

Main Street Station

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At the present time it would appear that Amtrak passenger arrivals and departures for calendar year 2009 at Richmond's Main Street Station will easily exceed last year's 21,450, most likely by a substantial margin. Modest numbers to be sure, but steady growth, year-over-year, despite a very limited number of train service options. This certainly suggests that, with the addition of three additional round-trips to and from DC and the Northeast Corridor (to be moved downtown from Staples Mill at some point in the next five years), the downtown station could be approaching 100,000 passenger arrivals and departures annually. Add to that, four more existing round trips (phased in between years five through ten), when the Carolina, Georgia and Florida trains are routed through Main Street Station, and we might expect to see 150,000 to 175,000 Richmond passengers using the downtown Richmond facility. But that's only the beginning. In a decade, more or less, with the addition of new service to Norfolk and additional Southeast High Speed Corridor service to the Raleigh-Durham Triangle, Greensboro and Charlotte, Richmond's downtown station would likely exceed today's Staples Mill station counts (although Staples Mill will undoubtedly continue to grow in usage as well).

This is certainly something to which we should all strive, and anticipate with the greatest of pleasure. However, there is a physical train-handling capacity problem with Main Street Station that, at some level of service, is going to represent another of those infamous "choke points" that former DRPT director, Karen Rae, used to talk about. Even assuming restoration of the second through track on either side of Main Street Station, the station can only accommodate one through passenger train, on each side. Restoration of stub-end tracks under the train shed could conceivably accommodate some trains from and to the north that terminate at Richmond, but the Newport News, Norfolk and Carolina (and beyond) trains will, in spite of the best of scheduling, tend to get bunched up in delay-producing conflicts with one another. The result: a new *choke point*!

Today, all the through trains, excepting those to and from Newport News, use the superior "A" line, the former RF&P-ACL and now CSX west-end route (I-195 corridor) which is double track, relatively high-speed, signaled for movement in either direction on either track, and with no conflicting on-line heavy industrial rail service comparable to that on the proposed "Bellwood Sub-Division" line through Main Street Station to Centralia. Money can fix many things, but rarely can one turn a poor route into a superb one. Degrading compromises usually must be made.

The point of this essay is not to fault Richmond's Main Street Station, however, there is more at stake here than Richmond's downtown station. Thus far we have not seen

a plan that anticipates the challenge described above. Until such plan is formulated and adopted, we would be ill advised to jettison access to the better route *through* Richmond. Acca Yard is the last point from which trains can proceed, via either route, in either direction, whether to Norfolk or Carolina or beyond. The wise course would be to address all of our future needs, now, rather than later. #####