

Dulles Rail Now!
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The challenges facing our region are complex, and planning to meet those challenges is made more difficult when every group insists on going off in its own direction. This past week was a notable exception when several diverse groups came together with a united purpose to proclaim in unison that they support ***Dulles Rail Now!***

The occasion was the public hearings on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) on the Dulles Corridor Rapid Transit Project. The DEIS considered many options for transit in the corridor from a no-build option to bus rapid transit to rail. In a press conference last week and at three public hearings, ***Dulles Rail Now!*** made clear its choice of the rail option.

It helps when we work together, but it really helps when organizations from the Coalition for Smarter Growth and the Sierra Club are on the same side as the Washington Board of Trade and the Washington Airports Task Force. Also signing on to the ***Dulles Rail Now!*** letter of agreement are the Committee for Dulles, Dulles Area Transportation Association (DATA), Landowners Economic Alliance for the Dulles Extension of Rail (LEADER), LINK, National Wildlife Federation, Reston Association, Reston Citizens Association, Reston Interfaith, the American Lung Association of Virginia, and AAA Mid-Atlantic.

Bringing the groups together was the Dulles Corridor Rail Association (DCRA). It was four years ago this month that I announced the formation of DCRA as a nonprofit organization whose mission is to promote rail transit in the Dulles Corridor. I currently serve as Chair of the Board of Directors, and Patty Nicolson serves very ably as President.

The group recommends that “the Commonwealth of Virginia select as the locally preferred alternative the rail option that produces the most ridership and has the most flexibility for increasing ridership in the future.” While each organization maintained its freedom to speak on issues of particular concern, the group stated that “we are united in our support of bringing rail transit to a corridor of the region that is second only to the District of Columbia in terms of employment and contains several activity centers.”

And the group pledged that “we will work with the region’s elected leadership to bring rail to the Dulles Corridor by 2010, sooner if feasible.”

After the locally preferred alternative is chosen by the Commonwealth of Virginia, the next hurdle will be the authorization of funds by the U.S. Congress. Soon after September 11, Congressmen Davis, Moran, and Wolf wrote a letter to U.S. Secretary of Transportation Mineta encouraging rail transit in the corridor in part for the safety of the Capital City. They need now to go to work with the U.S. Senators from Virginia to ensure that Dulles Rail is funded in the next transportation reauthorization act.

Rail really is coming out the Dulles Corridor from East Falls Church through Tysons Corner, down the median of the Dulles Access Road through Reston, past Dulles Airport into Loudoun County. The project is “on track” for completion by 2010. And with the diverse organizations that came together for the common purpose of ***Dulles Rail Now!***, the project is even more certain of completion on time.