



Appendix A-5

Media Coverage

June 2022

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- *Rail News*: New River Valley Passenger Rail launches station feasibility study (12.23.21)
- *The Roanoke Times*: NRV passenger rail: State seeks public input on study of potential station locations (12.27.21)
- *WDBJ7*: Virginia Passenger Rail Authority seeks public feedback on study of station location (12.28.21)
- *The Roanoke Times*: NRV passenger rail study virtual meetings set (02.13.22)
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Media Coverage

Rail News article (12.23.21)

Rail News: Passenger Rail

12/23/2021

New River Valley Passenger Rail launches station feasibility survey



The state will buy nearly 30 miles of right of way and tracks from NS.

Photo - VPRA

The Virginia Passenger Rail Authority (VPRA) has announced the launch of the New River Valley Passenger Rail Feasibility Study, which will examine potential rail station locations in the area.

VPRA is inviting the general public and key stakeholders to review the project on a [dedicated website](#), through a community meeting (potentially to be held in February), via social media campaigns and two surveys. One survey asks for public input about priorities and knowledge of locations, while the other seeks comments about the study results to examine stakeholder feedback after the meeting concludes.

The study launch follows a May 2021 agreement between VPRA and [Norfolk Southern Railway](#) to extend passenger-rail service along the former Virginian Line between Roanoke and New River Valley for the first time since 1979. The state will buy nearly 30 miles of right of way and tracks from NS, as well as make necessary infrastructure improvements and build a new passenger-rail station.

Five potential station sites are located along existing NS track, which currently only handles freight traffic. The study will help examine and screen locations.



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Media Coverage

The Roanoke Times article (12.27.21)

https://roanoke.com/news/local/nrv-passenger-rail-state-seeks-public-input-on-study-of-potential-station-locations/article_f3fca210-646e-11ec-8b02-17dfa883c3d5.html

NRV passenger rail: State seeks public input on study of potential station locations

Yann Ranaivo
Dec 27, 2021



Gov. Ralph Northam broke major news in Christiansburg in May when he and other top state officials formally announced plans to return passenger rail service to the New River Valley within at least the next several years.
THE ROANOKE TIMES, FILE

Yann Ranaivo

A state authority is seeking public feedback on potential station locations for the extension of Amtrak service to the New River Valley.

The Virginia Passenger Rail Station Authority started the New River Valley Passenger Rail Station Feasibility Study to look at five possible station locations in and around the region, according to an announcement this past week.

The study “reflects on previous work conducted for the New River Valley passenger rail station locations in the region, while examining what station location opportunities are possible following [Gov. Ralph Northam’s] May 2021 announcement,” the announcement reads.

Northam broke major news in Christiansburg in May when he and other top state officials formally announced plans to return passenger rail service to the New River Valley within at least the next several years.

The deal is part of Virginia’s more than \$250 million investment in the Western Rail Initiative, a program that covers the return of passenger rail to the New River Valley and **the upcoming addition** of another Amtrak train from Roanoke to Washington, D.C. The investment includes the acquisition of right of way and track from Norfolk Southern Railway for just under 29 miles of the Virginian Line from the Salem Crossovers to Merrimac in Montgomery County.

Several figures who for years were involved in the campaign to return passenger rail to the New River Valley praised the latest step being taken by VPRA and view the study as further progress on the much anticipated project.

“Above all else, it’s exciting that it’s one more step in the right direction to get passenger rail to the New River Valley,” said Kevin Byrd, executive director of the New River Valley Regional Commission.

The study adds to other activities related to the passenger rail project, including **recent decisions** by several localities in the region to join the entity that will own and operate the station.

Montgomery County, Blacksburg, Christiansburg, Radford, the town of Pulaski and Pulaski County have each agreed to join the New River Valley Passenger Rail Station Authority, Byrd said this past week. The measure is expected to be taken up in the near future by the boards of visitors for Radford University and Virginia Tech, he said.

As far as the possible station locations, the VPRA said they are along existing Norfolk Southern corridors currently operated for freight trains only — more specifically, the former Virginian and N&W lines.

However, all but one of those five locations are truly possible, and will be carried forward, due to this past May’s announcement of the Virginian Line purchase, according to the New River Valley station’s project page. The previously preferred location near the Christiansburg Aquatic Center on North Franklin Street was struck from consideration due to its location on the N&W line.

Work led by the New River Valley Regional Commission recommended some years ago the spot near the aquatic center, and the town bought land in that area primarily for that purpose. Town officials, however, did say at the time that the land bought for just under \$400,000 could be used for additional aquatic center parking should a rail station at that location not materialize.

Christiansburg officials previously said a big reason the town bought the land — which occurred a few years before the return of rail to the region was formally announced — was to show it would be ready to accommodate passenger rail operations.

One key reason the previously targeted site near the aquatic center was recommended was its central location in the area and convenient access point for the bulk of the anticipated ridership, people involved in the campaign to return passenger rail to the region previously said.

Of the four potential locations that remain in consideration, two are near the Uptown Christiansburg mall, one is in the Merrimac area on the northern edge of Christiansburg and another is in the Ellett Valley just southeast of Blacksburg.

Among other things, the VPRA is seeking input on the study. The authority's recent announcement includes a link to a survey that launched on Dec. 22 and is slated to close on Jan. 31. Plans for a second survey were also announced.

VPRA said the first survey will allow the authority to consider the public's priorities and knowledge about the locations as part of the location screening process.

VPRA said a community meeting to present the results of the feasibility study to the public is also being planned for some time in February. The authority said details of that event will be posted to the project website as the time of the meeting nears.

Larry Hincker, spokesman for the New River Valley Passenger Rail initiative, said the study is another indication of the state's commitment to extending passenger rail to the area.

"We're excited they're now moving forward with the study," Hincker said.

Ray Smoot, a member of the Commonwealth Transportation Board and co-chairman of the New River Valley Passenger Rail group, emphasized the importance of the public providing insights and perspectives on the project and said he hopes to see a great deal of participation in the process.

The project is, for several reasons, a major one because it will effectively create a direct connection between the New River Valley and areas as far as Boston, Smoot said.

“We will be on a direct rail all the way up the Northeast corridor, all on the same train,” he said. “I regard this as a real enhancement to passenger transportation.”

Smoot’s comment reflects one of the reasons behind the push for passenger rail in the area: An alternative travel route to the often tough Interstate 81. He said that alternative is particularly important for the Virginia Tech and Radford University students, many of whom aren’t from Southwest Virginia.

Even with the recent improvements to I-81, “you can still only do so many vehicles on it at any given time,” Smoot said.

While he said he’s glad to see the study and the opportunity for a great number of people to provide their insights on the much anticipated project, Christiansburg Mayor Mike Barber said he thinks it makes more sense to put the station near the mall due largely to that area’s immediate proximity to lodging — and even more planned lodging for the future — restaurants and shops.

Barber particularly questions the potential Ellett Valley location, which he described as an area that “makes absolutely no sense” for a station.

Barber said the Ellett Valley largely comprises agricultural lands and narrow winding roads, two things he doubts would be conducive to daily influxes of travelers.

“There’s nothing for them,” he said, referring to the little to no access to public transportation in that area.

Barber also questions whether the station would get support from Ellett Valley residents, who he said could raise questions about the project’s intrusion on the land. The mayor alluded to **Ellett Valley residents’ past resistance** to the Smart Road — a private test track that’s been used for autonomous cars and drones — and work over the past few years to expand that research ground.

Smoot echoed some of Barber’s points on the potential mall area locations, which he said “have the most desirable attributes of a site.”

Among those attributes, Smoot said, are access by not just automobiles, but also bikeways and trails. Then, he said, is the obvious proximity to the mall itself and its retail surroundings.

“They [passengers] would be proximate to dining locations. They would also be proximate to at least one hotel that’s located right there,” Smoot said. “They’ll be arriving to a place where there’s a lot going on.”

The mall area, Smoot said, would also allow for more convenient car travel between the station and the Blacksburg and Radford areas due to its proximity to Peppers Ferry Road (Virginia 114), and the U.S. 460 bypass.

U.S. 460 provides a direct highway connection between Christiansburg and Blacksburg. Peppers Ferry Road directly connects Christiansburg to Fairlawn, which is located just across the New River from Radford.

There is, however, currently no direct rail connection between the mall area to the Virginian Line, which may require the addition of a spur line, Hincker said.

By Yann Ranaivo

Yann Ranaivo covers local government and politics in the New River Valley, including Christiansburg, Blacksburg, Radford and Montgomery County.



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Media Coverage

WDBJ7 article (12.28.21)

Virginia Passenger Rail Authority seeks public feedback on study of station location

By Janay Reece

Published: Dec. 28, 2021 at 5:54 PM EST



NEW RIVER VALLEY, Va. (WDBJ) - In May 2021, Governor Northam announced Virginia had reached an agreement with Norfolk Southern to extend passenger rail services along the former Virginian Line from Roanoke to the New River Valley.

"We have a real opportunity with our partners at Norfolk Southern to move the station forward in a real way that hadn't been possible previously, but we're reflecting on all the good regional work, all the good cooperative work throughout the state to get this effort forward," said Katherine Youngbluth, the director of Planning at the Virginia Passenger Rail Authority (VPRA).

The next stage in the announcement is in the form of a feasibility [study](#) and [survey](#).

"We want people to engage in what the major issues are through this survey is one step towards getting a better holistic feasibility study that people can really feel like they had a say in," said Youngbluth.

Their hope is to use the survey and study to look at possible station locations of a new passenger rail platform in the NRV. Of the five station areas examined, only four of the potential locations are shown. Due to its location on the N&W rail line, the fifth location (North Franklin East) was eliminated from consideration.

The VPRA goal is to better connect statewide Amtrak service to southwestern Virginia. The Virginia Passenger Rail Authority (VPRA) began the New River Valley Passenger Rail Station Feasibility Study in fall 2021 to examine station locations to construct a new passenger rail platform in the New River Valley.

"Which is essentially important for us to get a different mode option of travel for those folks to go nationwide or even northern in the state if they wanted, or southern in the state if they want to on a train," said Youngbluth.

Officials report about 600 people have already taken the survey.

The study and survey will wrap up January 31.

Officials say once they gather all the results, in late February they'll present all they've heard and learned in a public meeting.

To [take the survey you can visit this website](#).

If you'd like to [read the study you can learn more here](#).

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Media Coverage

The Roanoke Times article (02.13.22)

https://roanoke.com/news/local/nrv-passenger-rail-study-virtual-meetings-set/article_026a62a8-8902-11ec-8c58-ff6b96f9c8ca.html

NRV passenger rail study virtual meetings set

Feb 13, 2022



Amtrak returned to Roanoke in 2019 — and plans have now been approved for the service to be extended into the New River Valley, and expanded service for Roanoke.
The Roanoke Times, File 2019

Virtual public meetings are set to discuss the results of a study that are part of determining the site of a new passenger rail station in the New River Valley.

The study details will include the results of a public survey. The meetings are scheduled for Feb. 28 at 6 p.m. and March 1 at noon. Those interested in participating are asked to register in advance, according to the Virginia Department

https://roanoke.com/news/local/nrv-passenger-rail-study-virtual-meetings-set/article_026a62a8-8902-11ec-8c58-ff6b96f9c8ca.html

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of Rail and Public Transportation.

Stakeholders announced last year that passenger rail service will be returning to the New River Valley last year, and the state recently announced the finalization of the process that will culminate in the service.

A major piece of the plan is where the New River Valley rail station will be located. Currently, several sites are being studied, including some in and around Christiansburg, and one in the Ellett Valley of Montgomery County.

More than \$250 million in investment is expected to cover the return of passenger rail to the New River Valley and the upcoming addition of another Amtrak train from Roanoke to Washington, D.C. The investment includes the acquisition of right of way and track from Norfolk Southern Railway for just under 29 miles of the Virginian Line from the Salem Crossovers to Merrimac in Montgomery County.

The start of the New River Valley service is not expected until at least 2025.

To register for the meetings, go to: **<https://transformingrailva.com/events>**.

- The Roanoke Times



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Media Coverage

Roanoke.com article (02.23.22)

https://roanoke.com/opinion/editorial/editorial-amtrak-extensions-hold-huge-promise-for-southwest-virginia/article_bc2700cc-93fa-11ec-91e3-2fabad9c9f92.html

TOP STORY

Editorial: Amtrak extensions hold huge promise for Southwest Virginia

Feb 23, 2022



Conductor Joe Snyder (left) chats with Walt Stringer, retired, of San Diego (right) who was headed to Baltimore on the first Amtrak train from Roanoke on Oct. 31, 2017.

The Roanoke Times | File 2017

The man stood on the Amtrak train platform in Roanoke, wheeled luggage at the ready, a smile on his face that placed his expression somewhere between resignation and exasperation.

https://roanoke.com/opinion/editorial/editorial-amtrak-extensions-hold-huge-promise-for-southwest-virginia/article_bc2700cc-93fa-11ec-91e3-2fabad9c... 1/4

The reason for his attitude wasn't hard to discern. He had brought his bags up the ramp right around 6:20 a.m., just as the passenger train had begun to roll north toward Washington, D.C., and New York City. The train's languorous pace tantalized him with an opportunity to take a long look at the train he had just missed as it lumbered away into the dark.

In Roanoke, once you miss that early morning train, you don't really have any other option for the day, unless you have the ability and the reckless impulse to lead foot a vehicle to Lynchburg and catch the same train there — an impulse that might not leave you, um, wreckless.

Depending on the destination, someone in that man's predicament could soon get a second chance to get where they want to go in the manner they wanted to get there, should events conspire to keep one from boarding the first train of the day.

Plans are in the works for a second train to bring travelers to and from Roanoke. As outlined in previous coverage by Roanoke Times reporter Jeff Sturgeon, this second train would arrive about 1:45 p.m. and leave around 4:30 p.m. It would go as far as Washington, D.C., unlike the morning train, which goes all the way to Boston. This new rail option will come about as the result of a partnership between Amtrak, Norfolk Southern and the state of Virginia.

The word has not yet been given as to exactly when this second train will start serving Roanoke, beyond an estimate of spring this year — but whenever that service begins, that will be great news.

Amtrak travel from Roanoke remains a different experience from the cram-packed train cars that run through the East Coast's urban sprawl. The train isn't crowded, and if you happen to be alert, you'll be treated to lovely Virginia countryside as it's slowly revealed by the sunrise.

You won't be squashed, as happens with airplane travel if you have a waistline wider than five inches. (Yes, that's hyperbole, but not by much.) If you own a laptop or tablet, getting extra work done is easy as the ride is roomy and relatively smooth and the train offers Wi-Fi.

Bringing your own supplies for assembling a sandwich can feel a little like risk taking as the train car occasionally wobbles along the tracks, but it can be done.

This mode of travel has proved compatible with the Roanoke region. It's both old and new — passenger rail was once routine in the Star City, but a 38-year hiatus passed before Amtrak service began in 2017. Usage has proven heavier than Amtrak anticipated. In the last fiscal year completed before the pandemic, 55,000 passengers disembarked in Roanoke.

There's even more good news looming. If you live a county or two east or west of the Star City, you are eventually going to have more train-hopping options, as potential places to board that are in range of the Roanoke Valley are going to triple.

In May 2021, then-Gov. Ralph Northam announced a \$257.2 million investment in the Western Rail Initiative, designed to expand Amtrak service to the New River Valley, with the funding earmarked for acquisition of right of way and track and infrastructure improvements. The goal is to have Amtrak trains clickety-clackety to the Christiansburg area starting in 2025. Officials estimate that once that happens, 80,000 new riders will fill those comfortable train seats.

On Feb. 28 at 6 p.m. and again on March 1 at noon, the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation will present the results of a survey conducted to determine where to build a passenger rail station in the New River Valley (the meetings are virtual — to register to attend, visit <https://transformingrailva.com/events>). Of the locations under study, three are in Christiansburg and one is in the Ellett Valley southeast of Blacksburg.

Groundwork is also being laid to arrange a third train for the Roanoke platform that will shuttle to the New River Valley station and back, hopefully providing a welcome alternative to tractor-trailer heavy Interstate 81 for the many commuters between the two locales.

After 2025, the state will start looking into what it will take to extend the service all the way to Bristol, something rail advocates there have long cried out for. On the very first ride when Amtrak service renewed in Roanoke, which took place in 2017 on Halloween morning, residents from Bristol drove up in the pre-dawn hours to board the train and raise awareness for their cause.

Meanwhile, a push to place an Amtrak station in Bedford has also gathered steam. A study estimated that the planned rail stop at the 6,600-population town, including a platform and a station, will cost about \$11 million to build, with a projected completion date of 2025.

As far as we're concerned, the more the merrier. It's better for traffic, better for the environment, better for the peace of mind of travelers.

If you happened to guess, by chance, that this essay was drafted while its author was riding an Amtrak train, your guess was absolutely correct.



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Media Coverage

WFIR News article (02.23.22)

Public meetings scheduled to help determine NRV Amtrak station site

Published February 23, 2022 | By [Evan Jones](#)



WFIR/Evan Jones

One of the next steps in extending passenger rail service from Roanoke to the New River Valley involves determining exactly where the station should be. The Virginia Passenger Rail Authority is charged with the process, and its staff has identified five potential station sites in the Christiansburg-Blacksburg area. There are two virtual public meetings scheduled next week — Monday evening at 6:00 and Tuesday at noon — to hear public comment and help determine which site is deemed most feasible before heading to federal environmental review. WFIR's Evan Jones has more:

0:00 / 1:01

[Click here](#) for full NRV Amtrak station location information.

[Click here](#) to register for the public meetings.

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WFIR - Mel Wheeler, Inc.

<https://wfirnews.com/news/public-meetings-scheduled-to-help-determine-nrv-amtrak-station-site>



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Media Coverage

The Roanoke Times article (03.01.22)

https://roanoke.com/news/local/proposed-nrv-rail-station-to-be-located-on-one-of-two-christiansburg-mall-area-sites/article_ab161166-98fe-11ec-818d-337d3d194211.html

Proposed NRV rail station to be located on one of two Christiansburg mall-area sites

Yann Ranaivo

540-381-1661

Mar 1, 2022



File, The Roanoke Times

Yann Ranaivo

540-381-1661

The location of the New River Valley's proposed rail station is now narrowed to one of two sites, each of which are in proximity to the Uptown Christiansburg mall, based on work performed by the Virginia Passenger Rail Authority.

The news about the sites was among several details shared Monday night during a virtual meeting hosted by VPRA officials.

The VPRA began a feasibility study this past fall to look at potential station locations in the New River Valley and then conducted a survey that ran from Dec. 22 to Jan. 31. The meeting briefly addressed the survey, with the hosts highlighting respondents' general preference for the two Christiansburg mall sites.

The survey drew just over 2,600 respondents. Among the other "general themes/comments" highlighted from the survey was that multi-modal and public transit access to the station and student access were all considered important issues.

One of the mall sites is located just west of that property. The other is just north of the mall.

Conceptual, but not definite, designs of each location were presented Monday. The diagrams for both potential sites showed a connection to the existing New River Road. They also showed what officials said would be a temporary relocation of a piece of the Huckleberry Trail, which passes by the mall as part of its run between Christiansburg and Blacksburg.

Officials also shared estimated costs, with the mall sites showing to be most cost-effective when compared with two other previously considered sites. The total capital costs for the west and north sites, respectively, would be approximately \$56 million and \$52 million.

More than \$250 million in investment is expected to cover the return of passenger rail to the New River Valley and the upcoming addition of another Amtrak train from Roanoke to Washington, D.C. The investment includes the acquisition of right of way and track from Norfolk Southern Railway for just under 29 miles of the Virginian Line from the Salem Crossovers to Merrimac in Montgomery County.

The start of the New River Valley service is not expected until at least 2025.

Of the sites being considered for the NRV station, several were in Christiansburg area, including the mall sites, as well as one in the Ellett Valley.

There is another virtual NRV rail meeting March 1 at noon. It was earlier announced that to register, go to: <https://transformingrailva.com/events>.