

The Day the Angels Sang for VA Rail

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Amtrak-Virginia Train No. 174, the **New Norfolk Train**, departing Richmond's Staples Mill Station ("RVR") at 7:16 a.m., Wednesday, December 12, 2012, for DC and NEC points with nearly 400 passengers were on board. This was the inaugural run.



Hampton Roads - DC is one of the more heavily-traveled urban corridors in the U.S.. The route epitomizes the challenge faced by motorists and commercial aviation travelers on similar routes. Constrained highway capacity often results in congestion and delay. Airline cost structure and resource allocation policies have resulted in fewer and more expensive flights.

Not since the 1960's has there been any passenger rail service between Norfolk and Richmond, and never, to our knowledge, has there been single-seat *through* coach service, Norfolk to DC and beyond. [There was through sleeper service.]. Coupling intercity VA rail with the DC Metro transit with Norfolk's popular new Tide Light Rail on the south end is a model for other mega regions to observe and possibly emulate..

Sadly, the City of Richmond seemed to have boycotted the celebratory festivities unhappy -- we assume -- that the Norfolk train does not yet serve the City's downtown Main Street Station. Norfolk leaders took a different approach, with better results.

Two of the most significant players in the long chain of events which ended years of frustrating efforts and finally accomplished this miracle were Wick Moorman, CEO of Norfolk Southern, and Thelma Drake, Director of the Virginia Dept. of Rail & Public Transportation. CSX, Amtrak, and bi-partisan Virginia political support also deserve recognition. Moorman and Drake, pictured below, arriving Richmond, on the 11th.



The long journey to December 12 started decades ago with former Governor Linwood Holton (R) and his vision. Former Governor Jim Gilmore (R) in 2000 supported the first substantial funding for the Richmond-DC rail corridor. Senator, Mark Warner (D), while Governor, took decisive leadership steps in 2005 resulting in the establishment of the VA Rail Enhancement Fund. Senator-elect Tim Kaine (D), also while Governor, launched the first two (2) Virginia-sponsored Amtrak regional trains - - from Lynchburg in 2009, and the second from Richmond in 2010. Our current Governor, Bob McDonnell (R), supported funding for the Norfolk train, celebrating the effort with his personal participation in inaugural events on December 11th. A compelling bi-partisan story !

Political support and public funding notwithstanding, much of our Virginia rail progress is attributable to more enlightened and cooperative attitudes at the two major railroads, CSX and NS. It was primarily Wick Moorman, NS CEO, who made the difference on the big policy questions. Peter Shutz of CSX has always been a voice of reason and moderation. Virginians are fortunate to have such leadership, in both the public and private sectors, particularly at a time when Washington seems paralyzed.

We also salute Jay Alexander of Amtrak (picture behind Moorman and Drake above), Kevin Page of DRPT, and countless others. Their depth and breath of institutional knowledge, their rail expertise, and their resiliency in dealing with the inevitable hitches along the way delivered what others had set in motion. Thank you!

Continue to believe in miracles and listen for the *Singing of the Angels*, but let all those named above know of our gratitude. Santa could not have done better himself!
Happy New Year! # # # #