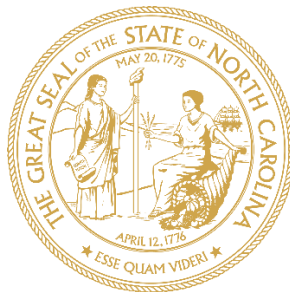


Testimony of

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before the

United States House of Representatives

House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure

Subcommittee on Railroads, Pipelines, and Hazardous Materials

Stakeholder Perspectives: Passenger Rail Development

Thursday, December 9, 2021 10:00 a.m.

North Carolina Department of Transportation

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Good morning, and thank you Chairman Payne, Ranking Member Crawford, and all of the members of the Subcommittee for holding this hearing to discuss passenger rail as an integral part of our national transportation system.

My name is Julie White, and I am the Deputy Secretary of Multimodal Transportation for the North Carolina Department of Transportation with oversight of our rail, aviation, ferry, public transit, bicycle, and pedestrian transportation divisions. I am also the Chair of the Southeast Corridor Commission, a regional partnership made up of North Carolina, Washington, D.C., Virginia, South Carolina, Tennessee, Georgia, and Florida.

The Southeast Corridor (SEC) Commission is leading the effort to connect states across the Southeast megaregion through passenger and freight rail. The Commission is charged with developing the Southeast Regional Rail Plan, reporting on the economic benefits of rail along the corridor, creating an implementation plan, and prioritizing major projects. The goal of this effort is to improve the mutual cooperation and planning between states and stakeholders to position the corridor to receive direct federal funding. The SEC extends from Washington, D.C., through Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Georgia, to Florida.

Our states work together to advance our shared vision for high-performance rail throughout the Southeast – because we have a shared understanding of the power of rail to connect our

states, and our communities. And equally important, we know that rail infrastructure investments create economic growth and opportunity.

The SEC works in partnership the Federal Railroad Administration, Amtrak, and our freight rail partners to further regional rail initiatives, identify program priorities, and secure consistent funding to improve rail services throughout the Southeast. The Commission received an FRA grant that enabled us to work together to complete three planning studies, the Southeast Regional Rail Plan, the Economic Benefits of High-Performance Rail in the Southeast and the SEC Implementation Plan. The Commission is now looking to the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) to provide the federal funding needed to continue our work together and to advance our plans to construction, as well as initial operating support.

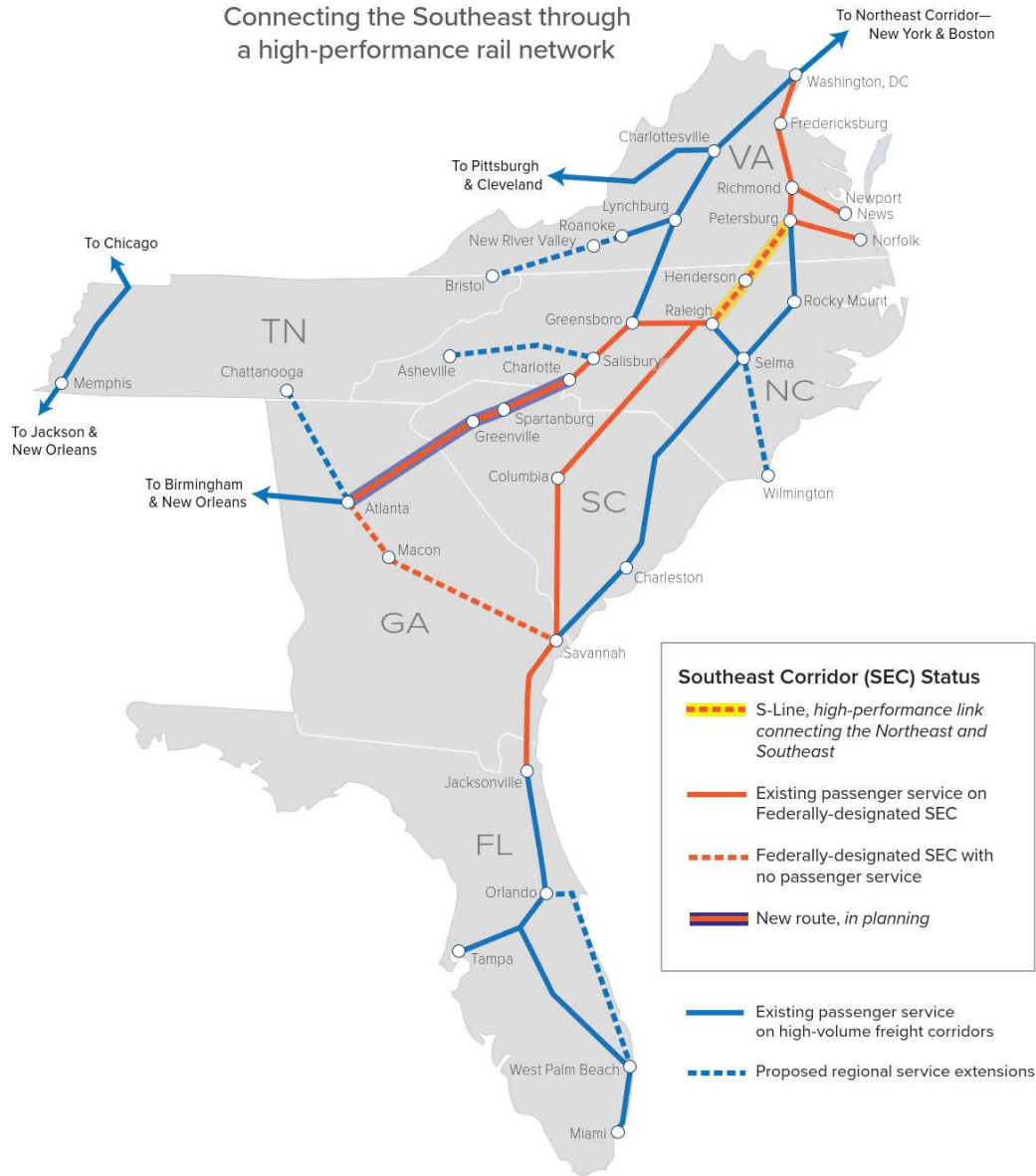
North Carolina and Virginia, with the support of the FRA, Amtrak and our freight rail partners, have a long history of partnership to advance development of the S-Line from Raleigh to Richmond. As you can see on the map, the S-Line is the key connection from the Northeast Corridor to the Southeast. I would note for you that the blue line to the right of the S-Line is CSX's main freight line, therefore advancing passenger rail on the S-Line rather than the freight line, ensures that freight traffic is not impeded by passenger growth. This is a key example of the way we work to identify win/win opportunities that benefit both freight and passenger rail.

The planning for this corridor dates back decades and has progressed through federal and state investment. North Carolina and Virginia have already completed the necessary environmental work for the entire Raleigh to Richmond corridor and are working toward detailed design of the corridor. This step will pave the way for construction, including all new track and signal systems, and safety projects that will have immediate benefits through roadway crossing grade separations and closures. Virginia has acquired the S-Line within their state, and North Carolina, through an FRA grant, is acquiring a portion in our state.

The S-Line will be developed as a high-performance passenger rail line providing both passenger and freight rail benefits by improving rail travel times by over an hour and improving schedule reliability, connecting rural and urban communities, and offers freight benefits by not growing passenger rail on high volume freight rail lines. We are jointly working to determine how to advance this critical link on the Eastern seaboard through the IJJA.

SOUTHEAST CORRIDOR

Connecting the Southeast through a high-performance rail network



We have defined incremental development phases both large and small to be ready to maximize federal dollars to construct and implement new passenger rail service, such as expanding our Piedmont service that currently runs from Charlotte to Raleigh further north

to connect to communities like the Town of Wake Forest, and large projects such as a full build out of the entire 163 mile corridor from Raleigh to Richmond. We are also examining how we can improve project delivery to get the line into service faster. Often it takes too long to build infrastructure and innovative ways to deliver projects faster is a must.

Connecting communities is a hallmark of the S-Line service, and this project will connect 9 million people and 6 million jobs along the new rail corridor, including 95,000 jobs created during the construction timeframe. We will expand reliability while limiting environmental impacts.

The State of North Carolina has history of investment by Congress and the FRA and in growing our state-supported intercity passenger rail program with coordination with Amtrak and our Class I railroad partners. We successfully completed the \$520 million federally funded Piedmont Improvement Rail Program on time and on budget. Recently, we have taken the lead in delivering the rail infrastructure for the new Charlotte Gateway Station, a transformational project to connect the center of our most populous city to other regional destinations by rail. The station will be developed via a public-private partnership into a multimodal and multi-use development with connections between intercity rail, public transit, walking trails and more. With the move of the station from its current location to the heart of the city we anticipate significant growth in ridership.

We are also thankful for the investments made possible by Congress and the FRA to be replacing our passenger rail fleet with new cars that offer a safer more reliable, and more comfortable ride.

What I hope you take away from my testimony today is that the Southeast Corridor Commission and the State of North Carolina are committed to continuing our strong partnership with Congress, the freight railroads, Amtrak, and others to expand passenger rail in the Southeast. The IIJA is a historic opportunity to build upon our joint work to date, connect rural and urban communities, and provide our residents with additional mobility and access to jobs and the economy.

We thank Congress for the bold action in the IIJA level of investment in rail that will provide the opportunity for critical capital improvements, corridor acquisition, and operations.

We stand ready with our partners to expand our nation's high performance passenger rail systems. Thank you very much for the opportunity to address the subcommittee.