

MEDIA RELEASE



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NCPC to Assist DDOT in Studying Rail Relocation Alternatives; DDOT to Receive \$1 Million to Fund the Study

Washington, DC – The District Department of Transportation (DDOT) will use a \$1 million regional award to study relocation alternatives for a rail line that currently divides the city and transports hazardous materials through the District of Columbia. At the invitation of DDOT, the National Capital Planning Commission will work with the District agency to conduct the study.

The Securing Freight Rail Transportation in the National Capital Region project is being funded by the Department of Homeland Security's 2005 Urban Areas Security Initiative (UASI). UASI funds are used to address the unique planning challenges of high risk urban areas and to assist in the prevention or recovery from threats or acts of terrorism.

DDOT and NCPC will study a seven-mile stretch of rail owned by the CSX Corporation. The line runs from Alexandria, Virginia to Hyattsville, Maryland and passes through the heart of Washington, posing security, accessibility, and development challenges for the nation's capital.

"We are pleased to team with the District Department of Transportation on this important issue," said NCPC Executive Director, Patricia Gallagher. "Through our combined efforts, we can work to resolve some of the unique challenges facing this vital rail corridor."

The rail line carries hazardous cargo through Washington's monumental core, posing a potential security threat to the nation's capital. The study would address the security risks and explore the infrastructure and transportation limitations of the line. Further, it would present a unique opportunity to reconnect Southeast and Southwest Washington to the rest of the city. The line currently fractures these neighborhoods from the monumental core, separates Capitol Hill from the Anacostia River, and limits public access to the waterfront.

"NCPC has long advocated increasing access to Washington's waterfront and reestablishing the connection between the monumental core, Southeast, and Southwest," said José L. Galvez III, chairman of NCPC's South Capitol Street Task Force. "Relocating the rail line, combined with our recently unveiled vision to transform South Capitol Street into a grand urban boulevard, will bring this goal to reality."

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“We need to do everything in our power to protect our city, its facilities and institutions, and the people who live and work here,” said District Department of Transportation Director Dan Tangherlini. “The rail line not only presents a critical security concern, it presents a barrier to economic development for the District. We look forward to NCPC lending its expertise on this matter as we work to improve rail transit along the east coast.”

“This rail line presents a barrier to vital economic development not only in the nation’s capital but also in the State of Maryland,” said Marsha Kaiser, director of the Office of Planning and Capital Programming with the Maryland Department of Transportation. “We stand ready to work with both agencies on this important study now that funding has been identified.”

NCPC and DDOT believe the study is needed, given the regional and national impacts of this stretch of the rail line. The segment is vital to the East Coast rail corridor, moving some 250 million tons of freight and more than 100 million passengers annually.

“As the rail line travels through several jurisdictions, the impacts of any relocation must be assessed for the entire region,” said Chris Zimmerman, Arlington County Board Vice Chairman and former chair of the National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board. “The NCR’s Transportation Planning Board believes DDOT, in collaboration with NCPC, can effectively conduct an alternative rail alignment study.”

NCPC and DDOT will coordinate their efforts with a working group of regional stakeholders that NCPC previously assembled. The group includes CSX, the Commonwealth of Virginia, the State of Maryland, the Transportation Security Administration, the Federal Railroad Administration, the Architect of the Capitol, and the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments. This past July, members of the working group and other dignitaries took a ride-the-rails tour with NCPC commissioners and staff on a VRE train to get a firsthand look at the tracks between Alexandria and Union Station. The tour illustrated the potential security risks to the nation’s capital and the current infrastructure and transportation limits of the line.

“The proximity of this rail line to one of America’s best known symbols of democracy makes it an obvious target for terrorists,” said Richard Friedman, a former NCPC commissioner who previously chaired the commission’s Interagency Security Task Force. “The awarding of this grant is a major step forward in protecting our capital city from a potentially disastrous event. This joint study would be the first step in seeking a long-term solution to this security problem.”

“The safety of the residents and visitors to the city and the region is our primary concern, so funding this study is critical in order to determine the best way to ensure that our people are secure as hazardous cargo is transported through our area,” said DC Mayor Anthony A. Williams. “I hope this grant can be used to find safe and economical alternatives to shipping dangerous cargo through the middle of our region.”

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“We support efforts to explore a variety of options for freight and passenger rail that will address alternative alignment scenarios for the region,” said Alan Tobias with the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation. “We look forward to working with our partners on this important and timely issue.”

“Considering that Congress has ignored my repeated requests for help on the rail terrorism danger here, I am delighted that this important federal grant opens the door to the realistic possibilities for rerouting and greater security,” said Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC).

The project has three main goals:

1. Identify the constraints of the existing alignment and the costs and benefits of relocation.
2. Identify potential alternative alignments.
3. Identify a preferred alignment.

The study will define critical freight service destinations, topographical and environmental characteristics, and locations of significant population and employment. A thorough analysis of the Potomac River within the Washington, DC region will be performed to identify suitable locations for a new rail crossing. The estimated nine-month study will also assess the redevelopment potential of the alignment and adjacent lands.

The National Capital Planning Commission is the federal government's central planning agency in the District of Columbia and surrounding counties in Maryland and Virginia. The Commission provides overall planning guidance for federal land and buildings in the region. It also reviews the design of federal projects and memorials, oversees long-range planning for future development, and monitors capital investment by federal agencies.

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