



DC2RVA Town of Ashland / Hanover County Area Community Advisory Committee (CAC) Meeting #2

Meeting Summary

- Project:** Washington, D.C. to Richmond Southeast High Speed Rail Tier II EIS (DC2RVA)
Town of Ashland/Hanover County Area Community Advisory Committee (CAC)
- Date:** Monday, June 26, 2017
6:00 – 9:00 p.m.
- Location:** Randolph-Macon College – Birdsong Hall
- Participants:** CAC Members, Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT), DC2RVA
Consultant Team

Meeting Open to the Public

Public Attendance: estimated 60

CAC Members in Attendance:

Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation:

- Jennifer Mitchell, Director

Town of Ashland:

- Jim Foley, Mayor
- Josh Farrar, Town Manager
- Kristin Reihl, Citizen Representative

CSXT:

- Randy Marcus, Resident Vice President
- Fyiad Constantine, CSXT Engineering

Hanover County:

- Bucky Stanley, Hanover County Board of Supervisors
- Rhu Harris, Hanover County Administrator
- Carey Carlisle, Citizen Representative
- Linwood Attkisson, Citizen Representative

Randolph-Macon College:

- Jen Thompson, Executive Assistant to the President

Richmond Regional TPO:

- Barbara Nelson, Richmond Regional TPO

SUMMARY OF QUESTIONS/ANSWERS FROM CAC MEETING

Note: This meeting summary is intended as a summary of topics discussed and Q&A, and may be modified for clarity and context. Please refer to the PowerPoint presentation and meeting video for further detail.

COMMENT: Request that the Director and Committee Members stand up while talking so the public can see their faces.

COMMENT: Based on personal experience in the blasting business, vibration impacts are affected by the duration of the vibration event as well as the amount of vibration.

Q: With the proposed federal budget including a 46% decrease in Amtrak in Virginia, how does that affect this project or number of trains? Virginians for High Speed Rail has been talking about a potential reduction, which seems contradictory.

A: A current budget proposal in front of Congress contains cuts in Amtrak's funding for long distance passenger rail services, including some routes in Virginia. However, this is just a proposal, and the shape/content of any final budget is unknown. If cuts to Amtrak's budget were to materialize, it is unclear how it would affect the proposed project.

Q: Is the deep bored tunnel for passenger trains only?

A: No, all lines will be interoperable in keeping with the project's Basis of Design. This insures the greatest flexibility for passenger and freight rail operations in the corridor, and maximizes use of the existing infrastructure.

Q: Would a deep bored tunnel be large enough for double stacked trains?

A: Yes. It would be 24' 3" minimum clearance, which is high enough to accommodate freight trains with double-stacked containers.

Q: Do you have a standard infrastructure model? Is there a standard?

A: There is not a standard infrastructure model. We start with the exact infrastructure that exists today, then add new infrastructure (additional main track, sidings, crossovers between tracks, etc.) and test the corridor to see how it performs. The infrastructure input to the model is a digital version of a track diagram, showing all main track, station platforms, sidings, and crossovers.

Q: Is that standard infrastructure available? Is it published? People want to see what you're building. How do we determine the infrastructure in the future?

A: An operations model tests only what it is given. It's an iterative process. We don't want to build more or less infrastructure than what is needed.

The infrastructure is consistent with the DC2RVA Basis of Design. It is adjusted based on previous studies, experience, and results of the modeling. The DC2RVA Basis of Design is available to the public on the website.

Q: Do you test the models? Do you test the models with multiple locomotives? Do you get feedback?

A: We test the base corridor model using existing infrastructure, train schedules, and Amtrak performance results. The model incorporates empirically derived operating results from actual locomotives and trains.

Q: Are the algorithms manual?

A: No, the operating algorithms in the model are derived from empirical evidence. Industry standards for models are followed. The model is given the actual track configuration and characteristics for the area that is being modeled, and the characteristics of the trains that would run on those tracks (locomotives, length, tonnage, etc.). The software tool we use is the rail industry standard used throughout North America. There are currently about 75 licenses. The people using the software currently meet regularly to discuss how to improve the model. The only uniqueness to each model is the specific trains and geography and track layouts. All other attributes such as locomotive performance for a specific model are the same to all models.

Q: We were led to believe throughout the 123 mile corridor, trains moving at 90 mph would save about 15 minutes per passenger. Who qualifies that as worth the investment?

A: The DC2RVA project's purpose is to improve reliability, increase frequencies and have a competitive travel time. Because the current Amtrak service is only on-time about 66% of the time, reliability is a major issue for passenger service in this corridor. Modeling tests reliability using both the infrastructure and the travel time as inputs. The goal is to have reliable trains that arrive 90% on-time. The model does not tell us whether it is economically feasible. The NEPA process determines that. The State makes the recommendation to FRA which turns into a Record of Decision. Funding gets into a policy sphere.

Q: Amtrak will be adding 18 more passenger trains?

A: Yes, the DC2RVA program would add 9 round trips or 18 individual passenger trains.

Q: It would be helpful to see the projected train graphics for 20 years out. We would like to see this for community impacts. We are interested in how many more trains will be traveling the corridor in the future.

A: We will look into providing that data. We are looking at demand over a twenty-year planning horizon post-implementation. Twenty years is the planning standard.

Q: Are there limitations on how many models you can run?

A: There are no limitations per se, but we want to make sure the modeling effort is productive. Models take lots of time and money to run. While it is theoretically possible to run infinite models, there are other

requirements, like environmental constraints and engineering considerations that must be looked at. The purpose of modeling scenarios is to inform the decision makers.

Q: In the prior meeting, you said some of the assumptions were changing. Are the changes to the assumptions addressed in the DEIS?

A: No, not yet. They are still being discussed with FRA. Factors in the northern part of the corridor may affect Ashland. We are discussing with VRE, CSX, and others to see how these changes may affect downstream.

Q: You say you're taking this into consideration twenty years out? Does that take into account the construction? That seems short sighted.

A: Twenty years post implementation. This is a standard time period for decision making. For planning purposes, we have assumed 2025 for our implementation year, and then projected train traffic out for another 20 years to 2045.

Q: In the modeling, social and environmental impacts are of the largest concerns for us. What percentage does the modeling have on the decision making process?

A: It's not necessarily a mathematical computation to balance factors, it's not that rigid. Federal law also dictates how we take into account several constraints. We will discuss some of the environmental factors as part of the next agenda item when we go through the alternatives. Because every stakeholder may assign a different level of importance or value to each of the environmental issues, the EIS process describes the impacts to each resource but does not assign weights or percentages to the impacts. In other words some stakeholders may assign a high value to impacts to natural resources, while other stakeholders might assign a high value to social impacts.

Q: How could you put a 3rd rail in through the Town of Ashland with all the brown (cultural resources) right in the center?

A: During the next part of the meeting we will discuss each of the alternatives.

Q: Does the law tell us we have to avoid them (resources) at all costs, or are there varying degrees?

A: All resources are different, with different legal protections and guidelines. Section 106 addresses historic and cultural resources protection, and requires a consultation process for potential impacts. Section 404 of the Clean Water Act protects waters of the U.S. (wetlands) and requires we use the least damaging practicable alternative. Section 4f generally restricts alternatives from taking land from public parks and recreation areas, although it does allow minor impacts.

Q: Does Slide 25 showing the screening criteria refer to Stage 1, Stage 2, and Stage 3?

A: Yes

Q: Was it in the parklands (impacted by the Eastern Bypass Alts 1&2)? I'd be happy to make a motion to remove the park.

A: The park is considered a 4(f) property and as discussed earlier, park land cannot be used if there is a feasible and prudent alternative.

COMMENT: A horse trail could be easily recreated.

Q: Is there a difference between natural resources vs. no infrastructure? Maybe the law did not allow flexibility?

A: Ultimately the FRA determines if there is a "use" but for the purposes of our preliminary screening, there is no distinction between the types of 4(f) properties. There have been numerous lawsuits and case laws regarding moving or eliminating parkland. For the DC2RVA project, FRA is the decision maker. They determine whether it may or may not be feasible.

Q: Were there any simulations/modeling done for these eastern bypass options, or did they drop off?

A: No, the eastern bypass was not specifically modeled. However, the operations modeling did include a bypass scenario, albeit the western bypass. The infrastructure parameters inputted into the model, such as length, track speed, number of tracks, class of track, grades, types of turnouts, etc. would most likely not be substantially different for an east or west bypass.

Q: Can the community decide if they want to do away with the park?

A: Section 4f was put in place in the 1960s and there have been numerous lawsuits and case laws. For the DC2RVA project FRA is the decision maker. They determine whether it may or may not be feasible. We did discuss this question with the specialist at FRA and they declined to speculate on what their decision would be.

Q: What would it take to run analyses of places that were eliminated knowing a county owned park may be moved or that there may be options due to the nature of the park? (Referring to AEB1 & AEB2)

A: We will have to get more information. There are other considerations as well, such as the wetland impacts for AEB1 and AEB2 are approximately 40 acres.

Q: Does wetland criteria, in addition to parks, make these (options) not viable?

A: Yes, these alternatives were screened out due to impacts to parks, wetlands, property, and infrastructure.

COMMENT: We don't want to throw anyone under the bus, but want to discuss.

Q: I'm concerned about the time constraint. We were invited to review, but it seems like you are saying there isn't enough time for future study?

A: That is not the intent. We have time and would like to discuss. We want to go more into detail about legal constraints. We also have a parallel effort occurring for modeling.

Q: By law, you cannot impact a park, but are private homes protected by law?

A: There are mechanisms in place to compensate property owners, and rules and procedures that guide the process. We recognize that taking private property is an impact, and something to be avoided if possible. We do look at property impacts in the Draft EIS, quantify and minimize to the greatest extent possible.

Q: I've noticed that there are already several areas of the Buckingham Branch that have two tracks.

A: Most are industrial leads, it's not a two-track railroad. Most of the additional track for Buckingham Branch would be within the existing Right of Way, but several adjustments to the track and additional infrastructure would be needed. There are wetland impacts both in and out of the ROW.

Q: The tunnel and viaduct options were thrown out? What caused them to be left out of the analysis?

A: Those options went through screening as well. The viaduct is basically a track on a bridge structure through the Town above the existing two tracks. The purpose of building such a structure would be to avoid the impacts of placing the additional track on the ground – however, it doesn't work. Large bridge support pillars are needed which would span the existing tracks. It cannot be built tight against the existing curb bordering the existing tracks due to safety and engineering constraints. Pillars would need to be almost to the sidewalk. There would either be many smaller pillars or fewer large pillars. The structure would fill up or block use of both sides of the road.

The cut and cover tunnel would need to start one mile south of Ashcake Road and extend about one mile north of Vaughn Road. There would be tremendous temporary impact to the town for 2- 3 years during construction, which would consist of deep trenches dug in short segments near existing infrastructure.

The deep bored tunnel, to get at grade, must start a couple miles outside of town; the top of the tunnel would be in bedrock at least 50 ft. below the town. When bringing it back to grade, we run into wetland impacts of approximately 14 acres. There would be infrastructure impacts in town for ventilation and sewer systems. A ventilation system would be needed in the center of town and on either side of the entrance.

Q: Why not use a tunnel boring machine at a shallower depth? They do it for the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel.

A: There is an approximately 50-foot deep layer of unconsolidated material before bedrock. Putting the tunnel through the unconsolidated material just below the surface could cause damage to the town.

Q: If you put a track through town to the east, you clip buildings. If you center the tracks, wouldn't you need a bypass anyway? Are there any specifications where we could find that information?

A: The DC2RVA Basis of Design specifies a distance from the adjacent track of 15 feet, or 15 feet from center line to center line.

Q: That doesn't clip 3 buildings through town?

A: Adding a track to the east does take out the road and street parking, but the additional track itself does not clip the building. Adding three tracks centered does clip a building, the old station building now used as a Visitors Center, eligible to be on the National Register of Historic Places.

Q: Wouldn't a temporary bypass be needed?

A: No, if putting a track to the east, the two existing tracks will remain in service during construction. If the tracks are centered, one track may need to be closed temporarily, but it would be doable.

Q: How would a reasonable person say Doswell's historic buildings are better versus Ashland's?

A: The analyses used in screening do not differentiate between the value of historic buildings or districts; alternatives that displaced a historic building were eliminated during screening. Alternatives that added track within a historic district where rail already exists were not eliminated during screening.

Q: How will people get to their houses if a road (Center Street) is removed? If any house does not have a side street, would the property have to be purchased?

A: Property acquisition laws say we cannot leave a property without access or take easements through other properties to provide access, so yes, properties without access would need to be acquired.

Q: Is there a difference when measuring wetlands near existing rail or where there is no rail at all? Area wetlands weighed differently if they are adjacent or non-adjacent to railroads?

A: Not for this screening, all wetland areas were considered of equal value. We evaluated Nation Wetland Inventory Maps that identify known wetland areas. For the alternatives in the DEIS, we did put boots on the ground to delineate wetlands in accordance with USACE and DEQ requirements. When it comes to any future permitting for wetland loss, the type and quality of the wetlands would be considered.

Q: Alternatives could be eliminated now, but is that too early? Would some of these areas be able to pass through USACE later?

A: The USACE considers total acreage of wetland impacts, as well as type of wetland. It's not clean and simple, but they start with size.

Q: We have three stages of screening. How did the Ashland through town options pass? We did not see the slides for that.

A: Trains already run through the center of town, and the development of the town around the railroad was a factor in identifying the historic districts. For screening purposes, alternatives that displace a historic building were eliminated, but adding track along an existing rail line was not.

Broad screenings were used to get to the alternatives carried into the Draft EIS for detailed analyses. We are reviewing the screening steps with you all to see if there are additional considerations or options we can take into account. We can potentially revisit alternatives that were originally screened out.

Q: In terms of safety, students walk to classes from the dorms on the other side of the track. Where does safety fit into the analysis? There is such a high impact in this area of people crossing track. Will it be in this draft EIS, or will it not be addressed for this portion of the track since this area has not been resolved?

A: Safety was not one of the preliminary screening criteria, but it is addressed in the DEIS. Safety is addressed generally and at specific locations near developed areas like Ashland and Fredericksburg.

Q: Which type of quantitative data was addressed in the DEIS for safety?

A: We looked at at-grade vehicular crossings and calculated the daily vehicle delay for all of the crossings within the study corridor. We also calculated changes to traffic safety.

COMMENT: How can we help get pedestrian info to you? Randolph Macon is happy to provide pedestrian crossing data to the team, we have a lot of it.

COMMENT: Digging a trench and filling it back in was taken out due to 3 years of inconvenience. But verses a life-time of inconvenience, 3 years is much better. That is not a reason to dismiss.

Q: A lot of people don't have the full understanding of public comment and how it impacts them. How does (DRPT) use that info?

A: We will review the comments received as part of this process and address those comments at the CAC meetings. The Draft EIS, once released, also has a 60 day comment period. All comments become part of the public record, which will be provided, with comments and responses, to CTB with a briefing. CTB will then consider those in a preferred alternative. The FRA will also review all public comments.

Q: I left the last meeting pretty positive, thinking tunneling or the eastern bypass may work, etc. It seems like those ideas are being dismissed. The eastern bypass has been shut down tonight. I'd hoped these would be revisited.

A: I propose we bring more information back about the tunnel. We are still looking at all alternatives at this point. We will ask the team to dig into the 4f flexibility, should some of those alternatives be reconsidered.

Q: I can envision a Doswell connector that was not in the options. What is the end game for us? Do you expect a consensus?

A: We hope so. We anticipate setting up a formal public comment period at the next meeting.

Q: Bucky made a comment at the last meeting. What is the benefit for Ashland or Hanover County? I've heard no benefits for Ashland or Hanover. Is there a benefit statement as to how this region will benefit?

A: This is looked at as an overall project for the Commonwealth and the North East Corridor. I'd refer you to the project purpose and need. It's a multimodal corridor which offers benefits to passenger rail, reliable service, quicker service, and an alternative to I-95.

COMMENT: Is there any specific benefit to Ashland/Hanover? It's a yes or no question. If so, what is it? In the construction world, this is what we call BS.

COMMENT: So there is a consensus to remove the 3rd rail through town, correct?

