

Statement of Shannon Valentine
Secretary of Transportation, Commonwealth of Virginia
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands
House Natural Resources Committee
Long Bridge Act of 2020
July 13, 2020

Madam Chair Haaland and Members of the Subcommittee:

I am honored to testify in support of HR 7489, a measure that will authorize the transfer of the National Park Service land to the Commonwealth of Virginia and the District of Columbia to construct the Long Bridge rail project connecting Virginia and the District. I would like to thank Representative Wittman, who testified on the first panel and is a member of your Committee, for the opportunity to be with you today. I would also like to thank Congressman Don Beyer (D-VA08) who co-sponsored the bill with Representative Wittman and Congress members Eleanor Holmes Norton, Gerry Connolly, Bobby Scott, Jennifer Wexton, Abigail Spanberger, Ben Cline, Morgan Griffith, Don McEachin, Elaine Luria, and Anthony Brown who co-led this legislation.

Background

The two-track Long Bridge was built in 1904 and reinforced in 1942. The bridge and tracks on both sides of the Potomac are owned by CSX railroad. The bridge spans from the Crystal City area in Arlington across the Potomac River to East Potomac Park in the District of Columbia. The two-track rail bridge carries on average 80 freight, passenger and commuter trains per day. The current Long Bridge is the main bridge linking the Southeast to the Northeast for both freight and passenger rail traffic.

The Long Bridge is a critical piece of infrastructure with national significance. The expansion of the bridge will support the economic vitality of the nation by significantly expanding rail capacity and providing critical network redundancy to support and enhance passenger rail as well as multimodal freight movement along the east coast and to the Midwest - while also connecting workers to key employment centers.

The VRE and Amtrak trains that travel in this corridor are split between the Manassas Line and Fredericksburg line trains. These two corridors have five total tracks coming together in Alexandria and converging across the two-track Long Bridge, creating a significant bottleneck and a major obstacle to future opportunity and expansion. For your reference, a graphic depicting the rail corridor today and in the future is included.

The project will bolster performance of the freight network by creating much needed redundancy, security and stability. The next closest rail bridge is 70 miles away (as the crow flies) in Harpers Ferry, West Virginia. The expansion will also improve network performance by separating freight and passenger rail, while relieving gridlock on the East Coast. Without additional capacity, freight trains will experience **10 times the current delay** by 2040.

Need for Additional Rail Bridge

As you can imagine, merging five lanes into two would create a significant traffic jam. Simply put, this is the problem we are facing on this very important rail corridor. On a good day with no delays, the current rail bridge is at 98% capacity during peak hours.

Virginia has seen record numbers of passenger rail ridership in recent years – nearly 1 million riders on state-supported Amtrak in 2019. Increased passenger rail service will accommodate a growing Virginia as its population is expected to increase from 8.5 million to 10 million during the next 25 years. Increased passenger rail service will meet the growing demand not only among Virginians but throughout the eastern seaboard as an alternative to traveling the heavily congested I-95 corridor. In fact, the route between Fredericksburg, Virginia, and Springfield, Virginia, is one of the most congested highways in the United States. However, due to the capacity constraints posed by the two-track Long Bridge, we are not able to address this congestion and offer rail as an alternative.

Therefore, in 2016, an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) process began, with the assistance from TIGER funds appropriated by Congress, to determine improvements for rail infrastructure between Arlington and the District. Led by the District Department of Transportation (DDOT), in a partnership with the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT) which is within the Virginia Transportation Secretariat, the Long Bridge EIS study is nearly complete, with final environmental clearance and the Record of Decision from the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) expected in the fall of 2020.

The Long Bridge study has determined that an additional two-track rail bridge constructed adjacent and upstream of the current bridge is the preferred alternative. Even though it is called the Long Bridge project, in addition to the bridge span over the Potomac River there are five additional bridges over roadways and bodies of water including the GW Parkway, I-395, and Washington Channel, as you can see from the map attached to my testimony. In addition, as part of the mitigation for the National Park Service (NPS) lands, the project includes a new pedestrian and bicycle bridge to be built alongside the new rail bridge.

The Long Bridge program of projects, an estimated investment of \$2 billion, would double the capacity of the current bridge and would be constructed in concert with projects adding a 4th track on both sides of the Potomac, thereby creating a four-track corridor that spans 8 miles from Alexandria to south of the US Capitol. The construction of a separate passenger-only bridge will also expand rail capacity serving the Port of Virginia, and will take thousands of trucks off Virginia's roads by allowing freight to move more freely.

Rail Initiative

While the EIS process was ongoing in 2018 and 2019, on a parallel path, Virginia was in negotiations with CSX regarding adding passenger service to DC. These negotiations, based on

strong collaboration, resulted in a landmark agreement between Virginia and CSX, which was announced on December 19, 2019 by Virginia Governor Ralph Northam, CSX CEO James Foote, and other senior officials from Amtrak and Virginia Rail Express. The agreement, a \$3.7 billion rail initiative, would double passenger service, increase freight capacity from the Port of Virginia to the Northeast and Midwest, construct Long Bridge and its program of projects, and include the acquisition of 350 miles of right-of-way and 225 miles of track.

This public-private partnership with CSX will have exponential economic impacts for generations to come. According to a study by George Mason University, construction of the Long Bridge project and the resulting increase in passenger trains would facilitate more than \$6 billion in additional economic activity in the Northern Virginia and Washington, DC region each year.

In 2019 the Virginia Department of Transportation completed the Interstate 95 Corridor Improvement Plan. This plan analyzed many potential improvements to this critical corridor. It found that widening I-95 by one lane in each direction for 50 miles would cost \$12 billion, and that by the time construction was completed in 10 years, the corridor would be just as congested as it is today. This rail initiative will add the same capacity at less than a third of the cost.

Impact on NPS Lands and Need for Legislation

Throughout this process, we understood that the main bridge would cross NPS lands. Virginia has been working with NPS to mitigate impacts -- and we are sincerely grateful for their help and guidance.

After conferring with NPS, we have determined that due to 43 US Code, Sections 934 and 938, that railroads - unlike highways - cannot be built through federal park lands without Congressional approval. Therefore, we have worked closely with members of the Virginia delegation, the District of Columbia, their representative, and the National Park Service to draft HR 7489, which was introduced by Representative Wittman. This bill would authorize the Secretary of the Interior to transfer NPS lands to Virginia and the District of Columbia to construct the Long Bridge project.

I should also note that similar language was contained in HR 2, the Surface Transportation bill that passed the House on July 1st. However, due to the uncertain passage of a companion bill in the Senate, we believe it is important for this bill to be heard in your Committee and to receive the opportunity for consideration on the Floor of the House. Senators Warner, Kaine, and Van Hollen are also working to introduce similar language to this House bill.

As we move forward with definitive agreements with CSX, including the construction agreement for Long Bridge, your advancement of this Long Bridge Act of 2020, is a central component. This language authorizing the Secretary of the Interior to convey NPS land to

Virginia and DC for the construction of a railroad is fundamental to finalizing a once-in-a-generation opportunity.

On behalf of the Commonwealth of Virginia, I respectfully ask for your consideration of HR 7489. I would be pleased to answer any of your questions. Thank you.

Long Bridge Corridor

TODAY FUTURE

