

Community-Led Discussion Kit

for the New River Valley Passenger Rail Project



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New River Valley Passenger Rail Project COMMUNITY-LED DISCUSSION KIT

DEAR COMMUNITY LEADER,

Thank you for joining the conversation about the [New River Valley \(NRV\) Passenger Rail Project](#). The Virginia Passenger Rail Authority (VPRA) looks forward to hearing input from your local community on our plans to bring passenger rail back to the NRV for the first time since 1979. We want to make sure that all voices are heard.

This project will affect how we travel, live, work, and play. That's why we want your help in hearing the thoughts of your community. Use the materials in this Community-Led Discussion Kit for an upcoming neighborhood association meeting, gathering, or event.

Beginning on January 29, VPRA will be reaching out to engage your community in our plans for the NRV Passenger Rail Project using a variety of communications tools. These tools include social media, an online survey, and a public meeting — all providing opportunities to share your thoughts.

Thank you for participating in this important project to bring passenger rail back to the NRV. VPRA looks forward to hearing your input and appreciates your efforts to help us spread the word.

Sincerely,

[The Virginia Passenger Rail Authority Team](#)

How to Collect and Return Materials

Collect the Summary Sheets that were used to capture the group's discussion and the sign-in sheet. Complete the Host Feedback Form. Return the materials to VPRA by February 28.

- *Method 1:* Scan and email materials to Jenna Friedberg
Government Affairs Manager
jenna.friedberg@vpra.virginia.gov
- *Method 2:* Mail to Jenna Friedberg
Virginia Passenger Rail Authority
919 E. Main Street, Suite 2400
Richmond, VA 23219

Thank you for participating in this important project to bring passenger rail back to the NRV. VPRA looks forward to hearing your input and appreciates your efforts to help us spread the word.

GET INVOLVED!

Use this discussion kit to help gather feedback from your community.

Sign up for the NRV Passenger Rail Project email list to be notified about events and project updates.

Go to VAPassengerRailAuthority.org/nrvproject/ to learn more about NRV Passenger Rail Project.

Contact us to learn more about our plans to bring passenger rail service back to the NRV:

✉ Email: contactus@vpra.virginia.gov

in LinkedIn: www.linkedin.com/company/virginia-passenger-rail-authority/

f Facebook: facebook.com/VAPassengerRail/

✕ X: twitter.com/vapassengerrail



What is a Community-Led Discussion Kit?

This Community-Led Discussion Kit is a tool designed for community-organized and -led discussions that will help collect input for the NRV Passenger Rail Project. Your feedback will provide VPRA with insight into the wants and needs of the community as we plan for future passenger rail service in the region. The Community-Led Discussion Kit contains everything needed to hold your own discussion including instruction sheets for the host/facilitator, discussion questions, worksheets for participant responses, and directions for recording and returning responses.



Meeting Roles

Defining roles can help create an interactive environment for everyone to participate throughout the meeting. Attendees need to assume three main roles to help keep your meeting running smoothly:

- **Host (1):**
Responsible for printing out materials, facilitating the meeting, completing the Host Feedback Form, collecting all materials, and returning materials to the VPRA staff.
- **Note-taker (at least 1):**
Responsible for writing down notes from the discussion on the Engagement Summary. If you break into smaller groups, you will need a note-taker for each group.
- **Participants (everyone):**
Responsible for engaging in the discussions.

Sample Meeting Agenda

- Welcome and Introduction (10 minutes)
- NRV Passenger Rail Project Overview (15 minutes)
- Group Discussion (30–45 minutes)

Getting Ready

1. Find a location. Choose a venue that is easily accessible and comfortable for people to attend. Don't forget to check on the availability of tables and chairs.
2. Invite a group of people to your meeting. Approximately 10 to 15 people is a good number of people for the discussion. Invite a variety of friends, neighbors, colleagues, or others.
3. Send a reminder. Remind your attendees about the meeting 1–2 days in advance of the meeting.
4. Meeting day. Set up your location and conduct the meeting.
5. Return your feedback. Once complete, please be sure to return your feedback.

Presenting Information to the Media

All media inquiries are handled by VPRA.

Please direct media inquiries to Karina Romero, VPRA Communications Manager, karina.romero@vp.ra.virginia.gov.

Before the Meeting

UNDERSTANDING THE MEETING

- Determine your role: Will you be hosting the meeting, or acting as a note-taker? If you won't be serving as the host, be sure to prepare someone to lead the meeting.
- Review this Discussion Kit: Take time to understand the contents of this kit so that you are better prepared to facilitate and help others.



MATERIALS NEEDED FOR THE MEETING

- Invitation (page 7)
- Sign In Sheet (page 16)
- Meeting Summary: during discussions (pages 8–15)
- Submit pages: 8, 12, 15, 16, and 17
- Pens
- Printer

KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

Knowing the types of people who will attend will help you prepare your remarks, so try to get a sense of their attitudes toward the NRV Passenger Rail Project before you begin.

- Friends and supporters of the NRV Passenger Rail Project
- Public officials/decision – makers and community leaders
- Opponents of the NRV Passenger Rail Project
- People without a firm opinion about the NRV Passenger Rail Project
- Reporters from newspapers and/or broadcast media – [All media inquiries are handled by VPRA](#)
- Business people from the community
- Adjacent property owners

Host's Guidelines

1. Make sure all participants sign in. If virtual, the host must document attendance of all participants.
2. Start your meeting with brief introductions as well as a safety briefing. Ensure attendees know where the fire exits are located, as well as any first aid materials. See *Page 4 for additional guidance*.
3. Review the ground rules with attendees:
 - Everyone should have an equal opportunity to speak.
 - Listen when others are speaking.
 - Avoid making things too personal.
 - Be willing to listen to other people's views and have an open mind.
 - Be honest but avoid criticizing others' viewpoints.
 - Be concise.
 - Avoid interrupting the facilitators or other group members.
4. After introductions, the host should provide an overview/ describe the meeting purpose (*see page 5 for talking points*).
5. Pose one discussion question at a time.
6. Document key ideas and take ample notes so a summary can be prepared.
7. Discuss key themes and ideas that emerge from discussion amongst attendees
8. Repeat the process for each question.

Model Speech Outline for Public Meeting Presentation: *EXAMPLE*

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

10 MIN

[Host: Acknowledge VIPs]

It's good to see each of you here tonight, but I'd especially like to acknowledge our Mayor, Elizabeth Smith. Thank you for taking time from your busy schedule for this important discussion.

[Host: Ask attendees to please state their name and where in the community they reside.]

If you have not completed the sign-in sheet, please do so before you leave and select if you are interested in receiving emails about New River Valley Passenger Rail Project.

NRV PASSENGER RAIL PROJECT OVERVIEW

15 MIN

I'm here tonight to introduce you to an exciting opportunity right here in our community — the New River Valley Passenger Rail Project.

I'd like to accomplish three things this evening:

- First, I'd like to share some more detailed information about the NRV Passenger Rail Project.
- Then I'd like to go through a few discussion questions with the group about the project.
- Finally, I'd like to answer your questions. If I am unable to answer your questions, I can either direct you to someone who can or I can follow up with the NRV team on your behalf and get back with you.

WHAT IS THE NRV PASSENGER RAIL PROJECT

The New River Valley Passenger Rail Project is aimed at bringing passenger rail service to the region for the first time since 1979.

This project will focus on the rail corridors between Roanoke and the New River Valley, addressing needs for infrastructure improvements, including track, signaling, tunnels, and a passenger station platform, and a westward expansion of passenger rail service.

Passenger rail infrastructure elements include:

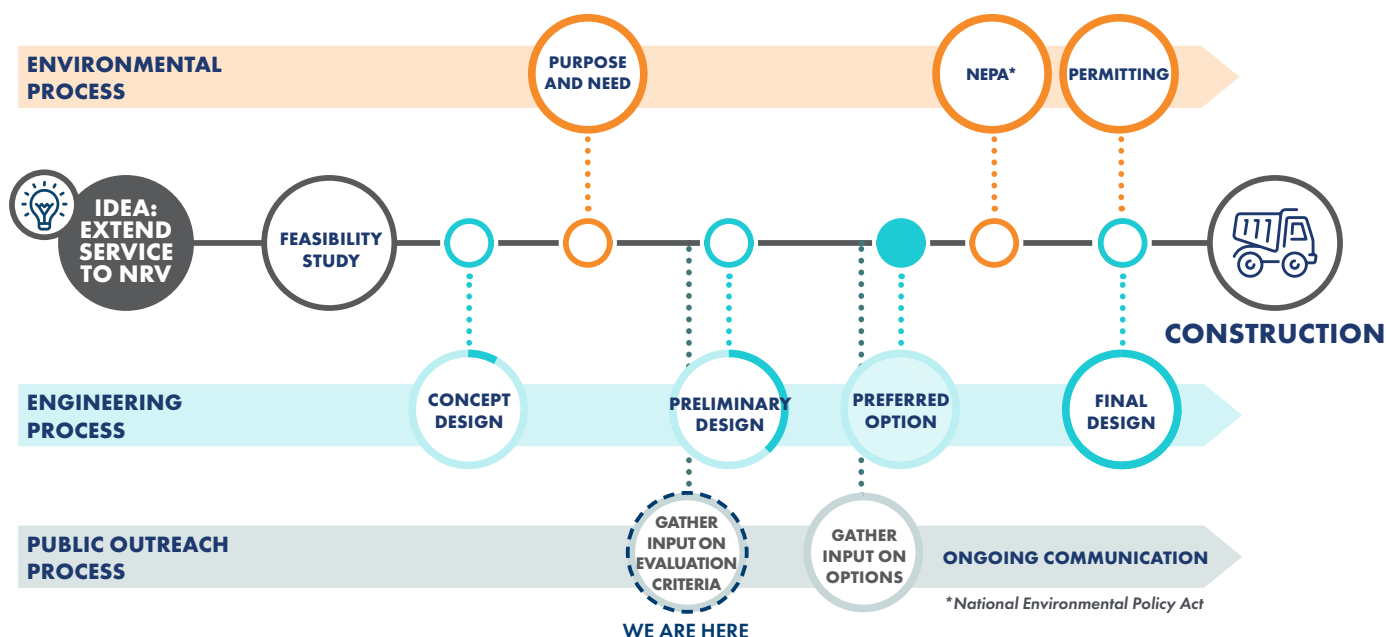
- Station and Platform
- Layover Facility
- Tunnel Improvements
- Connector Track
- Access Roads

WHAT KIND OF SERVICE WILL THERE BE BETWEEN ROANOKE AND NRV?

Two roundtrip trains between Roanoke and NRV as part of the Commonwealth's state-supported Amtrak Virginia service.

WHERE ARE WE ON THE TIMELINE

There are many steps VPRA must take to develop a project from idea to construction. The NRV Passenger Rail Project is currently in the preliminary engineering design stage. VPRA is developing concepts that include all of the infrastructure improvements needed to bring passenger rail service to our area. Completing the federal environmental review process, known as NEPA, is the next step and helps VPRA become eligible for federal funding to build the project.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

30-45 MIN

For the second part of our meeting, we're going to break into small discussion groups. Each group will need a note-taker and a facilitator. I will pass around the summary sheets with the discussion questions to each group.

CONCLUSION

5 MIN

Thank participants for their participation in the discussion and remind them to sign up for emails on the sign-in sheet.



New River Valley Passenger Rail Project COMMUNITY-LED DISCUSSION KIT

Sample Invitation

Use this template as a guide for your meeting invitations. You can include this language in an email, send invitations in the mail, or use it as a guide to invite people over the phone.

YOU'RE INVITED!

What: New River Valley Passenger Rail Project Community-Led Discussion: Let's Talk About the Project

Where:

When:

RSVP by:

RSVP to:

We are hosting this meeting on behalf of VPRA as they gather community input for the expansion of passenger rail to the NRV.

VPRA is asking the community to lead their own discussions and report back so they can obtain the widest range of input from the largest network possible.

We look forward to hearing from you!

For more information about the process, please visit <https://vapassengerrailauthority.org/nrvproject/>

DIGITAL INVITE TO GO WITH THE TEXT ABOVE



Meeting Summary for Each Group (*submit form*)

Discussion Leader: _____

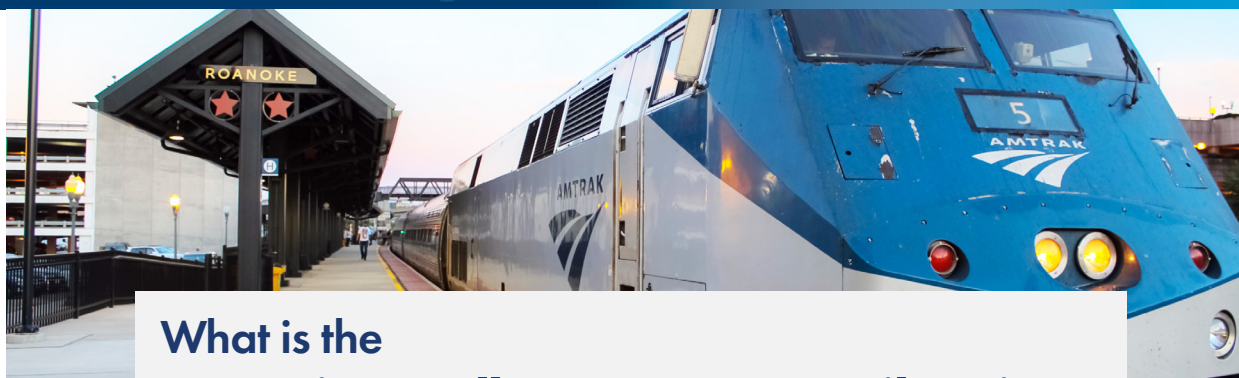
Discussion Point #1

15 MIN

The railroad between Roanoke and NRV needs improvement to be used for passenger rail.

- What questions or concerns do you have after reviewing the materials on the following pages?
- What do you wish you understood better?

Key Themes



What is the New River Valley Passenger Rail Project?

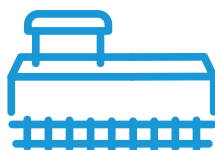
The New River Valley Passenger Rail Project will bring passenger rail service to the region for the first time since 1979.

This project will focus on the rail corridor between Roanoke and the New River Valley (NRV), addressing needs for infrastructure improvements, including track, signaling, tunnels, and platform, with the ultimate goal of extending passenger rail service westward.

Passenger Rail Infrastructure Elements



Platform and Station*



Layover Facility



Tunnel Improvements



Track Improvements



Infrastructure Improvements



Access Roads

*NRV PASSENGER RAIL STATION AUTHORITY

The NRV Passenger Rail Station Authority was enabled in 2021 by the Virginia General Assembly. This regional entity will lead the construction and maintenance of the future station facility.

Railroad Infrastructure Improvements

Platform and Station

An area where train passengers will board and alight from train.

Why improvements are needed

- No platform currently exists for Amtrak to service.
- The future station will be designed by the NRV Station Authority.

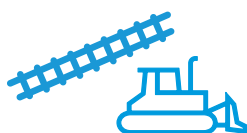


Connector Track

A connector track is new track constructed between two existing tracks or between an existing track and a new platform to complete a new route or to reach a new destination.

Why improvements are needed

- No connection exists between the VPRA-owned Virginian Line (V-Line) and the Norfolk Southern-owned Blacksburg Branch adjacent to the proposed station locations.
- A direct connection must be constructed for the passage of trains from the V-Line to the proposed platform on the Blacksburg Branch.

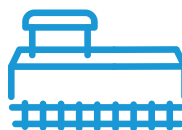


Layover Facility

A layover facility stores trains overnight between the last trip at the end of each night and the first trip the following day for maintenance.

Why improvements are needed

- No facility exists in the study area where trains can be serviced and stored overnight.
- Travel to closest facility in Roanoke not feasible because it is an extra 30-mile round trip with freight train interference.
- To provide morning service, trains must be stored near the station.
- A facility is needed for Amtrak crews.



Positive Train Control (PTC)

PTC systems are designed to prevent train-to-train collisions, over-speed derailments, disruptions to established work zones, and movements of trains through switches left in the wrong position.

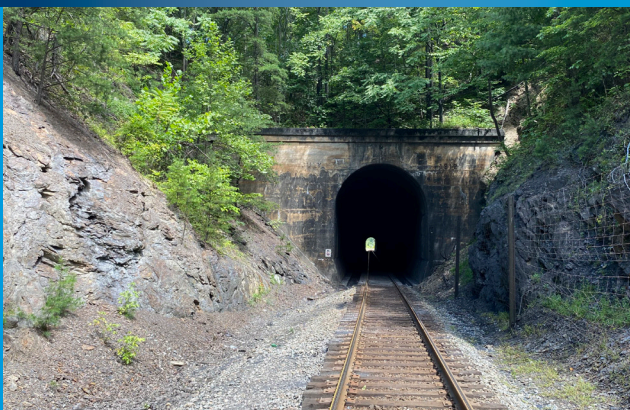
Why improvements are needed

- The Rail Safety Improvement Act of 2008 requires the use of PTC for train lines with regular passenger service.
- Reduces risks of collisions and accidents, which protects the corridor from damage.





Merrimac and Slate Hill Tunnels



Needed Improvements

- ✓ Safe emergency egress
- ✓ Firefighting (smoke control and updated fire life safety systems)
- ✓ Meet codes and standards

Why are these improvements needed?

- Evacuation pathway needed in both tunnels
- Add fire safety and water support to the facility building
- Emergency system upgrades
- Ventilation systems required to provide sufficient evacuation time of a full passenger train during emergency event
- Fire protection system for firefighter connection to the water system
- Upgraded communications systems for addressing emergencies

Existing Conditions



Merrimac Tunnel

- 5,175 feet long
- Concrete-lined
- Built in 1908 to haul coal
- Not up to code for passenger rail



Slate Hill Tunnel

- 861 feet long
- Concrete-lined
- Built in 1908 to haul coal
- Not up to code for passenger rail

Meeting Summary for Each Group (*submit form*)

Discussion Leader: _____

Discussion Point #2

15 MIN

Our survey asks about the criteria that will be used to evaluate different design options. These criteria are listed below. Discuss the competing benefits or impacts of these items.

- Minimize impacts to natural resources (streams, wetlands, protected species habitat, etc.)
- Minimize noise increases to residential areas and other sensitive receptors
- Minimize substantial earth removal
- Minimize impacts to the visual environment
- Proximity to commercial areas
- Proximity to residential areas
- Proximity to bicycle and pedestrian facilities
- Accessible by public transportation
- Operational as soon as possible
- Good financial stewardship of public resources

Key Themes

Environmental Resources

Through the planning and permitting processes, VPRA will identify existing resources in the project area and potential impacts. Data gathering has begun and will continue through fall 2024. The community is welcome to share information that may be helpful in this process. Below are examples of community and natural resources that we are studying.



Parks



Greenways,
such as the
Huckleberry
Trail



Schools
and
Libraries



Places of
Worship



Medical
Centers



Community
Centers



Historic
Resources



Noise
Levels



Air Quality
Levels



Visual and
Aesthetic
Resources

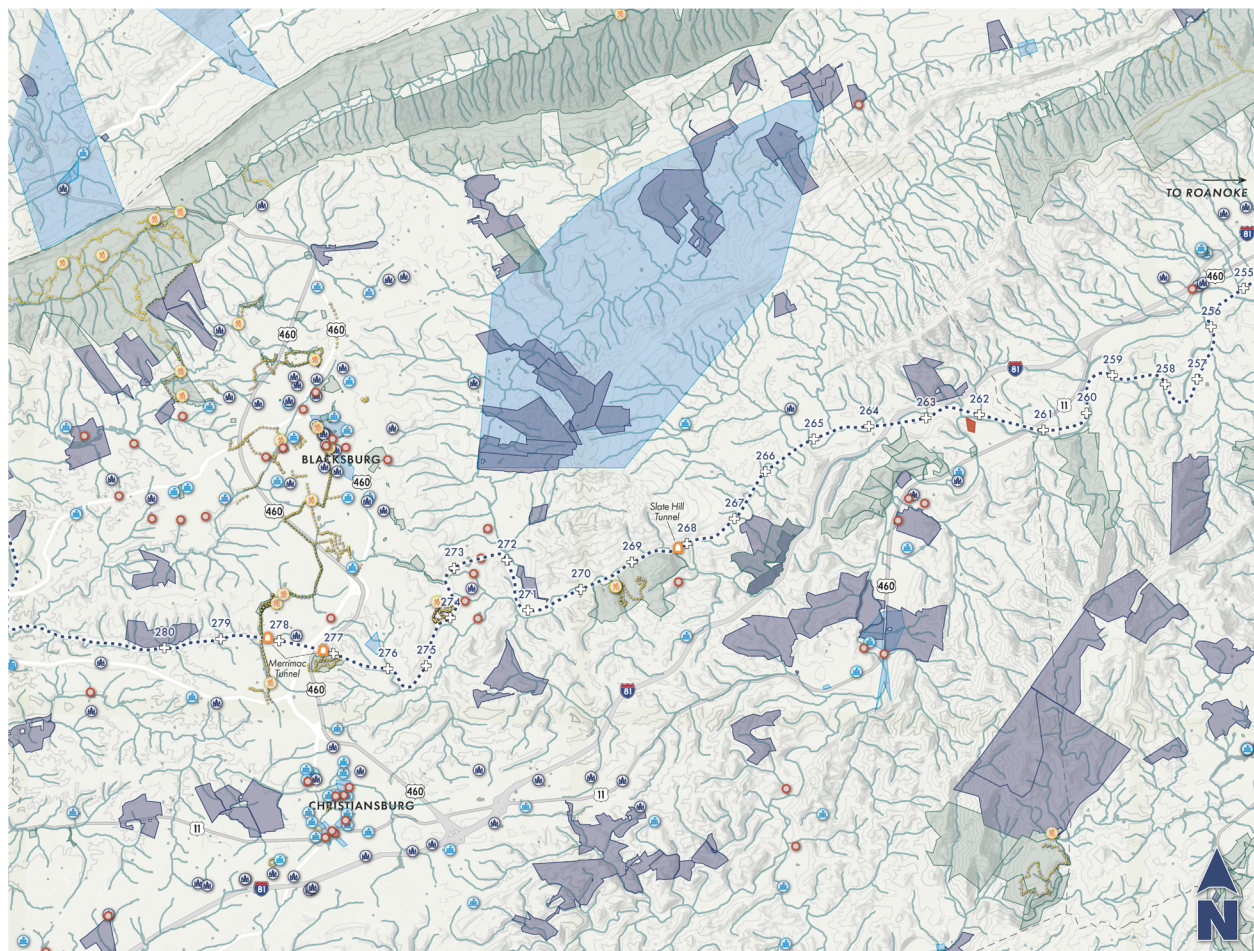


Streams
and
Wetlands









Protected
Species

Environmental Resources along the V-Line Railroad Corridor

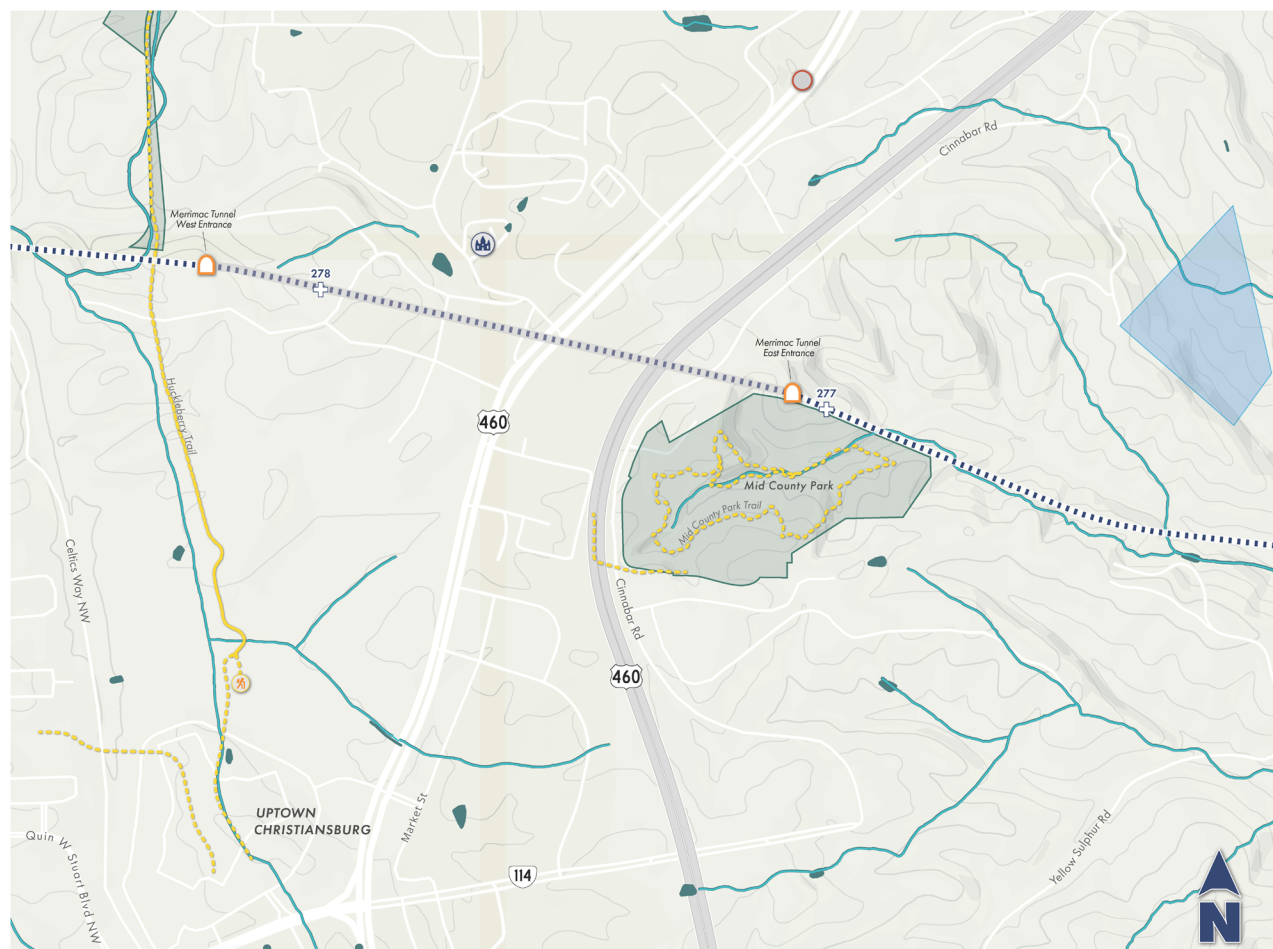


LEGEND

-  V-Line Right-of-Way
-  V-Line Mile Marker
-  Places of Worship
-  Trails
-  Schools
-  Trailheads
-  DCR Conservation Easements
-  DCR Protective Management Lands
-  Streams
-  Rail Tunnel
-  National Register of Historic Places Areas
-  Wetlands
-  National Register of Historic Places Points

0 2 4
Miles

Environmental Resources in the New River Valley Mall and Cinnabar Road Area



LEGEND

- | | | |
|---|--|--|
|  V-Line Right-of-Way |  277 V-Line Mile Marker | |
|  Places of Worship |  Trailheads |  Wetlands |
|  Rail Tunnel |  Trails |  Streams |
|  National Register of Historic Places Points | | |
|  National Register of Historic Places Areas | | |
|  DCR Protective Management Lands | | |

0 1,000 2,000
US Feet

Meeting Summary for Each Group (*submit form*)

Discussion Leader: _____

Discussion Point #3

15 MIN

VPRA is conducting a survey for community members to share their priorities and help plan the future of this rail extension to the NRV. Please take their short survey by scanning the QR code.



Comments after taking the survey (optional)



New River Valley Passenger Rail Project COMMUNITY-LED DISCUSSION KIT

Sign-In Sheet (*submit form*)

We will not share or use your contact information for any other purpose.

Participant Name	Email	I would like to join the project email list
(example) John Smith	john.smith@email.com	X

Submittal Cover Sheet *(submit form)*

The facilitator is responsible for filling out the summary sheets and recording all meeting data.

Host Name _____

Group/Organization Name _____

Phone _____ Email _____

Date Meeting Conducted _____ Location of Meeting _____

How many people participated in your discussion? _____

How did attendees hear about the meeting? _____

Your feedback is greatly appreciated.

1. How useful did you find this event for learning about the NRV process, the issues being discussed, and feeling that your input will be heard? Please mark your answer on the scale below.



2. How well did your meeting go overall? Please mark your answer on the scale below.



- Did everyone have a chance to talk? ___no ___somewhat ___yes
- Did you feel it was a good discussion? ___no ___somewhat ___yes
- Did you feel your group was satisfied with the outcome? ___no ___somewhat ___yes

3. Did you find the materials easy to understand and use? Please mark your answer on the scale below.



4. Would you host this type of event again? ___yes ___no

5. Would you recommend it to others? ___yes ___no

6. What other comments would you like to share?