

The S-Line Corridor

Introduction

Since the Federal Railroad Administration designated the Southeast Corridor connecting Charlotte, Raleigh, and Washington, DC in 1992, North Carolina and Virginia have been working cooperatively to advance high performance freight and passenger rail. High-performance freight and passenger rail are essential to move goods and people to, from, and within the growing Piedmont-Atlantic Megaregion, regardless of the presence of state lines. A key segment of the Southeast Corridor is the S-line between Raleigh and Richmond, currently owned by CSX.



Importance of S-Line Development

As the population of North Carolina, Virginia, and the surrounding Piedmont-Atlantic Megaregion continue to grow, the transportation network is becoming more congested. Developing the Southeast Corridor as a high-performance network will improve our region as follows:

- Enhance freight economic development opportunities in rural areas of North Carolina and Virginia
- Provide additional north-south freight capacity and network resiliency
- Connect areas of manufacturing and job centers to population centers
- Provide faster and more reliable connectivity between the Northeast and the Southeast. Trip times just between the Richmond and Raleigh segment could be reduced from approximately 3 ½ hours to just over 2 hours due to the shorter route, increased train speeds, and reduction of conflicts between freight and passenger trains.
- Will allow the growth of passenger and local freight traffic on the S-Line, freeing capacity for additional freight traffic on the CSX A-Line. Additionally, through overhead rights agreements, CSX could use the restored S-Line to move freight, either to accommodate surges in freight demand along the A-Line or provide the network resiliency needed if the A-Line were out of service due to maintenance or a natural disaster. The A-Line was closed to all passenger and freight traffic in the Carolinas for approximately 10 days following Hurricane Florence in 2018.

Corridor Acquisition Update

In December of 2019, the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation (VDRPT) signed a landmark rail agreement with CSX to expand Long Bridge, a key corridor connecting Virginia and Washington, DC, and to purchase 350 miles of railroad right of way and 225 miles of track. Part of the right of way purchase included the S-Line from Ridgeway, NC to Petersburg, VA. State ownership of the corridor allows for:

- Control of scope, timing, and development of intercity, passenger, and commuter rail services
- On-time service dictated by passenger needs
- Implementation of future technologies
- Planned and strategic economic development
- Improved freight cost-structure to serve existing and emerging industrial sites

NCDOT will pursue funding to purchase its portion of the corridor through an FRA grant program for Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements, also known as CRISI. This year's CRISI program includes an additional funding category for right of way acquisition, reserving \$45M for qualifying projects. In preparation of this upcoming grant opportunity, NCDOT has received five resolutions of support to date from towns and counties along the S-Line.

Project Readiness

North Carolina and Virginia completed the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) documentation for the Raleigh to Richmond corridor in 2017. This means right of way acquisition and construction along the corridor can proceed immediately with funding.

Phased Development

The Incremental Service Development Plan is being developed to identify potential phasing opportunities of near-term services to incrementally develop the S-Line as funding becomes available. In addition, both North Carolina and Virginia are advancing projects along the active portions of the rail corridor. For example, through the Strategic Transportation Investments program and discretionary federal grants, North Carolina is constructing grade separations to improve safety along the S-Line in accordance with the completed environmental documents.

A Regional Vision and Governance Model

The Virginia-North Carolina Interstate High Speed Rail Compact was established in 2004 in accordance with 49 USC 24101 and semi-regularly meets to develop and promote a plan for the design, construction, financing, and operation of interstate rail service through Virginia and North Carolina. Consisting of Virginia and North Carolina State Legislators, the Compact is authorized to advocate for federal funding and receive funds for rail development and is anticipated to meet regularly beginning in 2020.

The Southeast Corridor Commission is being developed to broaden the geographic footprint, align freight and passenger interests in the Southeast, and position for directed federal funding. Each state along the Southeast Corridor is represented through the Commission.