

Virginia's stake in the Northeast Rail Corridor

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One of Virginia's more important transportation infrastructure elements lies beyond the border of the Commonwealth. We refer to the 456-mile-long Northeast Rail Corridor ("NEC"), extending northward from Union Station in Washington to New York and Boston.

Once owned, or controlled, by the ill-fated Penn Central Railroad ("PC"), which went bust in 1970. The NEC was subsequently handed off to Amtrak as part of the northeastern railroad restructuring effort instigated by the U.S. congress and led by the federal DOT. It should have been no surprise that Amtrak, the recipient of the NEC, was only slightly more solvent than PC, and only then by means of public funding grants. Nevertheless, considerable progress has been made over the years in bringing what is essentially a 100-year-old railroad back to a "*state of good repair*" (beyond that standard in some instances, woefully short of it in others.). Much remains to be done, including replacement, or augmentation, of major elements, such as Hudson River tunnels and those under Baltimore, plus major bridges. So what is to become of the NEC? Can it be made to serve the transportation needs (freight as well as higher-speed passenger) in the decades ahead, or does the national interest, and certainly that of eastern U.S., dictate construction of a truly modern rail thoroughfare between DC and Boston? In fact, should it start at Richmond, or Hampton Roads? How much of the NEC capacity should be allocated to freight, to regional commuter trains, to much higher-speed passenger trains?

We have a material interest in the future of NEC, and in the rail passenger service provided within the NEC, because some of it originates and terminates in Virginia cities such as Richmond, Newport News, Norfolk, Lynchburg, and hopefully soon in Roanoke. Beyond that, the State of Virginia will, effective October 1, 2013, assume financial sponsorship of six (6) existing Amtrak regional round-trips daily. That was made possible by the General Assembly's recently-passed transportation revenue package, which included funding of Virginia's Intercity Passenger Rail Operations and Capital ("IPROC") program. These trains operate up and down the NEC, providing increasingly-popular, and well-patronized, "one-seat" (no change) rail service from to and between Virginia points and Baltimore, Philadelphia, New York, Boston, and intermediate points.

Currently the Federal Railroad Administration of US DOT is conducting studies of the NEC, out of which will come planning options for the years between 2015 and 2040. With just a few energetic exceptions, most Virginians are understandably unaware of the potential significance of all this to those of us who reside in the Commonwealth, yet have many reasons to travel to and from NEC points. This is *a train we can't afford*

to miss. Check the web-site of Virginia Rail Policy Institute, to see what one group of interested individuals has said to the FRA study team about the NEC. www.varpi.org

With I-95 being one of the least-inviting highways in the Mid-Atlantic, and commercial aviation options fewer and more pricy, NEC is an important issue. #####