



# COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

Office of the Governor

Ralph S. Northam  
Governor

April 30, 2021

Dear Ms. McQueen:

Thank you for your work and commitment to bringing the important history of the Shockoe Hill African Burial Ground to light. I also appreciate your participation and communication with the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT) and the Virginia Department of Historic Resources (DHR) through the Washington, D.C. to Richmond (DC2RVA) Southeast High Speed Rail Environmental Impact Statement and Section 106 process.

Through this transportation planning process, the Commonwealth gained a greater understanding of the history of the Shockoe Hill African Burial Ground and the destruction caused by past public works projects. We now have an opportunity to acknowledge what took place here and work to recognize it appropriately.

The DC2RVA Environmental Impact Statement, completed in 2019, documented the Burying Ground for Free People of Colour, as it was known at the time, as a resource that is potentially eligible for, or listed on, the National Register of Historic Places. This assured that the site was included in all dialogues regarding impacts from the proposed project. The research you provided was included in the Final Environmental Impact Statement and instrumental to the project team in the preliminary design phase to modify and minimize the rail line's footprint in an effort to avoid impacting the burial ground.

As a result of ongoing and extensive research by you and others, the Commonwealth wrote project commitments specific to Shockoe Hill that are recorded in the Federal Railroad Administration's Record of Decision. These include conducting a landscape analysis, performing archaeological testing and monitoring in future stages of design, and revisiting burial ground boundaries.

Thank you for information about the preliminary information form (PIF) for the Shockoe Hill Burying Ground Historic District and its unanimous support. DRPT is committed to re-

evaluating preliminary project plans and impacts in this area through the Section 106 process, and I have asked DRPT to work with you and other stakeholders to do this. While the *Transforming Rail in Virginia* initiative does not include funding for rail construction in this particular section of railroad, we understand that attention to this sensitive area is important.

DRPT is also working with the other signatories to the 2019 DC2RVA Section 106 Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) to amend the document in order to further ensure this site is taken into consideration during project planning and design. We will be in contact with the Section 106 consulting parties and other stakeholders to advise on a draft MOA amendment that addresses this specific area in the near future. Should you want additional information with the Section 106 process, DRPT Director Jennifer Mitchell is available to discuss further at your convenience. You may reach her directly at (804) 786-6797 and [j.mitchell@drpt.virginia.gov](mailto:j.mitchell@drpt.virginia.gov).

We are encouraged by the recent news that the City of Richmond will be acquiring part of the Shockoe Hill site to conduct further research, and understand that more work is needed to address the remarkable challenge balancing between regional transportation needs and historic preservation in a city that struggles to recognize all aspects of its past. I appreciate your partnership in bringing understanding and awareness of this area, and to make transportation decisions that honor its history.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ralph S. Northam". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Ralph S. Northam

cc: The Honorable Shannon Valentine, Secretary of Transportation  
Jennifer Mitchell, Director, Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation