Community Advisory Committee Meeting #1: Minutes

DATE/TIME: November 9, 2015 – 4:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m.

PLACE: Ben Lomond Community Center: 10501 Copeland Drive, Manassas, VA 20109

SUBJECT: Community Advisory Committee (CAC) Meeting #1

ATTENDEES:

CAC Members

- Patti McKay, Prince William Planning Commission
- Fran Arnold, Prince William Planning Commission
- Marchant Schneider, Town of Haymarket
- Bruce Wood, Manassas Planning Commission
- Matt Pierce, Innovation Owners Association
- Bill Forster, VA Association of Railway Patrons
- Brendon Shaw, Prince William Chamber of Commerce
- Debbie Haight, Historic Manassas
- Julie Bolthouse, Piedmont Environmental Council
- Charles Grymes, Prince William Conservation Alliance
- Doug Porterfield, Braemar HOA
- Tim King, Victory Lakes HOA
- Wenda Schmelebeck, Villages of Piedmont HOA
- Andy Britton, Virginia Oaks HOA
- Ray Grant, VRE Rider
- Deana Willis, VRE Rider
- Jose Velazquez, VRE Rider
- Erin Cobb, VRE Rider
- Mike Edwards, VRE Rider
- Flake Sherrill, VRE Rider

VRE GHX Study Team

- Christine Hoeffner, VRE
- Tom Hickey, VRE
- Sonali Soneji, VRE
- Jason Mumford, AECOM
- Lauryn Douglas, AECOM
- Ian Lazzara, AECOM
- Deana Rhodeside, Rhodeside & Harwell
- Jeff Schlossberg, Rhodeside & Harwell
- Jennifer Hewitt, Foxbridge Communications
I. Project Overview

Christine Hoeffner welcomed CAC members to the meeting and described the purpose of the meeting.

II. Introductions

Christine Hoeffner led introductions of the GHX Study Team. Individual CAC members introduced themselves and the organizations with which they are affiliated.

a. Innovation Park representative
   - Works for a developer involved in the Innovation Park development.

b. Town of Haymarket representative
   - Noted that the Town of Haymarket is actually very small (in terms of size and number of residents), and that the name Haymarket is applied to many communities/areas outside of the actual town boundaries.
   - The Town’s concerns: noise from additional trains; ongoing power line extension study; end of line station impacts; and, additional traffic.

c. VARP & NARP representative
   - He is a rail advocate.
   - He wants to see a balanced transportation network in Northern Virginia.

d. Prince William Conservation Alliance representative
   - He is an anti-sprawl, smart growth advocate who understands development is coming to western PWC.
   - He wants the VRE extension to minimize impacts on the North Fork wetlands.

e. Prince William County Planning Commission representative
   - Issues she wanted to raise: the planned I-66/Rt. 15 interchange and rail grade separation; the power line project near Haymarket; and, the idea of co-locating the VDOT Park & Ride with VRE parking facilities.

f. Prince William County Planning Commission representative
   - She is thrilled about the project, and hopes to not repeat sprawl mistakes of the past.
   - She wants to look at smart growth at the proposed stations and promotion of new commercial development, not only new housing, in PWC.

g. Victory Lakes HOA representative
   - Uses VRE to commute to DC, and is the HOA representative
• He sees benefits and concerns associated with the project. Benefits include the ability to bike/walk to the stations, while concerns include increased traffic flow in the area at train arrival/departure times.

• Mentioned example of “Broad Runners” at the end-of-line Broad Run station – people who run of the train to be the first people out of the parking lot (to avoid congestion leaving parking lot).

• He rides VRE not for cost/savings but to avoid congestion on I-66.

h. Piedmont Environmental Council representative

• She supports multi-modal transportation. She is concerned about the land use impacts of the VRE extension, and wants smart growth.

• She worries about end-of-line impacts to Haymarket and the VRE extension encouraging development to occur further west. She is concerned about environmental impacts of extension.

i. VRE Rider representative

• He is a train buff and a long-time rider. Wants to see mid-day service.

j. Braemar HOA representative

• Most people from Braemar use Broad Run station.

• He is interested in station locations and easing flow/adding capacity.

k. VRE Rider representative

• Wants to see mixed-use/multi-use development at stations and stations that are part of the community (not just park & ride).

• Her current commute takes over 2 hours (car to VRE to Metro to walk).

• Uses VRE because I-66 is “terrible” in terms of cost and emotional strain.

l. VRE Rider (Manassas Park) representative

• The commuter bus system is the only other option to avoid driving.

• Would like more frequent VRE trains.

• She is impressed with the convenience, efficiency, and comfort VRE currently provides.

m. VRE Rider representative

• He has seen positive changes to VRE over his 13 years of riding.

• Has lived in the “exurban” part of the area that has become increasingly suburban.

• He likes the notion of increased trains and he sees lots of demand for increased services, especially with potential I-66 tolls.

• Wants wi-fi on trains.

• VRE need greater public awareness – people don’t know about the service.
n. Villages of Piedmont HOA representative
   - Villages of Piedmont includes 424 homeowners, which is about to double with the new expansion.
   - She is part of an increasingly-vocal Haymarket community.
   - She is concerned about noise from additional trains. The power line project is also a concern – more of a current issue than VRE. Also concerned about end-of-line impacts in Haymarket and the potential for vagrancy, changes in property values, trash, and pollution associated with VRE.
   - Wants to protect the Rural Crescent.
   - Considers herself a public transit advocate.

o. Manassas Planning commission representative
   - Manassas has a good relationship with VRE. They share a parking garage downtown by the station.
   - Credits VRE with encouraging development in Manassas, including townhomes and restaurants.
   - Sees big interest in Saturday service.
   - He is concerned about trains filling up before Manassas.
   - Also concerned about potential for airport expansion related to what happens at Broad Run station.

p. Historic Manassas representative
   - Historic Manassas is an organization that promotes development and preservation of Manassas.
   - VRE has had a measured positive impact on Manassas.
   - Sees big demand for Saturday service.

q. Prince William Chamber of Commerce representative
   - The Chamber supports studying transit in the area, as I-66 improvements can’t be the only solution.
   - The success of Manassas is due in part to the Manassas VRE station.
   - The commercial tax base is important – can be connected to VRE service.
   - Mixed use should be the focus of development. People want to Work/Live/Play in the same place. VRE provides a good option for commuters.
   - The chamber is interested in promoting the reverse commute out to PWC, which would activate PWC as an employment center.

r. Virginia Oaks HOA representative
   - Interested in station locations.
   - Traffic leaving Broad Run is bad. What would the situation be at new stations?
s. VRE Rider representative
   - Concerned about full trains at Manassas.
   - Wants to hear more about changes in train schedules after extension as it impacts departure time down the line.
   - What happens with extension? How many people shift to new stations from old ones?

III. Public Meeting Presentation

Christine Hoeffner and Jason Mumford gave a presentation on VRE and the GHX project. After the presentation Christine opened up discussion and answered questions from the CAC members.

CAC members provided the following comments and feedback:

a. The environmental and community impacts of the extension will be studied and addressed during the NEPA process.

b. Facilities at the end of the line in Haymarket will not include a train yard. There may be extra side tracks for train staging.

c. Prince William County does not own any apparent parcels adjacent to the NS right-of-way. However, private developers do own land and are interested in working with VRE and PWC through the county’s development review process and proffer system (similar to the Potomac Shores station).

d. VRE is constrained by storage capacity at Union Station and looking at solutions for that issue. For example, mid-day service back out of DC could alleviate some of the constrained storage space.

e. The cost of a daily fare from Broad Run is $9.50. There are discounts for weekly and monthly passes.

f. A CAC member performed an analysis of costs comparing VRE with driving to Metro and determined that the two are comparable.

gh. While the Fredericksburg Line already has express service, the Manassas Line does not because it is shorter and meets current demand. Trains also have to merge in Alexandria which poses some issues. This study will look at express service on the Manassas Line.

h. VRE pays the freight rail companies, NS and CSX, a per-mile fee for every train, whether they have passengers (i.e., are revenue trains) or not.

i. A CAC member expressed worries about traffic congestion impacts.

j. A CAC member would like the Project Team to consider a no build alternative. The study will evaluate a No Build alternative during the NEPA phase, as required by law.
k. A CAC member suggested that the study look at increasing service on the existing Manassas Line as an alternative rather than investing in new rail infrastructure.

IV. Small Group Activities:

Teams broke out into smaller working groups to provide input on the project and feedback on the design and use of activities for the public meeting.

a. Train Schedules to Meet Traveler Needs
   i. Attendees suggested adding more evening trains (after 7 pm) and mid-day trains.

b. Potential Passenger Station Locations (see Figure 1)
   i. Haymarket
      • The Shoppes at Haymarket could be linked to station development
      • Joint use of parking with the Town
      • The station should be bike accessible
      • Haymarket station could extend further west near where the existing railroad and I-66 intersect
      • A station west of Haymarket will increase:
         o AM traffic US 15 S to I-66 W
         o PM traffic I-66 E to US 15 N
      • Haymarket has existing heavy traffic in town
   ii. Gainesville
      • If there were a station in the Prince William Station development with residential development, there would be a lot of noise complaints about Jiffy Lube Live
      • Explore using the proposed I-66 lot as overflow parking for a station near University Boulevard
      • Structured parking facility south of tracks
   iii. Innovation/Sudley
      • Can we add tracks to:
         a. Get closer to Innovation Park development?
         b. Allow for reuse of the quarry that is closing?
• Add multiple parking lots in the area with shuttle connections rather than parking lots at the stations themselves

V. Discussion and Next Steps

CAC members requested that the project materials be posted online to help continue the dialogue. Some members suggested remove the Potential Station Area circles to avoid any confusion.
Figure 1: Summary of Station Location Activity (CAC)