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## Virginia, Amtrak, and CSX advance \$US 3.7bn rail initiative

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The state of Virginia, Amtrak, Class 1 railway CSX and Virginia Railway Express (VRE) have finalised agreements for a \$US 3.7bn initiative to improve passenger and freight rail capacity and relieve road congestion in the state.

The “Transforming Rail in Virginia” initiative, unveiled by Virginia governor, Mr Ralph Northam, in December 2019, will “expand Amtrak and VRE rail services, create a pathway for the separation of freight and passenger rail in Virginia, and preserve future rail corridors.”

It covers:

- construction of a \$US 1.9bn double-track dedicated passenger rail bridge over the Potomac River. The state will own the bridge, which will be built adjacent to the existing CSX-owned-and-operated Long Bridge, the only freight and passenger rail bridge connecting Virginia and Washington, DC.
- acquisition from CSX of 621.2km of railway right-of-way and 358.8km of track at a cost of \$US 25m. This includes half of the rail corridor right-of-way from Washington, DC, to Petersburg, Virginia, the full extent of CSX ownership from Petersburg to Ridgeway, North Carolina, and the entire corridor from Doswell to Clifton Forge [Virginia],” according to the Governor’s Office. With the exception of Ashland, Virginia, the right-of-way from Washington, DC, to Richmond is wide enough to construct a four-track corridor, with two tracks dedicated to passenger rail, and when complete will allow separate passenger and freight movement.
- additional infrastructure improvements in the state, totalling more than \$US 1bn.

According to the Governor’s Office, over the next 10 years, the initiative will double the number of Virginia-supported Amtrak trains, providing nearly hourly service.

The state and Amtrak are entering into a long-term partnership for six new state-supported daily round-trips, and Amtrak will serve as Virginia's exclusive provider of inter-city passenger rail along the I-95 corridor for at least 30 years. Amtrak has committed \$US 944m to the "Transforming Rail in Virginia" initiative.

The initiative will also increase VRE service by 60%. "Through our funding agreement with the [state], VRE anticipates providing \$US 200m toward major infrastructure projects for the 'Transforming Rail in Virginia' initiative," says VRE CEO, Mr Rich Dalton.

"That, combined with more than \$US 800 million in improvements spelled out in VRE's six-year Capital Improvement Program, will bring our contribution to rail improvements in Virginia to more than \$US 1bn. As these projects come on line, VRE will be able to expand service by as much as 60% along the RF&P corridor."

The Governor's Office says the initiative will also "lay the foundation for a Southeast high-speed rail corridor; preserve an existing freight corridor between Doswell and Clifton Forge for future east-west passenger service; and create the potential to expand rail to all parts of the [state]."

In 2020, Northam signed legislation creating the Virginia Passenger Rail Authority (VPRA) to manage and govern state-wide passenger and commuter rail service. VRPA will now also administer all capital expansion projects, infrastructure and land acquisitions related to the "Transforming Rail in Virginia" initiative. The project is estimated to bring nearly \$US 6bn annually in benefits to the region by 2040.

***(International Railway Journal)***