

Intercity Passenger Rail Station Policy

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to assist localities and other public entities preparing to submit a proposal for an intercity passenger rail station to the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT).

It is also intended to guide the Commonwealth Transportation Board (CTB) and DRPT with decisions when evaluating a proposal.

Background

Within the Commonwealth of Virginia, DRPT is the lead agency for rail and public transportation. DRPT provides operating support for four routes which are operated by Amtrak on privately owned freight railroads.

The Intercity Passenger Rail Operating and Capital (IPROC) Fund provides state operating funds as well as funding for capital improvements necessary for new and enhanced services. DRPT has taken an incremental approach to expanding and enhancing passenger rail services. This ensures scarce funding resources are spent wisely, and allows the Department to evaluate the incremental impact of each project on the existing state-supported routes.

Since 2009 DRPT has funded infrastructure improvements and provided operating support for Amtrak state-supported routes. As service has expanded across the Commonwealth the demand for new stations has grown. There are generally three categories for station proposals which this policy guide will address:

- Adding a new station to an existing intercity passenger rail route;
- Modifying an existing station along an existing intercity passenger rail route;
- Adding a new station where service does not yet exist.

This policy guide does not guarantee approval of a proposal. It defines the roles and responsibilities of stakeholders, provides a breakdown of station cost factors, sets out considerations for a proposal, and outlines the process and expectations set forth by the CTB.

There may be circumstances where a proposal is brought forth as a state initiative. DRPT may also work with a locality and a region on a DRPT initiated station proposal.

Stakeholders – Roles and Responsibilities

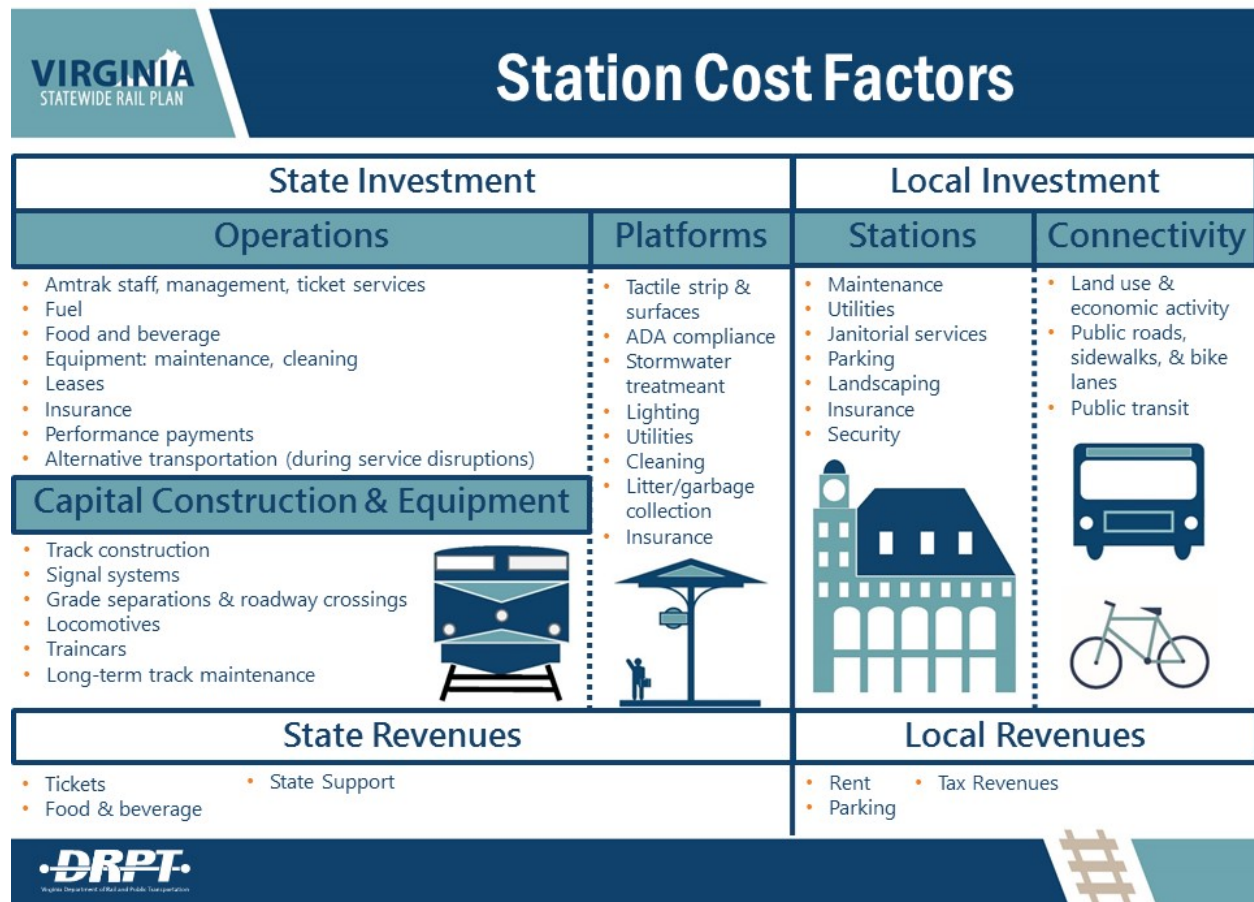
There are multiple stakeholders with specific roles who should be part of the consideration of a proposed station, and the impact of a station on a community, ridership, and the rail network. Stakeholders commonly include, but are not limited to:

- **DRPT** – DRPT has existing operating agreements with Amtrak, and close working relationships with the Host Railroads. DRPT will work with localities, MPOs, and PDCs through the Proposal Phase to develop concepts for a station, and then facilitate discussions with the passenger rail service providers (Amtrak/VRE) and the Host Railroads after consultation with the Commonwealth Transportation Board.
- **Project Sponsor** – Localities, Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO), Planning District Commissions (PDC), and DRPT can be a Project Sponsor. However, unless a proposal is initiated by DRPT, the local government must take a lead role in the proposal with regional support from the MPO and PDC. The locality must demonstrate a commitment to the land use and multimodal planning efforts that create a successful station (see Expectations of a Successful Station). The locality is also responsible for developing a funding plan that addresses construction of the station and the long term operation and maintenance (O&M) costs of the proposed station.
- **Host Railroads** – Private freight railroads own the tracks over which intercity passenger rail services operate south of Washington, D.C. The Class I (Host) Railroads in Virginia are CSX and Norfolk Southern. The Host Railroads will typically lead any analysis related to the impact a proposed station would have to their freight network.
- **Amtrak** – Incorporated as the “National Railroad Passenger Corporation”, Amtrak provides the rolling-stock for and operates the state-supported routes in Virginia through an operating Agreement with DRPT. DRPT relies exclusively on Amtrak to provide ridership analysis for state-supported services. Amtrak can also provide a program of station requirements for a proposal based on the anticipated service frequency and ridership.
- **Virginia Railway Express (VRE)** – VRE is a commuter rail service that operates in Northern Virginia over CSX (Fredericksburg Line – I-95 Corridor) and Norfolk Southern (Manassas Line – I-66 Corridor) with a northern terminus at Washington Union Station in Washington DC. VRE owns rolling-stock and stations, some of which are also served by Amtrak state-supported service.
- **Federal Railroad Administration (FRA)** – The FRA regulates safety for the Host Railroads and Amtrak, and has approval authority over the design of station platforms associated with intercity passenger rail stations (Amtrak). Any station proposal must comply with FRA Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards for boarding passenger trains.

- **Federal Transit Administration (FTA)** – The FTA provides funding for transit services, and has jurisdiction of ADA requirements associated with commuter rail stations (VRE). Any proposal affecting a VRE station must comply with FTA’s ADA standards for boarding commuter trains.
- **Public Interest Groups** – While the Project Sponsor must be a public entity, public interest groups can play an important advocacy role and shape the overall proposal. DRPT will work with Public Interest Groups by receiving comments on proposals, or as part of the Project Sponsor team.

Station Cost Factors

The following infographic breaks down the components of a station. The funding responsibilities associated with these station components should be addressed in a station proposal. While certain costs are the responsibilities of other stakeholders, as defined below, DRPT will work with the Project Sponsor to develop an overall cost estimate before presenting a proposal to the Commonwealth Transportation Board.



Operations

The costs of operating state-supported routes are funded by ticket revenues and covered by DRPT through the IPROC Fund. Costs for the service are allocated to DRPT according to a federal methodology created under the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act of 2008, known as the PRIIA Methodology.

Capital Equipment

Capital equipment costs for state-supported routes are funded by DRPT through the IPROC Fund. Costs for capital equipment are allocated through the PRIIA Methodology. Virginia shares the cost of capital equipment with the Amtrak Northeast Regional services, since Virginia's state-supported routes are extensions of the Northeast Regional trains, which operate between Washington, D.C. and cities in the Northeast.

Capital Construction

Capital construction costs related to intercity passenger rail services are determined through negotiations between DRPT and the Host Railroads. These costs typically include projects that enhance rail capacity in a corridor in order to mitigate the impacts of passenger service on the Host Railroad's system. These projects are funded through the IPROC Fund or other state and federal funds. Capital improvements to the network are proposed through a Host Railroad led analysis, and subject to negotiation with DRPT. The level of investment may vary depending on whether a station proposal is for a new station on an existing route, a modification of an existing station, or a new station where service does not yet exist. DRPT will also consider the previous ten years of capital investments in the corridor of the Station exploratory proposal, to first ensure that benefits have been fully realized.

Stations

Station Building

Funding for a station building is the responsibility of the Project Sponsor. This includes, but is not limited to, funding for design and construction, as well as covering operational costs associated with the Station Cost Factors. Project Sponsors may use public or private funds for these costs. The Station Building should be considered a community asset for multimodal connectivity and public/quasi-public space. Design of the station will require DRPT coordination with Amtrak to satisfy minimum square footage and space requirements.

Platform

Design of an intercity passenger rail station platform must be consistent with FRA standards for ADA compliance. An Exploratory Proposal should assume the platform will be built to 1,000 feet in length and 48 inches above the top of the rail for level boarding (commonly called a high-level platform). It should be noted that high-level platforms interfere with freight train operations because of the clearance required to operate freight trains. Therefore, any station Exploratory Proposal must also consider the infrastructure requirements to achieve a high-level

platform, such as construction of a siding off the Host Railroad mainline. Design and construction of a platform and associated passenger track is eligible for Intercity Passenger Rail Operating and Capital (IPROC) grant funding through DRPT. Platform costs associated with Station Cost Factors typically fall under PRIIA operating agreements between DRPT and Amtrak.

Land Use and Connectivity

While not explicitly a capital cost factor, or an operating cost factor, planning for land use and connectivity implies a commitment of resources to maximize the state and local investment in creating a multimodal station. DRPT will look to the local government to ensure appropriate land use and transportation connectivity around a proposed station (see Expectations for a Successful Station). This means accessibility to and from the station to other destinations by multiple transportation modes (i.e. transit, car, taxi, bike, walk, etc.). Land use around the station may vary in an urban or suburban location but should promote density and economic activity.

Proposal Development

There are three phases of determining viability of a proposal.

Proposal Phase

A proposal is submitted by a Project Sponsor to DRPT, unless DRPT is initiating the proposal. The parties will collaborate on the proposal. DRPT will inform stakeholders such as the Host Railroads and Amtrak in order to solicit any concerns over the initial viability of the proposal.

Adding a New Station to an Existing Route

DRPT and the Project Sponsor will work collaboratively to address the proposal as it relates to Station Cost Factors and the Factors for Consideration as defined by this policy statement.

Modifying an Existing Station on an Existing Route

DRPT and the Project Sponsor will work collaboratively to address the proposal as it relates to Station Cost Factors and the Factors for Consideration as defined by this policy statement.

Adding a New Station where service does not yet exist

Because extensions of existing service entail long-term capital and operating cost commitments, DRPT and the Project Sponsor will discuss the merits of the proposal and the current DRPT priorities which may determine whether a proposal will move beyond the Proposal Phase. Such proposals must be consistent with the Virginia State Rail Plan.

Assessment Milestone

The Assessment Phase will include two CTB Rail Committee meetings. At the first CTB-Rail Committee meeting DRPT staff will introduce the proposal to the CTB Rail Committee. At the second CTB Rail Committee meeting, the Committee will decide whether or not to recommend the proposal for presentation to the full Commonwealth Transportation Board.

Negotiation Milestone

If the CTB Rail Committee recommends the proposal for CTB presentation, DRPT will work with the Project Sponsor to prepare a cost estimate for the station proposal, which will include the full cost for the station, any infrastructure enhancements to the Host Railroad, as well as long-term operational costs. CTB approval of a proposal advances a proposal to a project. DRPT will take the lead in negotiating with Host Railroads and Amtrak on related operational impacts, service changes, capital improvements, platform requirements, ridership analysis by Amtrak, and modeling by the Host Railroad. Subsequent funding commitments to advance the project with state funds will also require approval of the CTB.

Factors for Consideration

The following questions intended to guide the Project Sponsor when preparing a proposal. This is not intended to be an exhaustive list, but addresses CTB expectations.

1. What funding is the Project Sponsor committing to the station?

The Project Sponsor must develop a funding plan that addresses construction as well as the operation and maintenance of a station. Federal and state funds may be available for the development and construction of a station, but local funding commitments are part of the factors for consideration.

2. Is the station proposal consistent with state transportation goals of the Virginia State Rail Plan?

The State Rail Plan has been developed to guide DRPT and the CTB in planning and funding decisions. The State Rail Plan describes the CTB's priorities for the expansion of passenger rail across the Commonwealth, and prioritizes corridors for future investment. Any station proposal should reference the Virginia State Rail Plan for passenger rail policies and priorities.

3. How does the station proposal affect the railroad network and other existing services?

A holistic evaluation of the rail network, including existing passenger services, will be based on discussions with DRPT staff and may incorporate results of operational modeling performed by the Host Railroad. Considerations will include existing freight traffic, existing intercity passenger rail services, existing commuter services (including intercity bus), and existing needs in the corridor.

4. What is the effect of this station proposal upon other stations?

Proximity to other stations is a consideration because a rail station is a regional transportation asset that represents significant public investment. A station proposal should quantify the population density within the ridership catchment area. It should also discuss the degree to which ridership at this station will be comprised of new riders to the corridor, as opposed to redistributing riders that utilize existing stations. In evaluating the impact to existing stations, DRPT will also review federal and state investments in the past 10 years to other stations and intercity passenger rail services in this corridor.

5. How will this station affect the total ridership for the route?

DRPT will rely on Amtrak to perform a ridership analysis. Amtrak's ridership analysis will estimate the total new riders added to existing routes. DRPT may perform a benefit-cost analysis to evaluate the net benefit to Virginia from the net new ridership added to a route.

One consideration in the benefit-cost analysis will be capacity on the existing route to absorb the estimated number of new riders resulting from the proposed station addition. If capacity were an issue, additional planned train frequencies (consistent with the State Rail Plan) should be operational in a timely manner to accommodate new ridership from the new station.

6. What are the capacity requirements of the proposed station?

The Great American Stations website www.greatamericanstations.com is a resource guide for developing a station proposal. DRPT can also coordinate discussions with Amtrak on capacity requirements. While Amtrak may recommend square footage requirements based on proposed service frequency and ridership, stations can be part of a multi-use building with larger community spaces. The Project Sponsor should clarify what other functions a proposed station might serve in the community.

7. What is the viability of the proposed station, given the Station Cost Factors?

The funding plan provided by the Project Sponsor should include design, construction, and operation of a station.. DRPT will work with the Project Sponsor and stakeholders when appropriate to develop costs related to capacity improvements and Amtrak services.

The costs for engineering and analysis necessary to obtain a Rough Order of Magnitude (ROM) estimate of a proposed station are the responsibility of the Project Sponsor. The Project Sponsor is also responsible for a funding plan which addresses O&M costs, with the expectation the locality will provide or secure funding for O&M of the station.

8. What are the current and future land use plans around the station proposal?

A station proposal should reference the locality's current comprehensive plan, land use plan, and zoning, as well as any community plans for a proposed station. It should address any natural and historic resources potentially affected by the proposal. Any economic development impact of a station can also be part of this discussion.

9. What transportation connections are available or planned for the proposed station?

The locality should differentiate between existing connectivity options, funded future options, and plans for connectivity that are part of this proposal.

Expectations for a Successful Station

Local and Regional Consensus

The locality where the station would be built or modified should be a strong partner and have a lead role. Regional entities such as MPOs and PDCs should support the proposal. DRPT will

look for resolutions and letters of support from neighboring localities, regional governments, public advocacy groups, and the business community.

Location

The advantage and convenience of intercity passenger rail service is travel from one city center to another, or to other centers of high population density and economic activity. The proposed location of a station should be located in significant population centers that are major nodes of economic activity for a region.

Land Use and Multimodal Connectivity

Land use around a station should support density and multimodal connectivity to final passenger destinations. A station should serve as a transportation hub for the locality or region. Connectivity via transit, car, taxi, bike, walking, etc. should be part of the proposal.

Policy Proposal Submission List

1. Introductory Narrative
2. Map identifying proposed sites for a station
3. Narrative describing how sites were selected
4. Funding plan related to Station Cost Factors identified in this policy
5. Narrative discussing Factors for Consideration
6. Letters and resolutions of support from local and regional governments
7. Letters of support from advocacy groups and the business community