public involvement activities and help inform selection of a preferred alternative that meets the DC2RVA Purpose and Need through the Ashland/Hanover County area.

Purpose of the Community Advisory Committee

DRPT established the Community Advisory Committee (CAC) to advise and inform DRPT on DC2RVA alternatives and issues in the Ashland/Hanover County area. The CAC was tasked to take an additional look at all previous options for greater rail capacity in the Ashland/Hanover County area and identify potential options that could meet the Purpose and Need of the DC2RVA project, while also minimizing or avoiding potential impacts to the community. The CAC process was initiated to run in parallel to the Draft EIS. The Committee was specifically requested to:

- Review all alternatives studied to date in the Draft EIS;
- Recommend alternative(s), including new alternatives or modifications to alternatives, to meet the DC2RVA Purpose and Need;
- Identify and represent the concerns of members' communities; and
- Apply a structured and transparent approach seeking consensus.



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Community Advisory Committee Approach

The Community Advisory Committee, composed of locally-appointed members of Hanover County, the Town of Ashland, Randolph-Macon College, the Richmond Regional Transportation Planning Organization, and CSX Transportation (CSX), met five times in the Ashland/Hanover area at approximately monthly intervals.

- All meetings were open to the public.
- Meetings were video recorded and posted to the project website, www.dc2rvarail.com.
- Meeting materials were posted to the project website.
- Committee members were requested to share comments directed to them individually with other CAC members and the project team.

DRPT Director Jennifer Mitchell acted as chairperson for the meetings. DRPT staff and members of the DC2RVA consultant team provided the CAC with technical information and presentations on:

- Project background and regulatory requirements,
- Rail operations and engineering,
- Potential effects of different alternatives, and
- Addressed questions posed by the CAC members and the public.

DRPT staff and members of the DC2RVA consultant team also met individually with members of the CAC upon request to discuss members’ technical questions. A summary of these questions, DRPT responses, and any materials generated were then shared with the rest of the CAC and posted to the project website.

In addition to the five CAC meetings, the Town of Ashland hosted a meeting on September 6, 2017, to solicit public input regarding the through-town three-track trench option. DRPT staff and the DC2RVA consultant team attended the Town’s meeting and presented information on the trench option including construction sequencing and potential effects. This meeting was open to the public.

Community Advisory Committee Members

Ashland/Hanover County Area Community Advisory Committee	
Committee Member	Representing
Aubrey “Bucky” Stanley, Hanover County Board of Supervisors	Hanover County
Cecil “Rhu” Harris, Jr., Hanover County Administrator	Hanover County
Carey Carlisle, Hanover County Citizen Representative	Hanover County



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Linwood Attkisson, Hanover County Citizen Representative	Hanover County
James Foley, Mayor	Town of Ashland
Josh Farrar, Town Manager	Town of Ashland
Kristin Reihl, Town of Ashland Citizen Representative	Town of Ashland
Paul Davies, Vice President of Administration and Finance	Randolph-Macon College
Jennifer Thompson, Executive Assistant to the President	Randolph-Macon College
Preston Bryant, Randolph-Macon College Board of Trustees	Randolph-Macon College
Randy Marcus, CSXT Resident Vice President	CSX Transportation
Fyiad Constantine, CSXT Engineering	CSX Transportation
Brian Barton, CSXT Trainmaster, Passenger Operations	CSX Transportation
Barbara Nelson, Transportation Director	Richmond Regional Transportation Planning Organization

Public Comments

All CAC meetings were open to the public, and a majority of Meeting #3 was set aside specifically for verbal public comment. In addition, the public was provided with several opportunities to participate and comment as described below:

- Public comment cards that were available at each meeting;
- Online comment submittals to www.dc2rvarail.com at any time;
- Post-meeting review of all meeting materials and presentations made available for public review on www.dc2rvarail.com;
- Public comments submitted to the project team and/or individual CAC members that were shared with the CAC; and
- All public comments and questions were reviewed by the DRPT staff, and, as appropriate, responses were prepared and shared with the CAC.

It is important to note that the CAC process was not meant to replace the Draft EIS public hearings and public comment period. Members of the public were encouraged to also provide comments on the Draft EIS once the document was made publicly available on September 8, 2017.



Meeting Summary

The CAC met monthly from May through September 2017, as follows:

CAC Meeting #1 (May 22, 2017)

The CAC was briefed on the legal requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), which guides DRPT's evaluations of the environmental effects of the proposed DC2RVA improvements, measures to avoid, minimize, and otherwise mitigate those effects, and allows the public to understand and comment on the benefits and impacts of the project, the DC2RVA Project's Purpose and Need, the basics of rail operations, and the Project's engineering basis of design for infrastructure improvements and alternatives. Appendix A provides the Meeting #1 agenda, member materials, presentation, comment report, and meeting summary.

CAC Meeting #2 (June 26, 2017)

The CAC was briefed on the alternatives identified and evaluated for the Ashland/Hanover County area in preparing the Draft EIS, including the Alternatives Screening Process and results. Additional background was provided on rail operations modeling and federal requirements for evaluating potential project effects on cultural resources and wetlands and waters of the U.S. The CAC requested additional information be provided on eastern bypass alternatives, including use of the Buckingham Branch Railroad, and below-grade options for the Town of Ashland. Appendix B provides the Meeting #2 agenda, presentation, comment report, and meeting summary.

CAC Meeting #3 (July 24, 2017)

The CAC was provided additional information on the eastern bypasses and below-grade options, and the results of DRPT's rail operations modeling. A soft earth tunnel and a three-track trench with capped sections were introduced as additional through Town below-grade alternatives. The meeting was then opened for public comment. Appendix C provides the Meeting #3 agenda, presentation, comment report, meeting summary, and member materials.

CAC Meeting #4 (August 28, 2017)

DRPT presented an overview of the Draft EIS status, and how the CAC process would fit within the DC2RVA project moving forward. DRPT requested the CAC members identify a "least objectionable alternative" in each of the following four categories: through Town at-grade, through Town below-grade, western bypass, and eastern bypass. The CAC indicated that identification of a least objectionable alternative in any category does not constitute an endorsement of that alternative by the CAC or DRPT.



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The CAC conducted a review of alternatives by categories, and began deliberations to identify a least objectionable alternative for each category. The CAC agreed to remove the following options from further consideration:

- Three tracks at-grade through Ashland
- Buckingham Branch Railroad
- Eastern Bypass 1 (AEB1)
- Eastern Bypass 2 (AEB2)

The CAC then discussed remaining options.

Through Town At-Grade: The CAC members, with the exception of CSX representatives, identified the 3-2-3 alternative as the least objectionable alternative for a through Town at-grade alternative. CSX objected to the 3-2-3 alternative, citing concerns over potential delays to freight traffic within their rail network.

Through Town Below-Grade: Several of the CAC members favored the deep bore tunnel and/or the soft earth tunnel, but indicated the cost of these alternatives would make these alternatives prohibitive and impractical as a least objectionable alternative. Representatives of the Town of Ashland requested more time to review the potential pros and cons of a three track trench. An identification of a least objectionable below-grade alternative was postponed for a following CAC meeting.

Western Bypass: The CAC did not identify a least objectionable western bypass. The CAC members deferred to the Hanover County representatives regarding the pros and cons of the western bypasses. Representatives of Hanover County requested additional time to review the western bypass alternatives.

Eastern Bypass: The CAC did not identify a least objectionable eastern bypass. The CAC members deferred to the Hanover County representatives regarding the pros and cons of the eastern bypasses. Representatives of Hanover County requested additional time to review the remaining eastern bypass alternatives.

Appendix D provides the Meeting #4 agenda, presentation, comment response report, letter to CAC members from Director Mitchell, DC2RVA Town of Ashland/Hanover County CAC August 2017 Correspondence, Buckingham Branch Railroad presentation, and other supplemental member materials and maps.



Ashland Trench Meeting (September 6, 2017)

The Town of Ashland hosted this meeting to solicit public input on the three-track trench alternative. The purpose of the meeting was for the Town's CAC members and Town Council members to hear from the community prior to making any recommendations on a least objectionable below-grade alternative. DRPT staff and the DC2RVA consultant team presented information on the conceptual design and layout of a completed trench with three tracks, described its likely construction sequencing and schedule, and answered questions from the public. Appendix E provides the agenda/presentation prepared by the Town Council, the presentation materials on the trench, meeting materials, a summary of the meeting, and a list of comments/questions and responses.

CAC Meeting #5 (September 11, 2017)

The CAC concluded their deliberations on the least objectionable alternatives for each category. After careful consideration of the options for greater rail capacity in the Ashland/Hanover area, the CAC recognized that no single option would meet every stakeholder's needs equally, and that all of the options would have impacts to the community. The Committee did not endorse any option as its preferred alternative; however, the Committee did agree that the following are the least objectionable alternatives:

- The 3-2-3 option is the least objectionable option for adding rail capacity through Ashland at-grade. In this option, a third track is added to the existing CSX right-of-way north and south of town while the existing two tracks remain in service through town. The downtown Ashland station would be closed, and road overpasses would be added at Vaughan Road and Ashcake Road. England Street would remain at-grade.
- A three-track trench through the Town of Ashland is the least objectionable option for adding capacity below-grade. In this option, a third track would be added to the existing CSX right-of-way north and south of town. A trench approximately 50 feet in width and 33 feet deep, extending from approximately Vaughan Road to Ashcake Road, would be constructed through town. The existing two tracks and a new third track would be placed within the trench. The trench would be provided with strategically-placed covers interspersed with open areas, allowing motor vehicle and pedestrian crossings, replacement of travel lanes, landscaping, and other amenities above the trench while eliminating the need for intrusive ventilation structures.
- The western bypass closest to the Town of Ashland, identified as AWB1 in DC2RVA Draft EIS documents, was determined to be the least objectionable option for adding rail capacity outside the Town of Ashland - with the provision that the bypass alignment be adjusted to avoid or reduce directly impacting commercial and residential properties. In this option, a two-track bypass approximately seven miles long would extend around the



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Town of Ashland to the west. Roads bisecting the new bypass would be grade-separated, closed, or relocated to avoid new at-grade road/rail crossings. The existing two tracks through town would remain in service, and the Ashland station could remain in service.

Appendix F provides the Meeting #5 agenda, presentation, and comment responses report.

Results and Next Steps

Over the course of five months, the CAC reviewed and fully evaluated over 30 different alternatives for the Town of Ashland/Hanover County area, including alternatives suggested by the public and alternatives developed by the CAC.

The CAC also considered hundreds of comments and questions provided by the public. The CAC determined that many of the alternatives were not practical, including use of the Buckingham Branch Railroad, a deep bore tunnel, and adding tracks to the median of Interstate 95. The CAC also recognized that all of the alternatives would have substantial adverse impacts to residents, commercial interests, and communities, and would be objectionable to one or more groups of stakeholders.

The CAC chose not to endorse any specific alternative. Instead, as documented in DRPT's September 19, 2017 memorandum to the CTB, the CAC provided recommendations for three least objectionable alternatives. The CAC also recognized that no matter which alternative the CTB ultimately recommends to FRA, mitigation for the adverse impacts will need to be considered, and the CAC members committed to working with DRPT on the mitigation.

The CTB will consider CAC results as it adopts a recommended preferred alternative for DC2RVA, which will include a recommendation for the Ashland/Hanover County area. DRPT anticipates the CTB will develop its recommendation for the DC2RVA preferred alternative at the December 6, 2017 CTB meeting. This will be documented in a Recommendation Report and submitted to FRA for inclusion in the Final EIS, along with the CAC Summary Report. FRA will make the ultimate decision for a preferred alternative for DC2RVA in the Record of Decision.