Virginia Railway Express (VRE) proposes to construct a permanent midday storage replacement facility (the Project) for VRE trains that travel to and from the District of Columbia (the District). The facility’s proposed location is between the Northeast Corridor tracks and New York Avenue NE, Washington DC, which would provide proximate access to Washington Union Station, necessary for VRE operations. VRE evaluated a wide range of potential alternative sites in Maryland, Virginia, and the District for the relocated storage facility, taking into consideration operations, access, environmental, community, and cost criteria.

The new permanent facility will replace the current temporary storage space provided by the National Railroad Passenger Corporation (Amtrak) in the Ivy City rail facility. VRE trains are currently stored during the day in Amtrak’s Ivy City rail facility through an agreement. Amtrak identified the need to store additional intercity trains in this location and requires VRE to relocate from the Ivy City rail facility.

The new facility is planned for daytime storage for 138 units (locomotives and coaches). The Project includes constructing eight (8) new tracks, six (6) of which will be used for storage and two (2) as run-around tracks, as well as a new turntable and a new tail track that extends north along the Northeast Corridor to the Bladensburg Road NE bridge.
ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW FINDINGS

Since July 2016, VRE has engaged the public, stakeholders, and agency partners on the midday storage replacement facility. Since the last public meeting, VRE has completed the environmental analysis and documentation required for compliance with the Federal Transit Administration’s (FTA) Environmental Impact and Related Procedures (23 Code of Federal Regulations 771) for implementing the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). On June 11, 2019, the FTA determined the Project does not involve significant environmental impacts and meets the definition of a Categorical Exclusion as defined in 23 Code of Federal Regulations 771.118(d). The following sections provide a summary of findings from the environmental review.

WHAT ARE THE ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS OF THE PROJECT?

Construction – Construction of the Project is expected to take approximately 30 months. The majority of the construction is anticipated to take place on weekdays during typical daytime working hours. Some nighttime and/or weekend work will be required to minimize impacts to the traveling public and rail operations. The Project is expected to result in typical construction impacts (such as dust from disturbed earth) that would be minimized on-site to the extent practicable. Construction impacts to rail operations are expected to be minimal and will be coordinated with Amtrak to avoid and/or minimize impacts to passenger rail operations to the extent possible. The Project will comply with District construction regulations, as required.

Transportation – VRE does not anticipate any impacts to the traveling public (including bus transit operations) during operation of the project. The proposed facility will have a negligible impact on the signalized intersections in the study area. The two (2) existing signalized intersections will maintain an acceptable level of service with the proposed project and project-generated traffic delays will be confined to New York Avenue NE within the Project limits. No permanent transportation mitigation measures are required for the Project. VRE will coordinate with DDOT regarding temporary lane closures proposed on New York Avenue NE early in the DDOT permitting and Comprehensive Transportation Review process, as required. There will be no impacts to passenger rail operations or freight rail operations on the Capitol Subdivision, after project implementation.

Air Quality – Since the Project involves relocating an existing storage facility, the Project would not result in new emission sources and would not have an impact on emissions at the regional level. The Project will not result in operational increases in emissions; therefore, no mitigation measures are required.

Surface Water – The Project is not located in an area of critical habitat, essential fish habitat or any other ecologically sensitive area.

Coastal Zone – The Project is not located in a designated coastal zone management area.

Floodplains – The Project is not located within the Federal Emergency Management Agency 100-year or 500-year floodplain.

Navigable Waterways – The Project does not cross or have the potential to impact a navigable waterway.

Prime and Unique Farmlands – The Project does not involve the use of any prime or unique farmlands.

Section 4(f) – There are no publicly-owned park and recreation areas that are open to the general public, or publicly-owned wildlife and waterfowl refuges within the proposed site. The Project is not anticipated to result in direct or indirect impacts to historic properties; therefore, there is no Section 4(f) use anticipated.

Seismic – There are no unusual seismic conditions in the Project vicinity.

Water Quality – The Project does not have the potential to impact water quality, including during construction. The Project will not discharge directly to any water body. The Project will be designed in accordance with District regulations and Best Management Practices, as required. A Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan, as required by the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System Construction General Permit, will be prepared prior to construction and implemented throughout construction. The Project will require a new paved access driveway and spaces for staff parking, totaling approximately 66,200 square feet of new pavement. This will be offset by removing approximately 65,900 square feet of existing pavement. The Project is not located near an Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) designated sole source aquifer.

Wetlands – The Project will not temporarily or permanently impact wetlands or require alterations to streams or waterways.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW FINDINGS SUMMARY

The environmental review considered potential impacts to the human environment, such as traffic, environmental justice, and air quality – and the natural environment, such as hazardous materials and water quality, as summarized below. The environmental resources studied and found not to be present at the Project site or not to be affected by the Project include the following:

- Aesthetics – The Project will not degrade or alter the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings. The Project will not create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in this area. A proposed visual buffer along a portion of the New York Avenue NE right-of-way line will serve as a community enhancement and is not required for mitigation for visual impacts to the existing views.
- Biological – The Project is not located in an area of critical habitat, essential fish habitat or any other ecologically sensitive area.
- Coastal Zone – The Project is not located in a designated coastal zone management area.
- Floodplains – The Project is not located within the Federal Emergency Management Agency 100-year or 500-year floodplain.
- Navigable Waterways – The Project does not cross or have the potential to impact a navigable waterway.
- Prime and Unique Farmlands – The Project does not involve the use of any prime or unique farmlands.
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- Prime and Unique Farmlands – The Project does not involve the use of any prime or unique farmlands.
- Section 4(f) – There are no publicly-owned park and recreation areas that are open to the general public, or publicly-owned wildlife and waterfowl refuges within the proposed site. The Project is not anticipated to result in direct or indirect impacts to historic properties; therefore, there is no Section 4(f) use anticipated.

- Seismic – There are no unusual seismic conditions in the Project vicinity.
- Water Quality – The Project does not have the potential to impact water quality, including during construction. The Project will not discharge directly to any water body. The Project will be designed in accordance with District regulations and Best Management Practices, as required. A Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan, as required by the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System Construction General Permit, will be prepared prior to construction and implemented throughout construction. The Project will require a new paved access driveway and spaces for staff parking, totaling approximately 66,200 square feet of new pavement. This will be offset by removing approximately 65,900 square feet of existing pavement. The Project is not located near an Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) designated sole source aquifer.
- Wetlands – The Project will not temporarily or permanently impact wetlands or require alterations to streams or waterways.

The FTA’s NEPA regulations consider projects with minor impacts to be “categorically excluded” from the requirement to prepare an Environmental Assessment or Environmental Impact Statement.
ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW FINDINGS SUMMARY

- **Noise and Vibration** – Project noise levels will be below the FTA moderate impact criteria and there will be no noise impact due to the project at any receptors, with the exception of the two closest buildings being built at the Kettler Market Terminal development (300 Morse Street). Due to close proximity of the development to the railroad right-of-way, there is potential for impact due to wheel squeal. VRE will implement mitigation measures to minimize noise impact to the greatest extent possible, as described below. Similarly, Project vibration levels will be below FTA vibration criterion and there will be no vibration impact due to the project at any sensitive receptors, with about the exception of the closest building at the Kettler Market Terminal development, where there will be a potential increase about 3 vibration decibels above existing conditions. (See Figure 1)

The Kettler Market Terminal development is currently under construction; VRE and the Kettler Market Terminal developer have consulted and will continue to coordinate as both Projects advance. The developer has designed the building to be noise-compatible with its surroundings by hiring an acoustical consultant, and is implementing noise and vibration-compatible design elements such as reducing the number and size of windows on the rail side, increasing wall thickness, orienting balconies, and including parking on the first two floors of the building. VRE proposes to install a wayside top-of-rail friction modifier system and/or apply gauge-face lubrication to minimize the potential for wheel squeal; the friction modifier system would reduce noise levels by up to 22 decibels at the Kettler Market Terminal development. VRE will continue to coordinate with the developer during the next phases of project development to determine whether additional mitigation measures are warranted relating to potential vibration effects.

- **Land Use and Property Needs** – The Project will use approximately 12 acres on Amtrak property adjacent to the Northeast Corridor and a Conrail easement through the Union Market area. VRE proposes to acquire three privately-owned commercial parcels in their entirety. These three businesses - the Howard Johnson Inn (600 New York Avenue NE), Mobil Gas Station and Metro Service Area (1230 New York Avenue NE), and Ed's Garden Center (1720 New York Avenue NE) - would be acquired in accordance with the Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act of 1970. A small amount of land is also required from two (2) privately-owned parcels (U-Store Self Storage at 301 New York Avenue NE, and Quality Inn at 1600 New York Avenue NE), which would not affect the operation of either of these businesses.

- **Environmental Justice** – No substantial adverse impacts from the Project are anticipated after implementation of project minimization and mitigation efforts noted throughout this summary. The Project is not anticipated to have a disproportionately high and adverse effect on environmental justice populations.

- **Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964** – The Project would not limit circulation, access, or community cohesion for potentially vulnerable populations protected under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 because of the historically extinct railroad operations and tracks.

- **Historic Properties** – The Project would not result in adverse operational or construction period impacts to historic properties. The Project was determined, by the District of Columbia Historic Preservation Officer (DCHPO), to have a conditional “no adverse effect” to historic properties, provided the Project does not impact below ground archaeological resources, and the DCHPO is provided the opportunity to review and comment on the visual buffer design, with their comments incorporated into the design.

- **Hazardous Materials** – No storage of oil and hazardous materials is planned within the proposed facility. Refueling and/or maintenance activities are not proposed within the facility. During the next phase of design, VRE will develop construction protection measures to provide adequate protection to workers and any nearby sensitive receptors. If contaminated soils or groundwater, or hazardous vapors, are anticipated to be encountered during construction of the Project, appropriate site remediation techniques or other measures to prevent exposure will be implemented.

- **Safety and Security** – The Project would improve the safety and security of the site. Building enhancements such as additional lighting, signage and markings, and emergency communications will be installed. The proposed site is in close proximity to emergency response services, enabling a short response time in the event of an emergency and ensuring that authorized facility staff have sufficient access to emergency services.

- **Indirect and Cumulative Impacts** – No indirect effects are anticipated; the Project supports both transportation and private development initiatives and would not result in cumulative impacts, beyond those associated with supporting the continued growth and expansion already occurring within the District.