



Property Owner Guide



Introduction

The Virginia Passenger Rail Authority (VPRRA) was created by the General Assembly in 2020 to promote, sustain, and expand passenger rail service in the Commonwealth.

Through VPRRA's Transforming Rail in Virginia (TRV) initiative, the Commonwealth is making infrastructure investments to deliver on its vision to provide high-performance passenger and commuter rail service that connects our communities and increases economic growth.

The TRV initiative is a generational investment in rail infrastructure that will build high-performance passenger and commuter rail service in Virginia. TRV projects will:

- Increase the state-supported Amtrak service between Washington, DC, and Richmond, resulting in near-hourly service along this corridor.
- Increase Amtrak service to Roanoke, Newport News, and Norfolk.
- Extend Amtrak service from Roanoke to the New River Valley (Christiansburg).

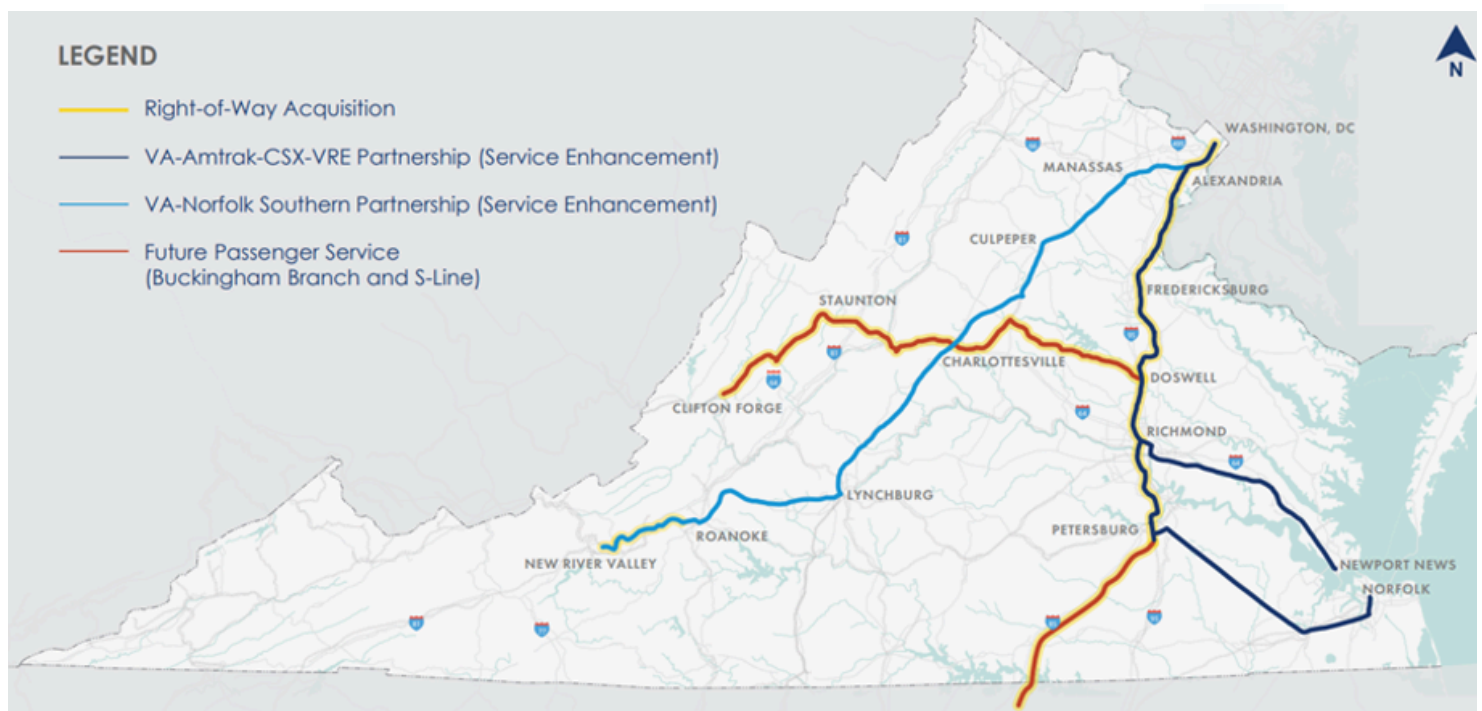


These investments will make the Commonwealth's state-supported rail service an even more practical transportation alternative for thousands of Virginians.

Scope of Transforming Rail in Virginia

TRV is changing the future of rail transportation in Virginia. By acquiring railroad right-of-way from freight partners and using that right of way to complete projects to add tracks and other rail facilities, VPRA will increase rail capacity and better coordinate passenger and freight operations to improve reliability and increase rail service in Virginia. In addition, infrastructure improvements, including building a new Long Bridge across the Potomac River between Northern Virginia and Washington, DC, and adding an additional track from Lorton to Washington, DC, will relieve rail congestion in Northern Virginia and allow VPRA to operate more trains along its current corridors to Newport News, Norfolk, Richmond and Roanoke.

Another goal of TRV is to expand passenger rail service in the southwestern part of the state with the extension of service from Roanoke to the New River Valley, and in southside Virginia with construction of new rail lines to revitalize passenger rail service between Richmond and Raleigh, NC.



Stages of Project Design and Right of Way Acquisition

1) Design

The TRV projects begin with the design stage, which includes a land survey component. During this stage, VPRA staff and consultants design the rail expansion projects and conduct testing and survey work in order to plan for eventual construction. The design team takes into consideration several factors including topography, geology, environmental impact, budget, and public access to the rail service. Special attention is also paid to preserving land with cultural and historic significance.

To conduct surveys and environmental studies, and to assess potential project locations, VPRA employees, consultants, or regulatory agency representatives may require access to private property to observe physical features, take photographs, record coordinates for mapping, and conduct testing. These activities will be conducted outside any occupied buildings or structures on the property. Whenever feasible, our crews will use existing roads, drives, and trails to access the property. They will make every effort to avoid damaging the property and will restore any damage inadvertently caused to its approximate original condition. Property owners will be notified, in advance and in writing, if work is necessary on their property. Crews will carry photo identification and copies of the notice letters sent to the property owners.

Types of surveys and other studies that may be completed include:

Architectural History Survey

During architectural history surveys, staff may visit the property to observe the exteriors of the buildings, including homes, barns, garages, sheds, and other structures. The purpose of the review is to help determine whether a structure qualifies as a historic resource. The review will include photographs to document the building conditions. All work will be done in accordance with Department of Historic Resource standards.

Archaeological Survey

During archaeological resource surveys, staff may visit the property to assess the potential for archaeological or cultural resources. This assessment will include shovel tests in some areas – during the shovel test, a small hole is dug, and the dirt is sifted for artifacts. Potential artifacts are transported to a lab for identification and processing. The hole is filled prior to leaving the site. All work will be done in accordance with Department of Historic Resource standards.

Wildlife Habitat Assessment

Staff will visually observe the vegetation, topography, and other habitat features of an area to evaluate its likely use by various wildlife species. Data related to species type, size, and density data may be collected within sample plots. No vegetation will be cleared, dug up, or otherwise removed, although leaf or twig samples may be taken from some plants for identification purposes.

Identification of Wetlands and other Regulated Waters

Federal, state, and local regulations protect many wetlands and waterways. Staff will delineate the boundaries of these protected resources through the evaluation of vegetation type, visual evidence of surface hydrology, and soil indicators of periodic flooded conditions. Soil samples will be tested with an auger, leaving a small hole approximately 1.0 inch in diameter at each sampling location. Plastic flagging may be hung in adjacent tree branches to mark the boundary of the wetland.

Topographic and/or Aerial Surveys

Surveyors may enter the property to place fabric markers on the ground to assist with aerial surveys of the rail corridor. Markers will be removed after the completion of the aerial survey. Surveyors may also need to conduct conventional boundary and topographic surveys of some features along the corridor.

Noise/Vibration Monitoring

Staff may enter the property to place sound or vibration monitoring equipment. The equipment will be left in place for a period of days to record noise and vibration caused by passing trains. At the end of the sampling period, the equipment will be removed.

Other Site Surveys

Staff may enter the property to observe site conditions, land use, and other features, evaluate potential impacts of various alternatives, or access other properties.

Many months and years are spent in preliminary study and investigation to consider all possible project locations. As part of a comprehensive outreach process, VPRA actively seeks participation by private citizens and public agencies during the study process so that various views can be considered. The process may include public hearings and/or workshops, which allow private citizens and public agencies to express their views and concerns regarding potential projects.

As we work to expand passenger rail through the Commonwealth, a certain amount of private property must be acquired. VPRA does not take these decisions lightly and will work with landowners and local communities to consider all reasonable options to determine the safest location and design that most benefits the public, and to avoid the purchase of private property where possible. VPRA will work collaboratively with affected property owners to educate them about their rights and inform them about their options.

2) Appraisal

Once the design of a project is complete, detailed plans are developed which determine the amount of land needed for the construction of the project. If you are identified through a title search as an owner of property needed for the project, a representative from VPRA will contact you to discuss the project and its impact on you.

These employees are trained to explain the project and answer any questions you have. During this discussion you will:

- Learn If the project may require only a portion of your property (partial acquisition) or your entire property;
- Be shown railroad right-of-way plans to see how your property may be affected;
- Be advised of your legal rights during the initial meeting.

Following your initial meeting with VPRA, two separate appraisal firms will contact you to set up a meeting to assess the fair market value of your affected property. You are entitled to have your property appraised for fair market value by two appraisers without any conflict of interest and without undue influence or coercion reflected in the appraised value.

The appraisers may need to see the inside of your home or business and take measurements to ensure your appraisal is as accurate as possible. You have the right to accompany each appraiser on the inspection of all structures on your property and ask questions.

A technical review appraisal is required for each appraisal report that is approved for negotiations. The review appraiser may select from three options:

- Recommended. The review appraiser concludes the value stated in the appraisal report is reasonable and is considered an adequate basis of compensation for the acquisition.
- Accepted (not Recommended). The appraisal meets all requirements but is not recommended as the most reliable basis of value for the proposed acquisition.

- Not Accepted. The review appraiser does not accept the value conclusion stated in the appraisal report. In the event the appraisal is not accepted, a request for an additional appraisal report may be prepared or the review appraiser may elect to accept the value in the other appraisal report. An explanation must be provided in the review appraisal as to why the report is not being accepted. Requests for additional appraisals are submitted to the VRPA General Counsel.

3) Acquisition

If it determined that the acquisition of your property is necessary for the completion of the rail project, you will receive a written offer for just compensation as determined by federal and Virginia law. Just compensation includes the fair market value of your affected property, damages in value to the remainder of your property (if any), and certain other items provided by law. The offer will represent the full amount of the approved appraisal or value evaluation.

Your written offer will include:

- The full amount offered as just compensation. If VPRA does not need your entire property for the project, your written offer will state whether you are entitled to receive damages to your remaining property;
- A description and location of your land to be acquired;
- Identification of buildings, structures and/or other items which are considered part of the property needed for the project. When appropriate, a statement will identify any separately held ownership interest in the property such as tenant-owned improvements;

- An offer to purchase any small, remaining tracts, deemed as uneconomic by VPRA, that has no utility or economic potential to VPRA or property owner.

VPRA negotiates for the acquisition of property in good faith such that an agreement may be made for the voluntary conveyance of the property from the owner(s). While VPRA does hold the power of eminent domain, we respect each owner's authority and want to reach a fair settlement based on mutual agreement. Negotiations and just compensation offered to a landowner will be made by the VPRA General Counsel or a member of the VPRA Executive Leadership Team as delegated by the General Counsel.

4) Relocation

If you are required to move, you will be informed of your rights and benefits under the VPRA Relocation Program implementing Virginia law and the federal Uniform Relocation Act. VPRA will provide you with relocation advisory services and assist you through the relocation process.

Any individual, family, business or farm that is displaced by a VPRA project shall be offered relocation assistance services for the purpose of locating a suitable replacement property. Relocation services are provided by qualified VPRA representatives. Any individual, family, business or farm that must relocate is entitled to receive payment for moving property.

The relocation agent will look in the inventory of available housing to find a comparable dwelling for the relocation. If three comparable dwellings cannot be found, the agent may consider fewer. While not necessarily identical to your present dwelling, a comparable replacement dwelling should provide for the same utility and function as the dwelling from which you are being displaced. In addition, a comparable replacement dwelling should be adequate in size to accommodate the occupants and should be within your financial means. If a comparable dwelling cannot be found, relocation will be postponed until one can be found. If you do not agree with the relocation services you have received, you may appeal the decision to VPRA.

The guide is a summary of VPRA's property acquisition process. Please contact the identified representative identified for specific details.

Contact us

📞 804-303-8700

✉️ contactus@vp.ra.virginia.gov

🌐 vapassengerrailauthority.org/realestate