

# RF&P's 175th Anniversary

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Today marks the 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the former Richmond, Fredericksburg & Potomac Railroad Company, its charter granted by the General Assembly in 1834.

The Richmond-Washington Line, as it was once known, is today the RF&P Subdivision of CSX. A unique piece of railroad always, it is today the busiest, most complex, and arguably the most important, rail link in the Commonwealth of Virginia. While CSX holds title to RF&P, the 110-mile *capital-cities* route is currently being improved by the investment of public dollars, moving it ever closer to becoming truly a modern, high-performance, line capable of accommodating almost every conceivable type of rail service. At the rate we are going, the public will someday have more invested in the line than CSX, which raises several important public policy issues.

As early as the 1850's, the State of Virginia, through its Board of Public Works, wanted more transportation utility from the RF&P than its private owners were willing to provide. Specifically, Virginia political leaders wanted the 76-mile, stub-ended, rail line from Richmond to the Potomac River wharf in Stafford County, extended on to Alexandria, via one of several optional routes. RF&P refused. The road's then-controlling stockholder group, headed by Moncure Robinson, thought the Potomac River steamboat connection to Washington would suffice. Only in 1870-72, when Tom Scott of the Pennsylvania Railroad (PRR) took over the dormant charter of the Alexandria & Fredericksburg and built southward to meet RF&P at Quantico, did RF&P become part of an all-rail north-south route.

Years later, in 1901, it was again the Pennsylvania Railroad, led by its visionary president, Alexandria J. Cassatt, that brokered the deal among six large railroads to form a new, jointly-owned, holding company to acquire control of RF&P. PRR threw in its Washington-to-Quantico line, to form the 20<sup>th</sup> century version of the Richmond-Washington (RF&P) route, all to be operated under one unified management.

Now, more than a century later, yet another northern visionary is thinking about the future of the RF&P. New York native, Joe Boardman, who until recently headed the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) in the Bush Administration, and who now serves as CEO of Amtrak, has several times suggested extending the Northeast Corridor electrification southward to Richmond. This would be a transformational development.

Recently, when the FRA called for expressions of interest by potential partners in the development of the long-discussed Southeast High Speed Rail Corridor, North

Carolina responded affirmatively, but apparently Virginia was silent; this at a time when the first real money may be available from the federal government.

Folks in DC and in Raleigh must wonder when Richmond will get on board?

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