

INTERIM REPORT OF THE

**HIGH-SPEED RAIL
SYSTEM COMMISSION**

**TO THE GOVERNOR AND
THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF VIRGINIA**



HOUSE DOCUMENT NO. 72

**COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA
RICHMOND
1997**

Members of the Commission

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Del. William P. Robinson, Jr. (Co-Chairman)
Del. Watkins M. Abbitt, Jr.
Del. C. Richard Cranwell
Del. Marian Van Landingham
Sen. Jackson E. Reasor, Jr.
Sen. Charles L. Waddell
Sen. William C. Wampler, Jr.
Richard L. Beadles
Leo J. Bevon
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**Report of the High-Speed Rail System Commission to
the Governor and
the General Assembly of Virginia
January, 1997**

I. Introduction and Background

Citing the conduct of several studies on various aspects of high-speed rail service between Richmond, Virginia, and Washington, D. C. (particularly the Department of Rail and Public Transportation's studies of the potential for rail passenger service in the Richmond-Washington, Bristol-Washington, and Bristol-Richmond corridors House Documents No 51 and No. 57 of 1996), and a variety of benefits that could be flow from such service, the 1996 Session of the General Assembly adopted House Joint Resolution No. 252 (HJR 252, see Appendix A), establishing the 16-member High-Speed Rail System Commission. The panel included legislators, elected and appointed state officials, and representatives of the railroad industry. HJR No. 252 specifically charge the Commission with:

- Identifying where in Virginia high-speed rail service would be most effective and efficient, given the goals of an intermodal system;
- Determining the appropriate roles to be played by private and public entities in the planning and delivery of high-speed rail service;
- Setting a timetable for the development of a high-speed rail system; and
- Recommending how system construction and expansion should be financed.

II. Commission Activities

The Commission held two meetings during 1996: one in Richmond (July 25) and one in Fairfax County (November 15). At these meetings, the Commission familiarized itself with work already done by the Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT) and its consultants in studying existing rail service provided by Virginia Railway Express and the Washington Metropolitan Transit Authority (Metro) in Northern Virginia and the potential for inter-city passenger rail transportation in Virginia.

Through briefings by DRPT and railroad industry spokesmen, the Commission came to realize the role that more frequent and speedier passenger rail transportation could have in taking some of the strain off Virginia's highway system (particular the interstate system) by providing a reasonable alternative to the passenger car for business travel and tourism. They learned, too that significant expansion of passenger service along existing railroad rights-of-way could not be undertaken without an analysis of the impact of that service on existing freight service in those corridors. There will be no net benefit to the Commonwealth's transportation system if increased passenger rail service forces freight off the railroads and back onto the highways or if the presence of passenger traffic interferes with the ability of the freight railroad to operate safely, efficiently, and profitably. Increased passenger service, particularly at higher speeds, will require changes in signals,

track geometry, and the elimination of most highway grade crossings to ensure safe operations. Many speakers suggested that the addition of a third parallel third main line between Richmond and Washington together with required improvements in signals, would cost about \$3 million per mile. Even relatively uncomplicated changes in tracks and signals could allow trains to reach 110 miles per hour in the Richmond-Washington corridor. Elimination of highway grade crossings within the corridor, together with the construction of a separate main line track dedicated to passenger service, could enable trains to travel at 130 miles per hour, which would reduce the travel time between the two cities to approximately 60 minutes.

III. Legislative Recommendations

Even before its November meeting, it became obvious that the Commission would be unable to consider even a majority of the elements of its charge under HJR 252. Accordingly, the members agreed to seek authority from the 1997 Session of the General Assembly for a one-year extension of its mandate and a revision in its membership to include a representative of CSX Corporation (see Appendix B). The Commission also recommended that the General Assembly adopt a joint resolution endorsing the improvements to the tracks, signals, and facilities essential to high-speed rail passenger service within the Richmond-Washington corridors already approved by the Commonwealth Transportation Board and urging continued funding of these improvements for the benefit of the traveling public (see Appendix C). Appreciating the fact that, to receive the maximum advantage from expansion and improvement of inter-city rail service, Virginia needs to coordinate its actions with those in neighboring jurisdictions, the panel proposed legislation urging continued DRPT cooperation with the states of Maryland, North Carolina, and Tennessee in seeking improvements to intercity rail transportation for their mutual benefit (see Appendix D).

Respectfully submitted,

Donald S. Beyer, Jr. (Chairman)
William P. Robinson, Jr. (Co-Chairman)
Watkins M. Abbitt, Jr.
C. Richard Cranwell
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IV. Appendices

- Appendix A: House Joint Resolution No. 252 (1996)**
- Appendix B: Proposed legislation/continuation of study**
- Appendix C: Endorsement of improvements to tracks and signal in the Richmond-Washington corridor**
- Appendix D Continued cooperation with other states**

Appendix A

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HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 252

Establishing the High-Speed Rail System Commission.

Agreed to by the House of Delegates, March 7, 1996

Agreed to by the Senate, March 6, 1996

WHEREAS, there have been studies conducted by the General Assembly on various aspects of the high-speed rail service between Richmond and Washington, D.C.; and

WHEREAS, other parts of the Commonwealth want to determine the usefulness of high-speed rail service in their locations; and

WHEREAS, the benefits of a national intermodal transportation system are enormous, offering the promise of (i) lowering overall costs by allowing each mode to be used for the portion of the trip for which it is best suited; (ii) increasing economic productivity and efficiency, thereby enhancing the nation's global competitiveness; (iii) reducing the congestion and burden on overstressed infrastructure investments; (iv) improving mobility for elderly, disabled, isolated, and economically disadvantaged persons; (v) generating higher returns from public and private infrastructure investments; and (vi) reducing energy consumption and contributing to improved air quality and environmental conditions; and

WHEREAS, high-speed rail service will be a critical component of the Commonwealth's system of intermodal transportation; and

WHEREAS, there is currently a mix of private and public entities involved in the financing, management and maintenance of Virginia's rail system; and

WHEREAS, coordinated planning and evaluation will contribute to the most efficient and effective use of Virginia's transportation resources; and

1 WHEREAS, increased rail ridership offers the opportunity for communities with rail
2 stations to expand pleasant, economically viable residential or commercial facilities near those
3 stations, resulting in environmental benefits to the affected communities; now, therefore, be it

4 RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the High-Speed
5 Rail System Commission be established. The Commission shall make recommendations
6 necessary to assure the presence of a high-speed rail system in Virginia, including an overall
7 plan and financing alternatives.

8 During its deliberations the Commission shall address the following questions:

- 9 1. Where in the Commonwealth will high-speed rail service be most effective and
10 efficient, given the goals of an intermodal system?
- 11 2. What are the roles of the various private and public entities now involved in the
12 planning and delivery of high-speed rail service?
- 13 3. What timetable should be used for the development of the high-speed rail system?
- 14 4. How should system construction and expansion be financed?

15 The Commission shall consider other aspects of the creation of a high-speed rail
16 system for the Commonwealth as they find necessary.

17 The Commission will build on preliminary work done by the Department of Rail and
18 Public Transportation and several private studies.

19 The Commission shall consist of 16 members appointed as follows: the Chairman of
20 the House Committee on Finance; the Chairman of the House Committee on Transportation; 2
21 members of the House of Delegates to be appointed by the Speaker of the House of
22 Delegates; the Chairman of the Senate Committee on Transportation; 1 member of the
23 Senate as recommended by the Co-chairmen of the Senate Committee on Finance and 1
24 member of the Senate to be appointed by the Senate Committee on Privileges and Elections;
25 1 member of the Board of Transportation Safety, 1 representative of the Virginia Railway
26 Express, and 1 citizen of the Commonwealth to be appointed by the Speaker of the House of
27 Delegates; 1 representative of commercial rail lines and 1 citizen of the Commonwealth to be

1 appointed by the Senate Committee on Privileges and Elections; the Lieutenant Governor; the
2 Secretary of Commerce and Trade; the Secretary of Transportation; and the Director of the
3 Department of Rail and Public Transportation. The chairman of the Commission shall be a
4 state elected official serving on the Commission.

5 The Commission shall be staffed by the Division of Legislative Services, assisted by the
6 staffs of the House Committee on Appropriations and the Senate Committee on Finance.

7 The direct costs of this study shall not exceed \$6,750.

8 The Commission shall complete its work in time to submit its findings and
9 recommendations to the Governor and the 1997 Session of the General Assembly as provided
10 in the procedures of the Division of Legislative Automated Systems for the processing of
11 legislative documents.

12 Implementation of this resolution is subject to subsequent approval and certification by
13 the Joint Rules Committee. The Committee may withhold expenditures or delay the period for
14 the conduct of the study.

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Appendix B

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. _____

1 Continuing the High-Speed Rail System Commission.

2 WHEREAS, the 1996 Session of the General Assembly, through the passage of House
3 Joint Resolution No. 252, created the High-Speed Rail System Commission to make
4 recommendations necessary to assure the presence of a high-speed rail system in Virginia,
5 including an overall plan and financing alternatives; and

6 WHEREAS, the Commission was charged to complete its work in time to submit its
7 findings and recommendations to the Governor and the 1997 Session of the General
8 Assembly; and

9 WHEREAS, while the Commission has assimilated a large amount of information,
10 much of the data required to address the questions proposed by HJR No. 252 is still being
11 developed; and

12 WHEREAS, the completion of the national high-speed rail policy has been delayed; and

13 WHEREAS, studies involving certain corridors such as the Richmond to Newport News
14 and Richmond to Charlotte, North Carolina, and an additional study on the Richmond to
15 Washington, D.C., are expected to be completed in 1997; and

6 WHEREAS, the issues involving the public and private roles, organization, funding, and
7 timetables are very complex; and

8 WHEREAS, the Commission does not include a member representing the CSX
9 Corporation, the owner of a major portion of the tracks affected; and

0 WHEREAS, although the Commission has found broad support for high-speed rail
1 service, the Commission has not had sufficient time for a complete review and formulation of
2 final recommendations to the Governor and the 1997 Session of the General Assembly; now,
3 therefore, be it

Appendix C

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. _____

1 Endorsing certain improvements to tracks, signals, and facilities essential to high-speed rail
2 passenger service and expressing the sense of the General Assembly in support of
3 continued funding of such improvements.

4 WHEREAS, the effectiveness of the transportation system is dependent on viable
5 transportation alternatives for shippers and travelers; and

6 WHEREAS, the continued economic development of and quality of life in the states is
7 directly dependent on a balanced, smoothly operating, multimodal transportation system; and

8 WHEREAS, studies undertaken by the Commonwealth of Virginia and others indicate
9 that there is potential for high-speed rail service in certain corridors; and

10 WHEREAS, increased use of railroads not only promotes economic development but
11 also reduces transportation's impact on the environment and consumption of energy; and

12 WHEREAS, a comprehensive network of privately owned rail corridors exists that could
13 be improved with public investment in order to carry significant numbers of passengers
14 between metropolitan areas and to increase the capacity to carry freight.; and

15 WHEREAS, the Federal Railroad Administration has designated certain corridors in
16 Virginia as potential high-speed rail corridors under Section 1010 of the Intermodal Surface
17 Transportation Efficiency Act; and

18 WHEREAS, federal funding has been provided to the Commonwealth under Section
19 1010 to improve grade crossings in anticipation of increased rail passenger service speeds;
20 and

21 WHEREAS, the Commonwealth's studies are identifying phased improvements
22 necessary for increased capacity and speeds on certain rail corridors; and

23 WHEREAS, the Commonwealth Transportation Board has programmed funding for the
24 first phases of improvement to the Richmond-DC Corridor to reduce travel times; and

Appendix D

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. _____

1 Expressing the sense of the General Assembly in favor of continued cooperation by the
2 Department of Rail and Public Transportation with other states in furtherance of high-
3 speed rail service.

4 WHEREAS, studies undertaken by the Commonwealth of Virginia and others indicate
5 that there is a potential for high-speed rail service in certain corridors; and

6 WHEREAS, the need to improve the national transportation infrastructure is growing
7 faster than are the funding resources available to the states; and

8 WHEREAS, the effectiveness of the transportation system is dependent on providing
9 viable transportation alternatives for shippers and travelers; and

10 WHEREAS, the continued economic development of and quality of life in the states are
11 directly dependent on a balanced, smoothly operating, multimodal transportation system; and

12 WHEREAS, the land and financing necessary to meet the accelerating need for new
13 highways and airports are in increasingly short supply; and

14 WHEREAS, increased use of railroads not only promotes economic development but
15 also reduces transportation's impact on the environment and the consumption of energy; and

16 WHEREAS, a comprehensive network of privately owned rail corridors exists that could
17 be improved with public investment in order to carry significant numbers of passengers
18 between metropolitan areas and to increase its capacity to carry freight; and

19 WHEREAS, the State of North Carolina and the Commonwealth of Virginia are jointly
20 conducting a Master Plan to judge the engineering feasibility, determine the cost, and select
21 the alignments for the Section 1010 High-Speed Rail Corridor designated to run between
22 Charlotte, Raleigh, Richmond, and Washington; and

1 WHEREAS, the federal High Speed Ground Transportation Feasibility Study
2 undertaken recommends linking the Section 1010 corridors in Virginia to Washington D. C,
3 Maryland, and the Northeast Corridor; and

4 WHEREAS, the States of Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Florida have
5 agreed to plan together for the expansion of conventional rail service between their respective
6 states as an incremental first step toward future high-speed rail passenger service; and

7 WHEREAS, the State of Tennessee has established a High Speed Rail Commission;
8 and

9 WHEREAS, Amtrak has included the corridor from Richmond to Newport News as part
10 of their Northeast Corridor system; and

11 WHEREAS, the Federal Railroad Administration has provided the Commonwealth
12 additional funding for high-speed studies; and

13 WHEREAS, the Commonwealth Transportation Board has programmed funding for the
14 first phases of improvement to the Richmond-DC corridor to reduce travel times; now,
15 therefore, be it

16 RESOLVED by the Senate, the House of Delegates concurring, That it is the sense of
17 the General Assembly that the Department of Rail and Public Transportation continue to work
18 cooperatively with the State of Maryland, the State of North Carolina, the State of Tennessee,
19 and other Southeastern states to identify the appropriate corridors for high-speed rail service
20 and to implement such service where feasible and cost effective for the benefit of the traveling
21 public; and, be it

22 RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the Senate transmit a copy of this resolution
23 to the Director of the Department of Rail and Public Transportation on order that he may be
24 apprised of the sense of the General Assembly in this matter.

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