



## VPRA Meeting - Chair Report

Monday, April 26, 2021

### RAIL TALKING POINTS:

- **Transforming Rail in Virginia:** USDOT Secretary Pete Buttigieg joined Governor Northam as well as representatives from the Commonwealth, CSX, and Amtrak on March 30 to recognize the execution of the definite agreements with CSX, Amtrak, and VRE. The event was held at the Alexandria VRE-Amtrak Station, and attendance was limited due to Covid. With the signing of the Amtrak and CSX agreements, Financial Close with CSX was completed on April 14.
- **Western Rail Initiative:** A binding term sheet was signed on April 2, 2021 between DRPT and Norfolk Southern (NS). This agreement involves acquisition of the NS Virginia Line from Salem to Christiansburg with passenger service rights through Roanoke/Roanoke Yard, funding for capacity improvements, securing an additional round trip between Alexandria and Roanoke, and a study for rail improvements for a station at Bedford, VA.
- **VPRA Executive Director and CFO Appointed:** On Thursday, April 8, Governor Ralph Northam announced that the Board of the Virginia Passenger Rail Authority (VPRA) has appointed *Donald A. ("DJ") Stadtler, Jr.* as its first Executive Director. At Amtrak, DJ Stadtler served as the Executive Vice President of Finance (CFO), the Executive Vice President of Operations (COO), and Executive Vice President of Administration (CAO). He led administrative functions for the railroad overseeing human resources, labor relations, police and corporate security, real estate, stations and facilities, and procurement and logistics. He was also responsible for providing executive oversight for over 18,000 employees, operating more than 300 daily trains, and attracting and retaining loyal customers resulting in the growth of revenue and ridership. Additionally, he spent 11 years at the Department of Transportation and the Federal Railroad Administration where he oversaw accounting, procurement, and real estate. The VPRA has appointed *Steve Pittard* as the new Chief Financial Officer of the VPRA. Steve brings his experience of the last 17 years at DRPT, where he built up a great team, improved DRPT's financial position and put into place many policies and procedures which have proven to serve the agency well.
- **American Jobs Plan:** President Biden released an overview of his \$2.5T American Jobs Plan on March 31. It also includes \$80B to address Amtrak's repair backlog, modernize the NEC, improve existing corridors, connect new city pairs, and enhance grant and loan programs that support passenger and freight rail safety, efficiency, and electrification.
- **Statewide Rail Plan:** DRPT is kicking off its Statewide Rail Plan, as required by FRA every four years. Be on the lookout for outreach materials for long-range planning. We expect to finalize the report in early 2022.
- **Amendment to the 2019 DC2RVA Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act Memorandum of Agreement:** DRPT is working with fellow signatories to amend the 2019 DC2RVA Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act Memorandum of Agreement. The first amendment was finalized in early April to add FHWA as a signatory, and will be working on another amendment as a result of changes to an important resource in the City of Richmond, the Shockoe Hill Burying Ground Historic District. Through this process DRPT will be



re-evaluating preliminary project plans and impacts in this area in collaboration with Section 106 Consulting Parties and other stakeholders, including the City of Richmond.

### PASSENGER AND COMMUTER RAIL SERVICE HIGHLIGHTS:

- **50% Capacity Restriction on Amtrak Trains Lifting in May 2021:** Amtrak moved from ‘Travel Restricted’ to ‘Travel Allowed’ phase in March 2021. Amtrak will move to ‘Travel Encouraged’ phase in May 2021. 50% capacity restriction on Amtrak trains as well as on Amtrak Thruway buses will be lifted on May 23rd.
- **Bikes on Virginia Sponsored Amtrak Trains:** Virginia will begin offering the option to reserve and bring bikes on board *all* Virginia sponsored Amtrak trains starting May 1, 2021 (National Bike Month). Amtrak completed a retro-fit of the luggage racks on-board Amfleet passenger cars, which allows luggage racks to be reserved for a bike and converted into a bike rack for that trip. Each luggage rack conversion allows one bike, and total reservations per train are limited to 2-4 bikes to preserve luggage space.
  - Previously bikes were only allowed onboard trains where checked baggage was offered, which required a baggage car. Except for one Newport News daily round trip to Boston, Virginia trains did not have a baggage car.
  - Virginia has received positive feedback from New York, and North Carolina who began offering the service on the Carolinian when this option became available in early 2021 when their baggage car was removed during the pandemic.
  - DRPT staff joined Champe Burnley in late February to test out the boarding and alighting with a bike on a passenger car on the Carolinian, which requires the passenger to handle their own bike when boarding. While it is a cumbersome process to board with a bike, especially at low-level platforms, and then remove a front tire to fit it in the bike rack and reverse the process when alighting, we do think it will have minimal impact on the boarding process.
- **American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA):** The newest round of federal stimulus in response to the pandemic has allocated \$1.7b total to Amtrak, with \$175M going to all state sponsored services. Virginia is expect to receive about \$12.6M in funding through ARPA.
- **Long Distance Service Restoration:** Amtrak is fully restoring reduced Long Distance service to daily service between May 24 and June 7, which was made possible through the latest round of federal stimulus funding. Long distance routes Crescent, Palmetto, Silver Meteor, and Silver Star which pass through Virginia are scheduled to be restored on June 7.

### Amtrak Service:

- **Change in Route 46 - Washington D.C.-Roanoke (Train 156) Weekend Schedule:** Starting May 24, 2021, weekend Virginia supported northbound train from Roanoke to New York Penn Station (train 156) will depart Roanoke at 8:55am (15 minutes later than current schedule) and arrive at NYP at 6:01pm (15 minutes later than current schedule). This change is being made to resolve potential conflict with a new schedule for the Crescent (train 20) arriving at the same time as train 156 at the Lynchburg station.
- **Amtrak 50 Year Anniversary Sale:** Virginia will participate in a nationwide Amtrak sale in conjunction with their 50th Anniversary celebrations. The details of the sale are as follows:



- Sales Dates: 4/28 – 5/5
- Travel Dates: 6/2 – 11/13
- Details: 50% off with a \$50 maximum fare (the maximum fare will not apply to the states as none of them have pricing that would reach that level)
- **Virginia Sponsored Service Schedule:** Virginia is working with Amtrak to look at the feasibility of restoring the Washington-Richmond route **in 2021, with a date TBD.** The Richmond route is the last remaining route of Virginia supported service to be restored to 100% of pre-pandemic level. This Route will terminate at Richmond Main Street Station instead of Staples Mill Station as part of the Transforming Rail service plan.

**Amtrak Ridership:**

- **Ridership on Virginia sponsored service:** March 2021 ridership was down 60.1% compared to March 2019 (pre-pandemic) ridership. Year-to-Date ridership in March 2021 (FY2021) was down 66.7% compared to March 2019 (FY2019).
- **M-o-M ridership change for Virginia sponsored service:** March 2021 ridership was 53.4% higher than February 2021 ridership (+9,852). February 2021 ridership was 18,440.
- From February to March 2021, all three operational routes saw an average increase in ridership of ~3,000. With a single roundtrip to D.C., Roanoke route had the highest gain in month-over-month ridership of all three routes.
- **Amtrak Bookings:** The volume of bookings and Yo2Y comparisons vs FY19 continue to improve. 7-day moving average for bookings is ↓55.5% Yo2Y. All business lines have improved since the beginning of CY21.

**Virginia Sponsored Ridership, March 2021**

Route	March 2021	March 2019	Percentage Change	FFYTD 2021	FFYTD 2019	Percentage Change	February 2021
Route 46 Roanoke	7,160	17,509	-59.1%	34,982	105,105	-66.7%	4,303
Route 47 Newport News	12,486	25,143	-50.3%	62,244	159,017	-60.9%	8,536
Route 50 Norfolk	8,646	20,153	-57.1%	42,949	83,503	-48.6%	5,601
Route 51 Richmond	0	8,014	-100.0%	0	73,027	-100.0%	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>28,292</b>	<b>70,819</b>	<b>-60.1%</b>	<b>140,175</b>	<b>420,652</b>	<b>-66.7%</b>	<b>18,440</b>

**VRE Service:**

- **COVID-19 Service Schedule:** VRE trains are operating on an ‘S’ Schedule Plus (special schedule for holidays and snow days, supplemented with Train 300 for the northbound commute and Train 307 for the southbound commute on the Fredericksburg line).

**VRE Ridership:**

	March 2021	February 2021	March 2020
Monthly Ridership	31,714	21,482	192,815
Average Daily Ridership	1,379	1,131	8,692
Full Service Days	0	0	11
“S” Service Days	23	19	11

- Average daily ridership (ADR) in March was 1,379. The average for the last two months was 1,155, so VRE did have a noteworthy increase in ridership in March. ADR in March 2020 was 8,764.
- VRE system wide on-time performance rate for March 2021 was 93%.