



# **Future of Hampton Roads, Inc. High-Speed Rail in Hampton Roads**

**Version 11-1-09**





# Why Hampton Roads should be on the High-Speed Rail Corridor

By James F. Babcock



The current scramble for some of the \$8 billion in stimulus funds for high-speed rail turns up the arresting fact that some years ago Virginia officials did not include Hampton Roads in the plan for the Southeast High-Speed Rail Corridor (SEHSR). Thus Hampton Roads is set to become the most important large metro area in the U.S. that is not on a main line route.

We deserve better. Our region has the largest population of any metro area between Washington D.C. and Atlanta, the third busiest port in the East, Virginia's main tourist destination, and the nation's largest defense establishment.

"High-speed rail" (HSR) comes in several flavors with significantly different design and operating features but designated simply by their maximum speed: Express HSR = 150 mph, Regional HSR = 110 mph, Emerging HSR = 90 mph. A fourth speed category, 79 mph, defines conventional intercity passenger rail. The SEHSR corridor is rated at 110 mph.

Virginia's plan for Hampton Roads offers two lesser alternatives, both of which call only for spurs from the main SEHSR line to our region, and neither of which offers SEHSR quality of service.

One spur would run from Richmond to Newport News on the existing AMTRAK route. As the distance is relatively short for 110 mph service with limited stops, the mayors of Newport News and Williamsburg have indicated willingness to accept a needed upgrade of this line to at least 79 mph with several stops and several daily trains with through service at Richmond.

If adopted, that choice leaves the other spur for Southside Hampton Roads. Running from Petersburg to Norfolk, it would provide passenger service on the freight tracks of Norfolk Southern, but for safety it would be limited to 90 mph. The difference in travel time between this plan and a 110 mph plan is said to be about fifteen minutes.

However, the speed categories are also proxies for funding. A recent congressional report indicates that the Surface Transportation Authorization Act being drafted for the next six years includes \$50 billion for HSR, with states providing a 20% match. But it limits this funding to systems "reasonably expected to reach 110 mph."

Hence a 90 mph spur costing, say, \$400 million would be apparently paid for entirely by Virginia. For a 110 mph spur costing \$1 billion, Virginia would pay only \$200 million.

Why should our region settle for anything less than a level of service equivalent to the SEHSR main line? At a minimum, our Hampton Roads Transportation Planning Organization (HRTPO) should ask for the Petersburg-Norfolk route to be designed for 110 mph. It should also insist on through service onto the main line at Petersburg both north and south.

Furthermore, HRTPO should invite the residents of the northeast North Carolina sector of our MSA to lobby for 110 mph service on the CSX line from Norfolk through Suffolk and Weldon to Raleigh. That would create a HSR loop like the one already approved for Winston-Salem.

Beyond that, however, HRTPO might ask our congressional representatives to legislate an amendment to the approved SEHSR to drop the Petersburg-Raleigh segment entirely. The money for that could pay for the line through Weldon. More important, our region would be an integral part of the SEHSR corridor itself, thus ensuring our system is built at the same time as the rest, rather than decades later as happened here with the interstate highway. No harm in asking.

The decision on high-speed rail is one of those rare 100-year decisions where the die gets cast. To remain competitive with other metro areas, we dare not allow ourselves to be locked into a comparatively inferior infrastructure. Make it 110.

*Mr. Babcock is the retired CEO of First Virginia Bank-Hampton Roads and Vice Chairman of Future of Hampton Roads, Inc., which supports SEHSR quality service for Hampton Roads.*



**Future of Hampton Roads, Inc.  
Hampton Roads for High-Speed Rail for Hampton Roads  
Town Meeting - 23 October 2009 - Old Dominion University**



The Federal Railroad Administration defines several categories of intercity passenger rail service:

- Express High-Speed Rail. .... 150 mph
- Regional High-Speed Rail ..... 110 mph
- Emerging High-Speed Rail ..... 90 mph.
- Conventional Intercity Rail ..... 79 mph

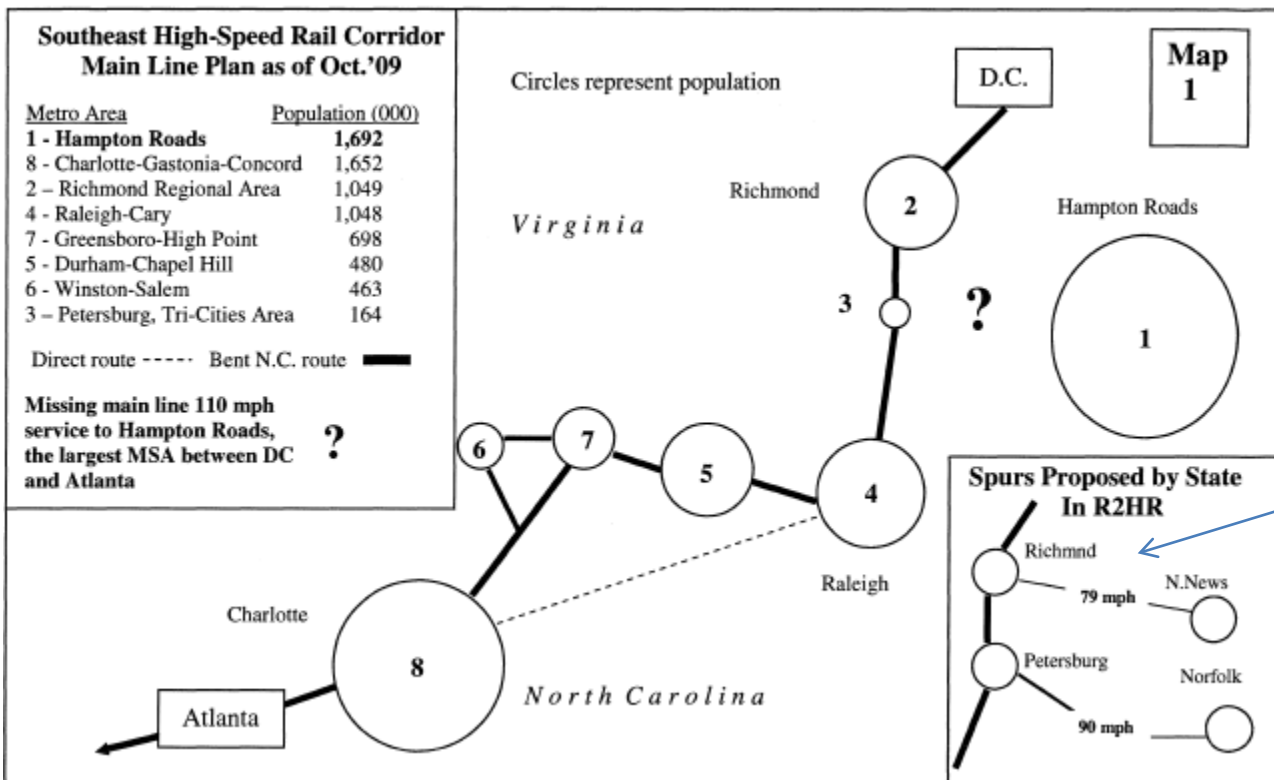
The difference between these categories is much more than the differences in speed. The higher speed categories provide increased levels of safety and on-time performance for passengers plus more passing lanes and control features to prevent conflicts between freight and passenger trains. The speed categories drive design, construction, and train scheduling. They are proxies for quality of service. Speed categories also affect funding. It is planned that transportation bills now being drafted by Congress will provide separate funding for future high-speed rail projects in addition to normal funding for conventional passenger rail projects such as AMTRAK. To qualify for high-speed funding, the draft legislation specifies that a system must be "reasonably expected to reach 110 mph." In other words, the choice of speed category will determine whether our region gets back a fair share of our taxes for a critical infrastructure project that will affect our region for 50 years.

Virginia's plan for the Southeast High-Speed Rail Corridor (SEHSR), one of ten corridors now competing for stimulus funds, has recently been altered to provide spurs off the main line to the Peninsula and South Hampton Roads. But spurs might not be built at the same time as the main line, and they would offer fewer trains at speeds lower than 110 mph. Is that good enough for the most populous region on the coast between New York and South Florida? For Virginia's port and main tourist destination? For the nation's largest military base? NC added time to our trip south by bending the main line to fit its smaller MSAs. Why shouldn't VA do the same for its much larger MSA?

Although the planning for the SEHSR Corridor is well advanced, no actual construction has started. There is no real impediment to having the planning process revised to allow Hampton Roads to be included as an integral part of the main line. Congress might have to make the change; NC, SC, and GA might oppose it, but maybe the other 46 states would agree VA has a compelling case. Doesn't our region merit the same superior quality of service that is planned for metro areas of lesser population and national importance? Not having our region on the main line would injure Virginia.



## EXISTING PLAN



This is the existing plan of record.

Note there is no main line connection to Hampton Roads, only spurs.

Spurs, however are not high speed and would create a low speed (79-90 mph cul-de-sac environment).

Although “better than nothing”, it is believed we should seek high speed alternatives with direct connections to DC and east coast points north.

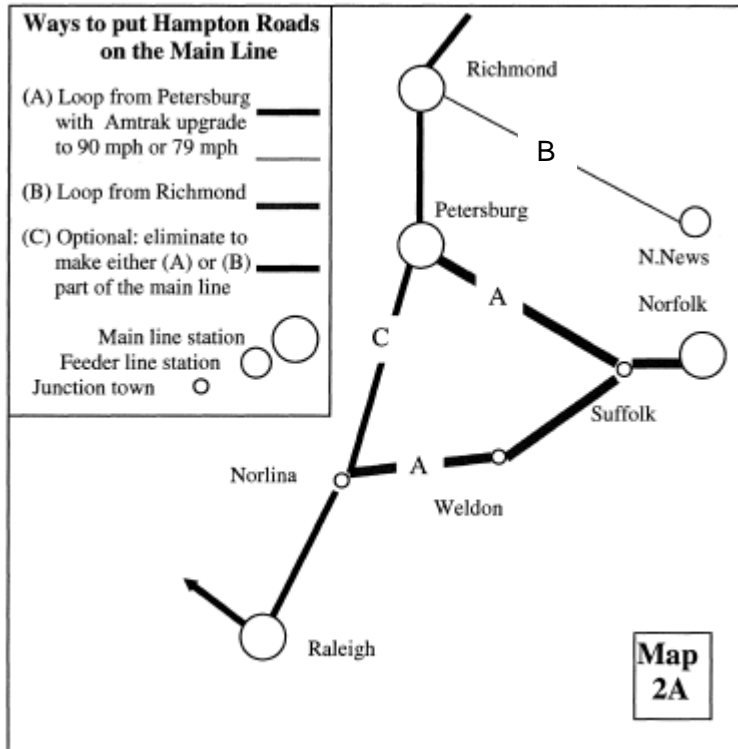
Pros: Most easily accomplished with Richmond and Feds?

Cons: No high speed access to Hampton Roads, only spurs

**No Survey Selection**



## Hampton Roads on Main Line



### Option 2A

Note there is no main line connection to Hampton Roads, only spurs.

Spurs, however are not high speed and would create a low speed (79-90 mph cul-de-sac environment).

Although “better than nothing”, it is believed we should seek high speed alternatives with direct connections to DC and east coast points north.

As part of the high-speed rail Main Line of the SEHSR Corridor itself (110 mph), via Petersburg – Suffolk/Norfolk - Weldon - Raleigh (Map 2A) (i.e. the present main line planned from Petersburg to Raleigh would be eliminated.). **Survey Selection B**

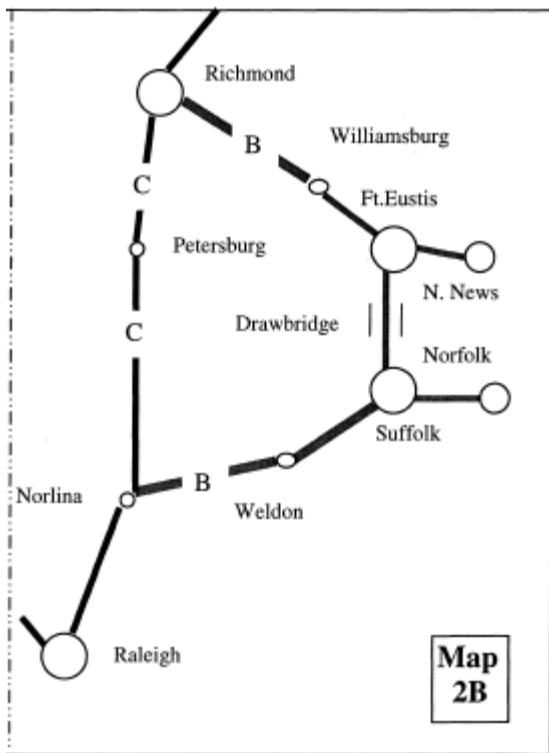
On a loop off the high-speed rail Main Line of the SEHSR Corridor (110 mph), via Petersburg - Suffolk/Norfolk - Weldon - Raleigh (Map 2A). **Survey Selection D**

Pros: More easily accomplished with Richmond and Feds?

Cons: Only emerging high speed access from Petersburg to Suffolk, Norfolk, Weldon



## Hampton Roads on Main Line: Option 2B



### Future of Hampton Roads Recommendation

Of the alternatives shown overleaf for ways to put Hampton Roads on the main line of the SEHSR Corridor, Future of Hampton Roads believes that alternative (B) shown on Map 2B-either as a loop off the main line with main line quality or as part of the main line itself-provides the best combination of features at reasonable cost:

- convenient boarding and shortest travel times for most riders from our region,
- access to trains on the main line schedule without having to change trains,
- the most direct service north and south for our travelers,
- the fastest route for those travelers whose destination happens to be Hampton Roads,
- possible one-day round trips to D.C. and back for military officers, defense contractors, and business travelers, thus avoiding overnight lodging expense,
- a drawbridge over the James River to provide a less expensive third crossing for rail, auto, and truck traffic and a water pipe to carry Norfolk's excess water to the Peninsula,
- no hazard from mixing passengers and freight on the tracks most likely to see increased freight usage.
- some assurance that when SEHSR is built it will be built to serve our important region at the same time as the rest of the SEHSR Corridor.

Pros: better access, faster speeds.

Cons: more costly (\$\$ and time) perhaps

As part of the high-speed rail Main Line of the SEHSR Corridor itself (110 mph), via Richmond - W'burg/N.News – Suffolk/Norfolk - Weldon - Raleigh (Map 2B), (i.e. the present main line planned from Richmond to Raleigh would be eliminated.) **Survey Selection A**

On a loop off the high-speed rail Main Line of the SEHSR Corridor (110 mph), via Richmond - W'burg/N.News – Suffolk/Norfolk - Weldon - Raleigh (Map 2B). **Survey Selection C**



# High-Speed Rail for Hampton Roads

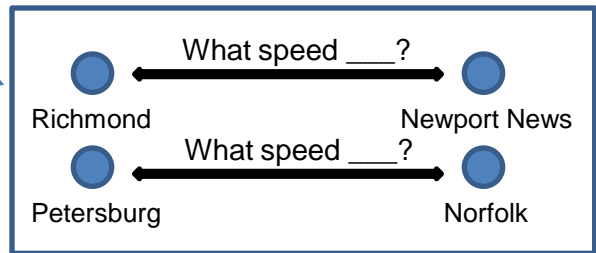
## Future of Hampton Roads Survey

Of the following five alternatives, please decide on your first and second choice, then reply by Wednesday, October.28,by emailing to jim.babcock@cox.net.

Example: If B is your #1 preference and E is #2, and your preferred speeds for E are 110 mph and 79 mph, your email reply can read "B E 110 79".

- A. As part of the high-speed rail Main Line of the SEHSR Corridor itself (110 mph), via Richmond - W'burg/N.News – Suffolk/Norfolk - Weldon - Raleigh (**Map 2B**) (i.e. the present main line planned from Richmond to Raleigh would be eliminated.)
- B. As part of the high-speed rail Main Line of the SEHSR Corridor itself (110 mph), via Petersburg – Suffolk/Norfolk - Weldon - Raleigh (**Map 2A**) (i.e. the present main line planned from Petersburg to Raleigh would be eliminated.)
- C. On a loop off the high-speed rail Main Line of the SEHSR Corridor (110 mph), via Richmond - W'burg/N.News – Suffolk/Norfolk - Weldon - Raleigh (**Map 2B**).
- D. On a loop off the high-speed rail Main Line of the SEHSR Corridor (110 mph), via Petersburg - Suffolk/Norfolk - Weldon - Raleigh (**Map 2A**)
- E. On two spurs, per the *Rail to Hampton Roads* draft EIS, via (fill in preferred speeds) Petersburg to Norfolk at \_\_\_\_\_ mph, and via Richmond to N.News at \_\_\_\_\_ mph.

Thank you for helping us gather this useful information!





## **High-Speed Rail for Hampton Roads** **Let Your Opinion Be Known**

Make your views known to government during the EIS public comment period:

Hon. Will Sessoms, Chairman & Hon. Molly Ward, Vice Chairman

H.R. Transportation Planning Organization

The Regional Building

723 Woodlake Drive, Chesapeake, VA 23320

Charles M. Badger, Director

Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation

600 East Main Street, Suite 2102

Richmond, VA, 23219

Let's all work together to get Hampton Roads on the SESHR main line!

For a movie of high speed rail in action, see the visualizations for the California route at: <http://www.mercurynews.com/california-high-speed-rail-map>



## **High-Speed Rail for Hampton Roads**

### **October 29, Update**

Given the relatively short distance between Richmond and Newport News, it appears that the mayors of Newport News and Williamsburg prefer that the Peninsula AMTRAK be upgraded to at least 79 mph rather than be included in a 110 mph system. The difference in travel time compared to a 110 mph system is only a few minutes and the conventional system could have more than one stop and perhaps more trains. Given this choice, it remains for southside. Hampton Roads to declare either for a spur off the main line, a loop attached to the main line, or a bend in the main line itself.



## **High-Speed Rail for Hampton Roads** **Friday, Oct 23, 2009 - What's Next?**

What's next?

The next critical event is the HRTPO meeting this coming Friday, October 30, 2009.

On the table is whether to pursue existing recommendations or to slow down and study alternatives.

If alternatives are entertained via a study, the next question is whether HRPTO is willing to actively pursue SEHSR plan changes to put Hampton Roads on the main line itself. **This requires congressional action.**

As a secondary (back-up) strategy, we would pursue getting the alternatives in the state's plan for Hampton Roads upgraded to 110 mph, with through travel north and south at Petersburg and Richmond on the main line, and construction at the same time as the rest of the SEHSR system. This could be done with loops off the main line--expensive, but it was done for Winston-Salem--or the famous spurs, either one from Richmond down across the James to Norfolk, or two as in the plan offered by the state, but with the necessary upgrades to 110 mph, etc.

The next efforts depend on what the HRTPO decides to do next. In the meantime, there is some progress in the fact that Joe Frank has written the HRTPO to say the Peninsula will live with the upgrade of AMTRAK to 79 mph provided they get nine trains a day.

This is better for them because the Peninsula route is short for high-speed and would have only one stop, whereas conventional rail, if it runs on time, is fast enough and can have more stops, including Williamsburg. So if that happens, then the question becomes what design we get for the southside: bend, loop, or spur.



## **High-Speed Rail for Hampton Roads** **Friday, October 30, 2009 Update**

On Friday, Oct 30, 2009, the Hampton Roads Transportation Planning Organization held a special meeting to gain consensus on the options available and indicated earlier in this presentation.

The result of the meeting was a unanimous vote in favor of:

- A. Establishing high speed rail south of the James River, through Suffolk and Norfolk
- B. Improving Amtrak service on the Peninsula
- C. Both options connecting to Richmond

The vote, along with the commissioning a Rail Task Force and hiring a transportation/rail consultant is regarded as highly favorable by the Future of Hampton Roads.



# From the Virginia Pilot

Friday, October 30, 2009





# From the Virginia Pilot

Friday, October 30, 2009



By Debbie Messina  
*The Virginian-Pilot*

## CHESAPEAKE

**E**NDING MONTHS of discord between South Hampton Roads and the Peninsula, regional leaders on Friday agreed to push for bringing high-speed trains to Southside Virginia.

The Hampton Roads Transportation Planning Organization endorsed routing the trains south of the James River through Suffolk and Norfolk, while at the same time improving conventional passenger rail service on the Peninsula.

"We've managed to come together in a way that should enhance passenger rail to both sides of the water," said Norfolk Mayor Paul Fraim, who has taken the lead advocating for high-speed rail.

Hampton Mayor Molly Ward said, "Sometimes you need to make compromises and move forward."

If state decision-makers concur and funding is secured, trains capable of traveling 110 mph could run along the freight corridor that roughly parallels U.S. 460. There would be stops in Bowers Hill near the Suffolk/Chesapeake border and Harbor Park in Norfolk, where the line would connect

See RAIL, PAGE 7

## RAIL | *Connections crucial to future, leaders say*

*Continued from Page 1*

with light rail.

On the Peninsula, additional trains and service improvements would be added to the twice-daily Amtrak passenger service that roughly follows Interstate 64 into Newport News.

Cost and ridership estimates have not been released.

Both would link with train service in Richmond and Petersburg and beyond along the I-95 corridor. The state's first rail priority is upgrading service to high speed between Petersburg and Washington at \$1.8 billion. High-speed trains already run from Washington to New York City and Boston.

With only five months before applications are due to federal authorities for a

share of an \$8 billion stimulus fund for high-speed rail, the Hampton Roads Transportation Planning Organization held a special meeting Friday to try to come to a consensus.

The vote was unanimous. Elected leaders from four Peninsula localities, including Newport News and Williamsburg, were not present.

Ward said the support was not there for designating the Peninsula as the region's high-speed rail corridor.

"You do what's best for the region and the commonwealth," she said. "You don't make any progress when you just say no."

Connecting to the expanding high-speed rail network is critical to the region's future economic viability, leaders say.

The vote will be forwarded to the Commonwealth Transportation Board, which will select the preferred route before March. That board is not bound to follow the planning organization's recommendation.

March is the deadline for applying for the federal stimulus money. Applications totaling \$102 billion already have been submitted nationwide.

The Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation has studied alternatives for bringing higher-speed rail to Hampton Roads for four years.

The results of that study are under review by the Federal Railroad Administration and are expected to be released soon.

One of the options is the scenario endorsed by the local planning organization. Others include upgrading the current Amtrak service on the Peninsula to high speed and initiating conventional rail service in

South Hampton Roads; and just upgrading the Peninsula train service without southside service.

The state has not released the price tags of the various alternatives but said they range from \$330 million to \$844 million.

State and local leaders acknowledge that it would be difficult to go from no service to high-speed service on the south side.

Instead, it is likely that rail service would be introduced in phases, starting with conventional passenger rail at 79-90 mph, moving to emerging high-speed rail at 90-110 mph, possibly to regional high-speed rail at 110-150 mph.

Virginians for High Speed Rail, the state's leading rail advocacy group, supports emerging high-speed service to both sides of Hampton Roads.

**Debbie Messina**, (757) 446-2588, [debbie.messina@pilotonline.com](mailto:debbie.messina@pilotonline.com)



## **High-Speed Rail for Hampton Roads** **Friday, Oct 30, 2009 - What's Next?**

Future of Hampton Roads next Phase 2 Plans are to advocate:

1. Getting through service both north and south
2. Adding a line from Suffolk to Raleigh
3. Put the Petersburg to Norfolk line on the funding priority list ahead of the Petersburg to Raleigh line
4. Put the Suffolk to Raleigh additional line on the funding priority list ahead of the additional line feeding Winston Salem
5. Correct the U.S High Speed Rail Association's report;
6. Correct the America 2050 report; require VDRPT to change the states Rail for Virginia Strategy Plan plus 15 more action items.

Another Town Hall may be scheduled to walk through these options and provide more regional feedback to the correct authorities.



# **Future of Hampton Roads, Inc. High-Speed Rail in Hampton Roads**

**End**

