



Virginia Railway Express

Working Group Meeting #3

VRE L'Enfant Station and Fourth Track Preliminary Engineering/NEPA Phase

**MLK Jr. Memorial Library, 4th Floor: 401-D Conference Room & Microsoft Teams
November 19, 2024 from 4 - 5 PM**

ATTENDEE LIST

VRE

- Christine Hoeffner
- Dagmawie Shikurye
- Dallas Richards

Virginia Passenger Rail Authority (VPRA)

- Geoffrey Pelletier
- Kate Kurgan
- Mark Schnauffer
- John Lehman (Hill consultant)
- Reza Mohammadinia (Hill consultant)

VHB Metro DC

- Josh Bendyk
- Lee Dwyer
- Lee Farmer
- Mark Colgan
- Meghan Powell

Amtrak

- Amy Wetterskog

Committee of Fine Arts (CFA)

- Carlton Hart
- Dan Fox
- Sarah Batcheler

Committee of 100 (C100)

- James Smailes
- Nick Delledonne

Department of Rail & Public Transport (DPRT)

- Taylor Holden

District Department of Transportation (DDOT)

- Kim Song
- Noah Hagen
- Ravindra Ganvir

Federal Railroad Administration (FRA)

- Chris Hansen
- Halie Mitchell

Federal Transit Administration (FTA)

- Rachel Hearon

Greater Washington Partnership

- Michael Jerakis

NCPC

- Mike Weil

National Park Service

- Jay Theuer
- Yue Li

Smithsonian Institution

- Nicole Harris

Southwest Business Improvement District

- Jesse Himmelrich
- Lexie Albe

NOTES

1. Introductions & PE Status Update (see accompanying PDF, slides 1-7)

- Dagmawie Shikurye (VRE) began the meeting, led introductions, and started the PowerPoint presentation (see PDF). He reviewed the purpose of the Working Group and the plan and schedule for further Working Group meetings in 2025.
- Mark Colgan (VHB) provided a quick snapshot of the project timeline, with the project just beyond the midpoint of the preliminary engineering (PE) and NEPA phase.
- Mark noted that PE and NEPA are slated to wrap up in mid-2025 and then the project would roll right into Final Design. He stated that the overall design will be complete in 2027, and construction would be complete in 2029.
- Mark provided an overview of the Draft 30% design (see accompanying PDF, slides 8-17)
 - 7th Street Bridge widening
 - 6th Street Bridge replacement
 - Center platform and canopy, with trains having access to both sides of the platform
 - Platform canopy stops at the beginning of the 6th Street bridge to minimize the impacts to the viewshed down 6th Street.
 - Pedestrian tunnel and vertical transportation, including elevators and stairs at both 6th and 7th streets; the pedestrian tunnels go under the proposed fourth track
 - Proposed design at the 7th Street entrance, with service rooms
 - Proposed design at the 6th Street entrance, with service rooms
 - Context of Hancock Park, Capital Gallery/Smithsonian Building, and Virginia Ave SW
 - Retaining walls and construction easements
- Mark presented the anticipated temporary impacts for the project. He noted the following:
 - Hancock Park: proposed construction access and laydown area where the existing ramp structure will be removed.
 - At 7th Street and 6th Street: temporary construction easements to construct the station entrances, tunnels, service rooms, and vertical transportation.
 - On 6th Street north of railroad: temporary ramp up to the rail corridor for construction.
 - Virginia Ave between 7th Street and 6th Street: proposed construction laydown and access area on the north side of the street. Since tracks will need to operate at all times during construction, staging from Virginia Ave is needed to access the south side of the corridor. This area will need to be coordinated with DDOT and others.
- Mark presented the 3D fly-through animation for the project.

2. NEPA/Section 106 Status Update (see accompanying PDF, slides 18-20)

- Lee Farmer (VHB) noted that the project is going through NEPA because it is a federally funded project, tentatively being filed as a documented categorical exclusion (DCE), and is in review with the federal agencies.
- Lee F. discussed the potentially affected resources which include:

- Noise and vibration
 - Traffic and transportation
 - Historic resources
 - Park and recreation areas
 - Aesthetics/visual quality
- For Section 106, Lee F. noted that the Area of Potential Effect (APE) has been identified along with existing historic resources.
 - Lee F. noted that Determinations of Eligibility (DOEs) have been drafted for the rail corridor and American Road Builders building, are under review by Consulting Parties.
 - 6th Street bridge, part of the rail corridor, is something of concern for DC SHPO on other projects.
 - Lee F. noted that an Assessment of Effects has been drafted, based on the Draft 30% design, with more information to share at the next Working Group meeting.
 - Lee F. provided an overview of the project schedule, including:
 - Developing the Final 30% design per comments on Draft 30% design
 - VRE, VPRA, and FTA reviewing Draft DCE by, followed by revision based on comments
 - NPS reviewing the DCE before final decision from FTA
 - Consulting Parties reviewing Draft DOEs
 - Completing Assessment of Effects, slated for late December/early January
 - Later on, holding Consulting Party meeting to provide opportunities to ask more detailed questions before submitting formal comments
 - Consulting Parties reviewing agreement document potentially at the end of February/early March, with another Consulting Party meeting at this time to provide an opportunity for discussion
 - Lee F. noted that the NEPA document cannot be formally executed until Section 106 is complete; signed agreement document that completes Section 106 is anticipated at the end of May 2025.
 - VRE/VHB looking to schedule meetings with Committee of Fine Arts (CFA) at the end of January and with NCPD in early February.
 - The next Working Group meetings will be in March and May, and a public meeting is slated for the end of January.

3. Discussion

- Jason Theuer (NPS NAMA) asked when should the NPS expect to receive official NHPA-106 consultation correspondence meeting 36 CFR 800.4 - Historic Property Identification Efforts? Specifically, how is Hancock Park being treated in regard to 800.4? As a contributor to the L'Enfant Plan NRHP district?
 - Lee F. responded that VHB can double check that NPS received the consultation correspondence that was sent in March 2024. She also noted that the DOEs were sent a few weeks ago.
 - Jason confirmed he was on the communication from March and that he received the draft DOEs for the rail corridor and American Road Builders building. However, he

noted that it did not include anything about how the L'Enfant Plan and Hancock Park were being treated in terms of historic property identification efforts?

- Lee F. noted that Hancock Park is considered a contributing element to the L'Enfant Plan.
- Sarah Batcheler (CFA) asked for information about tree protection in the construction laydown area in Hancock Park?
 - Lee F. noted that all trees within the park will be preserved, but there are some trees in rail corridor that screen the park that will be removed. She noted that this is being assessed as part of the DCE.
- Sarah asked if there are any special or heritage trees that are proposed to be removed in the rail right-of-way?
 - Lee F. stated that she does not believe so but will confirm.
- Jim Smailes (Committee of 100) asked if there is another WMATA elevator proposed to go from the street level down to the WMATA station?
 - Mark noted that WMATA is in the planning stages of adding a second elevator on 7th Street.
 - Lee F. noted that WMATA has another proposed elevator at the WMATA headquarters, but that this location is in the earlier planning stages than the one on 7th Street; she noted that there were some graphics in the alternatives analysis phase that showed the walking distances to the elevator locations.
 - Dagmawie clarified that as part of the project, VRE is not adding any elevators down to the WMATA station.
- Michael Jerakis (Greater Washington Partnership) noted that after seeing the renderings and looking at some of the pedestrian amenities and streetscapes on 6th Street and 7th Street, he was wondering if there has been any coordination on pedestrian amenities or streetscape improvements.
 - Lee Dwyer (VHB) noted there are plans for a 7th Street bike lane that DDOT has had in their bike plan for a while; the timing is not known; this would provide easier access to the station for cyclists.
 - Mark reminded attendees that the project is at Draft 30%; this is the point where the project team has finished initial engineering and shared with VRE and VPRA for management input; minor revisions were made and the design has been shared with major stakeholders; VRE is still waiting on comments from some stakeholders; the team is just beginning the real engagement with DDOT; the next step is to bring back all the comments from stakeholders and progress to the Final 30% design next year; the goal of the Draft 30% design is to make sure everyone has had an opportunity to provide input on the major project components.
- Lexie Albe (SWBID) asked whether VRE would be repairing/resurfacing the tunnel on 7th Street, specifically is VRE touching the existing sidewalk or underpass?
 - Mark noted that the sidewalk areas fall under the answer he just gave about getting the major components agreed on; right now, there is no proposed design work to

the right of joint between the existing and proposed bridge sections; however, the team welcomes feedback from stakeholders.

- Lexie suggested that the project should consider improvements to the existing 7th street underpass area.
- Lexie asked whether the entire 6th Street bridge will be replaced?
 - Meghan Powell (VHB) confirmed that the entire 6th Street bridge would be replaced.
 - Mark noted that there is the intent to leave the stone masonry abutments intact and support the new structure behind them.
 - Dagmawie noted that the new bridge would have the same type of structure as the existing bridge; 3 spans with 2 intermediate supports and steel girder.
 - Mark noted that the 7th Street bridge extension would mimic the existing bridge with the same girders and abutment.
 - Lexie noted that it would be good to have some minor repairs to the existing 7th Street bridge and that SWBID would be happy to chat with VRE about it.
- Dan Fox (CFA) noted that it's hard to tell exactly what is proposed in the 7th Street rendering. He asked what the type of concrete would be and if it would be the same as the existing bridge. He is interested in those details when developed.
 - Mark said that with the level the design has been looked at, it will be concrete; the renderings have a little bit of aesthetics, but it is in the really early stages; the project team is looking for feedback on aesthetics and there is a lot to work out in the final details.
 - Dan noted they would be interested in seeing a full design; as it is being shown now, he would recommend that it be an extension of the existing wall; if something different is being proposed they would want to discuss more; the existing bridge has a lot of stalactites/stalagmites, and he would hope that there are actual repairs and not just superficial aesthetic fix (ex. painting); a freshening will look not so great after a short period of time.
 - Mark pointed out that the existing bridge is owned by CSX; VRE is widening the bridge, but the bridge will go back to CSX; currently there are no plans for improvements to the existing bridge, but this has been great feedback as VRE wants the station to be a great experience.
- Dan noted that there are opportunities for better landscaping by the 7th Street entrance (where there is a dirt area in the rendering).
 - Mark noted these are early renderings and something would be done with the space.
 - Lee D. noted that an earlier version of the rendering had some landscaping, but it cluttered the view of the station entrance, so it was removed.
 - Dan said that the sooner they can see elevations or more developed drawings the better it is; CFA has seen a lot of plan views and renderings (high-level graphics), but there is a missing level of documentation; this is important for CFA's review.
 - Mark stated the project team understands.
- Noah Hagen (DDOT) provided some context on DDOT improvements along 7th Street; he noted that the bike path improvements are a few years away.

- Mark said there is a need for consideration of bike facilities as the design advances.
 - Dagmawie noted that VRE's design will be executed not to preclude future bike facility improvements.
 - Christine Hoeffner (VRE) noted that as far as locations for bike racks or a bike share, part of that decision will be what property is under VRE control that they could site them on versus property owned by others.
- Carlton Hart (CFA) asked whether there will there be locked gates at the two entrances to prohibit entry during off hours?
 - Mark noted that locked entrances do not exist today and are not being proposed.
 - Dallas Richards (VRE) explained that VRE does not lock any stations, but VRE monitors the stations and platforms using security cameras; VRE can also talk to people through speakers and telephones on the platform.
 - Dallas noted that there is only so much VRE can do on other people's properties for landscaping and VRE follows SEPTED requirements which may affect what can be placed around station entrances; VRE will do something nice that looks good at the end but there may be some requirements/limitations.
 - Dan agreed; he is not necessarily suggesting shrubs, it could be hardscape; however, the public does not understand property lines the way designers do.
 - Dallas noted that VRE wants something they can be proud of when they are done.
 - Carlton asked when the project team will have section drawings? In particular, through the Capital Gallery building to show proximity of proposed retaining wall to the building; it would be helpful to have a more accurate representation of what is being looked at; the rendering is a perspective, not a section drawing; a section would be helpful to better understand potential impacts.
 - Mark explained that the project team is going through major stakeholder input now; there are sections, but the team wants to get everyone's input on whether the design has the right pieces and parts.
 - Carlton noted that in particular it is helpful to have the site context, especially on the north side with the close proximity of the buildings.
 - Mark said that the three sections of blue lines are the new walls, and the one along the Capital Gallery building is on the same footprint of the existing wall for the stairs to the platform.
 - Carlton noted that it is hard to tell if the proposed wall is the same height; there are existing windows on the Capital Gallery building, but it is hard to tell if the view from the window will be impacted.
 - Mark noted that the project team can show sections at the next Working Group to help clarify things more.
 - Christine introduced herself as the environmental lead for VRE and noted that the team is still working on the assumption that the project will be a DCE and working closely with FTA to ensure that if there are impacts, they can be mitigated to a less significant level; VRE will have more information on this at the next two Working Group meetings.
 - Dagmawie thanked everyone for joining and ended the meeting.