

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

October 18, 2023

The Honorable Pete Buttigieg
Secretary
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Secretary Buttigieg:

We write today to emphasize the importance of the Virginia Passenger Rail Authority's (VPRA) **Transforming Rail in Virginia (TRV) Phase 2 Projects** application under the U.S. Department of Transportation's Federal-State Partnership for Intercity Passenger Rail Grant Program. The \$729 million application would fill a financial gap necessary to move the \$2.2 billion Long Bridge Project, the \$111 million L'Enfant 4th Track Project, and three sidings worth \$312 million from Stafford County to Hanover County to their respective construction phase. When combined with Phase 1 projects that are fully funded, by 2030 the Phase 1 and Phase 2 Projects will enable state-supported Amtrak routes to more than double in Virginia, and will increase VRE service by 75% as well as add late night and weekend VRE service.

The \$4.4 billion in Phase 1 and Phase 2 Transforming Rail in Virginia projects are an essential means to providing extra passenger rail service in the Commonwealth that is needed now more than ever. Rail ridership on Virginia's state-supported Amtrak service is setting records every month. There were over 110,000 riders on Virginia's state-supported Amtrak trains in June of 2023, which is a new June record and a 30% increase over the previous June record set in 2022. The state fiscal year 2023 also saw a record number of riders – 1,256,123 – which exceeded the previous record of 894,065 set in fiscal year 2015. This is evidence of the need for additional infrastructure, which will unlock further passenger train times per Virginia's agreements with CSX, VRE, and Amtrak.

The DOT support of VPRA's grant applications is essential, especially in light of new reporting requirements from the FTA that impact VPRA's Capital Investment Grant (CIG) submission. In November of 2021, VPRA was accepted in the CIG pipeline for the \$2.2 billion Long Bridge Project and the \$210 million Alexandria Fourth Track Project, which added up to four tracks in the corridor that would allow for commuter rail expansion, and thereby was a good fit for the CIG's Core Capacity program. Due to the Covid pandemic's impact on transit systems, 2019 ridership was allowed to be used while the pandemic emergency was in effect, and VRE's 2019 ridership was at 100% capacity in peak hours, and well above the 80% threshold necessary to be eligible for a Core Capacity project. However, with the official end of the pandemic, we understand that 2019 ridership can no longer be used to calculate Core Capacity eligibility. Specifically, section III.2 of the FTA's May 2023 *Reporting Instructions for the Section 5309 Capital Investment Grants Program for Core Capacity* requires that "All information must be representative of typical weekdays in **2022 or 2023**".

Unfortunately, even though VRE has made aggressive efforts to market VRE ridership, due to telework policies that have gained traction since the pandemic VRE's 2023 ridership has not rebounded as hoped and is well below the required 80% mark. Therefore, VPRA's CIG submission is no longer eligible for the CIG Core Capacity process. This makes VPRA's efforts to secure funding from the FRA's rail programs, which were established in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act with our strong support, even more important.

Virginia has already supplied \$2.6 billion in local and state revenues for the \$4.4 billion in Phase 1 and 2 TRV projects, and the \$729 million request, even when combined with Amtrak's \$944 million contribution and other smaller federal grant awards, will still equate to just over 40% of the TRV program being federally funded. If awarded, the grant will fully fund all of the Phase 1 and 2 TRV projects and close the \$460 million gap in Long Bridge funding, thereby allowing the Long Bridge segment over the Potomac River to move to the final design and construction stage of the project.

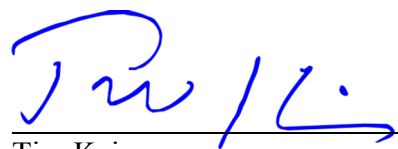
Long Bridge and the whole TRV Program constitute projects of regional and national significance. Once completed, this new infrastructure will provide enhanced passenger and freight rail services for people and goods along the East Coast and further to national and international markets. These projects are integral to unlocking the bottleneck between the north and southeast and developing an efficient and reliable intercity passenger rail corridor between Washington, D.C., and Charlotte, NC.

A strong federal investment is critical to delivering these projects on time and on budget, and therefore we strongly support Virginia's request for \$729 million in funding through the Federal-State Partnership for Intercity Passenger Rail Grant Program. Thank you for your consideration, and we look forward to continuing to work with you to build the multi-modal transportation network that America deserves.

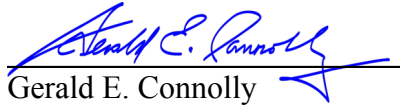
Sincerely,



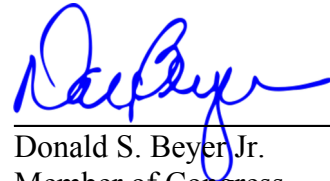
Mark R. Warner
United States Senator



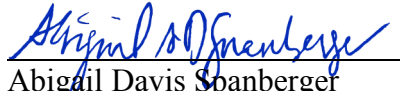
Tim Kaine
United States Senator



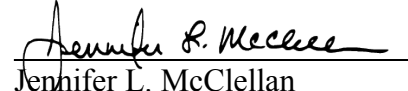
Gerald E. Connolly
Member of Congress



Donald S. Beyer Jr.
Member of Congress



Abigail Davis Spanberger
Member of Congress



Jennifer L. McClellan
Member of Congress