Executive Steering Committee Meeting #1: Minutes

DATE/TIME: November 10, 2015 – 9:00-11:00 AM

PLACE: VDOT Northern Virginia District Office, 4975 Alliance Drive, Fairfax, VA 22030

SUBJECT: Executive Steering Committee (ESC) Meeting #1

ATTENDEES:

ESC Members
- Rick Canizales, Prince William County (Alt for Tom Blaser)
- Helen Cuervo, VDOT
- Bryan Foster, Deputy City Manager, City of Manassas
- Brian Henshaw, Town Manager, Town of Haymarket
- Monica Backmon, Director, NVTA
- Todd Horsley, DRPT (Alt for Jennifer Mitchell)
- Helen Cuervo, Administrator, VDOT
- Kelley Coyner, Director, NVTC
- Betsy Massie, Director of Grant and Project Development, PRTC

VRE GHX Study Team
- Doug Allen, VRE
- Christine Hoeffner, VRE
- Sonali Soneji, VRE
- Tom Hickey, VRE
- Jason Mumford, AECOM
- Lauryn Douglas, AECOM
- Meredith Judy, Rhodeside & Harwell
- Jeff Schlossberg, Rhodeside & Harwell
I. Project background and objectives

a. The meeting began with introductions by all participants. Doug Allen (VRE) welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked them for attending.

b. Christine Hoeffner (VRE) gave an overview of VRE and the project and its current service, and Jason Mumford (AECOM) presented an overview of the current alternatives and constraints. Meeting attendees were encouraged to ask questions throughout the presentation.

II. Public and stakeholder engagement and coordination

a. The GHX Study team is coordinating with the I-66 Outside the Beltway study teams. GHX is one of the ten multimodal improvement strategies recommended by the Commonwealth Transportation Board for the I-66 corridor. The teams are also discussing potential shared park-and-ride facilities, if feasible and desirable for both initiatives.

b. The study is also coordinating with Dominion Power regarding the alignment of the proposed Haymarket High Voltage Transmission Line. Dominion has been responsive and collaborative in determining an alignment for their service. Dominion submitted plans to the State Corporation Commission (SCC) at the end of October. The preferred alignment is above ground along I-66. VRE will submit a letter to the SCC in support of this alignment.

c. VRE will be reaching out to Haymarket, Manassas, PWC, PRTC, NVTC, NVTA to offer presentations to their boards and commissions. VRE will continue to keep these boards and commissions informed throughout the study process.

d. Agency and stakeholder coordination is very important. Elected officials need to know about this initiative, and understand the economic development opportunities and value it will offer the County, Town, and Commonwealth.

e. The GHX Study will include a study of infrastructure needs and ROW impacts. Long Bridge is the primary bottleneck in the larger railroad network between Haymarket and Washington, DC. A Federal TIGER grant was awarded to the District Department of Transportation (DDOT) to initiate NEPA for the Long Bridge expansion. That study is expected to start after January 1, 2016. An American Recovery & Reinvestment Act (ARRA) grant is currently funding “pre-NEPA” work. VRE is participating in the study oversight committee.
III. Discussion: Alternatives and Constraints

Alternatives

a. The GHX Study is considering alternative alignments to serve future development, including a proposed town center, in Innovation Park. The study team will develop order of magnitude cost estimates and estimate demand for a station and alignment off of the B-Line.

b. Within the existing NS B-Line right-of-way, there is room for a second track. A third track would likely require additional right-of-way. A third track may be necessary in order to accommodate future passenger rail and freight demands, however, this will be determined as part of the current study.

c. The VRE GHX Study will consider future ridership potential at Broad Run and the potential new stations if the Manassas line is extended. There are many current riders that already live within the corridor extension area. The study will consider alignments that include two branches and alignments that remove Broad Run station to avoid a two-line configuration of the Manassas Line. The study will consider the ridership, scheduling, and storage/maintenance implications of both scenarios.

d. There is concern from current riders about trains filling up before they arrive at Manassas. This will be studied as part of the service planning exercise.

e. VRE is studying the addition of mid-day and weekend on the Manassas Line. This should be easier to maintain on the Manassas Line than on the Fredericksburg Line because most of that corridor is not critical to NS operations (except the B-Line segment). CSX operations will also have to be considered for trains going all the way to DC, however. Operating costs and railroad operating agreements are the biggest challenges for providing this additional service. I-66 traffic is getting worse on weekends, so additional VRE service could provide value.

f. VRE has some reverse commute revenue trains that make limited stops along the Manassas Line because potential conflicts with peak direction trains make it difficult to maintain a dependable schedule. VRE also operates several reverse commute non-revenue trains; the inability to maintain a dependable schedule precludes operating them in revenue service. Maintaining a dependable schedule is the biggest challenge to successful reverse commute service.

g. The study is considering Prince William County’s plans and projections to understand the future demand for jobs and development patterns along the corridor. For example, at Innovation Park at GMU, the distance between the B Line and the planned Innovation
Town Center will impact the ability of riders to walk to destinations in that area. A bus shuttle service may be a viable alternative for the “last mile”.

h. Prince William County has noted the potential value of Transit Oriented Development (TOD), mixed use development, co-located parking and structured parking at future stations. This type of development could significantly increase the economic value of VRE stations in Prince William and Haymarket.

i. Many people buy homes in Manassas because they can walk to the station. This has led to a tremendous amount of economic development for the City. This can serve as a model for the Town of Haymarket. Ideally, VRE will become an all-day system, which will impact development patterns even more.

j. The future Haymarket station sites should consider mixed-use development to give people a reason to stay and shop when you get off the train.

IV. Discussion: Implementation

a. VRE does not plan to phase implementation of the extension project, as it likely would not save time or costs in the long-term. There is a perceived cost savings to phasing, however in reality it would likely be more costly to phase the project. End of line stations have specific needs and phasing the extension would create a temporary end of line station, which would be difficult to plan in the context of a future VRE extension farther west. There are concerns from some about impacts to community and cultural resources in the study area, which is why a phased implementation strategy has been suggested. The potential impacts include existing residential communities in Haymarket, and historic resources identified during the I-66 Study. These will all need to be addressed.

b. VRE is responsible for extending the track, if needed. There would be an evaluation of the public benefit, but the tracks would still likely be owned and maintained by the private railroad. NS would provide access to the existing right-of-way, under an access agreement, and VRE would pay for the track construction.

c. There are seven or eight at-grade crossings along the length of the extension corridor. VRE does not know if NS will request grade separation or whether the future rail and vehicular traffic conditions will warrant it. This will need to be negotiated, but NS typically does not require it. There are some planned grade separations, e.g., at Route 15, which is an opportunity for potential station access. Traffic patterns and circulation will be important to discuss as part of this study.
Funding

a. VRE has submitted the project for HB2 evaluation. A future request to NVTA and HB 599 evaluation is anticipated.
b. NVTA and DRPT are very interested in next steps, as funding partners. NVTA will issue the FY2018 Program Call for Projects next fall (2016).
c. The GHX Study will develop both capital and operating cost estimates. VRE needs to make sure that it can continue to operate existing service before it commits to expanded operations. VRE is committed to maintaining high-quality service for existing customers while it also expands the system.
d. DRPT’s Rail Enhancement Fund is one possible source of funds for joint infrastructure projects. DRPT Rail Enhancement Fund requires performing a cost/benefit analysis to weigh the costs to the state and benefits to both passengers and freight.
e. Marshall, Leesburg and Front Royal are watching this study. VRE riders from these jurisdictions would use the Haymarket station. The VRE rider origin dots will move further out if the extension is built. It will be important to demonstrate that the benefits of the project are accruing to the same people who are paying the cost of the project.
f. VRE will re-examine the zone structure for fares with the extension. VRE a 55-65 percent fare recovery rate, which is very good for the industry.
g. VRE is preparing a system-wide financial plan, which will be coordinated with the GHX project funding plan. VRE is developing a financial model to look at various operating scenarios, and different levels of funding required for various service options.

Freight-Passenger Rail Coordination and Interoperability

a. The B-Line is strategically important for NS’s “Crescent Corridor Initiative” in the nationwide freight network, and VRE expects increased NS traffic on the segment. VRE is carefully coordinating with NS during this study process.

b. If VRE wanted to implement the extension without using NS tracks, the cost would be very high. NS owns the right-of-way, maintains the tracks, manages dispatching, pays taxes, etc. When positive train control needed to be added to the railroad lines, VRE’s cost was much lower than it would have been if they had owned the tracks. This is one indicator of the benefit that VRE enjoys by not owning the tracks. As a result, VRE needs a good relationship with NS and CSX (and Amtrak).

c. Currently VRE renegotiates with NS every five years for use of their tracks. This is a typical arrangement for similar services across the country. To date, it has not interfered with VRE’s ability to expand system investment. There is an access agreement with NS (and
CSX and Amtrak) and VRE pays on a per train mile basis, which is less expensive than VRE owning and maintaining the track for itself.

d. NS will want two tracks, at minimum, and will likely require three tracks in the future, if the VRE service is extended. NS will own, control, use, and maintain the tracks. This is the typical approach used throughout US. The potential exists for NS to say no to a VRE extension if they need the capacity themselves, although VRE believes an agreement can be reached with NS for joint operations. VRE can inquire about an agreement longer than five years, if these improvements are made. The study team will research case studies to show that this negotiation process is typical.

e. The number of train slots available to VRE is governed by its access agreement with CSX. VRE has a maximum of 20 trains per day on the Manassas Line (10 in each direction) under the current agreement, with another 18 trains per day on the Fredericksburg Line. Four of those trains are currently on loan to the Commonwealth for their Amtrak Virginia service, although there are provisions for those trains to be returned for VRE use. Even with the additional tracks in the NS right-of-way, there will still be a bottleneck on CSX tracks at the Long Bridge as the trains travel toward DC until additional capacity is provided there.

Action Items:

- Set up project briefings with NVTA, NVTC, PRTC, and City of Manassas.