



VIRGINIA RAILWAY EXPRESS

Midday Storage Facility

**PUBLIC MEETING #1
SUMMARY**

FEBRUARY 2017

Table of Contents

1 INTRODUCTION	3
1.1 PURPOSE OF THE MEETING	3
1.2 EVENT INFORMATION	3
1.3 FORMAT	3
1.4 BOARDS AND INFORMATIONAL MATERIALS	3
2 OUTREACH EFFORTS	4
2.1 NOTIFICATIONS	4
2.2 DOOR HANGER AND POSTERS	4
2.3 TITLE VI OUTREACH.....	4
3 ATTENDANCE	5
3.1 ATTENDEES	5
4 COMMENTS	6
4.1 KEY TAKEAWAYS.....	6
4.2 ACTIVITY SUMMARIES.....	6
5 THE PATH FORWARD	9

1 INTRODUCTION

The Virginia Railway Express (VRE) Midday Storage Facility (MSF) project's purpose is to replace the current storage space leased from Amtrak at the Ivy City Coach Yard in the District of Columbia. The project will include planning, designing, and constructing a permanent midday storage facility for VRE trains that travel to the District. The proposed facility will accommodate current VRE trains, and will be used to store those trains on weekdays between the inbound morning commute and the outbound afternoon commute. VRE will work with members of the community, stakeholders, and property owners to assess potential impacts and determine ways VRE can be a good neighbor. The first public meeting is to solicit feedback from the community.

1.1 PURPOSE OF THE MEETING

This was the first public meeting in the neighborhood for the VRE MSF project. As part of the project, VRE would like to work with the Ivy City neighborhood and other nearby communities along New York Avenue NE. The project team will determine potential impacts associated with replacing the existing storage facility including noise, vibration, air quality, and land use compatibility. VRE will work with members of the community, stakeholders, and property owners to determine ways to be a good neighbor and design the facility in a manner that supports community goals.

1.2 EVENT INFORMATION

The public meeting was held on Thursday, February 16, 2017, from 4:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. at Bethesda Baptist Church (1808 Capitol Ave NE, Washington, DC 20002). The meeting was scheduled from 4:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.; however, the discussion lasted until 9:00 p.m. The meeting location was accessible by the D4 and D8 Metrobuses. There was parking available, which was important since most attendees came to the meeting by car.

1.3 FORMAT

The meeting format was “open house” style with a formal presentation and a question and answer (Q&A) session. During the open house–style portion, attendees reviewed boards and large-scale roll maps and asked questions of the project team. To accommodate seniors and others who do not want to be out after dark, VRE gave the same presentation at 4:30 p.m. and 6:30 p.m. During and after each presentation, the meeting attendees were invited to ask questions.

1.4 BOARDS AND INFORMATIONAL MATERIALS

Boards were designed to give attendees an overview of the project and help the public better understand the benefits of the project and its purpose. The following boards and graphics were presented:

Process Diagram: This board provided the project timeline for the VRE MSF.

Project Area Map: This board showed the existing railroad facilities and surrounding transportation network with the project area highlighted.

Project Area Aerial Map: This map was a long, tabletop scroll that showed an aerial image of the project area with the proposed facility outlined as well as notes about key features.

Preliminary Engineering Drawing: This was a long, tabletop rolled drawing that showed the potential facility layout and design.

Handouts: The handouts included a Title VI demographic survey, the project Frequently Asked Question sheet, and a brochure about VRE's 2040 plan for rail service expansion.

2 OUTREACH EFFORTS

Outreach for the first public meeting aimed to let the adjacent community know about the project and invite them to the meeting to discuss the project with the project team. For this meeting, organizations, institutions, media contacts, and residents were notified.

2.1 NOTIFICATIONS

The project team contacted organizations, elected officials, neighborhood representatives, media outlets, residents, and institutions through e-mail blasts, news releases through VRE's channels, and posting information about the project on the project website.

2.2 DOOR HANGER AND POSTERS

Two hundred and fifty door hangers and 100 posters were distributed throughout the project area during the week of February 6, 2017. On-the-ground outreach was focused on the areas closest to the proposed facility. These areas included Gallaudet University, public libraries, grocery stores, churches, government buildings, and other businesses that agreed to display the posters. The project team also went door-to-door to distribute door hangers with meeting information to the residents of the Ivy City neighborhood and surrounding areas. This type of distribution has been effective in reaching Title VI populations in previous community outreach efforts.

2.3 TITLE VI OUTREACH

Key locations in the project area were identified (e.g., locations where residents include low-income persons, non-English speaking populations, seniors, etc.). Information was sent electronically or through hardcopy to the following locations:

ANC Commissioners

- ANC 5C, 5D, 5E, 6C

Religious Institutions

- Bethesda Baptist Church
- Trinity Baptist Church
- About My Father
- Mt. Olive Baptist Church
- New Samaritan Baptist Church
- First Jericho Baptist Church
- The Summit at St. Martin's

Community Center/Libraries

- Gallaudet University
- Youth Services Center

Other Community Organizations

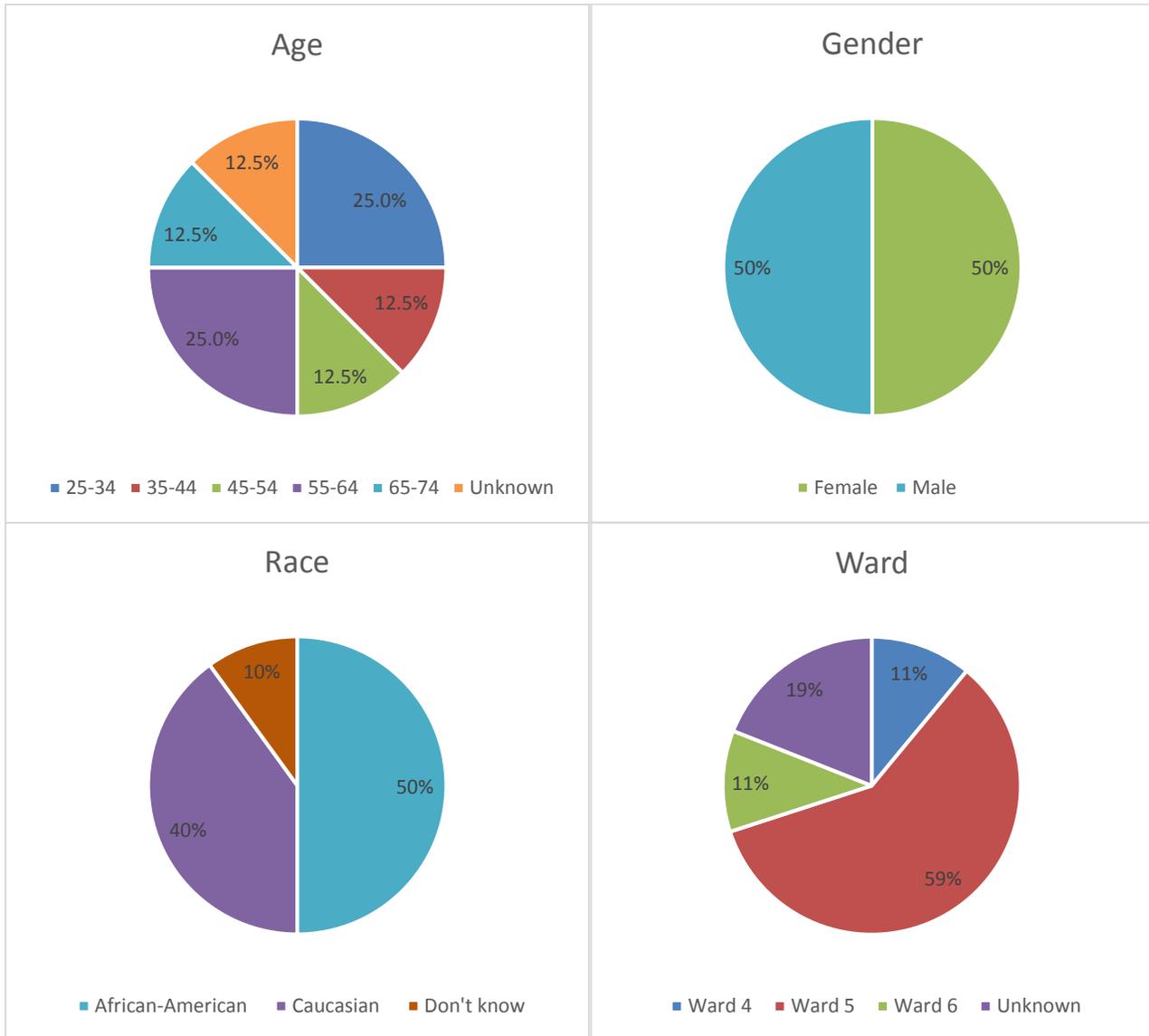
- District of Columbia Animal Care and Control

3 ATTENDANCE

Approximately 30 members of the public attended the first public meeting. These attendees included ANC Commissioners, local leaders, and community residents.

3.1 ATTENDEES

The charts below represent the demographic makeup of meeting attendees taken from Title VI forms that were completed and submitted to the project team.



4 COMMENTS

Comments were received at both presentations. The section below summarizes the input received from those in attendance.

4.1 KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **Provide more information on site selection:** The community wanted more detail about the criteria used, as well as the weighting and scoring of the site selection criteria, in the site selection alternatives report. A key concern was the “community impact” criterion.
- **Provide more notice to the community:** The community expressed concerns that there was not enough lead time with outreach, and that there was a great deal of uncertainty regarding their opportunities to participate in the process. Participants nearby, but slightly outside the project area, would like to be included because they consider the project site to be part of their community as well.
- **Explain community benefits of the project:** Participants wanted to know more about the benefits and opportunities that this project will bring to the neighborhood and the District. They understand that this is a need for VRE, but wanted to know how the project can be leveraged to continue development or meet community needs and vision for the future.
- **Explore and show design options that are possible:** The community expressed a desire to see options that hide the rail yard and train tracks. They do not want the facility to hinder the progress that the area has made to attract new development.
- **Find a way to make this an asset rather than just storage:** The community wants to see what win-win design options are possible for both the North and South yards. They wanted to know whether it was feasible to have the storage facility below the level of New York Avenue NE. They wanted to understand any potential disadvantages of the project.
- **Show more and better visualizations of the project:** The community wants to better understand what the facility and potential options would look like from the perspective of New York Avenue.

4.2 ACTIVITY SUMMARIES

4.2.1 Meeting Q&A Discussions – Summary

- **Clarifying Questions**
 - VRE was asked to define what a “unit” was and to use terms and directional references that are relevant to the community versus the directional references of the railroad.
 - The community wanted to better understand the agreement between Amtrak and VRE, and the reasons VRE needs to move out of the existing Amtrak rail yard
 - The question arose regarding the role of the Washington Terminal Company. VRE noted that it still exists as a corporate entity, is wholly owned by Amtrak, and that their board is comprised of employees of Amtrak.
- **Interagency and Involvement:**
 - Participants asked whether VRE has been coordinating with local public agencies and wanted to hear the views of these agencies regarding the project. VRE noted that it has been coordinating with the District Department of Transportation (DDOT), Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development (DMPED), Office of Planning (DCOP), and Office of Zoning (DCOZ).
 - DDOT was specifically called upon and responded that they share the same concerns as the community and will be recommending that the project be pushed to higher NEPA review. DDOT would also like 24 feet of right-of-way buffer rather than 14 feet.
 - It was requested that the next meeting include representatives from DDOT, Amtrak, the councilmember’s office, and other officials involved in the process to give a fuller picture.

- **Project Process:**
 - One participant asked if an environmental review had been conducted to determine the air, land, and water impacts. VRE responded that this examination is in progress.
- **Community Involvement:**
 - An ANC commissioner asked VRE to attend their meetings and talk this over with the ANCs
 - Participants wanted more views of what each potential design option would look like along the streetscape. One participant asked for multiple sections to see where the rail yard would be underground and where it would be at street level. Participants also wanted the team to add automobiles to New York Avenue NE for spatial reference on the sections and renderings.
 - The community expressed concerns that VRE did not “care” about the impacts of such a facility to their community, and that unless VRE comes in with viable options, residents will oppose the project to all elected officials and agencies.
 - Participants wanted to know the method for communicating suggestions. It was noted that contact information for the project manager from VRE was on the meeting materials.
 - One participant asked about where the comments will go and how they will be cataloged. VRE noted that for approval for Federal funding, comments collected from the community must be documented as part of the process.
 - Another participant recommended that VRE look at the Virginia Avenue Tunnel project as an example.
 - The community would like more lead time for the next meeting and to expand outreach to all communities along New York Avenue NE.
 - Participants noted that they would like to see a community engagement plan so they know upcoming opportunities for participation.
- **Site Selection and Design:**
 - The community wanted to better understand the process of site selection and to know more details about the analysis report. Specifically, participants asked for clarification of the criteria used to measure “community impacts” shown in the table in the presentation. One participant said that the community should be polled to determine the impacts to the community.
 - Participants wanted to know if this site was the only one that is being pursued. VRE responded that the New York Avenue site has been selected for the facility.
 - Residents were concerned that VRE had no contingency plan in the case that this site was unable to be developed into their facility. VRE noted that this is an allowed use for this railroad-owned parcel, per DC Zoning. It was acknowledged that the population, business environment, etc., of neighboring parcels has likely changed from the time the railroad property was originally zoned.
 - Participants wanted to know why the other high scoring sites are not being pursued. VRE noted that access to Union Station was very important and that Ivy City was the best for that. The participants encouraged VRE to examine their other top-scoring options. VRE noted that the table provided is a simplified version of a complex site analysis report.
 - Participants wanted to know what were the very basic needs for VRE and how they could streamline the facility to reduce impacts.
 - Participants asked whether the commercial overbuild would be completed by VRE or others. VRE noted that they could provide the space between the tracks for columns, but would not build any buildings.
 - Participants suggested that a park/trail overbuild be extended to the Fort Lincoln neighborhood and connect Union Station.

- **Benefit and Impact Concerns:**

- There were concerns over the servicing of trains while they are stored midday. VRE noted that the trains will only be cleaned and very minor maintenance activities will take place with tools that are in a standard toolbox. They will continue to be serviced nightly in Virginia at the end of the lines.
- Participants wanted to know what this project would do for the neighborhood and the District. VRE noted that it would generate tax dollars, and ease congestion by taking cars off the road. Participants wanted to hear more concrete benefits that are specific to the community.
- Participants raised concerns of proximity to the buildings near Union Market and the potential for trains to derail and hit buildings. VRE noted that trains would be far enough away from the buildings based on design standards and traveling at low speed and would not be likely to derail. Trains would be separated by an iron fence built by VRE and plantings installed by the developer along the section of the Union Market track.
- Participants raised issues of other plans and proposals for the site, like a park and trail proposal. VRE noted that it is open to suggestions of ways it can integrate community ideas into the facility.
- Participants noted that they would like VRE to explore the potential of the north yard being designed below grade and asked about the process. VRE noted that first the engineering consultants would need to determine the design feasibility and then they would review it with the community.
- Participants wanted to see how this could be an asset to the community and provide space that is useful.
- One participant raised the concern of this project increasing impacts on traffic along New York Avenue. VRE noted that it did not anticipate the facility having an adverse impact on traffic.

4.2.2 Comment Form / Title VI Form Comments

The Title VI and comment forms allowed participants to write comments about the project for the project team to take back and consider. They closely mimic the discussion in the Q&A session. They have been edited for grammar and clarity without changing the spirit of the comment.

- Build a scale model to facilitate the community understanding of options and impacts along the corridor.
- Polite VRE people under challenging circumstances; however, VRE people knew all their details, except conveniently the details about community impact studies. Also, unsurprisingly the summary of community impact (Alternative Analysis slide) is all blue and purple. It seems that community impact should be decided by the community, not consultants. Marketing of events in the future could be much better. Ultimately, the VRE presenter is a polite person doing his best in a challenging environment.
- Know your audience: the presentation did not focus on the needs/wants/concerns of the community, only on the business and logistical concerns for VRE and not relevant to the community elements. The plan/brainstorm options that were for the community. How is VRE going to meet with the community for the next 6 months? Is there a schedule? Also, being defensive is not helpful for the dialogue.
- I encourage you to meet with each affected ANCs and be exhaustive in meeting with individuals from all over, talking with everyone who is willing such as ANC 5C and 5D. In talking with the public, be clear about other proposed use for this space. Explore what it would take to move the yard below grade on the North yard segment, so that development or a trail or both could be at street level along the entire side.
- You need a better "community public participation" consulting. I am glad I wasn't running the meeting, but I have had similar experiences.

- This project should have been announced to all the affected advisory neighborhood commissioners. We are elected to represent the community. The project reflects an undesirable use that opposes the health, safety, and well-being of the community. In short, we do not want this project and will oppose it in the most vociferous and strenuous manner possible. We have a right to enjoy a community that is not saturated with industrial and undesirable projects.
- There should be more planning and discussion between the city and community. I suggest that we meet again, along with the city and community have had an opportunity to dialog. As for now, this is not workable, but it is up for negotiation.
- Extremely concerned that this project will halt development in the area. Very worried about the environment and noise effect from dramatic growth of train units. Community opposed to this plan. Matrix analysis needs to be redone to consider community affects
- One participant drew a section of an overbuild with a park at street level with New York Avenue NE and commented "How is this to be funded?"

Action Items for VRE and Project Team

1. Follow up regarding costs that VRE pays to Amtrak
2. Post alternatives report on website
3. Develop and post a public-facing Community Engagement Plan to the website

5 THE PATH FORWARD

Based on the comments from participants, the following represents recommended next steps for the project in terms of public involvement:

1. Post all materials requested to the website and send a follow up email to alert participants. Let them know that the team has taken their comments into account and will come back with more information, options, views of the project, and better community engagement.
2. Develop renderings of each design option showing axonometric as well as plan and sections of proposed facility designs. Sketch what the overbuild might look like. Post these as a slideshow on the VRE website.
3. Explore the potential and feasibility for moving the North Yard below grade.
4. Quantify and qualify the benefits to the District and community
5. Reorient the presentation so that it highlights the benefits and potential options that VRE is presenting from the perspective of DC residents
6. Meet with each ANC within and adjacent to the project site or attend public ANC meetings and request to be added to the agenda to discuss the project and options.
7. Keep a community concerns log to follow through on actions related to public comments and document the response.
8. Another public meeting is tentatively planned for the summer of 2017.